

# NORTH EAST LABOUR HISTORY



SUMMONING COLLIERIES' WIVES TO A MASS MEETING AT BOLDON.

**Bulletin of the North East  
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## 'Deadly Effluvia and Atheistical Glare': Republicans in early 19th century Cleveland

Malcolm Chase

The subject of this examination of North East Labour history is Cleveland where atheism and republicanism had flourished more than a decade before Owenite socialism. Criticism of Christianity, monarchy, and their institutions was of course hardly any more a novelty in the 1820s than in the ensuing decade: but organised freethought, or infidelism, was a comparatively recent development, a product of the 1790s and of the influence of Thomas Paine particularly. Paine took scholarly atheistic tenets and communicated them in stridently impious works, readily accessible to a popular audience. From the publication of his Age of Reason (1793-5), infidelism became a central part of popular anti-establishment thinking. Interest in it was particularly vigorous in the years following the Napoleonic wars: its focal points from 1819 were a weekly journal, the Republican, and the activities of Richard Carlile, its editor. Carlile was a dedicated freethinker and enterprising publishers. One of the aims of the Republican was to reach-out beyond a London circulation and involve the provinces in the promotion of infidel and radical political ideas.

Extensive space was therefore made available for correspondents to record their beliefs, activities, and the controversies in which, almost inevitably they became embroiled. One such correspondent, in January 1822, was Amariah Batty, dyer and threadmaker of Castleton (a moorland village mid-way between Teesside and Whitby).

"Having thus arrived at the age of 28 years," he wrote, "and feeling quite competent to think, judge and act for myself I do hereby renounce from this day the Christian religion in all its various creeds . . . I also protest against the Ecclesiastical Laws of Great Britain, and all human laws relating to religion, as impure, unjust, and oppressive." Batty's experience was a common one among professed infidels. His family were devout Christians, and he himself had worshipped regularly until his mid-twenties. Then, as a result of the furore which greeted Carlile's trial and imprisonment in 1819 for republishing Age of Reason, he read Paine to find out for himself what all the fuss was about. The effect was ironically akin to religious conversion: "My mind now began to soar above its former narrow sphere, and I eagerly sought the works of the most celebrated Deistical, Moral, and Philosophical Authors . . . every doubt on the subject of religion has now been driven from my mind, and I now know in what true happiness consists. It must be sought in Nature: it can nowhere else be found." Religion, he concluded, was "the chief cause in a nation's demoralisation." Relieved from those corroding fears which destroy the happiness of man." Amariah Batty resolved to preach infidelism. None of his children would be baptised, and already he had purchased a burial plot for his family and himself on unconsecrated ground. (1)

Batty had not been born in Cleveland: his family still lived in his native Leeds where it is possible Amariah had first encountered freethought along with the vigorous West Riding tradition of radical politics. However, there was an indigenous Cleveland interest in republican and atheistic ideas. Only a few weeks after Batty had written to the Republican, the same magazine reported a meeting 'of a few of the lovers of Civil and Religious Freedom' of Stokesley, an important market town nine miles south-east of Stockton-on-Tees. They met to honour the memory of Thomas Paine on his birthday. John Appleton an elderly member of a Teesside bookselling and printing family was in the chair, and toasts were drunk to Paine, Carlile, Henry Hunt, as well as to General Bolivar (the South American revolutionary), and to 'Patriots of Spain' (where there had been a rising in 1820: 'patriot' was at this time largely an anti-establishment term). Appleton, a flax-dresser, was a well known figure in Stockton where most of his working life had been spent, and in Stokesley where he was known as 'Old Chop Logic' because of his fondness for religious disputation. He had been raised a Calvinist and remained a Christian though strongly sceptical of the veracity of the Bible, until converted late in life to atheism by reading Mirabeau's System of Nature (a key French infidel work, often republished in Britain). In his own words 'always fond of a pot of Ale and a Song,' Appleton was a popular pub entertainer giving recitations of the scriptures, Shakespeare, Thomson's Seasons, and works of religious controversy. Though Appleton was the senior figure among Stokesley's radicals, their leader was a young watchmaker of the town, Robert Armstrong. His shop was an important centre for political and freethinking publications, items which Stokesley's other bookseller Pratt (a Wesleyan Methodist) would not sell. Armstrong's stock was varied and included works by Cobbett, Carlile and Benbow, political trials, atheist pamphlets, and a miscellanea of other items - travelogues, Cowper's Poems, and Baine's Directory of Yorkshire. In 1822 alone Armstrong claimed to have sold over one hundred copies of Paine's Rights of Man. (2)

The Methodist church soon hit back in response. Thomas Mease, parish overseer of the poor and a prominent Stokesley businessman, was first into the lists against Armstrong, whom he described as "impudent vendor of literary poison, by whose disgusting exhibitions a daily insult is offered to the public" A Wesleyan Methodist, Mease sought to associate the republicans with paganism. As examples of the latter he dwelt at some length on prostitution supposedly organised in Hindu temples by the Brahmin, and on the practice of infanticide among certain Asian peoples. As for Armstrong, 'I would give him a wife from some Gentoo Temple where licentiousness is carried to its utmost climax, and a better, I am certain, he does not deserve.' (3)

It is eloquent of the contrasting character of Methodism in the 1820s to the present that Mease's remarks were made in a speech to the sect's Missionary society in Stokesley, and that he published them at the urgings of other members of the circuit. This was however only the first round of a protracted exchange. Armstrong swiftly responded with two open letters, both entitled A Slap at the Prophet. On the subject of "this missionary hoax," Armstrong held that it was hypocritical of the Methodists to presume to enlighten other races when there was so much vice and squalor at home; he carefully rehearsed the details of celebrated criminal cases involving Methodists; and he attacked the Religious Tract Society, of which Mease was a prominent local member, for forcing women and children virtually to beg on the streets in order to obtain funds. "This mendicant company of Jesuits lost nothing in this town for the asking." Armstrong also dwelt on the supposed immorality of Methodist love-feasts, and on their drunkenness (at this time the Wesleyans had not abjured alcohol, whilst the freethinkers tended largely to be teetotal). (4)

This debate seems to have caught the public imagination, for more publications followed including the earliest known Cleveland radical journal. Mease's answer to Armstrong's counter-attack was The Rebound, or 'A Slap at the Prophet' returned upon a Vaunting Materialist. This met a reply entitled The Real Rebound, or a Slap at the Prophet Repeated. The follow-

ing year Armstrong followed this with a short-lived magazine, The Missionary, or Stokesley and Cleveland Illuminator, dedicated to 'the Stokesley Philological Phenomenon, Mr Prophet Mease, of Methodist Missionary Society Notoriety'. Not to be outdone, Mease, assisted by the town's other bookseller William Pratt, published The Extinguisher, a Moral Instrument, principally intended for an infidel thing, called the Missionary: "it was judged expedient to put forth an 'EXTINGUISHER' lest the public should be annoyed with its (the Missionary's) deadly Effluvia and Atheistical glare." The argument, as Armstrong's sarcastic reference to the "philological Phenomenon" suggests, had partly degenerated into a criticism of each other's prose style; Mease had also unearthed that Armstrong had been fined £10 for trading in gold and silver (from which, of course, many watches were partly made) without an excise licence. However, the self-styled "Republican, Deist, Materialist, Reformer and Revolutionist" claimed popular support for his cause, contrasting 'the canting Methodist' and his followers 'forcing on their neighbours (gratis) . . . execrable trash and lies."

Infidelism prospered in the area through this controversy. Immediately it had appeared, Armstrong had seized on Amariah Batty's "Renunciation of the Christian Mythology," displaying a copy in the window of his shop. Meanwhile its author distributed it as a tract round his Castleton neighbours. Together the two men undertook to raise a subscription in support of the imprisoned Carlile. Some fifty sympathisers contributed over the next three years, and a further forty supporters were secured from the Durham side of the Tees, principally in Stockton and Norton. At least £16, most of it sixpence or shilling donations, was sent to Carlile from the Cleveland region. A few of the subscribers were men of note in the area. Thomas Rigg was a farmer at Little Ayton. "Stockton's Poet Laureate" Thomas Webber; James Ellerker of Greatham, near Hartlepool and Thomas Blakelok, a Stockton subscriber both came from borough-holder families there. However, mostly the subscribers were ordinary workpeople and tradesmen, many of whom preferred to hide behind initials or pseudonyms. Some of the latter were simple titles, for example "A Republican Shoemaker," "A Female Deist," "A Materialist," and "a descendant of the great Circumnavigator Captain Cook." But there were others which speak of a darker side to becoming an avowed republican atheist: "A pretended Methodist who is forced to be a Hypocrite for the sake of his family," "Democritus from the Shades, not ashamed of my Name but of losing my bread," and "Another poor Slave." At a time when landlords, employers and neighbours set great store by religious observance, and when the parson was a figure of considerable secular as well as spiritual authority, such reluctance to be known publicly as a freethinker was only prudent.(6)

This becomes clearer if we consider what infidelism stood for. It was not simply anti-establishment and anti-clerical. Politically it was radical and republican, emphasising popular sovereignty and attacking parliament as undemocratic, government as corrupt, and the British constitution as contrary to natural justice. As far as religion was concerned, freethought was virulently anti-Christian, denying the authority of the bible, the divinity of Christ, and ultimately the very existence of God. John Appleton "used to say that he never heard but one good Prayer in his life: Oh God, if there be a God, Save my Soul, if I have a Soul" Although many freethinkers stopped short of atheism and espoused deism, they rejected any concept of revelation or of the supernatural. Christianity was just another superstition: the Cleveland infidels dubbed Mease "a worthy successor to Old Wrightson" a celebrated local wise-man of the time, originally from Sedgefield. Such scepticism is in marked contrast to the picture of a formerly ill-educated and gullible populace, which subsequent commentators on Cleveland suggested. Later political activity in the region is more intelligible in the light of this episode: the circulation on Teesside of the latest London radical publications; the breadth of these ordinary folk's reading, and their interest in political affairs not only at home but in Spain and Latin America too. They may have been a minority group, but their very existence is an indicator of broader educational and popular intellectual trends.(7)

Freethought's greatest challenge, however, to prevailing orthodoxies (and here we can only speculate to what extent more general attitudes are indicated) was on the issue of the mortality of the soul. In Cleveland this was dramatically demonstrated in the events surrounding the death, in 1823, of old John Appleton. Since 1817 he had been unable to work and now, aged 77, was an inmate of the Stokesley parish workhouse. It says much for the comparatively liberal nature of the pre-1834 Poor Law regime that Appleton was allowed out to give his tap room recitations, and to chair public meetings of the Stokesley republicans. In the summer of 1823, however, he succumbed to a wasting disease and was confined to his bed. Robert Armstrong was a constant visitor, and offered to contact Appleton's family, 'of whom there were several members in the town in respectable circumstances'; but, doubtless because of his political and religious views, the veteran radical had been largely ostracised by his relatives (with the salient exception of the young John Appleton, the Stockton printer who published much of Armstrong's work). The old man refused to be attended at his workhouse deathbed by those whom he held responsible for putting him there in the first place. He now became the object of an unseemly quarrel between, on the one hand, Armstrong and other local freethinkers and, on the other, members of his family and local preachers anxious to secure his last minute conversion to Christianity. Armstrong found himself debarred from the workhouse on the orders of Leveson Vernon, rector of Stokesley and son of the Archbishop of York. Vernon, it was alleged, remembering Appleton's fondness for a 'pot of Ale' had deluged him with gifts of wine and beer and, through persistent pestering, finally persuaded him to take the sacrament. Others similarly laboured to secure his repentance: on one occasion Armstrong claimed he had found, "... an old Methodist fanatic, Mr Stephen Bowes, who, with both his hands had hold of the old Man's arm, was pulling and shaking him about in the bed most furiously, at the same time crying out like a Madman, 'I tell you that you must believe in the atoning blood of our Saviour or else you'll be cast into Hell Flames.'

Armstrong may well have exaggerated the attentions forced on Appleton, and the extent to which they were unwelcome: but there can be no doubt that the conversion of the old man was regarded by local Christians as a symbolic victory of immense propaganda value over the forces of infidelism, as well as the capture of a soul they believed otherwise consigned to everlasting damnation. This Stokesley incident conformed to a pattern of alleged last minute conversions of freethinkers to Christianity which was commonplace throughout Britain. Appleton died on 20 September 1823, and controversy raged over the competing claims for his conversion.

The Reverend Leveson Vernon was only one of several Cleveland Christians who, like Mease, tangled with the infidels. The vicar of the Teesside parish of Ormesby visited Armstrong's shop to attempt his conversion. Having failed, he entered into an exchange of letters which the freethinker gleefully published. A Mrs Richardson, a Quaker from Great Ayton, lent Armstrong the works of the seventeenth century French divine Fenelon: his letter returning the loan was duly printed too: "I do not deny that it contains a few good moral maxims, but they are like grains of mustard-seed in a cart load of rubbish, not worth the picking out." The leader of the Stockton Unitarians challenged Armstrong to disprove Christ's resurrection: Armstrong replied with a closely argued examination of the inconsistencies between the gospels. Finally, some prominent Stockton Wesleyans clashed with William Milburn, one of the leading freethinkers on the north side of the Tees, on the issue of life after death.(9)

Armstrong, however, was the lynchpin of Cleveland infidelism and his sudden disappearance without explanation towards the end of 1824 left a vacuum no other freethinker in the region was able to fill. Some of his associates notably the young Appleton and Thomas Webber, continued careers in radical politics but were disinclined, at least publicly, to espouse infidelism. Others, like Batty, were isolated from the main cultural centres of Cleveland. Most critically of all, Armstrong had not just been the leading protagonist of local freethought, but its publisher, bookseller, and latterly printer as well. His disappearance thus deprived Cleveland infidels of their main contact with the like-minded nationally. The significance of this to

a minority faction, isolated from main urban centres, should not be underestimated. It is unlikely however that Armstrong's demise spelt the end of radicalism and infidelism in the region until Owenite socialism surfaced in Darlington. Much needed research into regional popular politics during the period might help substantiate this. Already we have in the persons of Batty and old Appleton proof that freethought was established in the area before Armstrong's career as a radical publicist began. His work, though, had helped strengthen this indigenous deism with 'all the infamous publications' of Carlile and his contemporaries. That he had been successful was admitted, grudgingly, by Thomas Mease: "By the circulation of RADICAL and DEISTICAL Books, he won many of the uninformed and unwary youth of both sexes over to his principles; and at length had regular meetings in his house." This legacy is unlikely to have disappeared along with him. Stokesley especially remained a remarkably vigorous intellectual centre, one which was also notoriously unreceptive to evangelising of any kind, suggesting that the climate which had proved conducive to infidelism was not abated. The events of the early 1820s themselves remained green in the local memory: in 1848 John Wright, the self-styled 'Bard of Cleveland' referred to the alleged conversion of Appleton in terms which supposed familiarity on the part of his readers. Finally we have the testimony of the Castleton rector John Atkinson to the existence of free-thought in his parish, ostensibly an intellectual backwater, during the 1870s. Cleveland infidelism of the 1820s, like Darlington socialism later, may have failed to endure in any formal organisation: but that does not mean that the ideas it had spread ceased either to circulate or influence popular opinion. (10)

#### NOTES

1. A Batty, 'Renunciation of the Christian Mythology', Republican V 3 (18 Jan. 1822) pp 86-8.
2. Republican V 8(22Feb 1822); (R Armstrong), True account of the last illness, opinions and death of Mr J Appleton (Appleton, Stockton, 1823) pp 1-4; Missionary or Stokesley and Cleveland Illuminator 1 (24 May 1823) p2.
3. T Mease, Substance of a speech delivered in the Methodist Missionary Meeting held at Stokesley on Monday June 2nd 1822 (Pratt, Stokesley, 1822) pp 9-10.
4. R Armstrong, Number two, or a slap at the prophet, being a second letter addressed to Mr Thomas Mease (Appleton, Stockton, 1822) pp 5, 8, 10, 11, 15.
5. T. Mease, The Rebound . . . (Pratt, Stokesley, 1822); R ARMstrong, Letter no 3 addressed to the inhabitants of Stokesley, being the real rebound, or a slap at the prophet repeated (Appleton, Stockton, 1822); Missionary 1(24 May 1823) p 1; The Extinguisher . . . introduction to the collected volume, p 11; Republican VII 15(11 April 1823) p 463.
6. Batty, letter to editor, Republican VI 19(4 Oct 1822) p 592; the same journal carried the Cleveland subscription lists (along with others from all over Britain), see VI 20 (11 Oct 1822), 29 (13 Dec 1822); VII 11 (15 March 1823), 15 (11 Apr. 1823); IX 3 (16 Jan 1824); X 16 (22 Oct 1824). The list of subscribers to an earlier collection in 1821/2 does not survive
7. Armstrong, True account (1823) p 8; Missionary 3 (March 1824); on Wrightson and, incidentally, public gullibility see J C Atkinson, Forty years in a moorland parish (1907 ed) p 103-125, and H Heavisides, Annals of Stockton on Tees (1895, as part of the Centennial Edition of his Works, but first published 1865) pp 366-8.

8. Republican VI 20 (11 Oct 1822); Armstrong, 'To Mrs Richardson', ibid VI 22 (25 Oct 1822); Unitarians, ibid IX 18 (30 Apr. 1824) pp 569-71; Wesleyans, ibid XII 5 (5 Aug. 1825) pp 150-4.
9. On Appleton and Webber see Heavisides, Annals (1895) *passim*; Mease, introduction to the collected issues of the Extinguisher; Stokesley's resilience to religious missions, see W M Patterson, Northern Primitive Methodism (1909) - 26; J Wright, 'The Priest's Example', Anacreontic Poems (Edinburgh, 1848) p 121; J C Atkinson, Forty years in a moorland parish (1907 ed) pp 16-7. Atkinson's experience is considered in an article, on which this piece is based, 'Atheists and republicans and early 19th century Cleveland', Bulletin of the Cleveland and Teesside Local History Society 47 (1984).

## NORTHEAST LABOUR HISTORY SOCIETY

**T**HE North East Labour History Society was formed in 1967 by people in the area with the following objectives:

➤ To bring together those interested in research into labour history in the North East

➤ To encourage and help organise such research

➤ To assist in the preservation of existing records

➤ To organise support for these aims by such means as seminars, lectures, bibliographical guides etc.

The Society publishes an annual Bulletin for its members, which it circulates widely, and has

regular meetings in various parts of the area. It is anxious that the work it set out to do be expanded and in this area with its wealth of working class history the need

for more labourers in the field is constant.

The help of sympathetic individuals and organisations is also of prime importance if resources are to be adequate.

Individual membership is invited from interested persons, as are affiliations from trade unions,

co-operative societies, political organisations, libraries, educational establishments etc. Subscription is £2.50 per annum (including Bulletin supply), payable on 1 October (£1.00 for students and retired persons), £3.50 for institutions.



ESTABLISHED 1967

# BACK TO THE ROOTS

## The Northern Tribune : A North East Radical Magazine

Susan Scott

JUST PUBLISHED No. 3 OF THE  
**NORTHERN  
TRIBUNE,**  
PRICE 4d., STAMPED 5d.

**CONTENTS :—**  
Physical Force—Addressed to reasonable peace men.  
Heng—Nature's Gentleman. W. J. Linton.  
History of the Month.  
Life of Bernard Gilpin (with a portrait), the "Apostle  
of the North," and ones Rector of Houghton-le-Spring.  
"The Evil Spirit" and how to ban him. Frank Grant.  
A Traveller's Christmas Eve. W. J. Linton.  
Type Sentences of the United Times. R. Sutherland.  
My Voice is for War. Victor Hugo.  
Our Library—The Post and the Plan. R. Sutherland.  
How Uncle-tom is getting along  
Sketch of St. "Modern Hercules."

Old Father Tyne.  
St. James' Mechanics' Institution.  
Benefit Societies.  
Charters Commission.  
Our Correspondents, &c. &c.  
NEWCASTLE.  
Published by **JOSEPH BARLOW,**  
Northern Tribune Office, 1, Nelson St., & 28, Grainger St.

The Tribune was printed at an estate called Brantwood, near Coniston Water in the Lake District. It had been rented by Gerald Massey with financial help from supporters of republicanism. To house the types and presses a special hut was erected which bore Mazzini's motto "God and the People". This remote spot was chosen for producing republican literature, principally W J Linton's English Republic, to avoid government interference and for security from foreign agents. The Republican Association knew that its mail was intercepted by government agents, under the directions of Sir James Graham and Lord Aberdeen. W E Adams, the compositor at Brantwood, later wrote:

"we were dreamers, enthusiasts, fanatics, what you will - we republicans of the middle 19th C."

He was helped by Thomas Halling the pressman and James Glover "the man of all work". They worked for very little pay because they felt that they were serving a great cause: "we were all vain enough to think we could convert England to Republican ideas".

The men who wrote for the publications printed at Brantwood had known each other from their long-standing connections with Chartism, The Fraternal Democrats and the Republican Association, and felt that they shared a common cause. They were experienced writers and agitators who knew that producing independent newspapers and periodicals was crucial to their continuing struggles for reform.

Joseph Cowen became a life-long disciple of Mazzini when he was an undergraduate in Edinburgh University and joined the Republican Association. After his return to Newcastle, he began preparations to establish his own radical periodical to disseminate his Republican ideas and agitate for reform. As he could use the printing facilities at Brantwood, the cost of setting up was not as expensive as it could have been, the disadvantages of the transport costs do not seem to have been realised until after the launching.

Cowen was the financial backer of the Tribune, and in a letter dated 4 January 1854, stated that he was the editor. He was also contributing to the costs of George Julian Harney's Red Republican: a receipt dated 2 December 1853 from Dr F R Lees of Leeds shows that Cowen paid £26.7.0d for paper to be used for "The Red Republican etc." Harney appears to have remained largely apart from local chartist activities during this period. During the life of the Tribune, he was paid a salary of £70.18.6d. Therefore Cowen must have been supporting Harney to enable him to continue in his agitations for reform.

The Tribune was launched efficiently in the manner of a commercial enterprise, and was extensively advertised before it appeared in January 1854. From October 1853 Cowen regularly placed advertisements in local newspapers promising "32 pages for 4d". The Newcastle Guardian, Newcastle Courant, Newcastle Journal, Newcastle Chronicle, Gateshead Observer and the Sunderland News were all used. Circulars were sent to "the trade" stating that "the first three numbers will be sent on sale".

The circulation was first envisaged to be among the people along the Tyne banks and surrounding villages, "the local newspapers, having too general an audience to reach, cannot appropriate any lengthened space to such limited circles. Hence the original title Tyne Tribune. The first issue, however, claimed that "because of the interest shown we intend to widen distribution to Durham and Northumberland" the title being changed to the Northern Tribune to make it more representative. This decision must have caused some confusion for some of the handbills proclaimed the Tyne Tribune and others the Northern Tribune.

The Tribune was originally published monthly to avoid the stamp tax, but at the last minute it was decided to make stamped issues available for 5d to take advantage of the free post. This, it was hoped, would enable the Tribune "to circulate to all parts of the United Kingdom, to the Colonies and to America, on the same conditions as a Newspaper".

The first edition of January 1854 sold out within a few days and a second edition of 2,000 was hurriedly produced and distributed. The February issue was claiming a circulation of 4,000, but because the first three issues were distributed "on sale", it is difficult to assess the number of readers who actually bought the Tribune. At 4d it was relatively expensive to many working people's incomes and probably only appealed to the radically inclined, educated sections of the working classes and lower middle classes.

The Tribune was attractively presented as a booklet with a primrose coloured cover and used woodcuts, some produced by W J Linton's firm and others by local artists. The type was small and close which must have made it difficult to focus upon in poorly lighted homes.

Most radical publications during this period depended upon voluntary contributions to keep going; the Peoples Paper claimed on the 6 August 1853 that it was "almost entirely supported by the noble generosity of the Chartists of Newcastle upon Tyne". They needed advertising revenue but this produced a moral dilemma for they were unwilling to accept advertisers who compromised their principles, and in any case they found advertisers difficult to attract because of their politics. The Tribune was also at a disadvantage because the North-East was dominated by heavy industry which did not advertise in magazines such as the Tribune. Tradesmen dealing in consumer goods were unlikely to find lucrative customers among the readers of radical publications.

The Tribune printed the advertisements on the back pages, their charges ranging from 6d for two lines to 12/- for a full page. The issues usually contained twenty to thirty advertisements but just under half of them were from people with whom the producers would be sympathetic, such as C Dobson Collett's Association for the repeal of the Stamp Tax and republican book-sellers and lecturers. The total income from 1 January 1854 to March 1855 from advertising was only £30.8.2d, therefore the Tribune must have given free advertising space to people who shared their beliefs and opinions.

The initial sales must not have been encouraging because Cowen was still advertising in local newspapers during January, February and March of 1854. In April he attempted to widen the distribution by advertising in the Darlington and Stockton Times and the Potteries Times.

"Our Local Record" section was broadened in the April 1854 issue to include Hartlepool and in May 1854 Stockton and Middlesbrough. The Expenditure and Income sheet shows that £53.18.3d was spent on advertising the Tribune, when the cost of handbills, prospectuses and show cards is added the total is £140.3.7d, a large sum for that period.

In December 1854 another manoeuvre to boost circulation was tried. The Tribune's readers were informed that the "Tribune's position is satisfactory but

because monthly magazines cannot keep pace with political events" they would publish the magazine in four weekly parts of 16 octavo pages for 1d or the four parts could be purchased bound together for 6d or 7d for the stamped. This was probably a ruse to get around the stamp tax. The publisher would be well aware that a weekly appearance had more chance of building up a loyal readership, and thus have more impact and influence upon them. The price of 1d was more likely to attract buyers than the more expensive 6d.

Joseph Cowen, Harney and the other supporters of their causes therefore worked extremely hard to try to make the Tribune a variable concern. Cowen was prepared to spend quite large sums of money to establish a magazine "for free and fearless expression" whose watchword was to be "above all things - Truth".

The Republicanism of the Tribune, with its emphasis upon National Sovereignty for all peoples, did not have the jingoistic connotations which nationalism would have conveyed towards the end of the 19th C. They saw Republicanism as the way to achieve "the welfare and improvement of humanity", rather than as a system of government, which they believed should be subservient to the will of the people.

The growth in nationalism was the product of revolt against the Napoleonic Empire and the ambitions of the other "great" powers. The Tribune saw Austria as a "heterogeneous and factious empire, in whose bosom nationalities are stifled". The Poles, "who burned for unity and independence", received popular sympathy in Britain. The Tribune included an article on Poland in their July 1854 issue, together with a pull-out coloured map of Poland for the readers reference. This was so that they could see for themselves how Poland was situated "amidst the three piratic powers - Russia, Austria and Prussia. In the article "The Nation of Refugees" W J Linton claimed that "a whole nation wanders over the earth to teach the worth of nationality and the real dignity of patriotism". Articles also appeared periodically which eulogised republican heroes such as Mazzini, Garibaldi and Kossuth.

The great powers of this period still saw the preservation of peace as a matter of maintaining the balance of power in Europe. Nationalism and Liberalism were starting to challenge the old methods which the Tribune felt was becoming "but a blind bungling endeavour at the solidarity of Europe" leaving "the people's interests unconsidered". It saw the establishment of an independent Polish State as crucial to create a barrier against "insatiable encroaching Russia" and the ambitions of Austria.

The British government would certainly have balked at the republicans' methods, for W J Linton invited readers to send donations to a central committee in London to finance a revolution in Poland. "They (the government) will not risk helping oppressed peoples in case republicanism gains a firm hold on the continent"; if this happened "the working classes in this country might not be so brutishly contented with their position as they are now".

The Tribune justified its support of violence in the article entitled "Physical Force" by saying that "war would be unjustifiable if there were other means" (but) "till the world is educated . . . your intellectual weapon shall nought avail you, for the tyrants, who will not reason, know how by brute force to put down reason". Another article, "The Austrian Alliance", urged people to associate for demanding war for freedom of nationalities, not for dynasticism.

Russophobia was a firmly established element in British thought by the middle of the 19th C. It found support in Newcastle not only on ideological grounds, that is because of pro-Polish sentiment and aversion to autocratic and authoritarian states, but also because Newcastle was a thriving commercial centre. Russian encroachments and ambition was seen as a threat to trading interests around the East, especially India.

The Tribune chose to emphasise the ideological objections to Russian policies. With David Urquart, they "saw the sinister hand of Russia intriguing at every level" and shared his contempt for the House of Commons and his belief "in local self-government", "but we must be excused from seeking after an increase in the royal prerogative". The Tribune disagreed with Urquart's Tory principles as well as his abhorrence of revolution. Urquart believed that

the 1848 revolutions had helped Russia; the Tribune, in contrast, blamed their failure on "rose-water revolutionaries" and argued this had helped Russia. Successful revolutions would crush her.

The "Austrian Alliance" article best illustrates the fear and threat which Russophobes felt during this period. With superb satire (probably the work of Harnev), Russia is depicted as a monster devouring the corpses of the Ottoman and Austrian empires. Despite asking "do we go to war only to set a corpse upon its legs?" and deploring the alliance with Austria as "calling another corpse to help us", the Tribune gave its full support to the Crimean War.

"What is remarkable is that a nation which prospered through foreign trade and always protected it by force if necessary, saw the Crimean War differently. It was depicted at its declaration in a government statement as a war in which "Her Majesty feels called upon by the sympathies of her people with right against wrong to take up arms". The Tribune hoped that the war would peal "the death knell of every despotism in Europe"; "the Russian Empire must be destroyed or she will destroy all her opponents in turn". It was aware that the war was being pursued for less lofty reasons, to stop "Russia continuing her schemes of aggrandizement at the expense of Europe" and "to frighten Russia into a proper consideration of Western policies", but again the Tribune chose to emphasise the ideological reasons to its readers.

The war soon lost its glorious aspects for most of the British public. The telegraph enabled war correspondents to keep readers abreast of developments. The new visual medium of wood engravings introduced the public to the hardships and sordidness of war. The public was made aware of the mismanagement and the unnecessary suffering of the soldiers which it caused. The deaths from typhus and cholera, from exposure because of lack of food and warm clothing, and from the military ineptitude were all fully reported and illustrated.

The Tribune deplored the "governing classes who assume a monopoly of wisdom and virtue", and appealed to "the people" to bring down the government, urging Londoners to march on Downing Street. It believed that if the war was not carried to its ultimate conclusion, the overthrowal of the Tsarist regime that is, the slaughter would be in vain. It stated that the government had no intention of crushing Tsar Nicholas, but only wanted to teach him a lesson. This made the government guilty of complicity with him in allowing this "costly farce", allowing soldiers to march off to their deaths under the belief they were fighting despotism.

The extremism exhibited in this article "War - Freedom of Despotism?" and others, such as Victor Hugo's diatribe against Nicholas "My choice is for war", inciting "the masses" to rise up and revolt, provides a possible explanation for the failures of such publications as the Red Republican, English Republic and the Northern Tribune to build up a loyal readership. There were people who had lived through the often violent suppression of the Chartists, the riots and industrial unrest which occurred earlier in the 19th C and had no wish to see them again. Many were beginning to enjoy better standards of living and had improved expectations of life. They saw reform as possible within the existing political framework.

Although Republicanism and Russophobia appealed to popular sentiments, revolutions, fanaticism and civic disorder did not. The Tribune appeared to be advocating unlimited bloodshed to attain their ideals, which may have repelled many people already shocked and sickened by the casualties of a current war. The Tribune was aware of the public's feelings and stated in "To Our Readers" dated 15 November 1854 that they had been advised "to moderate their extreme republicanism if we wish our periodical to sell", but it felt that it was above such commercial considerations and refused to compromise "we write for neither pay nor pastime" and "dare all opposition for that cause which we cherish more dearly than life or fame".

The first issue of the Tribune pledged support for political representation for the people. It considered that "the only measure of reform worth the thought of all men is the suffrage for all men, as a natural right". The issue of votes for women was never discussed. During this period as editor of the

Chartist newspaper The Northern Star Harney's editorial stance had always been one of "Political Priorities", "get the men the vote then give it to the women". This policy may have been carried over into the Tribune for both Harney and Cowen supported the Women's Suffrage Movement later in the 19th C.

There were about fifteen hundred working class electors in Newcastle, most were freemen and were seen as corrupt and allied to the Whigs. The Tribune was scathing over the support that they had given to the 1832 Reform Act, which had resulted in making room for "Big Whigs at Westminster and Little Whigs in Newcastle". True to character, the Tribune claimed, "the Whigs afterwards betrayed the Democrats". One article examined the reasons for the failure of the Chartists to gain their six points. It concluded that the Chartists' constitutional methods had been doomed to failure because they had used the middle class methods of members, funds, oratory, petitions and a powerful press. These, as the Anti-Corn Law League had shown, could only be successful if the campaigners already had power in Parliament, which the Chartists never had. Although the Chartist aims had been national, it still had remained a "sectional movement" (of the working classes). This had cut it off from potentially powerful middle class support. The Tribune believed this had been a mistake that must not be repeated. The campaign for manhood suffrage "must now be of all classes towards the Chartist end."

Harney had always been wary of middle class motives. He left Cobden and Bright's Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association in 1850, warning that its policy was to make use of proletarians to establish bourgeois supremacy. The Tribune also rejected the Association, declaring "the working classes cannot join them without a most dishonest abandonment of principle because the Association seemed unable to separate power and property, advocating property qualifications for the vote.

However, the Tribune considered the time for compromise and co-operation had arrived. The subdued tone of the article "A National Party" suggests Cowen thought "men who can forget little differences" should form an organisation to campaign for manhood suffrage. In 1854, therefore, the work began that ultimately led to the formation of the Northern Reform Union, created in Newcastle on 3 January 1858. Harney, too, was advocating class collaboration. This may have made Newcastle Chartists suspicious of him, explaining why close links between them were established in the 1850s. Whatever the reasons, these must have been resolved by 1858, for the committee of the Northern Reform Union consisted of "three middle class members, three trade unionists and three Chartists."

The brisker and more forceful style of the article "The New Reform Bill and the Working Classes" probably was written by Harney. In order for working people to get the vote, it argued, they had two possible means - rebellion and constitutional means. As they proved themselves "in every way unfit for rebellion" and seemed unable to co-ordinate effective strike action among "those of the working classes who are not apathetic", their only way forward was to co-operate with the middle classes and stop being "foolishly exclusive". They had become more flexible to achieve their goals - "the more the object is simplified, the fewer the conditions of union, the more likely we are to get the numbers."

The Tribune intended to be "the advocate of the rights and interests of the industrial classes" and supported trade unionism but had to accept with regret that the trade unions of that period were uninterested in broad-based militant action. The trade unions were beginning to see increased prosperity, not in revolution but in piecemeal negotiations for increased wages and shorter hours. They were seeking alliances with middle class radicals for political and social reform. Trade unions were also wary of radicals who sponsored refugees, which they saw as potential blackleg labour.

Martin Jude in "The pitmen of the North" article asked "why are the Working Classes so apathetic?" and claimed it was "solely because they know not, or care not to use, the power which they possess in united action to put an end to the many grievances and proscriptions under which they groan."

Samuel M Kydd, an experienced Chartist agitator who was acknowledged to be their ablest lecturer on the labour question, wrote an article "Strikes and Arbitration considered", which illustrates one of the ways in which conciliation was being sought by employers and employees. In it, Kydd maintained there were no opposing interests between them, the Courts of Arbitration were invaluable in preventing and resolving misunderstandings and everyone suffered through strike action, an attitude typical of the Tribune articles on industrial relations. He believed that legislation was necessary because the courts were voluntary and their services often refused "counsel acts only upon the willing, law upon the unwilling also". He felt that the House of Commons reluctance to interfere with the relationship between employers and the employed as an impingement upon their freedom was a mistake.

The disputes mentioned in the Tribune suggest that, if the Tyneside Court of Arbitration had been compulsory, it would have been seriously overworked. The Amalgamated Engineers were in dispute with the Shipbuilders: the Seamen with the Shipowners. In the Winlaton Foundries "class feeling was rife" because the employers "had forgotten their origins" and "ape the aristocrat". Craftsmen tyrannised and underpaid their labourers, refusing to eat or drink with them.

It was hoped that Government legislation would improve the lives of the miners. The Tribune was jubilant that the government had approved, and was using, the report on mining made by the South Shields' Committee. The Tribune condemned the mild judgements which past coroners had made upon negligent mineowners after disasters. This report "shattered the belief that such disasters were due to Divine Providence" and proved that "in every variety of torture and agony, these men have been hurried to their graves". In the January 1855 issue, the Tribune was advocating what later became one of the socialist's aims, that of nationalisation. The Tribune denounced the holding of mineral rights in private hands, demanding public ownership.

These articles help to illuminate how the "old style" agitators, such as Harney and Kydd were, despite their republican hopes for the continent, beginning to abandon any Utopian aspirations about creating a new social system. They were beginning to replace them with more practical and realistic policies.

One of the reasons why there was so much acquiescence with prevailing ruling class notions was that, by the 1850s, Britain appeared to have a dynamic economy, which was seen as ever expanding. The North-East appeared to be receiving its full share of the increased material wealth. The Tribune saw Tyneside as "being a scene of activity and enterprise unequalled in the Kingdom".

The Newcastle cholera epidemic of 1853 appears to have prodded the authorities into action. The Tribune reported that the 1848 Public Health Act and the Common Lodging House Act were to be fully implemented and considerable improvements were afterwards achieved. It vigorously reprimanded the River Tyne Commission, Mr John Falconer and Mr Robert Elliott, because they were the principal property-holders in Howden and greedy for profits. They had allowed the Howden district to become what the Newcastle Medical Inspector had described "as the most filthy place he had ever seen". They also reminded readers that the remedy was in their own hands: more working class men should stand in municipal elections.

The "Voluntary Principle", believed the Tribune, "thrived" in the North-East, "though the contributions are not a tenth of what they should be". It deplored the way in which raising money for worthy causes seemed to involve organising large social occasions. The Tribune paid full tribute to the sterling work of the voluntary organisations such as the Ragged Schools Society, Benefit Societies and the establishment of Seamen's Refuges.

These activities help to show how Victorian society "harmonized the concept of free choice with some measure of relief for those who did not benefit from its workings. Despite the region's pride in its charitable work evident in the Tribune's articles, they also show how society was increasingly turning to legislation to improve their lives.

The prevalent doctrines of self-help and improvement were fully approved of by the Tribune. Alcohol was seen as adding immeasurably to working-class degradation and the Temperance Movement received a lot of coverage, with publicity for their meetings. The pleasantness of their social gatherings was emphasised, where participants did not have to witness "drunken orgies".

The Tribune hoped to make its readers more politically aware; Harney urged working men to use the "Democratic Reading and Newsroom" established in Newcastle in 1850. He urged them to take advantage of the "daily papers and best of the weekly journals" to gain sound political knowledge. The Tribune did not have much faith in the Newcastle Mechanics' Institute educating the working classes, stating "that it was a pity it was not run for Mechanics". The Tribune considered that, if it "held less soirees", "the books might not have so much dust upon them".

"The Local Portrait Gallery" series are essays on local men who led exemplary lives, like J F B Blackett, a true advocate of reform, and James Mather, constantly endeavouring to improve the conditions of mining and seafaring men. "Portraits of the Poor" convey to a modern reader images of what the middle-class would have liked the poor to be rather than what they actually were. They are about people who lived moral, hard-working, frugal lives, striving to help others, such as Nanny Shacklock, who for "nearly three-quarters of a century" was "unselfishly employed in doing good".

In 1850 Thomas Cooper established his own journal and wrote his "Letters to Young Men of the Working Classes". He advised the young men to lead Christian, hardworking, temperate lives, and suggested improving activities for their leisure time. The young men may have felt that leading such admirable lives might prove to be a little dull for the journal had a very short life. Yet the articles were reprinted in the Tribune beginning in January 1855, and ultimately appeared in book form.

These and the other contents of the 1855 issues lack the vigour of previous writings. The pages are filled out with ponderous war poetry and an unbelievably amateurish serial, "Jane and Louisa", written by Eugenie Sue. These contrast sharply with former material, such as the sharp-witted "Miss Dinah and her lovers" by Thomas Cooper, and contributions designed to give readers a sense of the history of the North. There are also apologies to readers for unanswered letters, unprinted articles and unreviewed books. No "Local Record" appears and "Tyneside Talk" is restricted to one page.

This suggests that Cowen, although claiming in the December 1854 issue The Northern Tribune's position is satisfactory", had already decided to abandon it. The three issues of 1855 show that little effort was being put into producing or commissioning new articles. The printers at Brantwood may have been or commissioning new articles. The printers at Brantwood may have been filling out the pages with republican articles from other journals, for half the contents of 1855 are republican propaganda.

On the 18 February 1855 Cowen wrote in a letter "I have disposed of the Tribune to Holyoake, who is going to incorporate it with The Reasoner and bring the two out as a newspaper (unstamped) at 2d": I am going to start a local paper.

There were several reasons behind Joseph Cowen's decision to hand over the Tribune to G J Holyoake, for amalgamation with The Reasoner. The Association for Promoting the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge, formed in 1869, was about to achieve its objective. This would remove the advantages of a monthly periodical over a newspaper.

The governing classes had realised that the taxes did not keep cheap independent literature out of the hands of the masses. During this period the fear of revolution receded and the "upper orders" became more confident about the future. Prosecution of unstamped publications had proved ineffective. Therefore it made sense to create a responsible press, both cheap and competitive. Under the pressure of the news hunger produced by the Crimean War, the stamp tax was finally repealed in June 1855.

The campaign for the repeal of the stamp and paper duties received the full support of the Tribune. The arguments contained in the article "The Newspaper Stamp", by Frank Grant, reflect those put forward by the Association for Promoting the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge. That the liberty of the press is vital to a free constitution, that the stamp was totally ineffective in its aim "to destroy the vice, irreligion and sedition of the printing press". It kept the price of decent literature out of the financial reach of working men and tempted him to drink in public and coffee houses, where newspapers and periodicals were provided. The free postage granted with the stamp gave the London newspapers, particularly The Times (which favoured repeal) an unfair advantage.

To the Tribune the most annoying aspect of the stamp tax was that it hindered the education and self-improvement of ordinary people. Most of the contributors were self-made, self-educated men, who put a high value upon all forms of "wholesome" literature. Cowen wrote in the January 1854 issue, "We are unable to understand how they who profess an anxiety for the education of the people can levy taxes on the raw materials of knowledge."

Cowen already had ambitions to own a local newspaper, as shown by the letter dated February 1855. He accurately foresaw in March 1855 "The abolition of the penny stamp on newspapers" "will cause a revolution in journalist literature, and in all periodical publications partaking of a political character. Indeed, for political periodicals there will be no place. They must become newspapers or nothing." On the 1 May 1858 the triumvirate which owned the Newcastle Chronicle went daily with 4 large sides for 1d. Cowen had been making the Newcastle Chronicle loans and by 1858 they may have been enough in his debt for him to influence their business decision to publish daily. Yet still he was not in a position to influence the contents. A letter dated 6 February 1859 showed that he was dissatisfied with the amount of coverage they were giving to the Northern Reform Union.

Cowen had obtained his "daily organ" for advocating radical reform by December 1859: "these unlucky newspaper proprietors became so much in my debt that they asked me to take over the newspaper in discharge of their liability". He made the Newcastle Chronicle one of the most successful provincial newspapers in the country. It had the best staff, machinery and news coverage, both serious and popular, that could be obtained.

Cowen did not abandon his republican ideals along with the Tribune. He was secretary of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Newcastle and treasurer of the Republican Brotherhood of Newcastle, with Harney as treasurer. They issued the Republican Record, a publication in which their uncompromising ideals were further propagated, despite its claim to be "instructional and non-violent".

Harney went to America in 1855 to edit the Jersey Independent but contributed articles to the Chronicle until his death in 1897. He was one of "the few" willing to go on struggling and agitating indefinitely. W E Adams, the compositor at Brantwood, returned to Newcastle in 1866 as editor of Cowen's Chronicle, "where he succeeded brilliantly".

"Longest lived of the Chartist sentiments was their interest in foreign affairs. After they had despaired of success in England, they were still convinced that the revolution would shortly be victorious abroad." The Tribune helps to illustrate this development. It shows how the producers were advocating compromise and conciliation to achieve progress in Britain, channelling their revolutionary, violent impulses abroad. Adams became a highly respected, professional editor, W J Linton prospered with his wood engraving business. Cowen was absorbed into the Liberal Party and devoted himself to working class interests and reform within the existing political structure.

The variety of working class libraries in Newcastle shows that there was a demand for reading matter in the area. The Tribune's failure to achieve a big enough circulation to support itself can be attributed to its revolutionary republican views. During this period many of the working classes and lower middle classes were beginning to have a stake in society and were less amenable to extremism.

Though the Tribune published fiction, poetry and ballads they were obviously meant to instruct and elevate the minds of readers, not merely to entertain. From the beginning the Tribune had declared its aim of "the mental, moral, and political advancement" of the people. The high style of the Tribune suggests that it was aiming for the readers of the educated working classes and lower middle class. However they may have preferred G W M Reynold's Reynold's Weekly Newspaper or Edward Lloyd's Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper. These journals combined "middle-of-the-road" radical ideas while exploiting popular tastes and mixing politics with scandal and gossip.

Joseph Cowen's father may have been unwilling to meet the losses of the Tribune any longer. The balance sheet shows that it made a loss of £769.6.6d but an unsigned note dated December 1855 states that, considering Cowen and W J Linton donated their time and work free, the loss should be put at nearer £1,150.0.0d. Cowen's father (Joseph Cowen Snr) presumably agreed to the loans and eventual take-over of the Newcastle Chronicle in December 1859 when it was losing money. This was probably because Cowen Snr also had political ambitions - he was elected MP for Newcastle in 1865 - and during this period power in the press and political power were correctly seen as being intertwined. Cowen Snr may have been willing to meet the initial losses of the ultimately successful Newcastle Chronicle which developed Liberal views, but not the financial losses of the Tribune but not the financial losses of the Tribune, essentially a republican organ.

The Tribune provided Cowen with an invaluable journalistic and political apprenticeship. Producing a magazine with experienced Chartist and republican campaigners, some of whom had worked all their lives for reform, using their literary talents to further it, it must have added immeasurably to Cowen's education. Unfortunately Cowen's first venture into commercial journalism proved unable to stand on its own: "the whole concern was burdened with unnecessary cost, so in little more than a year there came to an end our hopes and enterprise together." The company at Brantwood dispersed in the spring of 1855: "the public not wanting our wares or our politics."

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## BACK TO THE ROOTS

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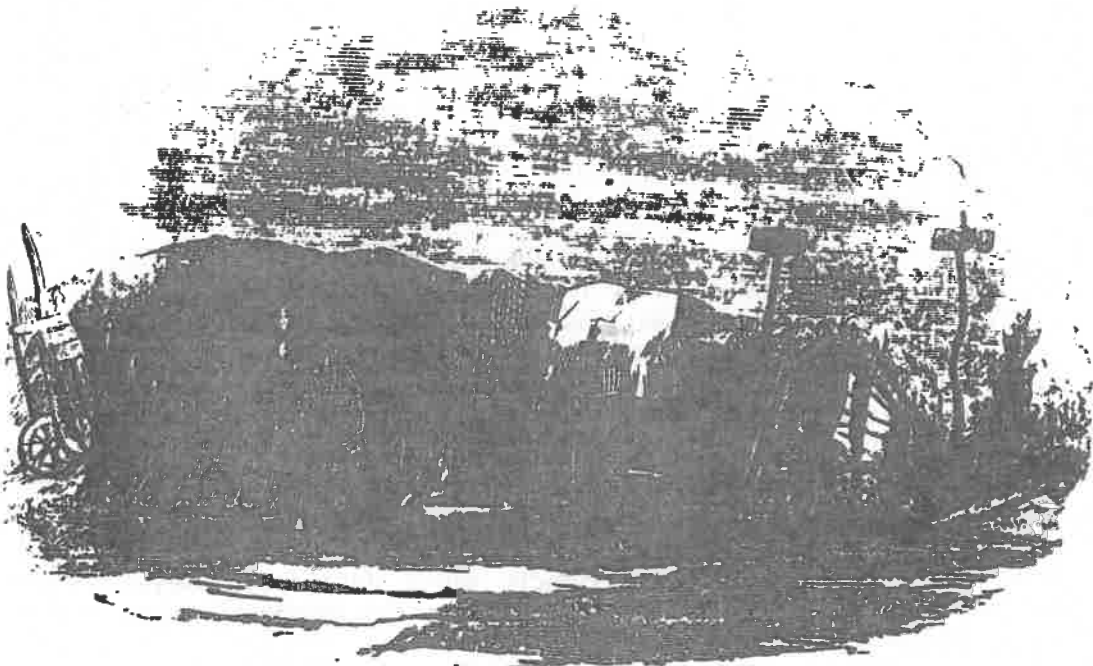
### The Lost Years:

### Northumberland Miners 1844 - 1862.

### Bryan Rees

In the history of the Northumberland and Durham miners, the years between the end of the 1844 strike and the re-emergence of a county-wide union in Northumberland in 1862 have been largely ignored by contemporary and present-day historians.

Richard Fynes, the first historian of the Northumberland and Durham miners, doesn't have much to say about union activity in this period. For him, the end of the effective union organisation in Northumberland came around 1853, following a series of disputes which began in 1849 and were primarily concerned with opposition to wage reductions and other changes in working conditions. Fifty years after Fynes, Wellbourne noted the conclusion arrived at by Fynes but went on to say that if the union was dead, the idea of union was not. He mentions "whispers" that



PITMEN ENGAGED.

along the Wear Valley the men were still banded together, that regular meetings of miners were held at Black Fell to discuss the expected terms for binding, that in 1854 some 13,000 signatures were collected for a petition demanding better inspection of mines, that major strikes took place at Seaham and Hetton collieries in 1854 and that in 1855 there was widespread resistance to wage reduction in both Durham and Northumberland.

Unfortunately no one seems to have followed up Wellbourne's very brief account of post-1844 activity. No one appears to have read through the accounts in local newspapers of events they considered worth reporting in the coalfield, or to have looked at the Minute Books of the Coal Trade Committee in Northumberland County Record Office. More surprisingly, no one seems to have been moved to ask how it was that, in the space of a few days in December 1862, a union could re-emerge in Northumberland which represented several thousand miners at nineteen collieries and which was the forerunner of the Northumberland union we have today.

From my own limited research into this period, I do not believe that the re-emergence of a county-wide union in Northumberland was simply spontaneous. There seems to be a connection between what happened in December 1862 and what had happened in the 18 years since 1844. More work will be needed before a definitive account of these years can be written but I hope to suggest in this article that there is a strand connecting 1844 and 1862 and to say something about what miners themselves were doing in these years which kept the idea of union alive.

#### THE AFTERMATH OF 1844

Miners who were re-employed after the 1844 strike had ended found that the terms offered by the coalowners were not the same as applied before the strike began, a point which was made by Edward Richardson, himself a striker, when speaking at the Wakefield Conference of the Miners' Association. A leaflet, published in response to an article in the Tyne Mercury (3 April 1845), noted,

"There is not one colliery unbound where the same terms have been offered as were given last year!"

So far, indeed, from the men seeking higher terms, the Owners have insisted on a reduction .... and the men, whenever they could obtain a hearing of their Owners, have offered to bind on half the ... reduction being made, but the viewers in this, as all other instances, have insisted on the full amount of the proposed reduction.

But a change still more important and more ruinous to the men has been proposed on the part of the Owners. At the last binding it was settled men should forfeit threepence for every quart of foul coal, splint or stone found in a corf when brought to bank, but now it is proposed that they forfeit the corf....."

In a letter published in the Newcastle Chronicle (10 May 1845), Martin Jude, prominent in the 1844 leadership, confirmed the drive to reduce wages, listing collieries where reductions of between 12% and 33% had been made.

Against this background the miners had to regroup and rebuild their organisation. The July 1845 Conference of the Miners Association held in Newcastle heard reports that the vast majority of miners in Northumberland and Durham; nonetheless, it decided to hold three area meetings at Scaffold Hill (near Longbenton), Botany Bay (near Cramlington) and Sheriff hill (near Durham) to try and win them back. The meetings were poorly attended - a combination, perhaps, of disillusionment after the strike and the persecution of activists by the owners - and despite optimistic reports in the Miners Advocate of men rejoining the union, this first attempt to rebuild the union foundered.

Yet it is clear from the Miners Advocate that between September and December 1845 the lecturers employed by the Association put considerable effort into organising and speaking at local colliery meetings. Some 34 meetings were held in 13 Northumberland colliery villages and more than half of the meetings were concentrated on the villages of Kenton, Fawdon, West Cramlington and Seaton Delaval. While the meetings seem to confirm the relative weakness of union organisation, they perhaps point to those areas where some level of activity remained.

According to Fynes, by 1847 what remained of the union in Northumberland and Durham was "living out a miserable existence ... and shortly after ... became a total wreck." There was little activity between 1847 and 1849 in his account and I haven't come across any evidence to suggest he was wrong. He noted that the existence of a monthly bond after 1845, while giving coalowners the means of getting rid of men easily, also allowed the men greater mobility and he suggested that men were frequently giving in their notice and moving between collieries. It is not clear whether this mobility made it more difficult for the union to re-establish itself.

In 1849 an attempt by the Coal Trade to reduce wages and worsen conditions provoked resistance. At Seaton Delaval the proposed reduction was over 30% and some 500 men from the colliery and others in the district met at Scaffold Hill on 22 January 1849 to consider what should be done. Resolutions calling for unity among all miners in doing so were passed unanimously. Seaton Delaval men struck for 3 weeks and the dispute was settled by arbitration; men at Cowpen stayed out for 11 weeks and resumed work at the same wages which had applied before the strike - here the reduction had been successfully resisted.

These disputes seemed to raise hopes that a union could be reformed in Northumberland and Durham. William Bell (Seaton Delaval), John Hall, George Young (Father of Ralph Young, later Treasurer of the Northumberland Miners) and others were members of a committee established to re-

cruit members in the Tyne and Wear collieries. Benjamin Embleton, an old union and Chartist activist, spoke at meetings but there were still difficulties in getting meeting places and miners to attend.

According to the special correspondent of the Morning Chronicle in a report on "Labour and the Poor in the Manufacturing Districts" in December 1849,

the Miners' Union is now again making head. The association in the north is local, being confined to the counties of Durham and Northumberland. It numbers at present upwards of 7,000 members, of whom a few, and only a few, are boys. It employs six paid labourers to disseminate and enforce its views - comprehends upwards of 60 collieries, many of them amongst the largest and most important in the district - and now holds regular fortnightly meetings, at which a delegate from each pit attends to consult and report progress"

For a few brief months a union was re-established - the "Three Week Union" referred to by Dr. Challiner in his book on the Miners' Association and by Fynes. While it does not appear to have lasted, disputes did continue at individual collieries. The disputes were of sufficient consequence for at least one local newspaper to comment. On 14 July 1849, a report in the Newcastle Journal noted that, unlike 1844,

"the pitmen have adopted the plan of striking in detachments and while the men at one or two collieries remain idle, they are supported by those who continue in employment"

The report said that strikes at Seaton Delaval and Hartley had been organised in this way and it does suggest a degree of organisation among miners, albeit localised, which was directed towards collective action.

Not all miners were prepared to take a stand against wage reductions - at Killingworth, a pitman received 3 months hard labour for assaulting another who was prepared to accept the reduction, and at West Moor 7 pitmen were tried for riot and attempting to prevent men working for reduced wages. When the case came to the Assizes, the colliery owners urged the judge to be lenient, explaining that they had brought the case in order to demonstrate that miners could not commit such offences with impunity. Whatever organisation did exist in the Northumberland collieries their attitude suggests that the owner did not see it as a serious threat.

Another example gives an insight into the level of union organisation at this time and the issues with which union members were concerned. In October 1849, a pitman employed at Cowpen colliery was attacked and beaten by two men, his skull was fractured and he died the day after the attack.

At the inquest the coroner, Stephen Reed, remarked

"that they had got the fact that the deceased had died from the injuries he had received, but he believed that there was a kind of union among the pitmen to prevent the men working, except upon certain terms. It might be possible that he had belonged to the union, and having gone to work he might have engendered some degree of ill-feeling against him. That would be very proper to inquire into."

Giving evidence, the pitman's brother (who also worked at Cowpen) told the jury.

"There is a union among the pitmen at Cowpen Colliery the object of which is to fix a certain sum of money to be worked for by each member. Any man working contrary to the rules is called a blackleg. My brother left the union and worked contrary to the rules. We heard that the threatening language had been used towards the men who left the union. A man named Reay had been assaulted by the pitmen of the union for working contrary to the regulations. Both my brother and myself entertained fears of being ill-used for leaving the union."

At Cowpen it seems that the miners had some form of organisation aimed at restricting output, a tactic which the Miners Advocate had argued strongly for in the years after 1844, and which was seen as a way of pressurising owners to increase wages or at least not to reduce them.

The owners, however, seem to have won the battle to reduce wage costs. Resolutions passed at a meeting of miners held on the Newcastle Town Moor on 12 October 1850 noted that the carriage of coal by rail had increased competition between coal owners and this, together with the unregulated state of the coal trade, led to reductions in wages. Other resolutions called for the formation of "a general organisation of the great body of miners" and a "Board of Trade ... to ensure a reasonable return to the coal owner for the risk of his capital, and proper remuneration to the miner for his dangerous toil". Writing to the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle in April 1852, Martin Jude "Secretary to the Miners" blamed the glut of coal coming onto the London market from the inland coalfields for low wages in the North East coalfield, as well as short-time working which was also prevalent.

As he was writing his letter, the miners at Barrington Colliery (near Bedlington) were under notice of a wage reduction, averaging 1s a week according to press reports and 4s-5s a week according to Jude. A majority of the 200 miners at Barrington appear to have opposed the reduction and were given notice to quit their houses, those who attempted to work, having accepted reduced wages, were "annoyed and molested" for their pains. Placards were posted in Bedlington, Newcastle and neighbouring towns calling on miners not to break the strike by seeking work at Barrington. Evictions provoked disturbances, the intervention of police from Newcastle and a troop of infantry, and the arrest of 6 miners for riot and assault. The miners returned to work accepting some, but not all, of the reductions. Reductions were also reported at Cowpen but the men there got an agreement that no more reductions would be made for 12 months.

Fynes reports that large numbers of strikes occurred at other collieries but does not give any details. Local papers, too, give no details and it is therefore difficult to say how widespread the disturbances were or if any organisation was involved. He says that,

"the men became desperate and careless in many cases; in others they gave way, for to resist with the resources they had at their command was but to unhouse their wives and families and bring greater misery on themselves, if greater could be."

Some disputes persisted at Seaton Delaval, West Cramlington and Cowpen collieries until late 1853, and at Seaton Delaval the agents discharged 30 men, some active in the union and some not, in order to get rid of union members without being seen to victimise them.

## THE IDEA OF 'UNION' PERSISTS

While a union, as an organised body of workers, may have been dead in Northumberland, the idea of collective action and organisation did not die so easily. On 15 February 1853, miners at Wallsend Colliery asked for an increase of 1d on the hewing price and were refused. The men didn't work the next day and the day after at least 60-70 men and boys disguised in women's clothes, their faces covered by veils, masks or simply blackened, were preventing other men going to work. On investigating the disturbance, the viewer and the overman were beaten by the men and six were subsequently charged with riot. Reports in local newspapers confirm that the dispute continues after the initial arrests and men who wished to work did so under police protection. The dispute ended at the end of March after 30 strikers and their families had been evicted and 11 had been imprisoned.

In June 1853, the Newcastle Journal reported that, "a movement is now taking place amongst the pitmen of the counties of Northumberland and Durham for the organisation of a 'Pitmen's Consolidated Union' to watch over and protect the interests of the large body of men employed in the trade".

and noted that several meetings had been held in the colliery districts. I have found no other references to this union and assume that as a county-wide organisation it did not take root. Two months later, in response to a handbill issued by the "Committee of the Miners' Association" some 1500 miners from mainly Durham collieries met at Black Fell (near Birtley) for the purpose of obtaining better wages and redress of grievances. The absence of Northumberland miners was explained by the fact that hewing prices had been increased. Benjamin Embleton, William Harrison, Martin Jude and David Swallow - veterans of the 1844 dispute - addressed the meeting and resolutions were passed affirming the need for organisation, a uniform bond and mode of hiring and for better ventilation and general regulation of the mines.

Although the "Committee of the Miners' Association" seems to have been able to generate some support for mass meetings, it is not clear who was on the "Committee". Martin Jude, a leader in 1844, is often referred to as "Secretary of the Miners' Association" but, apart from attending a number of inquests into colliery explosions - perhaps reflecting a change of emphasis towards improving working conditions by legally enforceable regulations in the 1850's - his role is unclear.

The "Committee" seems to have been behind a meeting of 1000 pitmen from collieries on the Tyne and Wear which took place in April 1854. Resolutions were passed in favour of a uniform bond for all collieries in the district and a minimum wage of at least 30s a fortnight and that the government should be petitioned to enforce more stringently the provisions of the Mines Accident Prevention Act. By 22 April some 3000 signatures had been collected on a petition calling for

- (a) regulations to ensure a sufficient supply of fresh air to mines by the sinking of more shafts;
- (b) that more inspectors should be appointed and the standards of inspection should improve;
- (c) that coalowners should be compelled to build schools for miners' children; that the miners should have the power to appoint teachers and contribute to their financial support;

- (d) that boys aged 10-14 should not be allowed to work more than 6 hours a day in mines;
- (e) that a qualified special coroner should be appointed to investigate accidents and visit pits where accidents occurred;
- (f) that the owners of collieries where accidents were proved to have occurred through neglect be assessed for damages for the benefit of the relatives of those killed.

These resolutions suggest the direction in which those who saw the need for organisation were moving. The emphasis was clearly on improving working conditions and the regulations of the industry but there was still a feeling, I think, that this was not enough. A meeting of the Northumberland pitmen on 9 September 1854 found Benjamin Embleton moving a resolution pledging those present to use every exertion to extend and perfect the organisation of the mining operatives in the two countries with a view to determining the rate of wages and hours of labour. It is not clear what organisation existed to extend and perfect; there is a reference in the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle of 4 January 1856 to the Miner's Society holding its annual meeting in the Elephant and Castle Inn Low Friar Street, Newcastle and to 213 members attending, but it is not possible to say if this was Embleton's organisation or even the remnants of 1844

#### ATTEMPTS TO RE-FORM THE UNION BEGIN

September 1858 saw the first serious attempt to reform the Pitmen's Union in Northumberland and Durham. While the local newspapers differ about the date the meeting took place - the Weekly Chronicle said it was the 18th, the Journal said it was the 21st - a large meeting of miners from Northumberland and Durham met at Black Fell (near Birtley). The speakers included Alexander McDonald (Secretary to the Miners Association of Scotland), Mr. Smith Reardon (of Leeds), Mr. Pye (of Wakefield, both delegates from the Yorkshire pitmen) and W.P. Roberts (of Manchester), also known as "The Pitmen's Attorney General."

The purpose of the meeting was to revive the Pitmen's Union, to concentrate the local unions in one grand federation for England and Scotland, and by means of the union to obtain a diminution of the hours of labour and increase of wages, as well as other objectives. The Chairman, William Liddell (West Stanley Colliery), said he was "glad to see so many friends there again to advocate the cause of union, which, for a short time, had appeared to be annihilated, and gone out of the land out of the hearts of colliers. The spirit of union would remain in the hearts of men as long as there were oppressors. If the viewers asked why they had gone there, he answered, 'You have called the meeting and we have been very punctual in attending to it'"

According to Liddell,

"The present organisation arose from intelligence, not excitement. The delegates must try to organise each colliery. He knew the masters wanted the delegates to cause an agitation at each colliery, and to make the men kick against them in their present disorganised form. But they did not want to make any invasion on their masters until they were properly organised."

Discussion of a resolution seeking a proper and legal contract of service from the coalowners and the establishment of a miners' law fund, gave an insight into working conditions in the coalfield between 1844 and 1858. According to James Robson (Seaton) the miners had been working under a monthly bond for some time, although it was never carried out in its proper form and because it had worked to the advantage of the men, the owners had altered it to an annual bond which gave the advantage back to the owners. Under this bond, the Durham County magistrates said that the masters could make the men do anything, including stopping wages and refusing them leave to move to other collieries. Robson maintained that the men wanted a better and more just bond and the sooner the yearly bond was replaced by a monthly bond, the better.

Despite the large attendance at the meeting, nothing seems to have come from the resolution to get the men better organised. As Liddell pointed out, the case for a union had to be won pit by pit and that was not easy to achieve.

While the attempt to reform the union in 1858 appears to have foundered, activity seems to have continued at individual collieries. In July 1859, 9 miners at Seaton Delaval (including Robert Burt) were arrested after having struck for an increase in wages.

I mentioned earlier that the 1850's saw a change of emphasis towards improving working conditions through parliamentary action and legislation and towards the end of the 1850's some miners decided to take on the job of organising a fund for the benefit of miners and their families who were killed or injured by accidents. A meeting held in Newcastle on 6 March 1859 by the promoters of the Miners Provident Association heard reports that meetings had been held in Seghill, Dudley, Hazelrigg and other places. It appeared that some miners were suspicious of the Association, believing it to be an attempt by the coal owners to avoid having to pay "smart money" - their system of sick pay. A subsequent meeting, attended by Richard Fynes as a delegate from Seghill Colliery, expressed similar doubts and one of the driving forces behind the Association - J. Baxter Langley, a local journalist and actuary - spent some considerable time addressing meetings to try and dispell this view. Langley was asked to draw up the rules for the Association and these were put to a number of coalowners who expressed their general approval. It was agreed to put the rules to each colliery and to seek agreement of the Coal Trade to providing a guarantee fund for the scheme.

The momentum for the Provident Association seems to have come from the Northumberland Collieries but its supporters were keen to see the Wear Collieries involved. A delegate from the Wear, James Watson, said the men there were keen for amalgamation and the men of the Auckland District said they would be guided by the opinion of Martin Jude in the matter. Watson told a meeting of delegates to the Provident Association in July 1859 that he had been to a meeting in Lancashire (attended by delegates from Lancashire, Yorkshire, Scotland, Staffordshire and Worcestershire) and that a petition had been drawn up to the House of Commons seeking amendments to the Mines Inspection Act. The Wear District felt that unless the counties were amalgamated in some way they could not act together and the meeting itself had proposed a levy of a farthing a ton on all coals sold to go to a fund for the support of orphans and widows. This was too much for some supporters of the Provident Association; Mr. Weatherly, a delegate to the same meeting, disclaimed any connection between the Provident Association and the

political union which Watson favoured. Watson made it clear that the men in the Wear District were willing to keep the political association and the Provident Association separate.

There seems to have been some antagonism between the supporters of the Provident Association and supporters of the union. Writing to the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle in August 1859, Martin Jude (describing himself as "Miners' Secretary") rejected the allegation that the "Miners' Union", particularly in Durham, was indifferent to the aims of the Provident Association and was making it difficult for it to become established. He said that the "Miners' Union" was seeking the same aim as the Provident Association but were pursuing it in a different way.

Suspicion of the Provident Association persisted among miners and owners alike. Supporters of the Association, like George Maddox of Burradon Colliery, believed that if it were to succeed the support of the owners was essential and, in addition, a paid lecturer was needed to win the arguments for the Association with the men. Others felt that a paid lecturer would be seen by the miners as being paid by them to promote their interests. On the other hand, some supporters of the Association felt that if the miners were seen to be acting on their own behalf, to be "up and doing", the masters would suspect that they were strengthening their own organisation in preparation for a strike.

The Newcastle Weekly Chronicle in a leading article on 22 October 1859 argued strongly for the Provident Association and while recognising the traditional antagonism between owners and men, deplored the suggestion that the Coal Trade might not support the Association. It pointed out that if those miners who were advocating cooperation between masters and men were isolated by lack of support from the owners, they would be absorbed into the ranks of those miners (like James Watson) who were arguing for legislative interference in the coal industry and protection of miners by the law. No doubt the Chronicle was aware that people like Watson were also among those who saw the need to rebuild a union in the coalfield.

A report of a meeting held in Durham on 10 December 1859 suggests that some kind of organisation had been established following the September 1858 meeting at Black Fell. James Watson is recorded as 'Secretary to the Miners' and Martin Jude as Treasurer of the petition fund. Each member was asked to pay 1s (with 6 weeks to pay) to help the petition through Parliament. Robert Archer, James Watson, John Arkless and John Scott were appointed to collect signatures for a petition which was the same as that drawn up by the Ashton under Lyne Conference.

By the beginning of 1860 it was clear that the Provident Association was having trouble getting established. William Urwin, Secretary of the Provisional Committee, writing to the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle on 21 January, reported that it was short of funds and could not hold meetings to promote its objectives and the expected support from the Coal Trade Committee had not materialised. Those miners who supported the idea of a reformed union appeared to be having more success. A meeting held on 21 January 1860 at Martin Jude's public house, The Globe Inn, gave James Watson and James Arkless the task of canvassing Newcastle and the collieries to collect funds and signatures for the petition to enable it to be presented in the next session of Parliament. Support for the petition was recorded from a number of Northumberland and Durham collieries, as well as from the Bishop of Durham, MPs and a local businessman, Mr. Bainbridge.

On 3 March, 1860, a boiler at Burradon Colliery exploded, killing 76 men including William Urwin and George Maddox, Secretary and Chairman respectively of the Provident Association. An attempt by the Coroner, Stephen Reed, to hold a quick inquest and allow no cross examination of witnesses, produced an outcry and an appeal to the Home Secretary brought official pressure to bear on him which led to the inquest being held in public. Local opinion also took the view that the owners of the colliery had been badly advised by a member of the Coal Trade Committee and a cover-up was suspected.

The disaster led to collections being organised in collieries and towns for the victims and delegates from the collieries met to organise this. At the meetings the chair was taken by Richard Fynes, a delegate from West Cramlington Colliery and, while there appears to be no evidence at this stage that Fynes was involved with miners like Watson who were seeking better legislation to protect working conditions, it was not long before the two groups started to come together.

On 26 May, 1860, the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle reported that at a meeting held a week earlier the promoters of the Provident Association, meeting to consider progress, had been joined by a deputation from the "Society for Watching the New Mines Inspection Bill" and that it had been agreed "for the convenience of the men" that their meetings should be held on the same day. Cooperation continued when the Association agreed to support an open air meeting called by the "Watching Society" on Newcastle Town Moor on 23 June 1860, and the Association invited W.P. Roberts of Manchester to speak.

Roberts declined the invitation, saying that while he supported the objects of the association he was concerned that in doing so he might offend some sections of the miners, not least because the Association had been seen as an opposition to the union he had advocated at the 1858 Black Fell meeting. He did not wish to give offence to those who supported the union and felt that he could support the Association best "by converting those whom he privately came across than by more prominent advocacy."

Commenting on Roberts' decision, the Newcastle correspondent of the Mining Journal, said that the miners he did not wish to offend were,

"the remnant of the old union who still cling to something in the shape of an organised union for the purpose of keeping up the rate of wages, although the necessity of such a thing has long since passed away. It has its stronghold on the Wear, but it is not, we believe, very extensively patronised."

Despite the absence of Roberts', Fynes says that the Town Moor meeting was very successful. The delegate meeting which followed it resolved that a 3d. levy be raised from each man to be divided equally between the Burradon Defence Fund, the Miners Provident Association and the Mines Inspection Bill "Watching Society".

#### THE UNION AND THE PROVIDENT ASSOCIATION COME TOGETHER

Reports of colliery strikes began to re-appear in the local newspapers and in some cases lists of contributions to relieve hardship were published. The strike at Benwell in August/September 1860 drew support from 21 other collieries in Northumberland and Durham. Elswick struck in September 1860 and February 1861 and Spital Tongues struck in March 1861 for wage parity with other collieries in the area.

In May 1861 the Newcastle Journal reported that "the pitmen of Northumberland and Durham are on the best of terms with their employers and in possession of fair remunerative wages." The message had clearly not reached the miners at West Cramlington and at the beginning of June 1861 they struck for an increase in wages. Responding to the attempted eviction of one of their number, the miners turned out in numbers supported by miners from the neighbouring collieries of Dudley, Seghill and Cramlington and reminded the manager that they had still not been paid. They refused to allow the eviction to take place and, wisely perhaps, the owners (led by Hugh Taylor) agreed to meet the men and discuss their grievances. As a result, the owners agreed the increase in wages, warning the men that if they became "unreasonable ... by neglecting their work and laying the colliery idle in the summer", then the owners would be able to "repay such conduct in the winter with interest." That the owners agreed to settle was perhaps tempered by the fact that the strike was the 23rd in the colliery's 22 years history. At this time, according to Fynes, "scarce a month passed ... without there being a strike in some part of the two counties"; if this was the case then the local press went to great lengths not to report them.

On 16 January 1862, just after the backshift had gone down, the beam of the pumping engine at Hartley Colliery broke suddenly and fell down the colliery's single shaft. It took with it the winding gear, brattices and part of the shaft lining and trapped over 200 men and boys in the mine.

The disaster produced a flurry of activity. About 2000 miners met at New Hartley on 21 January and at their request, Richard Fynes (West Cramlington) took the chair. The meeting had been called to discuss whether or not to strike in sympathy with the bereaved and to be free to help in the rescue operations. The general feeling was to remain at work in order that they would be in a position to contribute to any fund which might be established for the widows and orphans, and it was agreed to hold a delegate meeting the following week in Newcastle. In the meantime a public meeting was held in Newcastle on 24 January, chaired by Isaac Lowthian Bell (Lord Mayor) and attended by Lord Durham, Sir Matthew Ridley and Joseph Cowen, jnr. A deputation of miners also attended and asked that three of them should sit on the committee established to run the relief fund, a request which the meeting agreed to.

Collections poured in from collieries, other workplaces and the public; even Queen Victoria sent a message to Hartley. The disaster strengthened the resolve of those who were seeking more legislative control over mining; the truth was that Hartley was no worse than many other collieries in the district. Three of the largest collieries - Seaton Delaval, North Seaton and Newsham all had single shafts and the demand was raised for all collieries to have at least two shafts. It also strengthened the resolve of supporters of a Permanent Relief Fund and in the weeks after the disaster delegates from various collieries met to consider how the Fund could be advanced.

Richard Fynes, meanwhile, appears to have been dismissed from his job at West Cramlington Colliery, and was appointed as the agent for Northumberland to collect signatures for the Miners' Petition and the Executive Committee of the Watching Society. By the middle of March he had visited 28 Northumberland collieries and the other agents had visited 53 in Durham. In almost every case, the petition was well received. What happened between then and the end of December 1862 is not clear, but I think the fact that Fynes was available was

crucial to the re-forming of the Union in Northumberland. Decisions taken by the representatives of the Steam Collieries Association also played an important part in events.

On 4 November 1862 representatives of the Association met in Newcastle to discuss the question of wages. It was agreed that the hewing price should be reduced by 1d a ton and that this should take effect from 1 January 1863. Other reductions were proposed - 1d a score off the putting price, 1d a day off drivers' wages, 3d a day off onsetters and banksmen and 1s. a week off wrights, joiners and smiths. In addition the meeting decided that the miners should be hired on a yearly bond from 1 January. Legal advice was taken on the wording of the bond, a draft was agreed at a further meeting on 29 November 1862 and copies were printed and distributed to the collieries.

A special meeting of the Association on 13 December agreed that the general binding should take place on 20 December and that all collieries should adopt the yearly bond. The minutes of the meeting record,

"That owners of steam collieries may, in case it be found necessary, intimate to the men that such parties as decline the annual bond and desire a monthly bond to be substituted, must agree to the condition that a charge for house and garden be made. That such a rent shall not be less than two shillings per week for a house including fire coal, the loading of which shall be paid as heretofore."

It was also agreed that binding money should be paid - 5s for the first hewer, 2s 6d for the second and 2s for the rest, with putters and drivers getting 1s 6d.

A further meeting ten days later to hear reports on how binding had gone found that, apart from 2 men at Burradon, all men at Cowpen, Bedlington, Netherton, West Cramlington, Burradon, Seaton Delaval, Seghill and Seaton Burn had refused to accept the annual bond. On the same day - 23 December 1862 - an advertisement appeared in the Newcastle Daily Chronicle. It read,

"Notice to the Miners of Northumberland

A General Meeting of the Miners of this County will be held at Horton on Christmas Day, December 25, 1862 for the purpose of resisting the yearly bond which is being introduced by our employers at the present time. Come in thousands as you did in past times. Meeting to commence at 11 o'clock am.

Northumberland, December 22, 1862"

The notice was unsigned and the same issue of the Daily Chronicle reported that at most of the collieries in the district notice had been served that a yearly bond would be proposed. The advertisement was repeated the next day.

Incredible as it may seem, between 2000 and 3000 miners turned up on Christmas Day representing the collieries of Seaton Delaval, Holywell, New Backworth, Old Backworth, Old Cramlington, West Cramlington, Burradon, Seaton Burn, Seghill, Netherton, Sleekburn, West Seaton, Barrington, Cowpen, North Delaval and Dudley. After delegates from these collieries had agreed on the resolutions to be put to the meeting, Richard Fynes took the chair.

He told the meeting that he did not think it necessary to summon men to the cart (in which he was seated) to make long speeches - action was more their object than speech making. The Northumberland pitmen had worked under a monthly bond for the past eighteen years and had not expected a yearly bond to be proposed at this time of year. The meeting had been called to allow them to give an opinion on whether the yearly bond was practicable and useful to the pitmen at this time of year and to show their determination to resist it. They should give their opinions freely and should not simply hold up their hands as a matter of form.

A motion, that the miners' should resist the yearly bond and come to no agreement with the owners until it had been withdrawn was moved by Mr Nicholson of Sleekburn. Putting it to the meeting, Fynes remarked that,

"the yearly bond was one of the greatest evils that could have come amongst the men, for the reason that it gave the masters power to do what they liked in the dull time, for having the men fast at such a time, they must not do what they liked, but as the masters liked."

The miners seem to have been aware that a yearly bond could work to their disadvantage especially when demand for coal was low and they could not leave the colliery at which they were bound to seek work at another. The resolution was carried "amid loud cheering". Thomas Baulks (Cramlington) and Mr Patterson (Seaton Delaval) both spoke against the proposed wage reductions. Patterson also called for restriction of the hours of labour, a Ten Hours Bill for boys, an emigration fund and for a union.

John Nicholson (Sleekburn) then moved a resolution that "the pitmen of Northumberland form themselves into a union". Seconding, Mr Wilson (Seaton Burn) reminded the meeting that unity was strength and it would prevent them losing the liberty they had now had for 18 years and which the men of Northumberland were still determined to have. By opposing the yearly bond they had shown they were not prepared to become slaves for another year - as long as they could be free at the end of the month they could meet the fluctuations of the market which varied from week to week and be in a position to claim an advance in wages when the markets were rising. From the chair, Richard Fynes said that "if the attempted imposition of the yearly bond had been the cause of union, it would have been a very good timing indeed. It would be such a New Year's gift to the miners of Northumberland as they had not had for many a year." The resolution was again carried "amidst immense cheering".

A meeting of delegates from the collieries already mentioned together with Newsham and Choppington was held after the meeting. Thomas Baulks was appointed Treasurer and R Patterson Secretary for the next three months. It was resolved that the names of the men in each colliery should be collected and that each colliery should send one or more delegates to each delegate meeting. Thus was the union re-formed in Northumberland.

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# MINING DISASTERS

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## The Heaton Main Colliery Disaster, 1815

Kit Pearce

1985 marks the 170th anniversary of the Heaton Main Colliery disaster, described by H & D Duckham as 'Probably the worst inundation in British mining history'.<sup>(1)</sup> The disaster occurred between 4.00 - 4.30 a.m. on the 3rd May 1815 in the exploratory 'Stable Drift' of the colliery's Old Pit and between 75-90 men lost their lives.

Heaton Main was won towards the end of the 18th century and consisted of three pits; the Far Pit, (marked by a plantation of trees - the Spinney - which commemorates the disaster on the wrong site!), the Middle Pit and the Old Pit, (where the disaster occurred). All three pits exploited the Low Main seam at an approximate depth of 500 feet, but in common with the other pits in the Ouseburn valley the coal seams were troubled by a number of geological faults, the most serious being the Ninety Fathom Dyke where the coal seams ascend and descend steeply on either side.

There had been an earlier colliery in Heaton, known as Heaton Banks, that had exploited the High Main seam at a depth of 200 feet. The pit had closed down in 1745 because ". . . the influx of water was so great that seven engines . . . could not get the better of it . . ." <sup>(2)</sup>. Once abandoned, the workings filled with water. The disused shafts were filled with refuse and earth and were soon forgotten. The seams explored in the Old Pit of Heaton Main ascended at a gradient of 1 : 10 and adjoined the old workings for "many hundreds of yards".<sup>(3)</sup> There was a real risk of breaching the abandoned workings, and the viewers, well aware of the danger, bored holes at regular intervals in the exploratory drifts. Despite these precautions, it is clear from as early as 1807 that the colliery was in danger of closure and the situation was aggravated by a series of setbacks or "troubles" between 1810-1815. "Troubles" usually indicated faults and contortions in the seams. Moreover, the high grade Heaton coal (nationally renowned and highly priced on the London market), became exhausted and poorer grade "Benton coal" was all that remained.

The owners, in the hope of keeping the colliery in production, encouraged attempts to drain the Old Heaton Wastes in order to get at the high grade coal left as uncut pillars to support the roof of the old workings, (up to 50% of the seam could remain unexploited by the pillars). In 1807 John Watson and his fellow viewers received a letter from the owners asking if it was "eligible for them to draw the water out of Heaton and Long Benton old wastes."<sup>(4)</sup> The question of greatest concern to them were ". . . of what extent do you conceive the wastes to be? . . ." and ". . . what will be the expense? . . ." <sup>(4)</sup>.

The reply was unequivocal ". . . We cannot in any point of view recommend the attempt to drain the wastes." The reason given was that ". . . it appears to us that the feeders of water were so considerable . . . that the coal which can be obtained by draining the wastes will not warrant such an undertaking."<sup>(5)</sup> Thus for sound economic reasons the suggestion was dropped.

As the colliery's financial crisis deepened the original recommendation began to lose its force. In times of crisis earlier estimates are naturally reviewed and sometimes reversed, but Watson also gave words of caution ". . .Further . . . not only the water . . . contained in these two wastes will have to be drawn off but likewise (we) have reason to think . . . that a communication also exists between these collieries and the adjacent collieries of old Byker and Jesmond."(6)

It is clear therefore that not only would the expense of draining the wastes be prohibitive but the sheer volume of water could itself prove to be a real hazard.

Attempts were made to drain the wastes and these did indeed prove to be hazardous. In one year from May 1813 the Old Pit was flooded five times due to pump failure.(7) Three times the water rose so rapidly that the miners had to be hurriedly hauled to safety. Once a reliable steam engine had been installed there was little further flooding but the potential danger remained.

There is an interesting difference between the reports of John Buddle, the distinguished colliery viewer,(and a man who had an owning interest in the Heaton Pit), and his apprentice Matthias Dunn. Only Dunn comments upon the crucial factor of the thickness of the coal between the old flooded workings and those of Heaton Main. He wrote: "At length the drifts had arrived at a trouble of no great magnitude, but at which the coal was weak and soft, and here it was that, either by neglect or inadvertance, the ordinary thickness of the coal had been reduced till it gave way under the extreme pressure."(8)

Dunn's explanation is explicit. Buddle unfortunately confines himself to recording an eye-witness narrative of the event and little else. Perhaps not too much should be made of his silence in explaining the disaster. Yet five years before, in the Middle Pit, Buddle had faced a similar situation. He wrote in his viewbook "This coal is so soft that if any water should be met with it would be impossible to plug. As we are approaching the Old Waste . . . it appears to me to be very hazardous to continue further."(9) All work ceased immediately from that spot.

The coal may not have been so soft in the Stable Drift but it clearly was soft and in addition water was escaping from it. We will never know for certain why Buddle did not follow the procedure of five years earlier.

A week before the disaster, Buddle wrote, "a small bleeding of water from the coal - great care to be taken in boring."(10) Only a day before, on 2 May 1815, "the bleeding of water was much as usual."(11) On the fateful morning, 3 May 1815, the drifters informed William Miller of "a greater bleeding of water." (12) and suggested precautionary measures. Instead it was decided to mine some more coal and leave the later shift to base the drift.

Within half an hour the bleeding became a loudly hissing spout. Only a few minutes later "the water broke in with a noise like thunder."(13) Only 24 miners escaped. The 75-90 remaining became entombed in higher parts of the workings with no hope of escape.

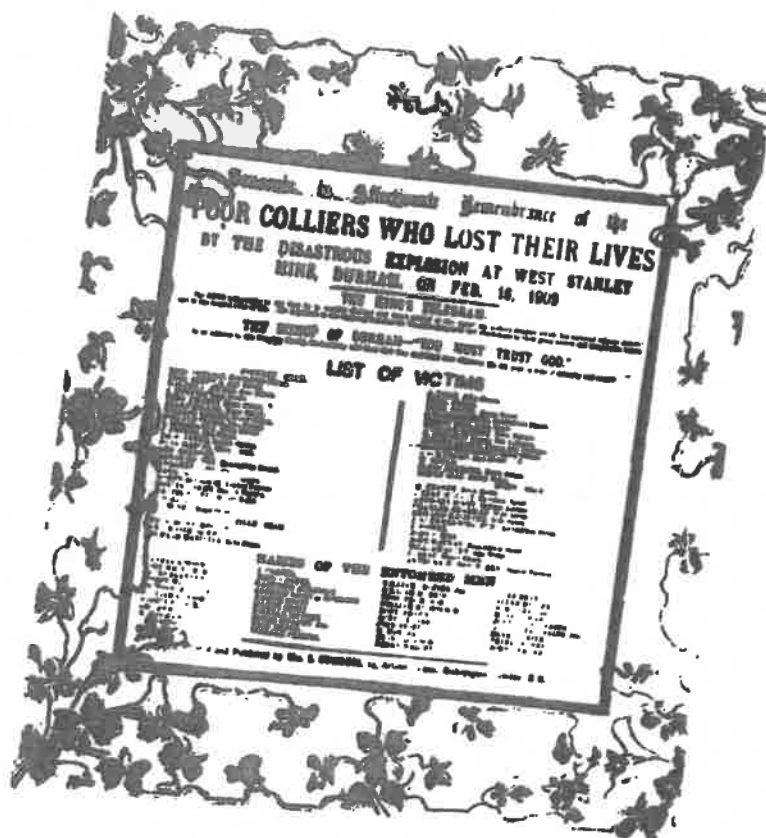
Geological weakness and human error combined to produce the circumstances of the Heaton Colliery disaster, "Both management and men probably became overconfident. Familiarity blunts men's sense of peril."(14), a conclusion which goes some way to explain Miller's decision to disregard the warning signs, which if acted upon might have saved some lives. Much more telling was the comment of Matthias Dunn, (Buddle's apprentice-viewer), "either by neglect of inadvertance the ordinary thickness of coal had been reduced till it gave way."(15)

Sadly little seems to have been learnt from the mistake; 110 years later at Montague Pit (March 30 1925) more men lost their lives under very similar circumstances. 1985 is the 60th anniversary of that disaster.

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## Pit deaths in Stanley, 1909



Little did the miners of the West Stanley Colliery think that on that bright Tuesday morning as they made their way to their customary work the self-same day many of them would meet their fate, and that death and destruction would bring sorrow and dismay into the homes of many Stanley and district families, on a scale terrible to realise.

At a quarter to four in the afternoon with 191 men and boys in the mine a calamitous explosion occurred wrecking the whole mine and resulting in the death of 168 men and boys.

A loud report followed by one much louder was heard, resulting in a mass of yellow flame which shot up the shaft into the air above the pulley wheels. It spread some distance around, scorching some of the men working near the shaft top.

The tale of terror was rapidly spread throughout the area, and thousands of men, women and children gathered around the pit in the gathering gloom.

There were two shafts the Busty and the Lamp Pit. Four seams were being worked the Townley, Tilley, Busty and Brockwell.

Rescue operations went on strenuously through the night, Herculean work was necessary to open up a way into the mine, and the rescuers were able to bring to the surface 31 men alive. Mark Henderson, a deputy overman in the Tilley Seam, near the end of this shift, heard a thunderous roar followed by the crashing of the falling roof. He was thrown violently to the ground and being an experienced miner he realised that an explosion had occurred. When he recovered he jumped to his feet, rushed to the workings and selected 36 men and boys. They did not know if they were cut off from the shaft and some of them, in spite of Henderson's advice that they were safe until the rescue men arrived, tried to make their way to the shaft. They were never seen alive again. 26 men and boys remained huddled in a small space of good air with only three lamps. Henderson calmed the rest of the men by saying he would try to get through to the shaft and after the third attempt he succeeded by squeezing himself through little gaps in the roof falls that had blocked the way to the shaft, which he finally reached. He picked up the receiver of the telephone. It was eight hours after the explosion had occurred. The officials at the bank were startled to hear the pit bank telephone bell ring. One of the officials picked up the receiver and asked who was there Henderson replied, "Twenty-six of us, Can you get us out?" The official replied, "The cage is jammed in the shaft but we expect to get it working again soon." Henderson then went back to the men and told them the news. He then began to get his men out five at a time to the shaft bottom. It took six hours before he got the last of them out, and 14 hours of entombment before they were brought to bank at 3.00 a.m. Three hours before Henderson's men were got out, 3 survivors from the Townley Seam were rescued. Although the rescue of these men raised fresh hope that others had survived, it soon became obvious as time went on, that they were the only ones.

One of the saddest features was that the great majority of the victims were young men and boys. The ages were; under 20 years 59; between 20 and 30 years 40; between 30 and 40 years 13; and over 40 years 5. Never will the town of Stanley witness such scenes as those on the Sunday following the explosion when 131 burials took place watched by an estimated 200,000 people. Trenches were prepared in the churchyard in addition to many private graves. The official report on the circumstances which surrounded the explosion in the workings of the West Stanley Colliery which occurred on the 16th February, 1909 and in which 168 lives were lost was commanded by the Crown and presented to both Houses of Parliament.

The official report presented the joint findings of R A S Redmayne, H.M. Chief Inspector of Mines, and R. Donald Bain, H.M. Inspector of Mines.

After 7 weeks of searching the hunt for survivors was called off. It was observed at the surface that two explosions occurred. The first

brought a cloud of dust and smoke. The second, 50 seconds later, is best described by the pit engineer Ralph Stephenson; "I stood on the lip or edge of the pit, (downcast) and looked at the ropes, I saw a red flame down the shaft. I jumped back shouting to others to keep clear. As I fell sideways I saw a ball of fire issue from the pit followed by black smoke. I was in darkness, smoke and dust around me, then the dust and smoke roared back down the shaft leaving me in clear air."

Two of the main fuses carrying electricity into the pit "blew". A loud "burring" noise indicated an overload on the generator. The account of the witness Stephenson was valuable, as it explained in detail the force and magnitude of the explosive forces being sucked back down the pit, known to miners as the "back lash" which always succeeds an explosion. But despite this, the mining inspectors could not establish why the explosion had happened. In their report they said in order to find the cause of a pit explosion one must find the point of origin. "This is often very difficult. This case proved more difficult than any before it. The principal evidence to guide one is the direction of the explosive force, the presence of flame, and the statements of survivors and the nature of death of the victims. So conflicting is the evidence in this case that no conclusion can be made as to the origin of the explosion."

After the blast the prominent French mining engineer M J Taffanel visited the pit. In his account he said, "As in the case of West Stanley the bodies had been brought to the surface and the whole mine was accessible, it remained only to recover two bodies which had probably been buried under rock falls. They had not yet attempted to get the mine back in order so any observation we were able to make coincided with the state of the place exactly as it had been immediately after the accident."

Taffanel's report gives interesting insights which are not to be gained from the official report. There were no firedamp measurements taken, neither were there any indicating lamps. The air was never sampled for laboratory testing and there were no rules at the mine governing all these safety aspects. At two-thirty each morning a special man went into each seam to see if gas was indicated on a Marsuat lamp a lamp fixed with a high-flame burning inside. This method had no precision as far as methane detection was concerned. Some of the British inspectors favoured the hypothesis that electricity caused the critical explosion in the Townley seam. It was here that a winching engine room was burnt out, a barrel of oil was hurled against the rock sides of the haulage road and its contents showed it spilling out towards the coal face - hence the force of the explosion had gone in that direction. The explosion if started according to this hypothesis was caused by electrically charged "arcing" (sparks of electrically charged air shorting between two external terminals caused by damaged fuses or cables). Close examination found no fusing or burning of fuses and no damage was found to any cables. Methane had never been found in this part of the Townley seam. Taffanel, therefore, had to ignore the conclusions drawn by the electrical theory. Taffanel was told that French engineers were now allowed by British Law to Examine any Safety Lamps. He went on to say that the Donald Safety Lamp, one of the types used at the pit was inferior to other lamps. The Donald Lamp was not allowed to be used in French mines because one of the most serious high risk dangers in coalmines is the use of inferior lamps.

Taffanel's report went on to conclude that an initial explosion of firedamp was caused, most probably, by a damaged lamp or a lamp of inferior quality. He could not support the electric arc theory or that of dust caused by a roof fall. He still thought that cables were safe to use in dusty mines. Therefore, firedamp was the initial cause and dust in the Brockwell Seam caused the second explosion according to Taffanel.

He went on to say that firedamp was of an explosive nature nearest the old workings at the verge of the ventilated area when firedamp mixed with air. He also noticed that the explosion, after knocking out barriers, travelled extensively even up and down the pit shaft. The shafts were damp, but flames ran the full height of the shaft and beyond the 220 metres of damp airways in the shaft and did not check the explosive flame.

What is remarkable is that his evidence was never submitted to either of the of the two inquests in 1909 and 1933.

No firm conclusions were reached by the official report as to the cause of the explosion. However, after two more bodies were found a second inquest had to be held. One man whose presence caused some concern at the time of the original exposition, was that of J B Atkinson, a mines inspector who was living in Newcastle and who was to prove a "Thorn in the side of officialdom". Atkinson was a rare prodigy. His family history was steeped in mining. In the 1860s the coal-owners in power appointed Atkinson's father to be one of the very first Mines Inspectors. Atkinson senior did a treatise on mine ventilation which was accepted by all as the standard on this subject. "Atkinsonian" is still a standard unit of air measurement as used in mining. Atkinson's brothers were making a mark in mining circles. At the time of the West Stanley Explosion J.B. Atkinson was H.M. Inspector of Mines for the Newcastle District. His brother was also in a similar position and another was in Australia serving as Chief Inspector of Mines for the Dominion. In fact J.B. Atkinson's grandson is Professor of Mining Engineering at the University of Nottingham today.

Atkinson's view of coal-owners did not endear him to this elite set. He summed them up as stupid men who expected to be immune from government enquiry in cases of explosions or other dreadful happenings in coalmines. He openly stated that they looked on colliers as just industrial martyrs. Atkinson and his brother came down heavily on the management and owners of the Seaham Harbour Pit where 160 men died. They accused the owners of failing to supply adequate safety precautions at the time of the Seaham Harbour incident. By 1933 the Derwent Coal Company became the new owners and opened the pit and in 1933 two men, Bob Chipperton and Ted Burton, were hacking their way towards old workings when two bodies came into view, badly decomposed. This sight chilled the two men and after a few seconds one ran off to fetch the deputy. The bodies proved to be those of William Chaytor and John Rodgers. In 1909 they were working as backshift repair men but their bodies were never found at that time. Prayers were said at the pit-top and they were forgotten.

It was to be an inquest without any fuss or bother. Coroner Carr knew what to do - identify the bodies, echo the verdict of 1909 and resign all the trappings to the coroners' filing cabinets. All should be smooth sailing. In between that day of decision and the day of the inquest a letter arrived on Coroner Carr's desk from J.B. Atkinson. He wanted there to be a full enquiry to prove that all the wrong conclusions had been reached at the first inquest of 1909. When Atkinson strode into the inquest room, Carr's plans had misfired. Atkinson placed a letter on the desk of Coroner Carr and went to find a seat. Mr. Carr spoke out to placate Atkinson. "Mr. Atkinson has written to inform me that he wants to give evidence at this inquest and he has in fact prepared a short statement." He went on, "I am sure all the ground was covered at the first inquest so we will not bother Mr. Atkinson for a statement." "I wish to give evidence," retorted Atkinson, "I cannot allow this to be used in evidence," said the coroner. "There is no need to swear you in as a witness and there will be no need to make notes in the depositions."

Atkinson pointed out that 168 men had been killed, that his evidence was vital, and the coroner hadn't the power to stop him giving evidence.

Coroner Carr was embarrassed but with determination repeated his last words and, turning to the press, who eagerly awaited this combat between the two men of power said "There will be no need for you gentlemen of the press to take notes or mentioned this intervention in the procedure in your reports." They all laid down their pens. Court-room reporters don't cross swords with young coroners who could pass many good stories their way. Atkinson jumped to his feet to continue in argument. Carr noticed this and tactfully agreed a compromise by saying he was about to read an extract from Atkinson's prepared paper but the court should pay no attention to it and there would be no note of it taken in depositions. Atkinson read out his statement and stormed off home to continue the fight.

The extract he read out in court never reached the public ears. It read - "In 1909 after the explosion at West Stanley I went below to examine the Townley Brockwell and Busty seams. I have carefully studied the joint official report and the evidence given at the first inquest. Also I have noted the report of M. Taffanel the French Mining engineer who went below in the West Stanley colliery soon after the 1909 explosion.

Two facts bearing on the explosion were not disclosed at the 1909 inquest neither were they mentioned by the official report or by Mr. Taffanel. These are:

1. Sections of the shaft exhibited at the first inquest and reproduced in the official report do not mention that the shafts were sunk below the Brockwell into the Victoria seam.

2. The landing section of the Return airway of the Brockwell seam was illuminated by two large so-called safety lamps. These are the two weak links in the chain of an otherwise well managed colliery. This is my theory of the explosion. A fall of roof in the North Brockwell seam where men were taking down pillars caused methane gas to be liberated, this gas passed over the large type so-called safety lamps and was ignited. An explosion of gas and air occurred."

None of Atkinson's evidence came to light and he was sure someone at the Home Office was hushing things up. The inquest was just a formality. After the identification of the two bodies it was just left to repeat the final words of the 1909 inquest. "No one was to blame." Coroner Carr's last words rang in Atkinson's ears. "It would be foolish to re-open matters after twenty four years."

In August 1933 Atkinson asked the Durham Miners Association to help name two witnesses as to the use of the unsafe lamps at West Stanley in 1909. Atkinson had seen these two lamps in 1909, but the next time he saw them was in the exhibition at Annfield Plain (on loan from the Armstrong College). There is no answer to Atkinson's plea for witnesses in his papers at the Mining Records (Newcastle) or in the reports of the Durham Miners' Association to be found at the N.E. Headquarters at Redhills Durham.

What is perplexing is the negative role of the union. In the union's report of the West Stanley disaster in September, 1909, they dismissed the idea of a methane explanation, stating a "force had swept inbye prior to any fire or flame having come outbye," but they admitted the Brockwell seam was very dusty and showed signs of having fired and that great areas of coal lay bare and unsupported (an ideal cause of firedamp emissions). Nevertheless the theory of a gas explosion was readily disposed of.

The other two causes examined were mechanic "friction" and electrical "arcing". They stressed that Mr. Hall the manager of West Stanley favoured a mixture of these two theories as having caused the disaster, the friction of iron on iron (tub wheels on rails) or a damaged cable

buried by stone having sparked off the explosion. The union here quote "The French Fire-damp Commissions" experiments which proved sparks of friction could not ignite firedamp which was more flammable than dust. These experiments carried out by Taffanel were not being cited as sufficiently sound evidence in order to discard a theory, but other experiments quoted in Taffanel's report have been totally ignored e.g. Taffanel's theory of inferior lamps igniting firedamp, such lamps having been banned in France. The union considered all the arguments and in the end they summed up by agreeing with Mr. Hall (the manager) and Dr. Thornton (the electrical expert) that electrical sparks caused the explosion and it started in the dusty seam. No damaged cables or fuse boxes were found. The miners' took the words of Hall and Thornton and gave their electrical cause as the most probable when Atkinson and Taffanel had cleared and checked out this theory and dismissed it in favour of a firedamp explosion ignited by inferior or unsafe lamps in the Brockwell seam. What was a "white-washed" inquest and a conspiracy of silence" by the Home Office went unchallenged from the union quarter.

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## TELLING IT AS IT WAS

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### Military intervention in mining disputes, 1921-26

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Mark Dent

Newspaper accounts of the 1921 miners' strike give graphic reports of the presence of the armed forces ready to intervene when required. The spectre of the Russian Revolution and the idling on the street corners of battalions of out of work war heroes were sufficient motivations for the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, to take such precautions.

That such fears were generally held in the upper echelons of society can be gauged by the entries in the Bishop of Durham's diary:

April 3rd 1921. It is a woeful reflection that the main thought in the minds of the people on this fair morning is a thought of anger, of apprehension, even of malice. And where is there left any exorcising virtue. We are in the grip of a malignant fate and as prisoners held fast to a treadmill, perforce we must go forward, though we disapprove the direction and detest the effort. And there is no confidence or possibility of confidence left to us. Even in this strike which seems so insensate and sinister can I purge my mind of a double suspicion that the coal owners want to utilise the crisis to break Labour and the Government want to justify the Prime Minister's language about the ominous risk of Revolution.

April 7th 1921. It really looks like a determined effort to start revolution, though what the men can gain by it is hard to see. But the heady wine of their windy theories has got into their heads and nothing can hold them back from 'having a shot at it'.

April 24th 1921. The King looked tired and worried. He spoke much of the strike and said that Lloyd George had determined to be quite firm against the attempt to impose nationalisation on the nation. He had 100,000 men under arms.

13th April 1921. For the most part, Newcastle was an eminently peaceful-looking city yesterday in the bright sunshine that helped to lighten the burden of care many people are carrying nowadays. Yet reminders were not lacking of the grim danger that lurks in the industrial crisis and the preparations that are being made to meet it. Out Fenham way, tanks and big guns were in evidence and columns of marching men who if they were in civilian dress yet gave every evidence in the swing and rhythm of their movements of previous military experience.

18th April 1921. The stream of humanity which passed the toll boxes at each end of the High Level Bridge during the weekend was furnished with a sharp reminder of the industrial crisis, for khaki sentries stood on guard in business-like attitude. More were posted in the near vicinity and a number of sandbags were stacked beneath an arch. Then overlooking the parapet one was given further room for thought in the shape of the grey bows of a couple of destroyers which were moored close to the Quay Wharf. Altogether the scene was reminiscent of war days and more than one observation was passed as to 'what it all meant'.

13th April 1921. More striking still was the squadron of armoured cars parked for a spell in the Bigg Market, the cynosure with their crews of many eyes. Dull grey in colour and with machine guns peeping from their turrets, these cars had a sinister yet eminently useful appearance. And 'useful' is a word which struck one as quite applicable to the officers and men who manned them. They had the look most of them of tried soldiers who knew their job. Let us hope there will be no test for them at home.

The Leviathans were manoeuvred on at least one occasion, for my father, then a boy of eleven, remembers that in the village of Burnhope, the day after a baker's van had been held up and its confectionary contents distributed to the miners' families, an armoured car appeared and patrolled the streets of the village, for a short but significant boyhood time.

That such military excursions into rebellious mining communities were envisaged is also witnessed in the log book of Long Newton Church of England School, in Lord Londonderry estate country between Darlington and Stockton. On April 14th 1921 the entry simply reads, "Military authorities called at school today re billeting of soldiers."

In the General Strike of May 1926, apart from the display of armed might in London and the presence in the major seaports, there is little evidence to suggest that the Baldwin Government was prepared to use the armed forces on a large scale, and in the North East reliance was placed on the civil powers of the police to maintain and, if necessary, restore law and order. It is also true that the relevant P.R.O. files which should disclose the machinations of the Government with regard to the use of the Armed Forces remain secret.

In the first week of the General Strike the avenues from Newcastle into the heartland of the Durham coalfield were heavily picketed, and these proud pickets were able to exercise a great deal of control over the passage of people and goods along the routes. On the weekend of May 9th the besieged authorities made a concerted effort to regain control over the roads, police baton charges were instigated at Birtley, Ferryhill, and elsewhere in the North West of the County. Henceforth police escorted lorry convoys were the order of the days of that May.

There are however five independent accounts which suggest that the Civil Commissioner in the North East, Sir Kingsley Wood, was under sufficient pressure to make at least a demonstration of military force to retain this tenuous control of the King's Highway:-

1) A miner from the Stanley area is unshakeable in his belief that the strategic objective of the use of civil and military force in the district was to prevent groups of activists from neighbouring pit villages from meeting and 'plotting' a co-ordinated campaign of action and resistance. (Recollections of Jack Dawson. Author's records)

2) Two armoured cars passed through Durham on Monday (May 11th) travelling in a northerly direction. They evoke not a little interest among the crowd of onlookers. (Durham Chronicle, 15th May 1926)

3) "There were armoured cars, I am not saying a fleet of them, but I saw at least one, it might have been the same one. It used to patrol up and down the road from Rowlands Gill and used to go up to Chopwell." (Albert E Patchett. General Strike Tapes, No 11A. Gateshead Public Libraries.)

4) The Workers' Defence Corps had been called out to support the pickets, eight lorry loads of police had been drafted into the village. Two armoured cars had entered the village one night. This was the result of a car which had attempted to drive through the pickets being struck with a stone. Another private car had driven through the pickets at speed and one of its occupants had fired a revolver. Some distance along the road, it turned round and raced back and again a revolver shot was fired. Fortunately no one was hurt. (Jack Hobbs, miners' secretary, Burnhope Lodge. Miner 26.6.1926)

5) The winning children's essay on the subject 'What I did during the General Strike' was written by Robert Farbridge, aged 9, of Hamsterley Colliery.

"I live in a little village on the banks of the River Derwent. The road that runs through our village is the main road between Newcastle and Consett. When the General Strike started I used to see groups of men standing on the road when I was going to and from school. On the second day there was some men standing with papers in their coats, and a lot of people near them. I went home to get my tea, and asked my mother why the men had papers in their coats, and what all the people were there for. She said the men who had papers in their coats were pickets, and were trying to stop the 'buses and cars from running. She told me to keep away off the road because I may get knocked over by the crowd, but when I got my tea I went onto the road to watch the pickets stopping the cars.

Every night, when I came home from school and got my tea, I used to go on the road to watch the pickets. On the last day I got a fright; two armoured cars came flying along the road with machine guns on, and a soldier standing on the top waving his arms. There was no more picketing done after that day, because my father said the General Strike was ended."

(Labour Woman, August 1926)

Further evidence of the fear of the government and the ruling classes of a potential revolutionary situation developing from the miners' dispute is revealed in the diaries of Bishop Henson:

"July 15th 1926 Fearne and I motored to Harperley and had tea with Colonel and Mrs Stobart. Their garden is wonderful. He told me that during the General Strike all the rifles of the Territorials had to be sent away in order that the risk of their being seized might be obviated. This shows the authorities realised the gravity of the situation."

Such action is confirmed by several old miners in the Birtley district who remember that the windows of the building used as Territorial headquarters were grilled with iron bars during the period of the strike.

Remembering Peterloo, Tonypandy and other incidents, it would be the more surprising if the Baldwin Government had not had secret plans for the use of military force and presence if in their adjudged opinion the security of the State had been threatened in 1926.

The Supply and Transport Committee of the British cabinet decided at a meeting on the 5th May 1926 "on the necessity to make a considerable show of force on the outbreak of serious disorder in any area".

## 1926 - Women support the Miners

### Maureen Callcott

An impressive and moving feature of the recent miners' strike has been the supportive activity of women in mining communities. They have not only provided moral support but also massive back-up organisation to enable impoverished families to hold out for 12 months. This has both demonstrated and nourished their sensitivity about their communities. Here we have Mrs Bella Jolly's account of how the women of Stanley, County Durham, helped miners' families in 1926.\* Mrs Jolly came to Stanley from Teesside in the early years of this century when she married Bill Jolly, a miner. She was horrified by the Stanley Pit Disaster of 1909 and when Keir Hardie visited the town they both joined the Independent Labour Party. From then on political activity was central to their lives. In 1922 Bella Jolly was co-opted to the Durham County Education Committee (and remained a member for 50 years), she was also a Stanley Councillor, a magistrate and a member of the Board of Guardians. Mr Jolly left the mines for health reasons in 1918 but they both remained committed to the interests of those working in the major industry in their region. Thus in 1926 Bella Jolly was centrally involved in organising the distribution of food, clothing and other resources in Stanley throughout the six months of the strike. She continues with her own story:

"By that time Mr Jolly was a Schoolboard Man, and they wanted women like me who could be free through the day to go and stop in the labour rooms to answer questions, and enquiries and things like that because men were picketing.

Well I was doing a bit of speaking for the Durham Miners and I was told whatever I had to do was keep my bike clear you know? and to do no outside speaking whatever. They couldn't do anything whilst I was inside but I must do no outside speaking. Everybody knew the fiasco of the general strike, but it was terrible while it lasted. By the time the strike broke out, we were running the child welfare centres, and the Welfares were able to give the children free food because the miners were just on 23s per week. If you were on the dole and just had a certain figure you could get 2 or 3 packets of baby food for the bairns so we continued that and the babies were fed, they were fed with the free food from the Welfare.

Now to the miners themselves, I was on the Board of Guardians at the time, we used to go and sit every day and we assessed the amount of relief, just in kind mind, no money, to the women and children. They got their vouchers for tea and sugar, and naturally the women gave the men the food, but there was no money. To help all relief cases we used to have bands parading and have collections, and these were what we called special cases, which needed maybe a bit extra nourishment. We used to meet twice a week and dole out these little bits of collections by giving a little bit of butter and a couple of eggs and a pint of milk. Everybody sent goods or money to the miners' relief fund. Maybe two or three stones (big bags of sugar) would come, chocolates from Rowntrees, biscuits from biscuit factories, piles and piles of old clothes from all over the country. The thing was how to get these things out to people. Well the Durham Miners' Hall took all this stuff, everything went direct from the donors and two days a week on Mondays and Thursdays, women like myself who were Labour Secretaries went into Durham and got this stuff. We brought clothes out, we brought chocolates, sugar, rice, peas, we brought everything that came, it was all shared out. Well we just had to carry it. There was just the bus, we had to get down from Redhills. We were just like pack horses. Now folks would come, 'Jimmy can't go to school without a pair of boots'. Well I would say we are going in on Monday give me his size and I will see if we can get him a pair. Come back on Monday Night, well I haven't been able to get them yet, but here's a coat for you, and we might manage to get you boots for Thursday take these now". Two women from each area went twice a week, all the time the strike lasted, to Durham, and brought everything conceivable that folks could send.

Great big bales of clothes from Leeds and places like that came, because the Labour folks were collecting among the universities and colleges and we got some really good stuff. Even hiking boots that had never been on, everything you could mention, suits that had hardly been worn real good stuff but that's the way we got them out. Now we weren't the only ones that were doing that because Labour women all over the country were doing it. I put three women's coats on and then carried other things on my shoulders, but we got them out, and for women that were having babies we had the child welfare and maternity centre, and we had a very sympathetic midwife, Nurse Cook would say "Mrs Jolly, Mrs so and so is going to have a baby and I've nothing to put on". "Well never mind come back in a few days time", and I'm not telling you a lie when I say that there wasn't a set of baby clothes left in Stanley by the time the strike was over. We cadged everything, and mind you just had to go and say now look you this is all we can get, but we'll get you something when the woman has her baby we'll let you have the things. And I guess, somebody was talking about baby clothes and someone said "There's nee baby clothes left in Stanley Mrs Jolly's got them all". They couldn't have carried on if we didn't have the collections. You see the miners carried on after the general strike broke, when they put the leaders in prison, the miners went it alone. They were very bitter, but they wouldn't give in, no they said we'll go it alone. Well they went for 6 months and fortunately during all that 6 months I don't think we had two days rain, it was gorgeous weather.

The Welfare was looking after the babies, and the food vouchers the women were getting were giving the men a bite to eat. We were getting through this relief fund as many clothes that we could, and were getting money for special items for folks that were sick so in the main the wheels were running on. The only thing was there was no money, the rents were running on and people had to go to bed at night because they hadn't pennies for the lights and things like that . . .

Mind some of them (Building Societies) were very good, some of the societies stopped the payments until the strike was over, and even landlords,

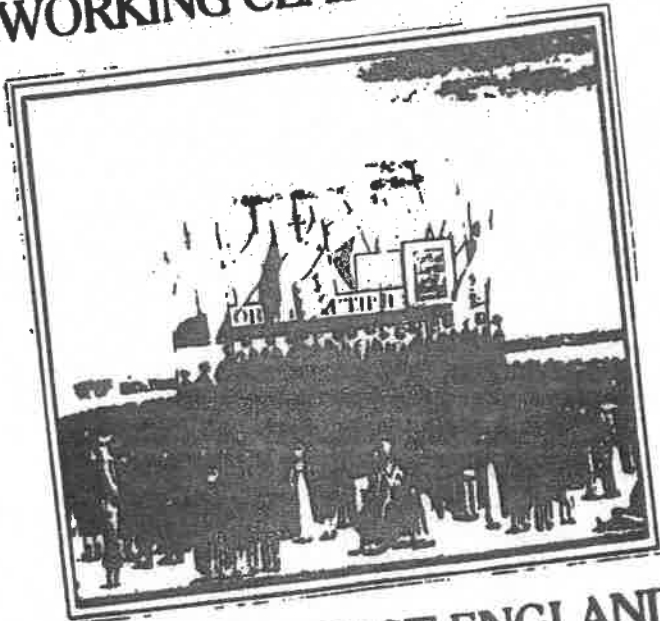
because they didn't have council houses like they have now, some of them just didn't bother going for the rents until the strike was over. And let it be said that private landlords told me that at 6d. and 1s 0d per week after the miners got back to work they got their money back and people who had let the tick out, grocery shops etc., got it all back and the (Cooperative) let their regular members, let them run on, some as high as £20 to £30. That was a lot of money then. It was a lot, not like money now. You talk about money now like peas.

Most of the private landlords were kind, they really couldn't put people out, there was no where to put them, really it was the best thing to let the money run up and trust to the good grace of the folk. The shopkeepers told me that they got every penny back, and the Store certainly did. The Store was in a better position because when they started trading again they had their dividend and they could wipe off, before they paid dividend what they owed.

Well that's how we got through the miners' strike. If the Labour movement has to go down in history, one of its finest achievements is how the women stood by their men in 1926, and I really believe that. If ever I had to say what was the greatest achievement of the labour movement it would be the miners' strike."

\*The account is taken from a tape-recording of an interview with Mr and Mrs Jolly made in 1970 by Maureen Callcott and Norman McCord.

## WORKING CLASS POLITICS



## IN NORTH EAST ENGLAND

*Edited by M Callcott and R Challinor*

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# I REMEMBER IT WELL

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## The Other Victory: Sunderland, July 1945

### Archie Potts

The fortieth anniversary of the Allied victory over Nazi Germany has been widely celebrated this year. Rightly so, because the defeat of Nazism was a major event in world history. However, we should not allow remembrance of the great military victory to crowd out some consideration of another historic victory of that same year, namely, the return of a Labour Government with an overall majority of 148 seats in the House of Commons.

I was thirteen years old at the time and remember the VE celebrations in Sunderland very well. Houses and shops were bedecked with flags and bunting, there was singing and dancing, and victory parades, and children's street parties. With the passing of years the memory of the 1945 Labour victory remains the more vivid in my mind, and the reason for this can be found in my family background and the political environment in which I was brought up.

I was born into a highly-politicised family, and the family's political allegiance was to the Labour Party. Not that my father was ever a paid-up member of the Party. Although a proud member of the Boilermakers' Society he was not one for joining organisations and never actually joined the Labour Party, although he voted for its candidates and supported its policies from the 1920s until his death in the 1970s.

One of my earliest memories was to hear a denunciation of Stanley Baldwin. Every Sunday morning my uncle, who lived in the next street, came round to our house for a 'bit of a crack' and he did this from the mid-thirties until the 1950s. The conversation was dominated by the politics and the discussion always followed a set pattern. First, there was some talking over of current events: the Anschluss, the progress of the civil war in Spain, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, Munich, the abdication of Edward VIII. This was followed by a replay of earlier events since 1918: the deviousness of Lloyd George, the Geddes axe, the Zinoviev letter, the general strike, the May Committee and the 1931 crisis. Things were viewed in black and white. There were no shades of grey. Lloyd George and Ramsay MacDonald were 'traitors', Baldwin and Chamberlain were 'scoundrels', and the Labour Party and trade union leaders of past and present were heroes. The memory of A J Cook was revered in our house as 'a fighter' and 'the man who never gave in'. Ernest Bevin, then best known as the 'Dockers' K.C.', was also much admired. And here is a curious thing, although Cook was a left-winger and Bevin stood on the right of the Labour Party these terms were never used to differentiate between figures inside the Labour Movement, at least not in our house. All the leaders were held in high regard. They were our champions, and any of their shortcomings were discounted or not believed. It was held to be a fact of life that the 'capitalist press' would always report the activities of Labour leaders in a bad light and therefore one could safely discount any adverse stories read about them in the newspapers.

The same approach was adopted towards the Soviet Union. Although my father and uncle were never Communists they took a very sympathetic of the Soviet Union and its policies. That the Soviet Union enjoyed full employment was a big plus in its favour, and the achievements of the USSR's five year plans of economic development were contrasted with Britain's economic depression. Stalin's version of the great purges of the 1930s was therefore accepted hook, line and sinker. The Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 and the Soviet attack on Finland were swallowed with some difficulty, but nevertheless they managed to get them down.

If it is said that these men were the dupes of Soviet propaganda, at least my father's view of Nazi Germany and its aims proved to be far more perceptive than that of, say, the British Foreign Office. My father read 'Mein Kampf' and concluded that Hitler meant what he said. Hitler was viewed from the start as a menace to Europe, who would have to be checked, by force if necessary. Chamberlain's appeasement policies were fiercely criticised. My father was a great admirer of the Czechoslovak Republic. It was only geographically a 'far away country' to him, for he had read many books on the subject and admired the achievements of Masaryk and Benes in building a social democracy in the heart of Europe. He was therefore outraged by the Munich agreement and strongly supported Churchill's views on the need for British rearmament, although he disagreed with almost everything else Churchill stood for.

The outbreak of war in 1939 did not come as a surprise and the collapse of French resistance in 1940 was anticipated by my father, although my uncle put great faith in the Maginot Line. With the outbreak of war the Sunday seminars began with a review of the week's war news, followed by the familiar replay of post-1918 political events. When Hitler attacked the USSR in June 1941 the great fight put up by the Russian people appeared to them to vindicate their views on the Soviet Union. Stalin's purges had rooted out a fifth column just in time and the Soviet acquisition of the Baltic States and part of Finland had proved vital to Russian survival.

Victory in Europe was quickly followed by the calling of a general election with polling to take place on 5 July 1945, although the declaration of election results was delayed until 26 July to enable the counting of forces ballot papers.

The election campaign of 1945 was very different in several respects from those of today. There were a few party political broadcasts on the radio, but there was, of course, no television, and war-time newspapers were very small, hence candidates had to rely on public meetings to put their case over. Mid-day meetings were held in shipyards and works canteens, and in the evenings the candidates usually spoke at two different meetings held in school halls, and because some people followed the candidates from one meeting to another a candidate could not make the same speech twice in the same evening. In addition there were public meetings held in the large halls with a 'big name', such as Hugh Dalton or Chuter Ede, as guest speaker. In Sunderland such meetings were held at the Cooperative Hall in Green Street or the Miners' Hall in Roker Avenue.

The highlight of Labour's 1945 election campaign in Sunderland, however, was undoubtedly the meeting held at Roker Park football ground with Shinwell as the main speaker. The crowd sat in the stand or stood in the paddock below it, facing a dais set on the pitch. Shinwell was in top form that evening. He built his speech around the theme of a game of football, accusing the Tories of being a one-man team with Churchill as their only star player, whereas Labour could field a well-balanced team of first-class players. What I remember most clearly about Shinwell's speech was his humour and not his invective. His jokes were delivered with a skill and timing which many music-hall comedians would have envied. It was a virtuoso performance and I have never seen it bettered by any other politician.

The result of the general election was to give the Labour Party a massive overall majority in the House of Commons. In Sunderland, then a dual-member constituency, F T Willey, a barrister, and Richard Ewart, a trade union official, won the two seats for Labour, defeating a Conservative, a Liberal National and a Communist candidate. Several studies have been published explaining why Labour won the 1945 general election, but for what it is worth my own impression at the time was that resentment at the heavy unemployment suffered during the 1920s and 30s was the major factor in motivating people to vote Labour in Sunderland.

On the Sunday morning following the announcement of the results my uncle came round for his weekly discussion and for once the pattern was broken. There was in fact, very little said on this occasion. The two men sat in their armchairs and were content to savour their victory largely in silence. For they regarded it as 'their' victory, and truth to tell, since 1918 they had had precious few victories to celebrate.

I remember my uncle saying, 'They'll never get us out'. Of course he was as wrong about that as he had been about the Maginot Line, but I doubt if that ever worried him. For nothing could take away from these two men - and no doubt many others like them - the intense satisfaction they gained from Labour's 1945 electoral victory.

# T R A D E

## NORTHERN FILM ARCHIVE/TRADE FILMS

On the 26th November 1984 the Society was treated to a visit to the premises of Trade Films at the Bottlebank, Gateshead. Despite the disappointing turnout this turned out to be a most enjoyable and informative evening. We were shown a wide sample of the unit's work which covered such diverse items as the first known movie film of coal mining, an inter-war housing cooperative, and a war time propaganda film introduced by Jack Common which aimed to attract ex-shipyard workers back to their former jobs. More recent material included interviews with veterans of Chopwell's 'Little Moscow', women trade unionists, and activities in the miners' strike. The unit is building up an archive collection of old film, transferring it to video for easier access. It also aims to catch history 'in the making' by building up a library of contemporary material, much of it in the form of interviews. They were, for example, closely involved with the Miners' Campaign Videotapes. Much of the unit's work is available for purchase or hire and this is a venture deserving of our fullest support.

KEITH WILSON

Among Trade Film's productions currently distributed by the Archive are:

**DEEP DIVISIONS: Coal and Class in County Durham:** A short film, drawing on material from the Beamish Photographic Archive, which looks at conditions in the local mining communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. (13 mins)

**The Empire's Children:** Another film drawing on material from the Beamish collection which looks at the lives of young people in the North East at the turn of the century. (15 mins)

**Who'll Keep the Red Flag Flying Here?:** People on Tyneside - trade unionists, tenants, young people - talk during the 1983 General Election campaign about the issues as they see them - unemployment, the NHS, defence policy - and about their traditional support for the Labour Party together with some of their current doubts and reservations. (58 mins)

The Northern Film and TV Archive,  
36 Bottle Bank  
Gateshead,  
Tyne & Wear  
NEB 2AR

Tel: (091) 477 3601

## Letters of a Portuguese Consul, 1877-79

In the last issue we published, in translation, a collection of letters written by Eca de Queiros, Portuguese Consul in Newcastle between 1874 and 1879. In the process of preparing the Bulletin for publication the text was not checked by the author and it contained a number of typing errors; more seriously, a substantial part of the third letter was not printed at all.

Our apologies go to the author, Dr Alan Freeland of Southampton University and we print below the full text of the third letter.

[18 January 1878]

Sir,

This is the second time in the short space of four months that I must inform you of a conflict between owners and workers in the collieries of this district.<sup>4</sup> These constantly recurring struggles are undermining the wealth of the county and, what is worse, creating feelings of hostility and mistrust between the two classes and a division of interests that may lead in the future to social consequences far more serious than the economic consequences.

It used to be said that in these northern counties relations between owners and workers set a fine example of harmony and proved that attitudes and customs were becoming more democratic. However, it is now clear that this fraternity was simply the result of prosperity. When the coal industry could give the owners maximum profits and provide the workers with the highest wages in the kingdom, the comfort of the former and the prosperity of the latter produced a golden peace. But the moment the crisis came the conflict of interests led immediately to hostile relations. Concession gave way to struggle. The truce, established by the appeasement of ambitions temporarily satisfied, came to an end, and class selfishness reappeared with all its worst characteristics: mutual mistrust, the intolerant exaggeration of contradictory interests. Since the beginning of the 'coal crisis' every effort of the owners has been to reduce wages - which, as a burden on the cost of production, cut the return on capital - without giving any consideration to the well-being of the workers. The workers, on the other hand, have felt it necessary to resist what they see

as base exploitation of human labour, without giving any recognition to the natural working of economic laws. Hence these successive strikes that are having such a deeply disturbing effect on this district in which coal is the great elemental force of industry. The coal business has undoubtedly been going through a severe crisis. The origins of this crisis lie in the past and are complex, but may be set out briefly as follows. Six or seven years ago when, as a result of the political and industrial state of Europe, England - especially the North (Northumberland and Durham) - had become the great, indeed almost the only coal producer and these firms gave an extraordinary rate of interest, there was naturally a rush of activity and capital into this industry. Coal production expanded at an astonishing rate; every week that passed saw the exploitation of a new mine. Such was the influx of orders that the buyers in the greatest hurry, who wanted the cargo dispatched more quickly, would offer as a premium so much per cent above the price; and, with an enormous merchant fleet, the docks on the Tyne were constantly full. The reaction was not long in coming. The great political and military upheaval of 1870-71 had passed: Europe was beginning to settle down and return to work; continental buyers were taking fright at the high price of English coal. The cost of production had risen in England but fallen on the Continent, and France, Belgium, Italy and Germany devoted themselves to exploiting their own coal deposits. America, a great customer of England, did the same. About this time and due to the same causes the iron industry, the most important consumer of coal, went into its own crisis; and suddenly the North of England found itself with an enormous quantity of coal and no consumers. The crisis became more clearly defined: prices fell and some mines immediately suspended work. In the period of prosperity the workers had obtained successive wage increases, through successive threats of strike at moments when manpower was most needed. A Northumberland miner at that time earned as much as a small factory-owner. A certain level of comfort was widespread among the working classes, indeed one might even say relative luxury, since, I am assured, many pianos were sold in the mining villages! With the outbreak of the crisis, the first concern of the owners was to cut wages in order to reduce the cost of production. And so began this long series of conflicts which has brought only wretchedness and resentment. The reductions imposed on the miners have meant a severe and sharp fall in wages: in April 1874, a 10% reduction; in October of the same year, 14%; in January 1875, 10%; in October 1875, 8%; in August 1876, 8%; in May 1877, a further demand for a 10% reduction.

All these reductions provoked great anger among the miners and led to very hostile meetings; the reductions were always decided finally by an arbitration tribunal.

It was not to be expected, therefore, that the mine-owners' association,

at the beginning of last December, would inform the workers of the need for a new reduction of 12%. There was great surprise and loud indignation. A deputation of workers called on the owners' association, asking for the reasons for this unexpected demand. The reply was predictable: 'that the coal industry was in a disastrous crisis, the biggest mines in the district were idle, the owners' losses were increasing, they could not continue production at present wage rates, the mines still operating would have to close, the reduction was a regrettable but unavoidable necessity'.

The workers, feeling that there was a lot of truth in this declaration, agreed to accept the reduction, provided, obviously, that it was decided by the arbitrators in accordance with long-established practice. This condition was scrupulously fair, since for a long time the rule has been that every difference over wages in this district is referred for examination and decision to an arbitration tribunal. However, to everyone's surprise, the owners refused to accept arbitration! The workers left the mines immediately, and 10,000 men with families, a total of 40,000 people, are suffering the misery of a strike in this harsh winter.

The behaviour of the owners is without any doubt unjust. Against established precedent, forgetting all the benefits that the peaceful legal system of arbitration has brought to relations between capital and labour, and with a hastiness and severity incompatible with class harmony, the owners are presenting a demand without allowing its justice or injustice to be investigated, insisting upon its terms in a despotic and arbitrary fashion. If arbitration was adopted before, why is it rejected now? Why try to impose by force what until now was decided by justice? If the owners appealed to arbitration when it was a question of raising wages, why do they reject it now that it is a question of reducing them? Why did they demand arbitration when they considered it in their favour, why do they refuse it when they think it may go in favour of the workers? The bad faith is palpable. All the reductions that the workers have suffered have been imposed on them through arbitration, so they have no reason to look on it with favourable eyes; and yet they are prepared to submit to its enlightened judgment. If in fact the demands of trade require a reduction, at the very least the legal procedures should be respected and the reduction imposed by the tribunal of arbitrators, thus making it legal rather than merely arbitrary. But to say 'we are enforcing a reduction' is to adopt a system that can only lead to mistrust, hostility and class enmity. That is what the miners say.

This is the state of affairs, and the strike is continuing. The Miners' National Union is helping the Newcastle workers, giving each man six shillings a week.<sup>10</sup> Individual donations have been received but they are insufficient. The winter weather is severe, the men have no savings,

and hunger is beginning to make its appearance. Some families are emigrating, others are dispersing to look for casual labour. Since the miners have free housing and coal, some owners were of the view that this coal and housing should be taken from them. I am almost ashamed to have to write this detail, but it is indispensable if I am to represent accurately the feelings that prevail. I am certain that such an idea could never have occurred to the owners, were it not for the deep resentment and the desire for reprisals that separate the two classes. What would be the situation of thousands of families having to live without shelter in the open country at this time of year when, if it is not pouring with rain, there are driving blizzards? How could this be endured by the women, weakened by privation, or by the sick, the old and the little children? Indeed, this was the method employed during the strike last June, but that was in a mild season, dry and warm, and people could sleep in the fields.

Fortunately, no such decision has been taken so far. Who knows what fatal consequences it might bring.

Due to the strike coal exports have almost ceased. In the Consulate activity has been very slight: ten or twelve days go by without a cargo being dispatched to Portuguese ports. The little coal that is being exported comes from Durham and it is only in gas-coal that some dealing continues, though to a very limited extent.

I very much hope that I shall soon be able to inform you that this conflict is over, and to announce the reorganization of work on a basis that will ensure equity and guarantee prosperity.

Consulate of Portugal in Newcastle, January 18th, 1878.

The Minister and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

I have the honour, Sir, to be your most obedient servant

José Maria d' Eça de Queirós

Unless there is a lapse of memory here on the part of Eça de Queirós, it would appear from this opening that he wrote in September 1877 concerning 'a conflict between owners and workers'. If indeed there is a missing letter of September 1877, it may have referred to the Durham miners' strike at Bearpark. See F. Welbourne, The Miners' Unions of Northumberland and Durham (Cambridge, 1923), p. 185.

10 Welbourne states that 'the utmost strike pay which the union could afford was a sum of 3s. 4p. a week'. Welbourne, op. cit., p. 184.

# REVIEWS

'Digging Deeper. Issues in the Miners' Strike' edited by Huw Beynon, Verso, £3.95.

In the current climate the need to rehearse the arguments as to the uses of History appears stronger than ever. Among these is the claim that knowledge of the past is essential to an understanding of the present. Similarly, the lessons and parallels of the past provide us with a series of guides to possible futures. Should anyone be in doubt as to the importance of History in these respects they would be well advised to turn to 'Digging Deeper'. What the book clearly shows is the extent to which the miners' strike of 1984-5 was shot through with the legacies of previous disputes, and while Tony Benn suggested a parallel with Luddism, the dominant points of reference were those of 1926, 1972 and 1974. One possible thesis is that the miners and many of their supporters on the left took 1926 as their historical touchstone. As Huw Beynon remarks, 'the Labour leadership was looking at the miners' strike 'through the rear view mirror'. The strike was seen as a re-enactment of the 1926 confrontation, with the ending pre-ordained'. (page 22). In another chapter David Howell gives us 'Where's Ramsay MacKinnock? Labour leadership and the Miners', while elsewhere the pattern is repeated. Martin Kettle, for example, wrote of '1926 and now. If the miners lose again' (New Socialist Feb, 1985), while Socialist Worker Review for March 1985 led with '1926-1985 Patterns of defeat.' Where the General Strike parallel was dropped it was only to replace it with one of military defeat, such as Neil Kinnock's reference to Gallipoli or John Field's Dunkirk. The key point surely is that, unless lessons have been learnt from defeat, these analogies serve as little more than historical millstones.

The Tories, on the other hand, had shorter memories. 1972 and 1974 loomed large as formative influences on their policies. Determined to avenge what was seen as humiliation, they used the lessons of those years in a systematic manner to engineer the scenario of 1984. From the Ridley plan of 1978, through the appointments of Marshall to the CEEB and MacGregor to the NCB, through changes in industrial relations legislation and changes in welfare benefits provision, through the appointment of Bell and Hart to the public relations department of the NCB and through the apparent withdrawal of the pit closure plan in 1981, the actions of the government clearly show its determination to weaken the power of the miners. If anyone still believes that the issue of the ballot was decisive in the strike they should consult this book and reconsider.

The book itself is divided into three sections. The first looks at the forces facing the miners - the Tory State, the Conservative party, the Welfare State benefit system, the police and the media. The second looks at the forces helping the miners such as the role of the women's support groups. Ramsey MacKinnock finds his way into this section. Part three looks to the future with assessments of nuclear power, computerised coal extraction, and the overall (un)employment policies for the coalfields. Like all collective efforts some chapters are stronger and more interesting than others but, to the book's credit, there is little of the repetition which might have been expected.

The great strength of 'Digging Deeper' is that it serves to remind us of the limitations of much current labour history. There is little point in 'reclaiming' history and writing history 'from the bottom up' if it does not teach us lessons or give us guides for future action. Equally labour history cannot be adequately handled without an investigation of the forces opposed to labour. On both counts 'Digging Deeper' serves us well, and although written before the strike ended, the British Library cataloguing data already lists the book as 'History - 20th Century'.

K W

The possibility of uniting public and private information about his subject was, as Ben Pimlott acknowledges, exceptionally fortunate. For Hugh Dalton kept a diary during most of his adult life and this has been the major source for this fine biography. But the portrait here presented of one of Labour's major figures is drawn from the fullest possible range of sources and is a model in its construction, selection and interpretation. As Pimlott argues, "The facts that matter are not just events in the life under scrutiny; they include facts about friends, enemies and society in general." And thus he brings to life the personality and times of his difficult subject.

Dalton was not a wholly engaging individual and his ambition, autocratic ways and propensity for subterfuge and plotting are fully illustrated. He was M.P. for Bishop Auckland from 1929-1959, except for 1931-1935, and Pimlott talked to a number of people there who retained vivid recollections of Dalton. He preferred his constituency secretary, Will Davis, a local schoolteacher, to a paid agent after the serious difficulties experienced in his previous seat Peckham, for Davis accepted Dalton's principle, that a healthy party was an inactive one. Later he told an official, "I didn't want a big party. Too many members might upset the applecart and bring in militants." In 1948 he was compelled to accept an agent when boundary changes reduced the security of Bishop Auckland. Tom Anderson, the man appointed, while retaining a "guarded affection" for Dalton said, 'He was the shiftiest man I ever knew, but he was the best fellow to work with...' If there was any Party after 1931 and his effecting of the Party's shift from appeasement of Hitler are thoroughly analysed as one of his wartime roles and conflicts at the Ministry of Economic Warfare, Special Operations Executive and The Board of Trade. The circumstances surrounding the Budget leak when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer which enforced his resignation are shown to relate in part at least to the pressures of the office is unimaginably difficult post-war conditions which affected his powerful constitution for the first time. Throughout the book Dalton's personal and public life are interwoven and we understand how the Etonian son of the Canon of Windsor, tutor to the royal princes, became and remained a committed socialist. The wider context of events, local national and international is also skilfully connected with Dalton's life and career.

The whole is a most compelling narrative, a highly impressive, masterly biography.

MC

WILLIAM'S MORRIS'S SOCIALIST DIARY, ed. Florence Boos. Journeyman Press. £3.25.

In the coal strike of 1887, one of the bitterest struggles, when angry militant miners repudiated the moderate leaders, speakers descended on the North East in droves. Among them was the distinguished Victorian writer and art critic, William Morris. The only strike meetings he ever addressed took place at Horton and Blyth. These diaries, covering the period from 25 January to 27 April 1887, deal with the day-to-day activities as a socialist agitator. They include his personal reactions to his experiences in Geordieland.

On arrival at Newcastle, Morris was met by John Lincoln Mahon, the organiser of the Socialist League. The following morning they set off for Seghill, where they met one of the rank-and-file leaders, a man whose face had been wrecked and he had lost one eye in a colliery explosion. He explained the points at issue, the proposed wage re-

duction and the sliding scale. Morris was impressed by his knowledge and lack of rancor, by his good-tempered wife and by the tidiness of the cottage.

In Blyth Market Square, Morris spoke for 40 minutes before starting off, along with a small group of strikers, in the direction of Horton. "The day was bright and sunny," he observed, "the bright blue sea forming a strange border to the misery of the land." As they progressed, their procession grew in size. A banner appeared. A band joined in. By the time they reached Horton, an impressive number had assembled. His diary records:

"We spoke from one waggon, Fielding of the SDF in the chair, then me then Hyndman then Donald. It was a very good meeting: the front ranks sat down to let the others hear and see. The audience listened intently and were hearty with us: they began by objecting to the reporters, and cried out to 'put them out' unless they put all down. They hooted the police lustily when I said something about these worthies; being much excited by the news of J. Williams' arrest in London, as he has been down speaking to them."

Afterwards Morris rushed off to catch a train. He had to do another meeting, this time at Ryton Willows, "a piece of rough healthy ground by the Tyneside under the bank by which the railway runs." It was a lovely sunny evening, with children enjoying themselves on the nearby swings and merry-go-round. Clearly enjoying himself too, Morris continued speaking until well after dark. Proceedings ended with three cheers for socialism.

William Morris was quite realistic about the long term consequences of the socialist campaign. Its immediate impact had been to arouse widespread enthusiasm for the cause; he rightly doubted whether this would be maintained. Even so, some of those men, touched by what they heard and did in the 1887 dispute, are names that turn up in the annals of the working-class movement of the North East in later years.

William Morris's Socialist Diary gives a useful insight into the struggles of the time. My main criticisms would be the high price - £3.50 for 37 pages -- and the fact that his activities cannot be seen in context because an account of the 1887 dispute is yet to appear.

Raymond Challinor.

## NORTHEAST LABOUR HISTORY SOCIETY



Details of the Society's meetings, activities and membership are available from the Secretary,

Keith Wilson  
Bishop Auckland Technical College  
Woodhouse Lane  
BISHOP AUCKLAND  
DL14 6JZ

# ANNUAL REPORT

## The Committee

<u>President</u>	Professor Norman McCord (Newcastle University)
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## Publications Sub-Committee

Maureen Callcott, Ray Challinor, Ian Hunter, Bryan Rees, Roy Sturgess, John Rowland, Tony Barrow, Keith Wilson.

## Meetings

- 29 October AGM followed by 'Tyneside and the making of the Russian Revolution' - Talk by Dr David Saunders.
- 26 November Visit to the Northern Film Archive and Trade Films at Bottle Bank, Gateshead.
- 24 January 'Labour Migration in the Durham Coalfield in the Nineteenth Century' - Talk by Dr Mike Sill.
- 25 February 'Class, History and Experience' - Talk by Bill Williamson.
- 11 March 'The Lost Years: Northumberland Miners, 1844-1862' - Talk by Bryan Rees.

Back numbers of the Bulletin are available from the Treasurer at a cost of £1.50 plus postage. 'Working Class Politics in North East England (eds. M Callcott and R Challinor) was published at the end of 1983 at a cost of £2.50 to members, £4.50 retail. Copies can be ordered from the Treasurer.

The Society welcome new members, ideas and contributions for publication or lecturers. The cost of membership includes a copy of the Bulletin.

## Membership

Institutions £4.00

Individuals £3.00

Students, Pensioners and Unwaged £1.00

Keith Wilson  
(Secretary)