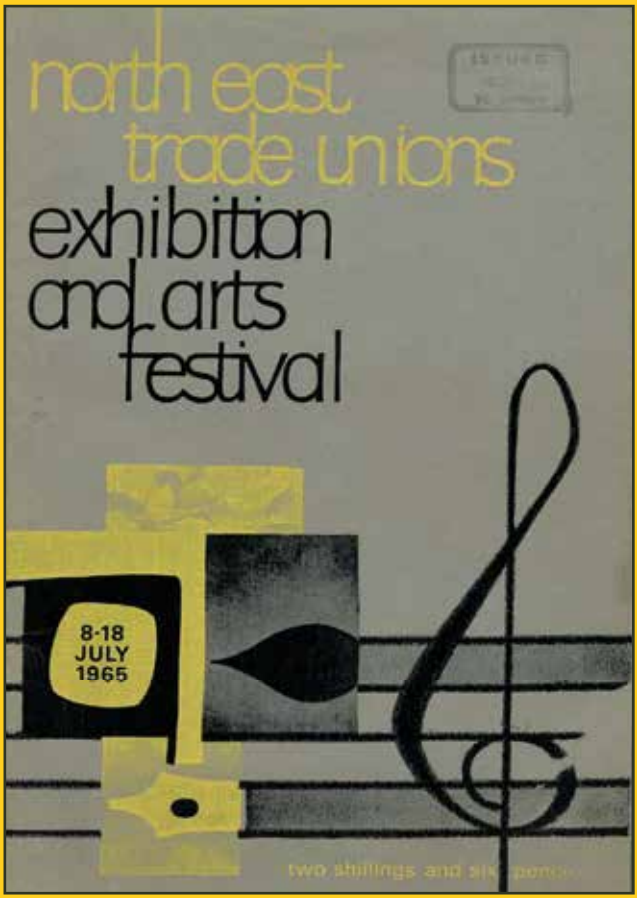
North East History

Volume 56 2025



Journal of the North East Labour History Society

NASUWT THE TEACHERS' UNION

40 YEARS AFTER THE STRIKE ENDED

IT'S TIME FOR TRUTH AND JUSTICE FOR ORGREAVE

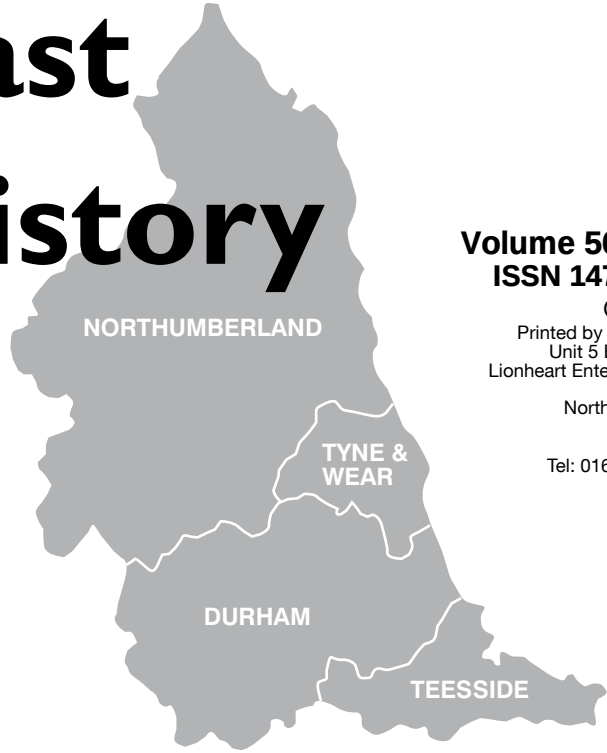


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A note from the Editorial Board

This year's edition of the journal has allowed us to explore a variety of approaches to history from below – finding ways to allow ordinary working people to tell their own stories as well as documenting the work of those who facilitate this process.

In 2024 Sue Ward transcribed Liz O'Donnell's interview with Maureen Callcott. This year she has updated that work with a new interview which highlights the achievements of our President as a founder of the Oral History movement in this region. Sue has also put together a complete bibliography of her work which we hope to make it available on our website.

Maureen used her material to document the political activities and capacities of North East women in a series of articles which appeared in what was then our bulletin in the 1970's and 80's. This year's 'From Our Archive' is an interesting example of this.

Sue Ward has also prepared another article in her series about the North East in the 18th Century, this time examining the 1761 Hexham riot.

Val Scully offers us a picture of the development of both a local historian and a local community history group – a sort of history from the inside. That theme of the inside voice is also reflected in Martin Spence's piece on the closure of North East Shipbuilders. He worked with Rob Clay's material – Rob was, of course, the MP for Sunderland at the time this was going on.

Sally Watson and Silvie Fisch have been documenting community responses to the modernisation of Byker for some time. Their article on the subject is reprinted from the 2024 Bulletin of North East Heritage Library both as a fascinating piece in its own right but also as an example of the innovative project Kieran Carter has put together. We also carry an interview with Kieran in which he explains how the Library project came about.

John Tomaney asks a whole series of questions about the relationship between art and memory using his own and his family's Sacriston background as a starting point. Can art be used to evoke the feelings of a community? Can

photographs and found poetry capture the collective experience of a people? Can artistic licence inform historiography and capture the complexity of social change? These questions were prompted by a series of exhibitions and events, held in Sunderland in 2024 and 2025, entitled Coal Face, created by the writer, Louise Powell, and the photographer, Andy Martin.

Tony Fox's article about the role of Teeside International Brigaders offers some unexpected insights as well as a bit of a detective story.

There may be more to come on this as so many of the local actors of the 1930's had also been active in the events of the General Strike of 1926. We plan to do a special centenary edition next year. Do get in touch if you would like to contribute an article or if you have family or community memories to share.

Increasingly, we find that new books are being made available in electronic form rather than as hard copies. We very much want to continue our tradition of reviewing new and relevant material and are looking for people willing to act as reviewers. Let us know if you would be interested or if there something about to be published that you think we should cover.

Congratulations to Abbie Urquehart-Arnold for her Chaplin Prize winning essay. Considerations of space meant we could only use part of her work in the journal, but we would be happy to make the whole thing available if anyone wants a copy.

We have been unable to trace the artist, John Nesbit whose work we have reproduced. We would be happy to credit him properly if anyone can put us in touch. We have made every effort to ascertain copyright where appropriate. The Editorial Board has worked long and hard to get this year's Journal to this stage – everyone deserves high praise for their dedication and sticking power! The members are:

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

Notes on Contributors

Martin Spence was brought up in London and headed north for university. In the 1980s he worked at 'Days of Hope' socialist bookshop in Newcastle, then Trade Films in Gateshead, and throughout was an active delegate to Newcastle Trades Union Council. In the '90s he became a full time official for the media trade union BECTU which took him back to London. He retired as Assistant General Secretary. He is still active in the Labour Party, and his historical research focuses on London history and labour history.

Dr Sally Watson is an ESRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape at Newcastle University. Her recently completed PhD examines the development and experience of postwar housing in Newcastle, with a focus on landscape design, children and play.

Silvie Fisch is an Associate Researcher at the Oral History Collective at Newcastle University and Director of Northern Cultural Projects, a Community Interest Company that strives to promote inclusivity, social and historical justice, and community empowerment through history, heritage, and cultural initiatives. She is an Activist and involved in the Mutual Aid Movement.

Ross Forbes is the Durham Miners Association (DMA) Programme Director, who has led the Redhills project from its inception. The extraordinary building at Redhills in Durham, built in 1915 as the headquarters of the Durham Miners' Association (DMA), was said to be in "severe jeopardy". The National Lottery funded restoration is now complete and the building will reopen this year.

A retired teacher of English and History, **Val Scully** leads the Gibside Research Group and has produced books on the wider area of the Durham Derwent Valley for the Land of Oak Iron Landscape Partnership: Men of Iron, Crowley's, Releasing the Genie of Coal, A Legend Evermore, Addison, Clara Vale, Tales of Derwentdale, Brickworks of the North East and The Wheel of Time: A People's History of Stella, Path Head and Blaydon Burn. She is also the author of three historical novels, A People's History of Gibside, Path Head Water Mill, and a biography of J.W. Fawcett.

Dr Jon Warren is a social scientist who studies the industrial history of the North East of England. He formerly worked in the departments of Sociology and Geography at Durham University. He is now retired but remains an Honorary Fellow in the department of Sociology.

Tony Fox is a member of the International Brigades Memorial Trust. He is, among other publications, the author of 'I Sing of My Comrades: Remembering Stockton's International Brigaders.' He is a history teacher who has done much to develop good practice in embedding local history in school curricula.

Prof. John Tomaney is Professor of Urban and Regional Planning in the Bartlett School of Planning, and Pro-Provost (Regional Communities) University College London. Previously he was Henry Daysh Professor of Regional Development and Director of the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS), Newcastle University. He has held visiting appointments in the Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences at Monash University, Melbourne; Faculty of the Built Environment at the University of New South Wales, Sydney; CURDS, Newcastle University; Gran Sasso Science Institute; Manchester Business School and University College Dublin and is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Science (UK) and a Fellow of the Regional Studies

Association. He was educated at the London School of Economics, University of Sussex and University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

He has published over 100 books and articles on questions of local and regional development including Local and Regional Development (2nd Edition, Routledge, 2017) and Handbook of Local and Regional Development (Routledge 2011) co-authored with Andy Pike and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose. He has undertaken numerous research projects in the UK and elsewhere. Among the organisations for which he has conducted research are: UK Research Councils, government departments in the UK and elsewhere, the European Commission, the OECD and local and regional development agencies and private sector and voluntary organisations and thinktanks in the UK and abroad. He has given evidence to Royal Commissions and Parliamentary Committees in the UK. In addition, he is a regular commentator in the UK media on matters of local and regional development.

John Stirling is the retired head of Social Sciences at Northumbria University, having joined when it was a Polytechnic and has been involved in teaching trade unionists and writing about the movement ever since. He worked for many years as a trade union tutor both in the UK and beyond and has worked part time at Newcastle University and Ruskin College.

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

Abbie Urquehart-Arnold graduated with a First Class Honours degree in English Literature and History at Newcastle University in 2024. She was awarded the 'Cowan, Johnson and Watson prize for Best Dissertation

in Literature' and the 'Cowan, Johnson and Watson prize for Best Overall Performance in Literature and History. She is currently undertaking teacher training.

How to Submit an Article to the Journal

The North East Labour History Society is committed to making our journal reflect the diverse range of historical experiences of working people in the North East region.

We aim to reflect all communities and groupings in the North East and would encourage contributions from those who live and work in them, those who research them and those who write about them. We want to hear from individuals, community organisations, local history societies, students and teachers and all who have something to say about our region.

If you have a research interest that could form the basis of a written article and would like to discuss this, please contact our Secretary or the Editors - contact details are at the end of the Secretary's Report.

If you have an existing article that you would like to submit for publication, we can send you a set of guidelines to ensure that the article and its endnotes are presented in a format that is appropriate to our Journal's style.

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

Past issues of North East History, volumes 36 - 54 (2005 - 2023) can be viewed online at our website: nelh.net/the-societys-journal/previous-issues. There is also a searchable index of articles and reports.

It was sixty years ago today….

John Stirling



The North East Trade Unions and Arts Festival took place between the 8th – 18th July 1965 supported by the North Eastern Association for the Arts, a range of trade unions and opened by 'Miss Jenny Lee' MP.

In this article I do not want to simply record the 'nostalgia' (for some) of an event from sixty years ago, but also to situate a trade union movement that was approaching a peak in post war membership levels in 1979, a rising wave of militancy and a shift towards workplace organisation led by local shop stewards. In that sense, the Festival might be seen as an

expression of trade union power and influence but could it also be judged as a search for 'respectability' with little connection to its locality? Was this a Festival of a divided rather than a united trade union movement and were union members interested anyway?

Let us begin with a quick look back to the year 1965 in order to give some context for the Festival followed by a brief comment on trades unions and the arts more generally.

1965: On The Edge

Where we you in 1965? Not yet born or in your teenage years? I was moving on from my London comprehensive school clutching five 'O' levels and heading for the civil service – the first white collar job in my family and an employment pathway to spending money on records by local band, the Kinks. My father was more into Ken Dodd and 'Happiness' (still selling well) so we agreed to differ. A not untypical teenager of the era, but what of the wider world?

On the day the Festival opened (8th July 1965) one of the 'Great Train Robbers', Ronnie Biggs escaped from jail to begin his years on the run. Of greater significance during the days of the Festival, there was a Parliamentary vote to abolish the death sentence for murder and government policy supporting comprehensive schools and rejecting the tripartite school system was affirmed.

In the USA in 1965 Lyndon Johnson (LBJ) was inaugurated as the US President and Rhodesia (as it then was) made its Universal Declaration of Independence (UDI). Apartheid laboured on in South Africa and the Soviet Union still led the communist world although Khrushchev had lost power the previous October. In the UK, Harold Wilson was Prime Minister having been elected the year before; Winston Churchill's state funeral took place; Edward Heath became leader of the Tories; the Race Relations Act and Redundancy Payments Act were passed and the Beatles topped the charts in July with Help! (they were to receive their MBEs in October).

1965 was the midpoint of 'the sixties' so beloved of journalists and social commentators, when Britain, or at least London was supposedly 'swinging'.

By contrast, inflation stood at 1.9 per cent in 1965 but was 3.9 per cent in 1966 and on its way to 9.44 per cent five years later. The unemployment rate was 4.6 per cent and also on its way up with its particular impact on the Region's engineering and shipbuilding industries. There was 'A Northern Wind Blowing' to steal the title of David Kynaston's book about Britain between 1962-5 (2023, London: Bloomsbury publishing.

A year on the edge of some dramatic changes for the working class and their trade unions so was an arts festival simply a minor diversion?

Bread and Roses?

For some, there might seem an incongruity between a trade union movement concerned with the more material interests of its members than with their artistic sensibilities: whatever they might be. However, there are long traditions of artistic endeavours supporting trade union actions in the visual arts; theatre, literature, film, photography and music. In particular, May Day (Labour Day in some parts of the world) has been associated with festivals and celebrations of trade unions and workers and has often attracted artistic endeavours. Strikes have similarly brought out the links between the unions and those in the arts that support them.

Some people engaged in the arts may be trade union members themselves in, for example, the Society of Authors (founded in 1884); the Musicians Union (founded in1893) and Equity (founded in 1930). All are TUC affiliated unions although it was only the Musicians that directly supported the Festival. Perhaps more significant has been the engagement between trade unions, socialism and the arts. Again, this goes back to the movements early days and at least to the 19th century in the UK where artists and activists such as Walter Crane and William Morris provided support with their designs (Crane's May Day illustration is still with us) and it was not uncommon to see art discussed more generally in socialist papers such as Robert Blatchford's Clarion.[1]

In the North East, there is the long history of the banners of the mineworkers unions amongst many other examples of culture. In this

case, with the Durham Gala hot on the Festival's heels , there were few on display. They might also have been considered unlikely art objects by some and as reflecting more of the past than the future to which the Festival was looking.

The Trade Unions

And the UK's trade unions in 1965?

They were becoming enough of a 'problem' to require that tried and tested solution: the establishment of a Royal Commission. In this case it was led by Lord Donovan and it began collecting its evidence in the year of the Festival and produced its Report in 1968. It was, in order to be 'even handed', to investigate Employers' Organisations as well[2], but everybody was aware that this was a report on the unions in general and strikes in particular.

In 1965, trade union membership stood at 10.32 million and continued to rise to a peak of 13.2m in 1979. Some of this membership was working in sectors characterised by the 'closed shop' (compulsory union membership) but for other economic sectors union membership seemed a 'natural' commitment even if it was little more than an 'insurance policy' in case of individual problems. Around two thirds of the workforce were covered by collective bargaining arrangements between employers and trade unions, giving the unions an 'institutional' role in negotiations with employers and national agreements.

Strikes were an almost inevitable part of the employment relationship of the time and in the festival year, 2.9 million working days were lost to industrial disputes. There was no national system of mandatory ballots so many of the strikes were called at local level and in individual workplaces. For example, David Kynaston lists disputes in the London docks and on the buses; at Vauxhall Motors, Caterpillar Tractors and London Airport.[3] Many of the disputes were 'unofficial'; that is they were in defiance of, or at least lacking the support of, union structures beyond the workplace (although it was not uncommon for them to be made 'official' in retrospect,

(although this would rarely be acknowledged in the media). We were not far away from the 1970s and the UCS work-in and the epitome of the strike 'problem' as analysed by Lane and Roberts in their discussion of the strike at Pilkingtons glass works.[4]

The media portrayal of the strikes had begun with the film, 'I'm Alright Jack' (1959) featuring Peter Sellars as the belligerent shop steward, Fred Kite. This was followed by TV series such as 'On The Buses'(1969-73) and 'The Rag Trade' (1961-63) with Miriam Karlin's 'everybody out' catch phrase.

In terms of their political role, the trade unions were, of course, affiliated to the Labour Party and were influential in policy making through the TUC and Labour Party conferences as well as in more informal relations with Labour leaders. They could not be ignored by Conservative governments either and were entering a period that became known as 'corporatism'. National policies agreed between the government, the TUC and the CBI (Confederation of British Industry). From the Labour Party and the TUC's view this might mean planning agreements for industrial sectors but was to move rapidly towards 'prices and incomes policies' and the Labour government's Social Contract.

The 'Two Systems'

The Donovan report concluded that there were 'two systems' of industrial relations in the UK: the formal and the informal and that the two were often in conflict. This was a rather more 'academic' way of looking at the emergence of a powerful shop steward movement and, with it, a shift in bargaining power from national collective agreements, negotiated by union full-time officials (the formal system) to local deals done by workplace representatives directly responsible to their members (the informal.) There was little doubt for Donovan as to which was the better and one solution to the 'trade union problem' was to get the informal system under control.

In reality, this groundswell of local organising was to have an impact on 'formal' trade union hierarchies as well, with the notable election of

Jack Jones (TGWU) and Hugh Scanlon (AUEW) in 1968. However, such leaders were recognising and benefitting from the local shop steward organising and were markedly more radical than their predecessors. The public sector was affected too, with Alan Fisher and Bernard Dix later steering NUPE in a similarly radical direction.

These leaders and their more militant members were dealing with a Labour government elected under Harold Wilson in 1964 and with Barbara Castle as Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity. An appointment from the 'left' of the party to deal with the 'trade union problem' and even introduce legislation. The White Paper: 'In Place of Strife' generated plenty of that with Harold Wilson's famous 1969 plea to 'get your tanks off my lawn Hughie' (Scanlon). A botched compromise was reached, the tanks were moved and the unions were reputedly warned that they'd get worse from the Tories if (when) they were elected.

A more radical view of the 'two systems' was taken by various left wing groups who saw this as a battle within the trade unions of a militant rank and file held back by trade union bureaucrats, unable or unwilling to relinquish control. Some of this critique came from the Trotskyist left arguing that Communist Party influence in the unions had amounted to little more than an electoral machine to get their members elected or appointed to leadership positions and had little to do with organising or leading a militant membership.



Meadows' Sculpture 'Spiit of Trade Unionism' - Congress House London

Much of the debate is drawn together in 1971 in Richard

Hyman's Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism, which explores ideas of trade union incorporation into capitalism and the development of Michel's 'iron law of oligarchy' in relation to unions. However, as Hyman notes 'the rank and file may be able to exert considerable influence over (or even act independently of) leadership policies and actions – *as recent British experience well demonstrates* (p32 my italics).[5]

In such a climate; what then of the Festival itself? It clearly situates itself at the 'respectable' end of trade unionism and, as we shall see, is determined to distance itself from any 'cloth cap image' or 'I'm Alright Jack' stereotypes.

A Festival of the Arts

The festival, properly titled: North East Trade Unions Exhibition and Arts Festival, was initiated by Newcastle and District Trades Council with Tom Dargon from the Sign and Display Trades Union, as the Organising Secretary. As an aside, it is interesting to note the significance of Trades Councils in 1965 and that, through them, the leader of a small trade union could take on an important role.

The Festival was wide ranging with theatre, music, art and old time music hall, alongside display stands from trade unions and days for children (as well as a writing competition for those at school); women and a six-a-side football tournament. Whilst most of the events took place in Newcastle at venues such as the old town hall, the City Hall, Balmbras and outside in Eldon Square, the art exhibition began at The Laing and went on to The Shipley and Sunderland Art Gallery. The organisers report suggests over 100 organisations took part, and there was also a daily bulletin and news report issued.

If we turn to the festival programme itself, of which 4000 were reported sold, there are a number of notable features.

Firstly, there is the design attributed to a certain John Nesbit but clearly within a very 1960s zeitgeist. The thin strokes and condensed san-serif typeface lacking any capital letters was very much of the time, as were the

bold and blocky images. There is surely more than a hint of the television screen in amongst the black and yellow abstract 'eyes'.

Once inside the covers, there is a long essay by Terry MacDermott, a founding member of this Society, on the history of trade unions in the Region. It would be impossible to summarise here but Terry points out what he sees as the independence of much trade union activity in the North East from national trends. He leaves off his analysis with the general Strike of 1926: 'this moment of truth for the British trade union movement' (p34) but cannot resist a further comment on the strength and independence of the Regional trade unions:

Up to a point the local organisation of the struggle was successful,' the degree of control over transport is particularly noteworthy, and it seems clear that the committees set up in Newcastle worked amicably and well. The real reasons for any shortcomings must rest with those at national level since the confusions that existed came down the line from London, certainly not in the opposite direction. (p34)

The programme for the Festival goes on, through its listing of the exhibition stands, to reflect the diversity of the trade union movement in 1965. There are 25 individual unions listed, three confederations, two organisations of Trade Councils, the TUC, Newcastle City council and the Ministry of Labour. Many of these unions have simply disappeared or amalgamated and they reflect some of the trade traditions in unions such as bookbinders, furniture makers and blacksmiths as well as specialist industrial unions such as the Cigarette Machine Operators Society (founded in 1922). This is characteristic of a period when much industrial organisation, such as in shipbuilding, had grown from a collection of different craft skills. However, the membership-dominant unions such as the Transport & General Workers (TGWU) were there too, alongside white collar unions such as the Civil Service Clerical Association which I had joined when I got my first job after leaving school in London!

The advertisements are very much of their time too. With a strong Regional slant; an optimistic view of our technologically inspired futures and gender stereotyping typical of the period.

What went on?

But what of the events themselves?

The Festival was opened by Jennie Lee MP who had been married to Anuerin Bevan and was a Minister of the Arts in the Labour government of 1964. She was later renowned for her work on the foundation of the Open University. It is more than likely that the organisers felt it to be quite a catch to get her.

The Festival was divided into arts, drama and music. On the art side there was 'an exhibition of works by trade union artists' at the Laing Art gallery.

For drama the listing is of one play; a revue and a 'special event' which was to include the selection of a Miss Trade Union! It is not quite clear how all this adds up to a 'festival' of drama and one local at least was very disappointed as we shall see. The revue was written by noted North East writer David Bean with music by Alex Glasgow and Johnny Handle and was titled 'For You Jack'. Was it a response to the 1959 film 'I'm alright Jack' with its negative portrayal of the trade unions? It is a limited programme in a Region with a strong tradition of drama that was host to the Peoples Theatre which also fails to feature.

As for the music, in an era of rapid expansion of 'pop' led by the Beatles and Rolling Stones nationally and with a vibrant local music scene (The Animals were formed on Tyneside in 1963 for example), the lineup remains respectably conservative. There was Gilbert and Sullivan, the Northern Sinfonia, the Newcastle City Orchestra, choirs and barn dancers; showbands and 'jazzmen'. Perhaps the 'Decka' Rhythm Group and The Lectrons were more reflective of the taste of the young?

Finally, women were not missing in that they had a day to themselves (12th July) with a pageant of women at work and a fashion parade. Indeed there were further fashion parades on the 8th and 16th July, incidentally matching the number of events in the drama festival.

How was the festival assessed?

The exhibition Report of 5th October 1965[6] records:

'in our view the exhibition passed all expectations and hopes. As an exercise in public relations it was 100% successful. To quote Jim Conway, the General Secretary of the AEU; "this was public relations from a trade union angle at its best" '.

However:

'whichever way we look back at the festival we must accept it was a financial disaster'

The final accounts conclude with a loss of £1329 12s 2d. despite various grants from the City council and the North Eastern Association for the Arts and 'extremely generous grants' from the NUM and the Musicians Union.

There was widespread national and local news coverage in the press including from 14 local newspapers – a vibrant Regional media community that has more or less disappeared.

The national media picked up on the 'cloth cap' story (see below) but some also had something to say about the Festival itself with The Guardian, for example, being a little sniffy about the trade union art at The Laing:

'A strong body of work by hobby painters [of] insufficient artistic merit to warrant a public showing in a major provincial art gallery'

The exhibits were overwhelmingly oil paintings and were for sale at prices ranging in old fashioned 'guineas' from three to fifty, although the prize winning picture by Mr A. Clark of Peterlee was not for sale.

The Newcastle Evening Chronicle was also less than enthusiastic describing the Festival as utopian with a 'William Morrish sentimentality', suggesting that 'the average workers attitude' to the arts was simply 'uninterested'. It illustrated this by what it knew of attendances:

'A Gilbert and Sullivan concert filling less than half the City Hall… only 400 for a massed brass band concert … and the difficulty of selling tickets for a Geordie Night Out (at the time of writing they had sold none at all'

(Newcastle Evening Chronicle 15.7.1965.)

The Organising committee had to admit its own disappointment at this and speculated that they had presented 'the wrong type of concert at the wrong time of year with too little publicity and no international names'.

All this might raise broader questions of who the Festival was for: union members or the general public and what was its main objective?

As the Organising Committee Report noted:

'a strange phenomena was the number of visitors who were apprehensive about visiting a trade union exhibition.'

Was the aim of the Festival then, to be a public relations exercise in respectable trade unionism that had little to do with a membership that was becoming increasingly militant and 'disrespectful'?

Conclusion

Quintin Hogg (Lord Hailsham), the Conservative MP and holder of a variety of cabinet posts had toured the Region before the Festival and his wearing of a cloth cap was much commented on (not that they were that unusual for aristocratic shooting parties). The local and indeed, the national press, picked up on the story and the 'cloth cap image' became the media focus rather than the Festival itself. Of course, many local people were and are proud of their working class traditions and their regional identity but it provoked the Festival committee, which suggested that Hogg donate his cap to Oxfam for a charity auction. Leading the committee, Tom Dargon, is quoted in the Newcastle Evening Chronicle (8th July 1965) as saying:

We want to celebrate a symbolic farewell to the cloth cap image of the North East. The purpose of the Festival is to project a new image of the trade union movement. The movement in the North East is most anxious to rid itself once and for all of the cloth cap image.

But just what image was the Festival projecting to its members as well as the general public? As we have seen, and were soon to see even more clearly, the unions were on the cusp of an increasing militancy in the face of rising inflation, unemployment, anti-union legislation (after the 1979 election) and a largely hostile press. In the North East this gave rise to a period of growing trade union political action alongside the strikes as well as an engagement with people and organisations beyond their own

workplace and individual trade unions. More generally, Labour's legislative programme had given rights to time off work for trade union activity and the consequent development of trade union education programmes well beyond what had been available in 1965.

How might the Festival be summed up?

As a somewhat patronising event aimed at securing the engagement of trade union members in 'high' art and culture? Or an event to reassure the general public that trade unions were not as the mass media might portray them? Perhaps it is best remembered as its organisers would surely have liked: a genuine attempt to do something new and exciting that could show the Region the real work of the trade union movement and its members.

John Creaby was there and was to become a union activist and official so let us conclude with his view that puts the event in context:

'Through the Trades Council, I was made aware of the activity to support the "Resolution 42 Campaign" to bring arts and culture to the forefront of trade union activity. I remembered that in 1961, in the "59 Society" Barry Scaum had brought us information about the TUC resolution from which this campaign was established. My interest was not only due to my own cultural experience but also because the main protagonist was Arnold Wesker, someone I greatly admired for his stance on nuclear disarmament (a member of the Committee of 100 and imprisoned for his activities) and his plays. Moreover, the County Association of Trades Councils and some unions, particularly the Musicians' Union had argued for some time for [the need] to act on this as had happened in other regions. Jimmy Murray [union activist at Vickers] had even taken the argument to the Confed [Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions].

It [the Festival] was now to take place using all the facilities provided by Newcastle Council – the town hall (no longer there and now an office block) in the Bigg Market; the City Hall; Laing Art Gallery; Balmbra Music Hall and The Little Theatre next to Saltwell Park in Gateshead. The exhibition was great, it showed the breadth of trade union representation

across all sections of employment and the Revue at Balmbras was as you would expect from Alex Glasgow and my folk music legend, Johnny Handle. I was at other events over the fortnight but didn't put them in my diary so my only memory is of the sing-along upstairs in The Bridge [Hotel].'

An extract from John's unpublished memoirs. We'd love to hear from you if you have memories too.

1 For a review of just some of the relationship between unions and the arts see the books by John Gorman: Banner Bright (Penguin 1976) Images of Labour (Scorpion 1985); To Build Jerusalem (Scorpion 1980)

2 As a student of 'industrial relations' not long after the Report's publication I do not remember any widely publicised coverage of employer's blacklisting. Nevertheless, the Report dominated the academic discourse of the time and generated considerable critical analysis.

3 David Kynaston, A Northern Wind: Britain 1962-65 (Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2023) See chapter 17.

4 Tony Lane and Ken Roberts: Strike at Pilkingtons (Collins/Fontana, London, 1971)

5 Richard Hyman: Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism (Pluto Press, London, 1971)

6 An anonymous report but presumably written by the Secretary of the organising committee is available in Newcastle City library along with other ephemera and two volumes of photographs.

The 1761 Hexham Riot

Sue Ward

The Hexham Militia Riot, on 9 March 1761, ended with around 50 dead, and an unknown number of wounded. The casualty rate was only surpassed in mid-Georgian England by the week-long anti-Catholic Gordon Riots in London in 1780, in which between 300 and 700 people died. In contrast, the deaths at Hexham were the culmination of a single day's stand-off. A large crowd had gathered in Hexham Market Place, in protest against selection methods for the militia. A much smaller number of militia men opposed them. After hours of threats but no violence, one militia man and one officer were shot by a protestor. The militia shot back, at close range, leading to many deaths and a stampede out of the square by the crowd.

There were a number of contemporary reports of the riot, and there have been several studies subsequently. The most recent and substantial one is by the late Tom Corfe (2004).[1] This article is not intended to supersede that, but includes a fresh look at the background, especially Britain's involvement in war at the time, the agitation around the creation of a militia, and the resistance in Northumberland and elsewhere. The source of the resistance was the unfair way in which men were to be selected, laid down in the 1757 Act. This was partially reversed in 1762, ironically just as the Seven Years War was coming to an end.

Historically, in this country the term 'militia' has meant a temporary citizen force called into being in emergencies, with basic training, arms and equipment. In medieval times this would be provided by the great

landowners calling up their tenants, or by the towns pulling together 'trained bands'. After the 1660 Restoration, a series of Acts of Parliament created a new structure, but the institution then underwent what the leading author on the topic, J R Western, has called 'Eighty Years Decay (c. 1670-1757).[2]

1745 and the Seven Years' War

Throughout the eighteenth century, Britain and France were involved in intermittent conflicts in a 'second Hundred Years War'.[3] The kings of Britain were also sovereigns of Hanover, which meant that any conflict about trade or possessions overseas would spill over into a European one, and vice versa. It has been estimated that Britain was the most heavily taxed country in Europe, with the revenue mainly spent on the navy, the army, subsidies to foreign powers supported by Britain, and debt repayments from previous wars.[4]

In August 1745, the Pretender, Prince Charles Edward, arrived on the coast of Scotland, sponsored if not much supported by France, in the middle of the War of the Austrian Succession (1742-48). '[T]he late pretender landed in the isle of Sky with forty-three men only; he collected a ragged rabble without cloaths on their backs, or meat in their bellies: … yet at the head of this ragged and undisciplin'd rout, he vanquish'd our military force, conquer'd the kingdom of *Scotland*, (the castle of *Edinburgh* only excepted), marched triumphantly into England, took *Carlisle*…. marched even to *Derby*….[5]

He was finally defeated at Culloden in April 1746, but not before English troops had been brought back from the Netherlands and Dutch troops imported. (Newcastle and Northumberland hosted both Dutch and Hessian (German) troops over this period).[6]

1748 brought peace in Europe, but there was almost constant conflict between British and French settlers and armies from 1753 onwards, along the banks of the Ohio and in Canada, with several British defeats on both land and sea in 1755. In 1756, a new war was declared on the European

mainland and the French began preparing for an invasion. The need to keep ships in home waters, rather than send them to the Mediterranean, led to the loss of the island of Minorca. It was a humiliating, as well as a dangerous situation. 'We have lost Minorca it is true: Nay, we have lost our reputation, where we used to triumph, at sea', as the opposition writer John Almon put it.[7] Fears of invasion lasted until at least 1759, and foreign troops had to be brought in to bolster defence. Even when the tide of war turned in Britain's favour, there remained a shortage of regular troops.

A National Militia

Calls to create a national militia had begun soon after the events of 1745-6. These came from a wide spectrum of the Whig opposition, from the grandee Charles Sackville, second Duke of Dorset, to the radical journalist John Almon.[8] 'There was a strong wish for offensive action and this the advocates of the militia were eager to further by relieving the army and navy of the burden of home defence', as Western puts it. This, it was claimed, would be better value than increasing the regular forces. The details of how such a militia should be set up differed between authors, but the idea overall was for a large body of men, across the country to be given at least rudimentary training but kept in their ordinary work 'until the moment of danger, when alone the nation would be at the expense of calling them into pay'.[9] As Matthew McCormack explains,

> The militia was the 'constitutional force' which had pride of place in opposition Whig ideology since it celebrated the manly independence, martial valour, and civic virtue of the patriotic citizen. It was safer than a standing army since it was not the tool of a would-be despot, but was rather an expression of the people's power.[10]

However, George II was against the idea, wanting instead more regulars, and his Tory supporters claimed that undertrained farmers and tradesmen

could not oppose determined rebels or foreign professional soldiers. The Duke of Cumberland supported a plan for the nobility and gentry in each county to raise volunteers for new regular regiments. However, this was sabotaged when the military authorities refused to honour promises that the new recruits would not be sent abroad. Those raised by Lord Digby in the West Country were more or less forced onto Gibraltar-bound transports. Henry Fox, Cumberland's leading friend in the Government, said years later that he had 'begged, lamented, and do to this moment lament it' – rightly, because even absolute statements in successive Acts of Parliament that the militia would not be required to serve abroad, were not believed.[11]

A Militia Bill went through the House of Commons in 1756, but was knocked back by the government's supporters in the Lords, shortly before news of the fall of Minorca came through. A widely-supported campaign began to get a Bill passed. The king was forced to offer the leading opposition politician William Pitt (Pitt the Elder) a ministerial appointment, which Pitt accepted on condition that a new Militia Bill be introduced and that there was an inquiry into the loss of Minorca. The Bill was duly published in January 1757, and Admiral Byng, commander of the fleet that lost Minorca, was executed on his own quarterdeck in March.

Political 'parties' did not really exist in Parliament at the time – it was more a matter of different factions collected around influential men, and at any one time either supporting or opposing the court's policy. So there was then a struggle with the outgoing ministers and their supporters looking for ways to amend this bill to their liking, or replace it with one of their own. Finally in May the Bill became law, 'but the new force was to be smaller and a little less under popular control than its advocates had wished'.[12]

The new Act required each county to raise a quota of militia men, with the Lords Lieutenant in charge of deputy-lieutenants, working together with the justices of the peace. The officers were to be drawn from the propertied classes. As Corfe explains, 'Gentlemen could, by definition, lead'. Soldierly skills were to be provided by adjutants and sergeants

seconded from the regular army.[13] Able-bodied men between 18 and 50 were eligible to serve in the ranks for three years, either by volunteering or by having their names entered into a ballot to be drawn by the deputy-lieutenant in charge. There was a long list of exemptions from service, including schoolteachers, clergy, and articled clerks. Catholics were still widely distrusted, and so debarred from serving by the need to take a loyal oath. The county authorities had go through an elaborate process of fixing quotas for each parish, holding meetings at which people could claim exemptions, and finally carrying out the ballot. Those whose names were drawn could pay a £10 penalty, which gave exemption until the next 3-year call up, or pay rather more to a substitute, which provided exemption for good. (No limit was placed on the price that could be paid to a substitute, which became a matter of supply and demand).

This created a fundamental unfairness between rich and poor, and was the main cause of the resentment and resistance over the next few years.

The baseline for service was that those enrolled would be drilled by the professionals at regular times each year, and should hold themselves in readiness for full-time service in the event of an emergency. But, as explained in one popular guide, an obligation to turn up once a week during the summer months for drilling, could suddenly be turned into an obligation to serve as a full-time soldier for up to three years, in any part of the kingdom;

In case of actual invasion, or upon imminent danger thereof, and in case of rebellion, the king first notifying the occasion to parliament… and to the people by proclamation, may direct the [lord] lieutenants… to draw out their regiments, who shall march… to any part of the kingdom, under the command of such generals as he shall appoint…[14]

This was described as 'embodying' the regiments.

Resistance and concessions

The enthusiasm in 1756 for the Militia Bill in principle did not carry over to putting the 1757 Act into practice. '[F]or the most part the gentry

declined to serve as officers and the common people were most unwilling to serve in the ranks'.[15] Riots broke out across the country, usually when the parish constables began putting together the lists of those liable for service. In York, two houses were destroyed by the mob, and much damage done. The Lord Mayor George Fox Lane asked Whitehall to send troops urgently, saying that

'the necessitous, who are by much the majority, are endeavouring to promote a levelling principle (which is constantly made use of in their meetings) which would prove fatal to the peace and happiness of our constitution and they think, by the Militia Act, the poor are to defend the rich.'[16]

The authorities came down heavily on the rioters. At the York Assizes in March 1758 four people were found guilty of having obstructed the Militia Act, and were sentenced to death,[17]

Few counties got through the enrolment process and into training in 1757. A notice in the *Newcastle Courant* suggests that the process was begun for Northumberland, but no more than that.[18] In Parliament, there were new endeavours to make the law palatable. A new Act in 1758 provided for a family allowance to be paid by the parish while a militiaman was on active service. As Western says, 'This was a revolutionary humanitarian innovation in the British military system and may be said to represent the victory of the militia riots over the parsimony of the country gentlemen'.[19] But since the cost was reimbursed from the county rates, paid by those same country gentlemen, it made them no more enthusiastic.

Active service

By February 1759, it was clear that the French were making new invasion plans. Suddenly, the militia came to the centre of the stage, with huge efforts made to embody new county regiments. In Newcastle, the *Courant* printed an Abstract 'In Order that Militia-men may know some of the Privileges they are intitled to', including the family allowance, and freedom from the obligation to work on the highways. The words of a patriotic

song, entitled 'Old England; or a Constitutional Militia' was printed the following week;

The Frenchmen may vapour, may strut and may boast
And threat, by Invasion, to ravish our Coast;
Let them come when they please, in their flat-bottom Boats,
A well-form'd MILITIA will soon change their Notes.[20]

More practically, the Earl of Northumberland, as Lord Lieutenant of the county, finally started the enrolment process in good earnest. On 8 September he notified the Privy Council that enrolments had reached the required level for the men to be issued with arms. In January 1760, the militia companies were 'embodied' – effectively, becoming full-time soldiers. The County Durham militia was embodied in February 1760. Both contingents received their marching orders at the same time, with Northumberland's men going to Berwick and Durham's to Pontefract.[21] Meanwhile, companies from the North Yorks militia arrived in County Durham, soon joined by others to make up 720 men in all, and over the next few years they alternated between Newcastle, Gateshead, Durham, Berwick, and Sunderland.[22] (It was usual for embodied militia companies to be sent outside their own counties; Northumberland's going to Berwick was the exception).

It was soon clear that they were in for the long haul, and this did not go down well with the country gentlemen in the House of Commons, nor probably with the militia-men themselves. 'It was felt that the force was being treated more or less as regular troops, in violation of the law and for the sake of undesirable constitutional measures'. The family allowances meant they were actually more expensive than the regular army, and in May Pitt was forced into modifying the rules to say that the scale of allowances should be based on local wage rates, and payment restricted to families of men balloted and serving in person. The counties would be reimbursed for their spending from the Exchequer.[23]

Northumberland Quarter Sessions decided on the new level of allowances in mid-July, and instructed the parish overseers to discontinue

the current allowances until the men had obtained new orders from JPs near the places they lived.[24]

The sparking of unrest

These changes, or the prospect of further balloting and prolonged service, sparked unrest in Northumberland and County Durham. So far as is known, the North East had been free of disturbances in 1757 and 1758, but in February and March 1761 we can see a co-ordinated movement across the two counties. The only other county where we know of disturbances in 1761 was Huntingdonshire away in the south.

The process for bringing the lists of those liable for service up to date for the year began with meetings scheduled in the various wards in County Durham between 26 and 28 February, and in Northumberland between 1 and 9 March. The parish constables were required to return lists of all the men between 18 and 50 living in the area, 'fit to serve as Militia-Men'. Those who wanted to appeal against inclusion had to attend; after that no Complaint or Appeal can be heard; but that all Persons, whose Names are inserted and returned in such Lists, must take their Chance of being balloted to serve in the said Militia.[25]

There seem to have been disturbances at the meetings on 26 and 27 February in County Durham. In consequence, a fairly conciliatory notice was published, suggesting that 'the intentions of the … Meetings… are not so clearly understood as might be wished'. This was not new general balloting for the Militia, the notice stressed; the idea was to add the names of incomers, and those who had reached the age of 18, to the list, and they could then all take their chances to fill up the vacancies that had arisen in the militia's ranks.[26]

The dissidents were not mollified, however, and on 28 February, a crowd estimated at around 1,000 assembled at the meeting place in Gateshead and sent in a printed notice to the officials. There must have been some sort of organisation behind this, but no evidence survives. It would have been extremely unwise for any organiser to put anything

in writing or draw attention to themselves. It is quite surprising that a printer could be found for the handbill, but it may have been produced clandestinely, perhaps by an apprentice or journeyman.

There was no desire to be rebellious, it said, but far from it, only what common men desire is men of estates to hire men for the militia as they were formerly: being very fit that they who have lands should hire men to maintain them: for it is a thing that none of us will submit to, to be ballotted after this manner, as it is in vain to inlist or draw any belonging to this our country: for we are resolved not to let any man go out among us after this manner.[27]

As local historian M A Richardson put it, The gentlemen, to avoid mischief, agreed to excuse them for that time at their expence (save a trifle from those on whom the lots fell) as only about a dozen were wanted in the ward. They then went peaceably home, but swore they would stand to their proposal as in their printed paper, whenever a general balloting happened again, and at the same time, begged his majesty might be petitioned to alter the act.

The action moved in the following week to Northumberland. At the meeting in Morpeth on 2 March, a riotous crowd 'obliged the deputy-lieutenants and justices to quit their duty for their own safety, no military force being at hand ; the rioters then seized all the lists and books… and tore or burnt them before their eyes'.[28] The authorities responded by publishing a notice in the Newcastle papers on 7 March;

…It is to be feared, that the Persons concerned in these rash and unlawful Proceedings, do not know the Guilt they thereby incur, and the Punishment to which they make themselves obnoxious… and that on a late Prosecution at York Assizes… it was by the Court adjudged High Treason… and several of the Offenders were condemned to be hanged… This is inserted to caution such as are misled into such perilous Undertakings, what severe Laws they make themselves subject to.

Constable Joshua Hindmarsh inserted a grovelling apology for abusing the deputy-lieutenant William Fenwick, and said that he did 'hope, if this

publick Acknowledgement of my Crime shall have this effect, by putting a Stop to their outrageous and treasonable Riots, that further prosecutions may be stopt against me and other Offenders.'[29]

Landowners took action also. Lady Jane Allgood of Nunwick Hall wrote to her husband that she had 'sent up the day before [the riot] to let them know their assembling themselves in that manner wou'd be deemed Rebellion & must be treated as rebels & if any of our Tenants or whoever they were that lived upon any part of our estate went with the rebellious men they nor none belonging to them shou'd have habitation here again'. [30]

Meanwhile, the authorities asked the commander of the militia stationed at Newcastle to send a force to protect them at the Hexham meeting scheduled for 9 March. What happened in the course of the day was described in a number of different reports, to the government in London and the militia commanders in Newcastle and Berwick, and to the newspapers and journals. Unsurprisingly, none come from the protestors, though we do have one from a serving militia officer, Lieutenant William Allen, and another from an eyewitness.[31]

Corfe covers the events in detail and so here, we need only summarise briefly what happened. Somewhere between 240 and nearly 400 militia men, with their officers, were assembled in the market square, as against a crowd generally put at around 5,000. Crowd numbers are notoriously difficult to estimate, but Corfe has studied the layout of the square at the time, and believes that it would have been just possible for that number to cram in, overflowing into the narrow streets around it, but 'there would have been little room for the rioters to swing the cudgels many were said to be carrying'.[32]

The militia escorted the deputy-lieutenants and magistrates to the town hall at around 10.00, and there was then a long process of receiving the constables' lists and hearing appeals against them. As the morning went on, a large and threatening crowd assembled. The militia was drawn up in ranks, fully armed with fixed bayonets and loaded muskets. The magistrates may have sent out a warning to the townspeople to stay indoors, 'as it was

feared there would be a Necessity of repelling Force by Force'.[33] In the early afternoon violence broke out in one corner of the square, and one militia man and one officer were shot by a protestor. After proclamations, there were several volleys of shots by the militia in response, at close range into the crowd. The eyewitness account says that the officer's orders were to fire a volley over the heads of the crowd, but the militia 'were not to be kept within bounds', and the firing continued for ten minutes or more. Lieutenant Allen wrote that he and other officers 'ran up and down the line to make the men give over firing'.

Immediate deaths were put at between 20 and 50, with an unknown number of wounded, followed by a stampede out of the square and a hurried dispersal of the crowd. As the eyewitness put it, 'and what a horrible scene did I behold afterwards, some carried by dead in carts, others on horses ; and many were led along just dying of their wounds, and covered with blood!'

The aftermath

The Quarter Sessions in July 1761 agreed substantial payments to surgeons and others for 'medicines and attendance' on the wounded in the square, and also a payment for looking after the Papists' horses 'in the late Rebellion'.[34] This chimes with a comment by Lady Allgood, that 'the roman catholics are in a mortal fright least they shou'd be suspected having any concern with them'.[35] The *Annual Register's* eyewitness said that by 12 March 'all the coalworkers gave over their labour, and it was supposed that a body of many thousands' was forming. By that evening, an urgent message had reached government minister Lord Holderness that the 'Gentlemen of the Country still apprehensive of the Resentment of the Mob, apply to His Majesty for Protection and desire the assistance of some Light Horse.' After consultation with the commander-in-chief and the king agreed, the troops were sent.[36]

Locally, news had arrived with the Northumberland Militia at Berwick on the morning of 11 March. Over the next few days, troops were sent

to counter rumoured disturbances at Ancroft, Belford, and Wall. John Dawson, a militia officer at Berwick, recorded in his diary an untrue rumour of a riot at Carlisle with several men killed by the Westmorland militia.[37]

Letters from Lady Allgood's steward suggest that he was very jumpy, and her neighbours organised a rota to stay in the house with her over the next few nights, since her husband was away. Lady Allgood treated this rather mockingly, saying about those who had returned from Hexham, 'a child might take every man of them if any of them or belonging to them comes near me or any of my people they bow and cringe down to the ground nay I believe they wou'd lie down & let me tread upon them if I pleased'.[38] The local clergy were preaching sermons by the end of the week, and in the midsummer Quarter Sessions, the magistrates thanked 'the several Clergymen of the Church of England and Ministers or Teachers of Dissenting Congregations… for their laudable Attention to the Tranquility and Happiness of the County' and ordered three of the sermons to be printed.[39]

Once the threats had receded, the meetings to make up the militia lists which had been abandoned earlier resumed at the end of March and early April. Action also moved on to arrests of men who could be prosecuted for their part in the disturbances, carried out by the Northumberland Militia and soldiers of the Light Horse. However, Lord Bute (now effectively Prime Minister) was told at the end of May by the Attorney General that the Informations which have hitherto been taken against the Persons concerned in the late Riots in Northumberland & which have been refer'd to Him contain not sufficient Evidence on which he can advise a Prosecution'.[40]

An 'agent'- a Government investigator, not a secret agent, a Mr Perrott, was sent to attempt to find out more, but had limited success, as he reported on 14 June. The prisoners in Morpeth Gaol all 'remain absolutely determined ag[ains]t speaking or declaring what they know'. A surgeon told him that while treating injured men in the market-place, he had asked

about the identity of the ringleaders 'but could never obtain a satisfactory answer'. It was, however, 'in general believed that the person who shott Mr Hart was himself immediately dispatched by a Soldier certain it is that numbers of the very worst were killed & that some few escaped who have since fled their Country'.[41]

As often happened in the eighteenth century, ferocious threats of punishment ended in comparative leniency in the courts. 'The King's Counsel have shown the greatest clemency in every prosecution, and have discharged several out of custody without preferring any indictment, who did not appear by the informations against them to have been of dangerous dispositions, or remarkably active in the riots' reported the Newcastle Journal.[42] There were fines and short gaol sentences for some, but only two people were sentenced for high treason, Peter Patterson, a wealthy farmer from Shilvington and William Elder of Rock; Patterson had been involved at Belford, Elder at Morpeth. There were appeals to the King, but it was decided in Whitehall that '[j]udging it to be necessary that for the Peace of His County of Northumberland an example should on this Occasion be made', Peter Patterson should be executed, but Elder should be reprieved. Patterson, when hung in October, died exclaiming 'Innocent Blood is ill to shed'.[43]

Conclusion; a new principle

At the same time, the fortunes of the war, and therefore of the militia legislation, were changing. The rumours of peace talks after English victories proved unfounded, but there was no longer any fear of invasion.

After much discussion between the different factions in Parliament, a new Militia Bill was brought in at the end of 1761, and finalised in March 1762. The leading proponent was Sir George Savile, MP for York, who attacked the mechanism of the ballot head-on in his *Argument for the Militia*. 'If we consider a ballot as taking real effect, it appears ridiculous, impracticable, and carrying an Utopian idea of property and patriotism into the ranks: That on the other hand, compelled as we are, to allow of

finding or substitution, it becomes the inconvenient, burthensome, and odious expedient of unequal taxation'.[44]

Instead, parishes were empowered to levy rates, and use the money to enlist volunteers to the number required. A ballot would only be held if this was not done, and when the militia was called out, a balloted man would receive up to £5, half the local price of a volunteer. Poor men with three legitimate children or more would be exempt.[45]

Not long after this, the war ended. The embodied militia regiments were disbanded by the end of 1762. The new rules were brought into effect, but with limited money from the Exchequer. Some counties defaulted on their obligations. With various amendments, the Act remained in existence until the outbreak of the American revolution once more changed the picture.

In conclusion, the tragic deaths in Hexham on 9 March 1761 probably had no effect in themselves on the arguments in and out of Parliament about how to raise the militia. But the whole pattern of resistance across the country between 1757 and 1762 did. As the eyewitness said in the *Annual Register* report, 'so variable is the multitude, that a measure brought about a few years ago by their clamour, appears now to them the most oppressive that ever a free nation was subjected to !'[46] While there was apathy from the propertied classes who expected to provide the officers, the poor actively resisted the 'inconvenient, burthensome, and odious expedient of unequal taxation'.

1 Tom Corfe, *Riot: the Hexham Militia Riot*, 1761 (Hexham Community Partnership, 2004)

2 J R Western, *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pages 52-74.

3 Several authors using this term are listed in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Hundred_Years'_War [accessed 29 May 2025]. This also helpfully lists the conflicts between Britain and France between 1688 and 1814.

4 Patrick O'Brien, 'Central Government and the Economy, 1688-1815', in Floud, R and D N McCloskey, *The Economic History of Britain since 1700*; vol 1, 1700-1860, 2nd edition, (Cambridge UP, 1994), 205-41, p. 212.

5 Anon., *A letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt, Esq. Wherein the utility and necessity of a well-regulated militia, during the French war, is clearly demonstrated.…* (

J. Scott, London, 1760). Eighteenth Century Collections Online (hereafter ECCO) [Accessed 23 April 2025], p. 7.

6 John Sykes, *Local records; or, historical register of remarkable events, which have occurred in Northumberland and Durham, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Berwick upon Tweed, from the earliest period of authentic record, to the present time*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1833), vol 1, pages 172-4, https://wellcomecollection.org/works/g76bwxw5/items. [Accessed 26 May 2025].

7 John Almon, A Seventh letter to the people of England. *On annual Parliaments, public addresses, a general militia, and the danger of foreign mercenaries*. 1756. Eighteenth Century Collections Online (herewith ECCO), [Accessed 23 April 2025].

8 Charles Sackville, *A treatise concerning the militia*…. London, 1752. ECCO [Accessed 23 April 2025]; Almon, see above.

9 Western, pages 105-106.

10 Matthew McCormack, *Embodying the Militia in Georgian England*, (Oxford University Press 2015), chapter 8, 'Supporting the Civil Power', https://academic.oup.com/book/1504/chapter/140930648, [accessed 23 April 2025]

11 Western, p. 122, quoting Earl of Ilchester, *Henry Fox, First Lord Holland*, (London: John Murray 1920), vol 1, p. 305-6.

12 Western, p. 140.

13 Corfe, p. 17.

14 *Gentlemen's Magazine*, 1757, p. 304, quoted in Corfe, p. 17.

15 Western, p. 140.

16 SP. 36/ 138/1/26, in National Archives, printed with modernised spelling in Robert Bell Turton, *History of the North York Militia* (Leeds, Whitehead & Sons, 1907), p. 175.

17 *NC*, 1 April 1758, p. 3.

18 *NC*, 23 August 1757, p. 1

19 Western, p. 169.

20 *NC*, 14 July 1759, p. 1.

21 Western, appendix A, pages 447-448; NC, 16 Feb 1760, p. ; Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Militia_and_Volunteers_of_County_Durham [accessed 30 May 2025]

22 Turton,, p. 43.

23 Western, pages 170-73.

24 *NC*, 26 July 1760, repeated on 2 and 9 August.

25 *Newcastle Journal* (hereafter NJ), 14 Feb 1761. The wording in the Northumberland notices is slightly different.

26 NJ and NC, 28 Feb 1761; this and other notices may have been issued as handbills as well.

27 Corfe, p. 26. It was apparently widely reprinted in the press at the time, in the NJ and NC among others, but the original handbill does not survive.

28 Moses Aaron Richardson, *The local historian's table book, of remarkable occurrences, historical facts, traditions, legendary and descriptive ballads [&c.] connected with the counties*

of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northumberland and Durham (London, 1841-46), p. 94.

29 *NC*, 7 March 1761, pages 2 and 3.

30 Northumberland Archives, ZAL 40/12, Correspondence, Hexham Riot from Lady Allgood, 1761

31 For Lieut Allen's diary see Sir Cuthbert Sharpe, 'Original Account of the Riot at Hexham, by an officer of the North Yorks Militia' Newcastle Magazine (1824), pages 297-99; the eyewitness account is in The annual register, or, a view of the history, politicks, and literature for the year. Vol 4, 1761, pages 82-83, (hereafter AR) Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/s25id13210470/page/n1/mode/2up [accessed 7 June 2025]

32 Corfe, p. 36. Indictment papers in ASSI 44/76 (see below) use the figure of 500, while the eyewitness (see above) reports 'between 6 and 7,000'.

33 *An authentic Account of the late INSURRECTION, which occasioned this Discourse*, preface to Brown, John, A Sermon preached at St Nicholas Church.., (London, L Davis and C Reymers, 1761).

34 Quarterly Sessions Order Book Q/S/O/ 9, p. 445.

35 ZAL 40/12, as above.

36 State Papers, SP. 44/ 139, in National Archives, pages 9-10.

37 'Diary of John Dawson of Brunton', *North country diaries (second series)* ed by J C Hodgson, Surtees Society, (1915), vol 124, pages 253-295, pages 256-61. https://archive.org/details/northcountrydiar00hodgrich/page/n1/mode/2up. [Accessed 4 June 2025]

38 ZAL 40/12, as above.

39 Quarterly Sessions Order Book Q/S/O/ 9, p. 447

40 SP. 44/ 139, pages 20-22.

41 National Army Museum (NAM) archives 6510 – 146 (2) – 25, transcribed 2025 05 21. From the handwriting and language of his report, he was an educated man, perhaps a senior clerk.

42 *NJ*, 22 Aug 1761. The report lists the penalties and discharges, and there is further detail in Corfe.

43 SP. 44/ 139, p. 67; Corfe, p. 55.

44 Savile, Sir George, *An argument concerning the militia….* [1762]. ECCO, pp17, accessed 23 April 2025

45 Western, pages 188-191.

46 *AR*, p. 83.

Pit Elegies and Ballads: Abbie Urquhart-Arnold

Abbie Urquehart-Arnold

This Chaplin Prize winning essay highlights the importance of the memorial materials produced after mining disasters. It is part of a longer piece which is available on our website.

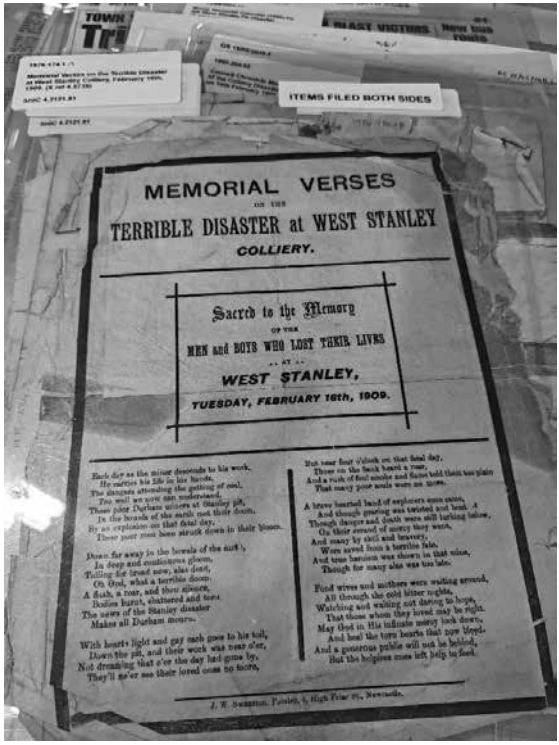
This [paper] explores the mining disaster elegies and ballads that emerged following the Seaham pit disaster of 1880 and the West Stanley explosion of 1909 in how they portrayed grief as a multifaceted experience for the widows and families of Seaham

In the years 1880 and 1909 two significant mining disasters occurred in the County Durham coalfields of Seaham and West Stanley…resulting in the deaths of over 300 men and boys, with Seaham losing 10% of its male population in that one explosion.[1] As a result devastation and financial hardship were widespread. Families were left devoid of breadwinners, widows struggled through the chaotic scenes at each pithead waiting for news of their loved ones and to identify their bodies.

Amidst this chaos, panic, and immense grief, mining disaster elegies and ballads emerged… this literature not only depicted the scenes of grief-stricken widows in the aftermath of these disasters, but worked at creating a genre of commemorative…memorabilia that highlighted the complexities of grief, and advocated for protective legislative changes.

A plethora of these tangible literary objects survive to this day, preserved for over one hundred years …The elegies examined include: 'The Wail of Woe' by Reverend Ernest Little[2], John Rowell Waller's 'To the Memory of 163 Men and Boys, who lost their lives by an Explosion of Gas in New

Seaham Pit, Seaham Harbour, which occurred at half-past Two o' clock on the morning of Wednesday, September 8th 1880' ('To the Memory')[3], and Edward Boyle's 'In Memoriam, Lines on the Seaham Colliery Explosion which occurred early on the Morning of Sept. 8th, 1880', ('In Memoriam') [4]. The ballads included are Tommy Armstrong's 'West Stanley Explosion 1909"[5] and the anonymously written 'Memorial Verses on the Terrible Disaster at West Stanley on February 16th 1909, Over 150 Lives Lost', ('Memorial verses')[6].



Memorial Verses on the West Stanley Pit Disaster, February 16th, 1909". Circa February 1909. Regional Resource Centre, Beamish Museum. 1976-174.1 A, X ref 4.5739, SHIC 4.2121.81.

In addition, [we have] the Thomas Anderson Funeral Card[7], and commemorative napkins from West Stanley[8]. These elegies and ballads interacted with the grief of widows and their families as physical, transitional objects which worked to provide them with a tangible way to mourn their loved ones. This literature focused upon the perspective of women and their children, allowing for a deeper understanding that widows grieved for their own circumstances, and futures as well as their lost husbands and sons. It is also evident that these objects aimed to encourage political activism amongst their reading audiences for positive change concerning the dangerous working conditions of coal mines that led to mass disaster. By utilising the grief of widows, these writers targeted those directly affected by coal mine explosions, who would have been living through the consequences of dangerous working conditions. … these mining disaster elegies and ballads interacted as objects [for] the widows, depicting their complex struggles, and working as a voice to call for a positive future for families.

[I intend to] examine this literature and physical objects intended to interact with mourning families to memorialise the loss of their loved ones. Thomas Anderson's Funeral Card, Tommy Armstrong's 'West Stanley Explosion 1909', and the 'Memorial verses' all emerged following the West Stanley disaster.

For Seaham, Edward Boyle's 'In Memoriam' particularly memorialised George Dixon and Corporal Thomas Hindson. Boyle's poem sought to capture positive accolades of both figures, and as a result Dixon's family held onto a copy of 'In Memoriam' as an object of remembrance, that supported them in grieving Dixon's memory.

[I] could have focused on any mining disaster literature from the northern coalfields... As a local to Stanley, with connections to Seaham, it only made sense that this project focused upon these two areas, as two of the largest mining disasters of the Durham coalfields. [This] developed into a discovery of largely forgotten, once notable writers of the Victorian and early Edwardian periods whose works are finally being appreciated for their literary brilliance.

Those forgotten writers include John Rowell Waller, Edward Boyle, and Tommy Armstrong. Well-regarded, they highlight the significance of both the Seaham and West Stanley colliery disasters as all three turned their pens to capture the events of each fateful day. John Rowell Waller was a poet who published nature-inspired volumes of poetry - the turn towards creating a funeral poem for Seaham marked a shift in his typical muses. Edward Boyle, on the other hand, was best known for his broadsheet publications, and public political lectures in the Northeast, which focused on the urgent political change that was desperately needed in the coal mining industry. Known as the "Spennymoor Radical Rhymer", his poetry and works were esteemed for their controversial nature[9] ... In the latter section of his poem 'In Memoriam' on the Seaham colliery disaster, Boyle advocated for political change that improved the working conditions, and lives of the coal miners of Seaham. Likewise, Tommy Armstrong was also a well-regarded poet and an experienced miner of the Stanley area who wrote on various other mining disasters including the Trimdon Grange explosion. His experience of the Stanley coalfields developed his own sense of camaraderie with those affected by the explosion, as he knew what the life of a coal miner entailed, and the risks of working in such a dangerous environment. His ballad 'West Stanley Explosion 1909' provided not just a historical but a reliable account.



Commemorative napkin for those lost in the explosion at West Stanley Mine, Durham, on 16th February 1909". Circa Feb 1909. Regional Resource Centre, Beamish Museum. 1980-354, SHIC 4.2121.81

The mining disaster literature which followed the Seaham and West Stanley disasters, created a genre of commemoration that eloquently memorialised the men and boys who lost their lives in those tragic events. For those communities, the mining disaster literature combined both literary and material culture in tangible, printed, and decorated poems and ballads. Formatted as broadsheets, cards, and napkins they interacted with the

grieving families to provide consolation as transitional objects of grief. As a result of their importance to those in mourning, a plethora of these objects survive in near-perfect condition. This suggests that for the widows of Seaham and West Stanley, having physical literature that they could interact with [helped] to aid them through the grieving process.

Following the West Stanley disaster, many ballads emerged depicting the grief of widows and families as well as the events of that fateful day. Two notable examples one anonymous, … offered the grieving families a way to connect to each other's suffering and the final moments of their loved ones. Armstrong's 'West Stanley Explosion 1909' was written to the tune "Cassels in the Air", which the public would have already been familiar with.[10] The tune itself seemed to be oppositional to the mournful content, but it created a memorable way for widows and families of the 168 men and boys who perished that day, to engage with the content of the ballad. Armstrong wrote in Standard English as opposed to his usual 'Pitmatic' dialect.

For the anonymously written ballad 'Memorial' the broadsheet does not have a tune listed, but existed alongside multiple other anonymously written ballads published in the aftermath of the West Stanley explosion that were also titled 'Memorial Verses'. They appear to have existed for collective singing, possibly at funerals or commemorative events. In this period [literacy rates were steadily rising] to around 97%.[11] Written ballads and poems offered …an accessible, easily distributed form of news whilst also working to provide tangible keepsakes for families to preserve their loved ones' memories.

As printed media, the mining disaster literature …created an opportunity for public and personal reflection upon both disasters. This is evident in the paper napkins from the West Stanley Disaster, held by the Beamish Museum Archive, which were decorated elaborately as if they were intended to be displayed. The archive holds a great number of these objects, each one decorated slightly differently. Some …bear generic mourning poetry, some list of names of the victims, some bear

both The number of surviving copies …suggests that there was a need within communities, post-disaster, for objects of commemoration. These commemorative items were not produced by regional printers – the majority were made in Bishopsgate, London. This was an unusual choice for localised events, especially since there were printers in the locality. This may be a signifier of an economy of scale for death memorabilia of mining disasters. John Benson noted that "from 1860 to 1897 over 13,000 widows lost their husbands, and over 30,000 dependent children their fathers, by accidents in the English coal-mining industry"[12] This could explain the choice to mass-produce commemorative napkins in London. If there was significant public demand for memorabilia of this kind, it would make good business sense to tap into this niche. This is evident in West Stanley's commemorative napkins which appear to form part of a larger ensemble of objects intended for the grieving public. It suggests that in times of grief, the public turns to poetry, a commemoration of their loved ones and a search for consolation.

Other individual objects includes the funeral card of 20-year-old Thomas Anderson This printed poem and photograph showcase intimate, personal wording intended for his mourning family which contained a generic funeral elegy that conveyed emotions associated with the loss of a child, and worked to humanise his memory. As an object intended for remembrance, Anderson's family commissioned "Neasham, Printer, Consett" to create cards to be distributed at his funeral, to preserve memory. In the Transitional Objects of Grief study, it was observed that 'While conducting home-based interviews with parents who had experienced the death of their child, some version of a shrine to the deceased was almost always found, consisting of photographs and occasionally keepsakes.'[13]

For the Seaham Colliery disaster, [we have] printed broadsheets. Edward Boyle 'aimed to capture the personas of George Dixon and Corporal Thomas Hindson:

Behind a roof-fall lying out from the face
Two bodies were found in each other's embrace;

Thrice warn'd to escape with the last chance he had,
George Dixon replied, "Nay I'll stay with the lad." (Boyle 25-28)

This references the heroic actions of George Dixon, who refused to flee to safety, leaving a young, injured man to die alone. "Nay I'll stay with the lad", defined Dixon indefinitely for his heroic decision. Boyle's poem goes beyond just memorialising Dixon's name it gives an insight into Dixon's character and personal morals. For his grieving family, to have Dixon remembered heroically and heralded for his actions may have cast a positive light in the world of darkness that is mourning a loved one. Boyle also captured Corporal Thomas Hindson in his eleventh stanza:

Poor Hindson- respect'd by his belov'd Queen,
Now sleeps where fresh graves by the score may be seen;
'The mark of "high calling"- the King of King's prize,
Let's hope he has won where no perils arise.

Boyle is referencing Hindson's victory at the National Artillery Association Competition one month earlier, winning Queen Victoria's cup and other prizes. The awards were due to be presented to him at the Seaham Flower Show on the 8th of September the day after the Seaham explosion[14]. For Hindson and Thomas' families, this [highlights] how they lived, rather than how he was discovered and identified amongst the dead. The heroic positive events of their lives memorialises them as more than mining disaster victims.

Keren Shafir argued that a poet's usage of 'language fashions pieces of memory -- place, word and sound -- into poems that like a grave, demarcate the prior existence of a person, a people, indeed an entire world.'[15] Memorialising George Dixon and Corporal Thomas Hindson within a broadsheet poem created this metaphorical gravestone, which the families could visit regularly through reading of Boyle's words. There is also evidence that 'In Memoriam' was a transitional object of grief for

the family of George Dixon. A copy of this broadsheet poem was held by the great, great granddaughter of George Dixon.[16] This had been passed down the family, in a well-preserved state, highlighting what an important keepsake this was for his family.

Kim Langley has argued that "Poems are a source of consolation, strength, and a springboard for meaningful conversations."[17] Boyle did not fixate his attention on the specifics of how Dixon and Hindson died. This would have memorialised their suffering and reduced their memories to an existence as victims of a mining explosion. Instead, Boyle dealt delicately with their depiction as heroes and thus, their families preserved 'In Memoriam' as a transitional object of grief, but also as though it were an extension of these men's graves.[18]

There is another facet of these texts. They do not exist as just objects aiding grief but also depict the grief of widows and its operation in the face of mass mining disasters.

The Seaham and West Stanley poetry showed grief as a multifaceted experience going beyond depicting the events of each fateful day. This literature placed the sorrow of widows and orphans as central to their retellings of events, offering a nuanced representation.

The literature explores grief as a physical, emotional experience, but also deals with the harsh realities for the widows and children of Seaham and West Stanley who had to live without the presence of a breadwinner. Mining disaster poetry and ballads stand out in comparison to newspaper articles of the time in discussing and humanising loss. They allow for a more developed and complex understanding of the impact of the disasters because the writers combine fact and emotion into an informative piece of literature memorialising the suffering of two coal mining communities.

….It highlighted the devastation and financial impacts on the dependents. They went beyond the descriptive details published by both local and national newspapers which focused upon providing its reading audience with statistics of each event. For instance, the Newcastle Daily Chronicle, focused its attention on the immediate victims of the disaster or

the financial assistance being raised within the communities.[19] Reverend Ernest Little's depiction focused upon the grief of widows, and failed to explore its complexities in any great depth. This was despite, as Gavin Havery wrote, that in Stanley there were "over 300 dependents, the vast majority of whom lived in colliery company houses, were not only grieving but also faced destitution after losing their loved ones."[20] Moreover, Durham Records show that there were "107 widows, 2 mothers and 259 children without their breadwinners" following the Seaham disaster.[21] There was a significant number of dependents left behind, whose stories are as valuable as the loved ones they had lost. These stories formed the backbone of mining disaster poetry and ballads which took the widows and their children as their muses, allowing for the living victims to also be remembered.

The form of the elegy provided the perfect method for widows and their families to lament the men and boys who suffered in each explosion. It also allowed for an intimate depiction of grief that highlighted the plight dependents faced without the security of income from a breadwinner. These working-class elegies oppose the popular compositions of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, intended for an upper-class audience, by showcasing the realistic, complex nature of grief that was faced by the lower echelons of society. Julia Mitchell coined the term "pit elegy" in her work regarding the dissatisfaction in the coal mining industry during the latter half of the twentieth century.[22] She wrote that the "pit elegy' provided a musical narrative for the plight of coal miners and their communities" Her standpoint also applies to the elegies from Seaham and West Stanley. These … provided an accessible depiction of grief that the general public could relate to, which made these works powerful.

The 'Wail of Woe' by Reverend Ernest Little was one example of this type of working-class elegy. It depicted grief as a raw, physical, emotive experience. Little wrote his poem and intended to raise money for the Stanley Disaster Fund, a charitable fund established by the Newcastle Chronicle, to aid the widows and their families struggling in the aftermath

of the explosion. Given his ecclesiastical background and, therefore, his experience of dealing with loss, Little crafted a beautiful poem that delicately portrayed the very physical lamentations of widows:

> Hark to that agonizing wail
> From broken hearts whose spirits fail,
> They mourn and weep in deep despair
> And cries of anguish rend the air. (Little 1-4)

"Hark to that agonizing wail/ And cries of anguish rend the air" paint a picture of immense physical grief. The use of "wail" and "cries of anguish" convey how distraught these women were. In the aftermath of a disaster there is no time for delicate mourning. Little does well to recreate this raw, emotional image of grief, but he fails to develop it further by offering more information about the disaster itself. It could be read as generic funeral poetry had we not known it was written to raise money for disaster relief. He provides no details of the widows, nor does he talk about the more complex aspects of their grief (unlike Armstrong and Boyle). He depicted their bereavement in isolation. It is almost a supernatural image …vocalising and publically lamenting.

Clergyman that he was, Little employed the long-standing analogy of a bible verse to their suffering. Jeremiah 31:15, depicts Rachel weeping for her children:

> In Ramah, such a voice was heard
> A mother's soul was strangely stirred,
> Unutterably sad her lot,
> Whom she had borne, and loved were not. (Little 5-8)

Rachel was then assured by God that all would be well, and as a reference, offered the symbolic reassurance that these women needed in the aftermath of their immense loss: a message of hope. Nevertheless, the situation for

many women in the aftermath of large-scale disasters in this period was dire. For instance, this harsh reality can be seen in the story of Mrs Worby; a teenage mother, who was left, pregnant, with a two-year old daughter after the West Stanley disaster. The article, 'Miner's wife brought family up on a pittance' depicted the harsh reality for Mrs Worby: she mourned for more than her lost husband.[23] She had lost her future and was now left to raise two children on her own.

Tommy Armstrong's ballad emphasised the economic dependence of miners' wives and the uncertainty these widows faced having lost a male breadwinner:

> May God protect the widows and raise up each drooping head;
> And may the little orphans never have to cry for bread.
> We hope our fellow-workmen that has only gone before,
> Has reached the place of happiness, to rest for evermore. (Armstrong 9-12)

For these women, their entire being was economically tied to their husbands, whether or not they were themselves employed, "In mining communities, limited economic alternatives and the gendered division of labour often led women to regard their interests as closely tied to those of their husbands and fathers."[24]

Unlike Little, Armstrong depicted the brutal reality of mining disasters, and as a former miner himself, Armstrong understood the financial as well as emotional impact of a miner's death on the family unit. The grief of these women and their children went beyond simply lamenting the loss of someone they loved, but lamenting the loss of their previous life, and mourning the future to come.

Edward Boyle also utilised the imagery of bread. Boyle's approach, however, in using this imagery is what sets him apart from Armstrong:

> And let it be ours to relieve the distress'd,
> 'Tis said the free giver is doubly bless'd;

Shall widows and orphans lamenting the dead,
Lack pity, or rather, what pity means, bread? (Boyle 45-48)

Boyle was urging the Seaham community to directly support the widows and their families, In Seaham, each widow, received one shilling from Durham Miner's Permanent Relief Fund with a further three pence for each child if they were in education.[25] This was not enough and resulted in ten widows marching into a meeting of the Permanent Relief Fund to demand more income to support themselves and their children, which was denied.[26] Unfortunately, this harsh situation was not uncommon. "The founders of colliery disaster funds were determined to restrict the level of relief to that which they considered adequate to maintain, but not to improve, the position of the bereaved."[27] Boyle was calling on the community's charitability, to support these families when the established fund was not adequate. Boyle highlighted his knowledge of the impact of the Seaham explosion, and cemented his legacy as an avid critic of coal mines in Durham through the single line "Lack pity, or rather, what pity means, bread?", encapsulating the complexity of the widows situation and critiquing those who neglected them, and their families.

Finally, John Rowell Waller's short seven-line poem 'To the Memory' also explored another issue facing the Seaham widows in his references to the child labour of the coal mining industry.

As in the dark, times out of count gone past,
They'd groped together at their thankless toil,
So, daring fellows, to the very last
They spent their vigour - Children of the soil;
Toil! Solemn knell, each sad September, Toil!
Till time has soothed the grief that throbs at home;
And softly cut the fibre, and their end was come. (Waller 1-7)

John Rowell Waller's reference to "Children of the soil" is relevant given

the proportion of those under the age of eighteen who died in the Seaham explosion. Some of those women of Seaham also lost children as well as husbands, children who might have been sent to work to support their families.

Given that coal mining was for many a lifelong career, many of the adult victims of this disaster were also likely to have been miners as children. This resonates with the idea that widows grieved for the future, as well as the present, because for the rest of the family to continue living they would need to rely on an income, which may have stemmed from their other children turning to coal mining. Knowing the consequences of dangerous working conditions but having few other options available to them, many survivors also had to return to these hazardous working conditions. Gavin Havery discussed this idea in another article entitled 'Miners had no choice but to return to work."[28] Havery described the hand-to-mouth culture of one particular working-class mining family in Durham, who were the relatives of a Mr Cowen who lost his life in the West Stanley disaster. They had little time to grieve, having to return to coal mining to feed their families. The same plight could be viewed in Seaham, where the New Seaham pit was reopened before every last victim had been brought to the surface. This led to a strike by the workers, which was ultimately unsuccessful, as families could not survive merely on strike pay. Men and boys were forced to return to the pit to support their families, working in the same dangerous conditions that killed their colleagues.

Little focused on the physical nature of grief by likening the widows cries to biblical lamentations like that of the biblical figure of Rachel, offering a falsely optimistic portrayal of hope. For the widows of West Stanley, their circumstances worsened in the aftermath of these disasters: they did not benefit as Rachel did from a promise of hope from God.

Tommy Armstrong and Edward Boyle, depicted grief beyond the physical attributes of crying. Their lived experience meant they both understood the precarious situation encountered by these families who had

lost the breadwinner... It was this imagery of bread which underpinned their depiction. Overnight, the entire family dynamic and futures of these women hung in the balance, forcing them to resort to charitable aid and community support to survive

The elegies and ballads of the Seaham and West Stanley disasters portray how grief can lead to public outrage and the desire for change. Kirstie Blair argued that mining "poems were often activist, in the sense of advocating for change on a particular social or political issue. And they used poetry to create and share a sense of community, both by writing on local topics and in local dialect."[29] Poems like 'To the Memory' and 'In Memorium' called for better working conditions.

Boyle explicitly advocated for legislative change to protect miners, their families, and their communities. This poetry formed part of the campaigning of radical scathing voices calling for political change – including speakers at the Durham Miners' Association Gala. "Before the 1890s speakers included radicals such as Joseph Cowen (1873), Peter Kropotkin (1882), Annie Besant (1884), and Tom Mann (1887). The atheist MP Charles Bradlaugh spoke 10 times at the Gala. In 1888, the Fenian John O'Connor Power was speaker. In 1887 Tom Mann used his speech to attack the opposition of the DMA leaders to parliamentary legislation to create an 8- h day, returning in 1899, 1900, and 1901 to repeat."[30] Emerging in the aftermath of the Chartism movement and amidst the development of the Durham Miners' Association, coal-mining disaster poetry portrayed the growing discontent of the Durham coalfield.

Disaster literature utilised the discontent of these communities borne from the grief of losing loved ones, to encourage more political thought for legislative mining change.

You can see this in the 'Memorial Verses' from West Stanley:

Once wore bad news we hear, if sons and husbands dear,
Struck down while in the midst of honest toil,
How little do we know the dangers they go through,
Who earn their daily bread beneath the soil.

At the Busty Pit we're told, many hearts so true and bold,
Have met with a sad and sudden death
By firedamps deadly blow, they, alas have been laid low,
And in pain and darkness drawn their latest breath. (Anonymous 1-8)

As a verse, it was intended to provoke the community of West Stanley to advocate for change by deliberately directing the reading audience to question the safety of coal mines. For a family in mourning, this consideration would lead to radical thoughts on exactly the changes that speakers at the DMA advocated for. Poet and activist, Malkia Devich Cyril in an interview said that "radical loss is the ability to move grief in the direction of justice."[31] This idea applies to the communities of Seaham and West Stanley in reading these ballads and poetry, their grief gave them the opportunity to work towards a positive future of change, so that subsequent generations never had to die because of their profession or to experience grief of mass disaster.

Boyle's themes of grief and anger at those in power stand out uniquely against the other radical ballads and poems of the Seaham and West Stanley pit explosions. 'In Memoriam' was not subtly but explicitly radical in questioning the conditions of the pits and directly advocating for change. Boyle was aware of the increasingly dangerous conditions miners had to face. His work was unique - he used 'In Memoriam' as a vehicle that combined grief and discontent towards a goal of tangible change.

These depictions allow for the working-class perspectives of women and children and their grief to be heard. Their stories have been memorialised within this literature for over a hundred years, and are still as poignant as ever.

The writers of this literature including Edward Boyle utilised the grief of widows and families, tapping into the language of Trade Unionism and socialism to provoke the mourning audience into lobbying for change. For the poets and writers this was a platform for change. Grief was used to promote change, making a difference so that the likes of the Seaham

and West Stanley disasters never happen again. These works of literature engaged in the political discourse which was popular in the Durham Miner's Association meetings, and used the grief of widows and their families to encourage political thought for positive change.[32]

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32 Tomaney

Coal Face: Exegesis.

John Tomaney

Modern Memory
It is difficult/to get the news from poems/yet men die miserably every day/ for lack of what is found there.

- William Carlos Williams, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower"[1]

Can art be used to evoke the feelings of a community? Can photographs and found poetry capture the collective experience of a people? Can artistic licence inform historiography and capture the complexity of social change? These questions are prompted by a series of exhibitions and events, held in Sunderland in 2024 and 2025, entitled *Coal Face*, created by the writer, Louise Powell, and the photographer, Andy Martin[2]. The exhibitions are occasioned by two anniversaries: the creation of Washington New Town in 1964 and the beginning of the miners' strike in 1984. These events, 20 years apart, sounded a death knell in the history of Durham coalfield and, simultaneously, were episodes of the "modernisation" of a society. *Coal Face* focuses the mind on the gains and losses that these transformations entailed and the sources we draw upon to make sense of them. In this exegesis, I reflect on what we can learn from C*oal Face* about identity, politics and the uses of history. *Coal Face*, to use Paul Fussell's phrase, is an exercise in the production of "modern memory", in which art is a means by which the past is "remembered, conventionalized, and mythologized"[3]. *Coal Face* presents a transect of societal change and raises historiographical questions about how to represent a recently vanished world.

Coal Face comprised film and tintype portraiture of people connected to the mining history of Washington and Sunderland. It also comprised oral history and 'found poems' collated from interviews with former miners and their families, some of which is quoted below. Three catalogues were produced to accompany events and exhibitions at Washington F Pit, Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens and Wearmouth Colliery Club. This exegesis draws on these sources but situates them in a broader account of change.

Cavils and marras

> "ya'd get two men workin together/they would be like/ put together for all the ya know/and they were like Marras/ya know what I mean/ me pit Marra *(Coal Face)*

The Durham coalfield developed distinctive forms of work that shaped life underground[4]. In order to mitigate the risks that could lead to disaster and to ensure a fair chance of earning a living, miners created their own work rules. To begin with, coalface workers – *hewers* who hacked out the coal with a pick – were paid by the piece and their chance of earnings depended on the geological conditions they faced. To give every miner a fair chance of a good wage, lots were drawn each quarter to allocate workplaces in the pit. These were known as *cavils*. *Hewers* worked in pairs; each miner worked alongside his *marra*. A *marra* was somebody who you trusted completely and depended on for your life. As machinery slowly replaced hand picks these old forms of work eventually disappeared, but the principles of fairness and looking after your *marra* remained central to coal mining life. *Marra* acquired a more general connotation as workmate. But the principles of solidarity and care that governed underground life remained sacrosanct and woe betide anybody who contravened them. The importance of the *marra* relationship is key theme of *Coal Face*. These were

powerful bonds and underpinned the strong of sense of belonging that marked mining communities.

These principles did not just operate underground but also on the surface. They worked through the clubs, chapels and co-ops which formed and supported the community. A year after the 1909 disaster, the Glebe miners were on strike in a dispute about the rents they paid for colliery-owned houses. Under the draconian industrial relations laws of the time, miners were prosecuted and imprisoned in Durham Gaol for withdrawing their labour[5]. As the miners were led off to prison, they were accompanied through the village by the colliery band. A later report recounted how: 'On the platform at Washington station, the good miners' wives congregated, and sang "Oh! Oh! Antonio! he's gone away and left me alonio". When the miners released from prison, they were met on their homecoming by the band playing "See the conquering hero returns"[6]. Life in pit communities was hard and there were many imperfections and injustices, but solidarity, defiance and wit were its leitmotifs[7]. The sense of a strongly bonded community is powerfully attested in *Coal Face*.

Early mining was concentrated on the banks of the River Wear, so coal could be transported easily. Coal mining always costs lives: in 1708, an explosion at Fatfield Colliery killed 68 miners, including women and children who worked underground at that time. With the development of railways, the Durham coalfield expanded dramatically in the 19th century, fuelling the steam age, the growth of Victorian capitalism and the expansion of the British Empire. Coal mining in County Durham, during this period, occurred in hundreds of scattered, often tiny villages, hastily erected by coal companies to accommodate its new workforce. Each village grew up around a colliery. To begin with, the villages lacked even basic infrastructure and services. Housing conditions were dreadful, disease was rife, medical care was rudimentary, water and sanitation provision comprised, at best, standpipes and dry closets, while roads were unpaved and street lighting non-existent. Migrants flocked to the coalfield from all over the British Isles to take advantage of the new employment opportunities in the mines. As

the industry grew, miners fought bitter battles against the coal owners first to form a union – the Durham Miners' Association in 1869 – and then for improvements in pay and conditions in what was a dirty, dangerous and deadly industry.

Epic struggles produced social advance such as reductions in the working day, but mining life remained fraught with peril. On 20th February 1908, an explosion occurred in the Low Main seam of Washington 'Glebe' Colliery[8]. Fourteen miners were killed instantly (see Figure 1). The youngest was 18 years old, the oldest was 50. Fellow miners rushed to the rescue but, on this occasion, there were only corpses to retrieve. The Glebe disaster left a community in mourning and families at a loss without their breadwinner. The mining villages of Durham rallied to raise money for the widows and orphans. When the funerals of the dead took place later that month, the whole village attended, along with others from neighbouring villages, with the cortege led by the band and banner of the Glebe Lodge of the Durham Miners' Association. The Glebe tragedy was one of the numerous major disasters that occurred in the Durham coalfield in in the early 20th century. And it was by no means the worst. In 1909, at West Stanley, 168 men and boys died in an explosion. Death and disaster in the mine were commonplace in the early 20th century and brought forward extraordinary acts of bravery and solidarity. The story of the Glebe disaster – and others like it – demonstrates how mining work was beset by danger but marked also by courage, generosity and solidarity. And mining communities were characterised also by extraordinary stoicism. Less than a month after the disaster, Glebe Colliery was back in full production[9].

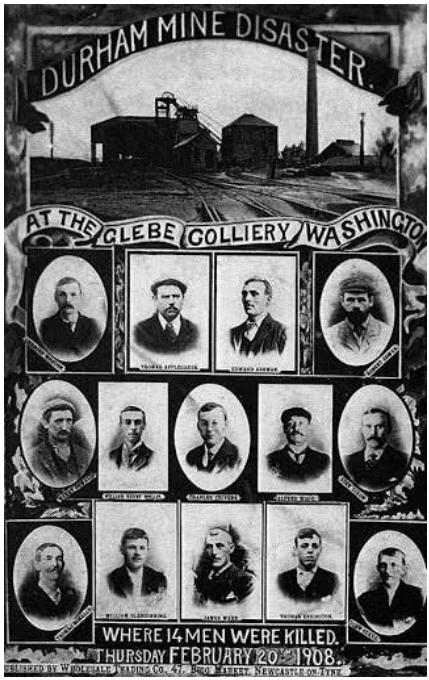


Figure 1. Glebe Colliery Disaster 1908 Commemorative Card
Source: Raggyspelk
(http://www.raggyspelk.co.uk/washington_pages/selections2/disaster_glebe_1908.html)

'We all have rights'

> Washington Village was always a meetin place /always *I'll meet ya down the village*/The Gebe C Colliery/Usworth/this one/it was like a/ everybody knew each other … that was the way it as it was a community (*Coal Face*).

Almost as soon as the villages were erected, miners and their families began the task of improving their living conditions. In the second half of the 19th century and into the first half of the 20th, throughout the villages

of the coalfield, mainly using their own resources, they built their own community infrastructure. They constructed chapels and clubs, colliery welfares and Aged Miners' Homes. These principles underpinned the forms of cooperation that permeated village life and took a strong form in the Cooperative Societies that were especially strong in the Durham coalfield[10]. As the Durham miner turned writer, Sid Chaplin, put it, 'each village was, in fact, a sort of self-constructed, do-it-yourself counter-environment. … The people had built it themselves'[11]. Communities took great pride in the facilities they built. Writing about Durham mining villages in 1946, the American sociologist, Mark Benney, noted,

> … wherever, by chance, the eye rests upon some building more attractive than its neighbors, one almost invariably finds that it owes its existence to the organized efforts of the miners themselves. Their clubs, welfare institutes, and co-op stores are outstanding institutional buildings ... Nothing has come easily to this village ... Every institution in the village with the exception of the cinema, the post-office and the church, the people had built themselves or struggled for through their union[12].

It was a world built on distinctive values that emphasised 'neighbourhood, mutual obligation, and common betterment'[13]. But each village had its own identity and a powerful sense of belonging. At its heart was the Lodge, the local branch of the Durham Miners' Association. But surrounding the Lodge were chapels, Catholic Women's Leagues, Working Men's Clubs, Co-op Committees, cricket teams and brass bands, that gave a vibrancy and focus to village life. Women were legally excluded from working underground in coal mines in 1842 but fought for their place in politics and society[14]. This is by no means only a male story. I visited the exhibition with my mother, who was born in Fatfield, for whom it uncorked mixed emotions and a complex story. The voices of women are strong in Coal

Face, recording both the struggles of their lives but also their pride in being miners' daughters and granddaughters and living in mining communities (Figure 2). Village identities were displayed in the Lodge banners that were paraded, most notably, each year at the Durham Miners' Gala – the 'Big Meeting'. The Gala served many purposes but, ultimately, for the people of the coalfield, according to the Miners' Leader and MP, Jack Lawson, it was 'the spontaneous expression of their communal life'[15]. It paraded an identity[16]. Traces of this world can still be seen in Washington. 'F Pit' is all that remains of the many pitheads that once marked the landscape. But, on Blue House Lane, you will still find Aged Miners' Homes. On Bonemill Lane and Grasmere Terrace, the old Miners' Welfares are still used as community facilities, as they are in Houghton-le-Spring and Herrington; a physical legacy of community action. These efforts reinforced the sense of belonging that marked the villages.



Figure 2. Caroline Ramshaw
Source: Coal Face

There was a powerful sense in these villages that enterprise and ownership should be in common. Egalitarian values imbued daily life. John Suggett, who grew up the son of a miner in Usworth, recalls a small but highly telling incident in Usworth Miners' Welfare Park which, as a child, brought home to him an important feature of this way of life. The park was maintained by the Usworth Colliery Miners' Welfare Organisation, which was funded by weekly deductions from the pay of the miners employed at the colliery. Among its attractions were two bowling greens, one kept immaculately for serious competition, the other less so. John's dad was keen on bowls and one sunny summer afternoon took his son for a game. The best green was busy with bowling club members who were practising, so John and his dad used the second green. But John's dad was soon complaining about the poor quality of the green surface and its effect on the run of the 'woods', so he decided to use the main green instead. John recalls what happened next,

> After a while, the groundsman sheepishly approached my dad and explained that some of the bowling club members were objecting to our playing on the club's green and asked that we be returned to the other green.

My dad rarely swore, and even then only mildly, and he rarely raised his voice. Calmly, but in a voice just loud enough for the complainers and anyone else in the vicinity to hear, he told the groundsman that his (my dad's) wages were 'docked' a weekly amount for the upkeep of the park and its facilities, including the groundsman's wages and the bungalow he lived in. He pointed out that he would not be told by "...shopkeepers and businessmen" where he could or could not play bowls in the Colliery Welfare park.

The groundsman nodded and walked away. No need to report to the complainers – they'd heard it all but opted to say nothing.

We played our game to its conclusion, returned the equipment to the

pavilion, and walked home. My dad showed no sign of pleasure or victory and we never spoke about the incident.

So, what was the lesson I learned? I learned that we all have rights and that there's a time and a way of exercising them that can be powerful. It's something that's stayed with me all of my life.

This simple but exquisite tale sums up much about the values of the people who lived in villages like, Harraton, Fatfield and Usworth, the powerful sense of belonging they produced and the confidence that rested upon it.

Farewell to 'Cotia

> The whole existence of Washington was down to collieries/ here ya had here Washington F/Down the road ya had the Glebe/across there ya had Usworth and er Cotia/Cotia was one of them it was actually/Harraton Colliery/that was its proper it's in Fatfield (Coal Face) (see Figure 3)

The occasion for Coal Face was the 70th anniversary of the creation of Washington New Town. The creation of Washington New Town signalled the impending demise of the Durham coalfield. Washington, 70 years ago, was a few scattered villages, almost all concerned with the mining of coal. The creation of a government corporation in 1964 to build 'Washington New Town', created a 'new' world to replace an 'old' one. The New Towns Act, 1946, was one the major pieces of legislation passed by Clement Attlee's Labour government elected in 1945 by a landslide. The original idea for 'Garden Cities' was proposed by the 19th century social reformer, Ebenezer Howard. Horrified by the poverty and squalor he saw around him in London, he proposed new settlements surrounded by countryside, in order to improve the quality of life. Howard pioneered his ideas by developing Letchworth Garden City in 1909, then in 1920, Welwyn Garden City. Under the terms of the New Towns Act, a wave of new towns was built

mainly in rural areas around London, helping to transform the geography of southern England, beginning with Stevenage in 1947. The aim was to rehouse families from poor and overcrowded parts of London.

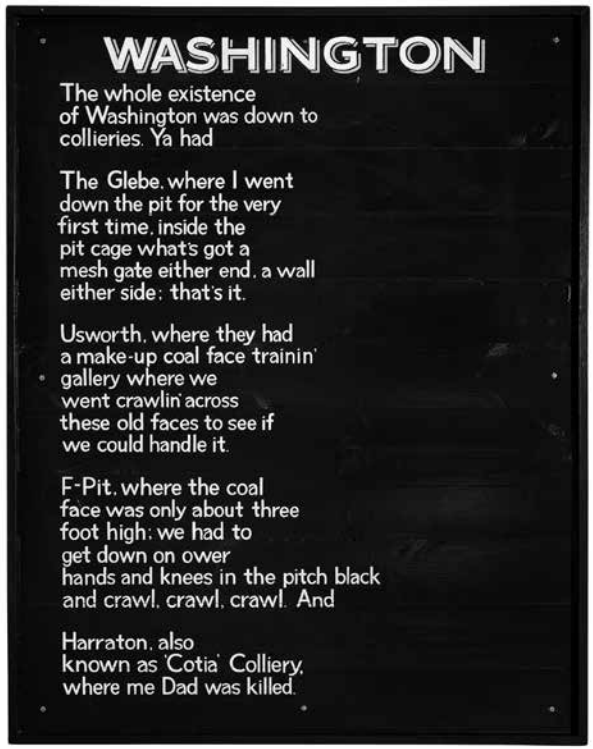


Figure 3. Washington
Source: Coal Face

Washington, by contrast was part of a second wave of new towns built in the 1960s. Its purposes were quite different to the New Towns in the south. There, New Towns were created to disperse population from London whereas, in the Durham coalfield, New Towns were developed in order to the concentrate the population. Why was this? To answer this question, we must delve into a bit of history.

By 1964, when Washington New Town Development Corporation was created by Harold Wilson's government, a dramatic reduction in coal production was envisaged, as steam was replaced by electricity and coal was replaced as fuel by oil, gas, and nuclear power. Remaining coal production was concentrated in bigger, more productive pits, especially in Yorkshire and the Midlands. A massive programme of pit closures occurred in the 1960s in the Durham coalfield. The nationalisation of the pits by the Attlee government in 1947 was a historic victory for working people and rid them of coal owners like Lord Lambton. But nationalisation proved to be the mechanism from the 1960s onward by which the coalfield was closed. My maternal Granda worked at Harraton Colliery – 'Cotia pit. In 1961, Harraton Colliery employed 1,200 men. By 1965 it was shut. Some younger men and their families moved to Yorkshire or Nottinghamshire to work in pits there. After a brief, unhappy spell at Boldon Colliery, Granda took retirement, although he remained a Durham miner until the day he died (Figure 4).



Figure 4. R.M. "Meff" Hughes (1910-1999), Durham miner, the author's Granda, with his marras. Far right, holding a pint, with his mutilated hand in his pocket. Source: author's own image

In part, the creation of Washington New Town was a response to the changing character of the regional economy and to a broader perceived need to 'modernise' the North East. As coal mining disappeared the search was on for new employers. Although District Councils and Durham County Council had fought hard to build high quality council houses, conditions in many of the villages were scarcely improved from the 19th century. Many families still lived in houses built hastily and badly by the coal company: outside netties ('lavatories', in English) were still commonplace, for instance.

Durham County Council first proposed the idea of a New Town and identified land around the village of Washington as its location. At that time, about 18,000 people lived in the various villages in the vicinity. The council's ambition was to create a self-contained town that could grow to 70,000 people and it asked the then Conservative government to designate the site as a New Town, under the terms of the 1946 Act. The government initially refused. But, faced with rising unemployment in the region and a belief that the days of coalmining (and other traditional industries such as shipbuilding) were numbered, the government appointed the Conservative peer, Lord Hailsham, to come up with a plan for the regeneration of the region. He accepted the case for a New Town, and it formed a key proposal in the 'Hailsham Plan', published in 1963, which set out the future for the North East region, although it was left to Harold Wilson's Labour government to take the plan forward[18].

The animating idea was that the New Town would be big enough to attract large plants in new manufacturing industries, would allow building of new housing on a large scale using industrial prefabrication methods and would draw in population from declining mining communities elsewhere in County Durham. A government-appointed Development Corporation was seen the best mechanism for achieving this because it would be dedicated to a single task. For Durham County Council's Planning Officer at the time, J.R. Atkinson, the biggest challenge was creating a New Town amidst 'the large amount of existing old and drab development within the designated area, together with the colliery waste heaps and pit head gear'[19].

But this diagnosis overlooked the strong community bonds that had been created in adverse material conditions.

Atkinson's remarks are revealing because the suggestion is that the world, which the people of the villages had fought so hard to improve, had no value and was about to be swept away. Washington was to be developed on the basis of eighteen newly planned 'villages' of about 4,500 people – determined as the size which would support a primary school. Initially these villages were known as 'districts' and given numbers instead of names, the source of much confusion. As, reported by the voices in *Coal Face*, names that are familiar today including Columbia, Blackfell, Oxclose, Lambton, Rickleton, came later. Washington Development Corporation employed a Community Development Officer to help foster a sense of belonging in these new villages, for instance by helping mothers to establish voluntary playgroups. By this time though, women were starting to work outside the home in the new 'lighter' manufacturing industries that were developing in Washington, so this proved more difficult than anticipated .

The approach to developing the New Town in the 1960s was a far cry from the 'do-it-yourself' yourself communities of the 1860s and afterwards, identified by Sid Chaplin. The future was to be shaped by masterplans and successive governments largely rejected the case for local representation in the planning of new towns[21]. The past was seen as a liability to be dispensed with, rather than asset to build upon. These events were not lost on the communities undergoing rupture. Harraton colliery produced two of the great folk singers of the 20th century in Jack Elliott and Jock Purdon who gave expression to the sense of loss associated with the passing of this old world. Purdon's most famous songs lamented pit closures and the perceived betrayals that accompanied them. In 'Farewell to 'Cotia,' Jock Purdon sang poignantly of the pit's impending demise,

> Ye brave bold men of 'Cotia,
> The time is drawing thus,
> You'll have to change your banner, lads,
> And join the exodus.

History or nostalgia?

I'm a miner its' in me blood/is anybody nostalgic enough to want this now/ or is it just historical? (*Coal Face*)

What is left of the rich legacy of endeavour and enterprise and its culture of sacrifice and solidarity to which *Coal Face* draws attention? In Summer 2024, Sunderland AFC unveiled a new shirt which featured a pattern made from heapsteads, the pit wheels that once punctuated the skyline of Washington and beyond. This might be regarded by some as a mere product marketing exercise, but it also is evidence of the power of icons that symbolise a past that still has meaning for many people. Every July, the Glebe Lodge banner – along with other Washington banners, such as Usworth and Harraton ('Cotia) – is paraded at the Durham Miners' Gala, to honour those who went before and to celebrate the endurance of community[22]. As William Faulkner, wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past".[23]

A striking theme that emerges from the testimony gathered by Louise Powell that accompanies Andy Martin's photographs for the *Coal Face* project, is one of loss, which is the corollary of belonging. The closure of a colliery was not merely a cold economic fact, although this was how it was calculated and appraised by governments and employers. A pit closure was a social upheaval, even a trauma. The American sociologist, Robert Wuthnow, in his brief but powerful book about "left-behind" America, reports the "sense of loss" and "feeling of grief" that accompanies the closure of traditional industries which employed generations of workers, and around which communities had grown[24]. The feelings of many of those interviewed for the Coal Face project echo Wuthnow's findings. A tone of nostalgia and lament undergirds much of the testimony, but this operates less as a yearning for the past and more as a critique of the present hedged, as it is, with insecurities and uncertainties and a sense that things are going in the wrong direction.

What was lost when a colliery closed? As the words and images from *Coal Face* attest, pit work was dirty, dangerous and, at times, deadly. One of the most powerful images in the exhibition is a maimed hand belonging to Ken Fearn (Figure 5). (My Granda lost a finger at working at 'Cotia pit, a disfigurement he bore with nonchalance and humour, to the bemusement of his grandchildren. More painfully, he lost his brother-in-law – his closest friend – in a colliery accident.) What, then, is there to mourn? During a lunch with the *Financial Times*, Hilary Rodham Clinton, sometime Democratic nominee for the US presidency, puzzled over why people are so attached to their mining past: "Whether they were from West Virginia or Tyneside, their lives were so grim and disease-prone and unhygienic — but the nostalgia for those days. I don't know"[25].



Figure 5. Ken Fearn's Left Hand
Source: Coal Face

Of course, Senator Clinton misses the point. Mining life entailed loss, but miners and their families do not long for accidents and unsanitary streets. Instead, as *Coal Face* affirms, they miss the camaraderie, solidarity and sense of purpose and belonging, that were the hallmarks of mining communities or shipbuilding towns[26]. These lacunae are transmitted through the generations, even to those who have no direct connections to a mining past (see: Figure 6). "The tradition of all dead generations", wrote Karl Marx, "weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." Former mining communities live with these losses, as vouched by the voices in *Coal Face*. There has been little space in our political culture for an appreciation of this. We are beckoned, instead, by the promise of "economic growth", driven by tech industries and AI, but what does this mean in a former mining village?



JUST BAIRNS

My Grandad, born in
the eighteen hundreds, started
at seven years old.

those men what worked at
Wearmouth Colliery,
if they had any sons,

I had recordings
of him talking about how
an older person
would go down with you
the first time, but then you were
just left in the dark.

coal owners made them
go down the pit, ten, twelve years
of age: coal owners

I had recordings
of him talking about how
scared you were to go
down the colliery
opening the door for pit
ponies in the dark.

used to threaten the
fathers with the sack if the
sons didn't go down

My Grandad, born in
the eighteen hundreds, swore his
sons wouldn't go down.

Figure 6. Just Bairns
Source: Coal Face

March 2025 was the 40th anniversary of the of the defeat of the Miners' Strike. This monumental and costly struggle was about employment and energy policy, ideology and economics, but above all it was about community. The Durham coalfield previously had experienced waves of colliery closures. Durham County Council in the 1950s responded to anticipated contraction of mining with plans to close whole villages and erase entire communities – assigned to "Category D" in the language of the planners, to be denied investment and infrastructure and left to wither and, eventually, to die. Communities which had borne the sacrifice of getting coal were to be promptly and unceremoniously discarded[28]. In 1984, remaining mining communities knew that what was at stake was their very survival.

There is a long history of neglect of former industrial communities in England. But, since 2016, a new language has emerged to describe an old problem, the language of "left behind places". The sense of being "left behind" or "forgotten" recurs unbidden and insistently among the contributors to *Coal Face*. This trope has been widely used in the media and in politics to describe places that have not shared in the wealth visible in big cities. It speaks of the entrenched class and geographical inequalities in our society. Indeed, many former mining communities have seen the accumulation of what governments call "multiple deprivation". The former Durham coalfield contains some of the most disadvantaged places in the UK. This is not a uniquely British problem, however. In collaboration with researchers at Newcastle University and in Germany and France, I have been studying the causes, patterns and consequences of "left behind places" across Europe. The continued neglect of such communities remains a scar on the body politic in many countries. *Coal Face* brings these issue into focus in ways statistical analyses cannot.

Mining communities were places in which people took pride, a theme which emerges strongly from *Coal Face*. Lives in mining communities were difficult – at times unimaginably so – but they were not grim. They contained joy, achievement and progress. The sense of belonging they engendered lingers, even if it is attenuated. The spirit of earlier labours lives

on in the efforts of ordinary people who seek to mend the places where they live. Across the former coalfield, in every community, there are people trying to make improvements. What they need are resources to be invested in support of their efforts to rebuild social and community infrastructure. They need the real attention of our leaders.

Modern Memory redux

> "… poetry might be defined as the clear expression of mixed feelings"
> WH Auden., Notes to "New Year Letter"

In her Reith Lectures in 2017, which address the value of historical fiction, Hilary Mantel reflects on how to connect one's personal story to that of the collective and how "to work authentically hearing the words of the past, but communicating in a language the present understands" . Coal Face provides an example how this can be done. It gives shape to the past and offers a mediated authenticity. It contributes respectfully to the memorialisation of both epic struggles and daily life but does not romanticise these. For the many families whose images and testimony are recorded, it has opened a door to the past and provided a rare opportunity to reflect. *Coal Face* does not merely tell the story; it has become part of it; a feature of modern memory, according to Fussell. It makes available testimony and experience on the verge of extinction and provides a narrative of change. The arresting images of miners and their families, their testimony and the found poetry, offer a clarification of gains and losses, resulting not in easy answers about the future but, in the words of Robert Frost, "a momentary stay against confusion".

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Endnotes

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The North East Heritage Library: An interview with Kieran Carter

Rosie Serdiville

The Library is an online site providing an independent database of historic sites in the North East with specific projects on coal, shipyards and sports. There is an annual publication, community chats, socials and walks. Plus a book club which is actually a publishing enterprise issuing 6 new books a year on subjects as diverse as brickworks' histories, North East women and football.

The site is hosted on Patreon where paying supporters help to cover costs. But Kieran Carter, who set the site up in 2018, is meticulous in ensuring that the database is free to all - becoming a member is about additional benefits, not access.

Keiran described it as a passion project when he was interviewed back in April 2025. He was frustrated by the research roadblocks created by leaving university – suddenly paid subscriptions, mapping applications, websites and papers were out of reach. He'd gone to university not with a particular career in mind but because of a love of history. He wanted to continue and felt that there must be a lot of other people who were interested in the field, would love to study but did not have the means to do so.

He views it as 'a library of historic structures, a chance to peel back the layers (going back in time) to understand what is there now.' He gives the City Library in Newcastle as an example. "A modern building but if you go back a generation you find another version, and before that there was the very narrow Late Victorian structure, before that Carliol Tower. So you have a plot of land with peelable layers that show the different structures

and help us understand our environment is a living breathing thing".

When Covid came along in 2020 Kieran wondered what he could do to keep his brain ticking along – this is where the idea of the North East Heritage Library was born. He wanted to build a free resource that was exactly what he had been looking for, what he enjoyed. "Hopefully if you do something you enjoy and have a passion for, other people will take an interest in it".

That idea is still the fundamental spine of the resource. He regularly lists structures, describing what he sees on the ground as he conducts planned walks. He spends an average of 25 hours a week on the project – on top of his full time job. It's a workload that requires 5 am starts.

His research plus social media – sharing his walks, research and pictures online became the basis of his website. It expanded as his initial undertaking focussed on collieries.

This was a mapping project, perhaps a bit ambitious – he thinks he probably did not realise just how big a task he had taken on at the time. From 2021 he has been attempting to log every known coal working in the North East. Now he has about 2000 of the main colliery sites with photographs and maps with potted histories built up over time.

"The next mapping project (2022) was on sports. There was an information vacuum on historic sports grounds – football, cricket, handball" .He found himself building a database of grounds that no longer exist or in their current form. "Again, it's unpeeling the layers – looking at the series of sites Newcastle United had before they were Newcastle United. Five or six grounds where there is no plaque, no signs to indicate what was there". He researches newspapers, seeks out the stories people pass down in families to create insight.

In 2023 he started doing shipyards, so far having covered the Tyne, Tweed, Blyth, and the Coquet. He is currently working on the Wear.

Every day he allots himself a certain task. "I'll get up in the morning and either do the sports, the shipyards or the coal. It's built this really big resource of entries. It's like a depository which is why I originally called

it a library. It's really easy to use (I would like to think) – you can just pop into it, you don't have to be an academic to understand it. That was the core principal in the first place. It was for someone who just had a fleeting interest in local history. A young person or an old person who was not able to go outside. Just to have somewhere where they can find what they want to find. That's what it's turned into as well as providing walks, a community where we have socials. Something far bigger than I ever envisioned it or expected it"

You could describe it as a contemporaneous archive - recording what is there now as well as the history of each location.

"This is what's really romantic about it to be honest. Because you are going into the nooks and crannies of particular places. So, for example, I'm looking at a particular football ground from the 1890's, somewhere like Walker Celtic, a really old football club. You'll see the league tables of the old North Eastern league that have all those other clubs on there and you'll think, well what about these other clubs, where did they play? So I build a list of places I'd like to go to take pictures and add it to this.

It becomes a huge eco system… on the website, I use a lot of maps and where I can see a big void I think how can I plot a walk that covers the voids in the map. So last year I wanted to do Hexham and Allendale so I plotted a route for myself using an app called Footpath where you can plot a route using rights of way. From there I normally build a twelve mile walk. Using Archaeology Explorer provided by Historic England (a cornucopia of information, a vast mapping project that uses data about previous archaeological expeditions, the presence of rigg and furrow, old lime kilns as well as old coal working sites. I might use a map of listed buildings to … understand where exactly I want to go. The Coal Authority have their own interactive bureau where you can see where all the coal entries are. So I piece it all together like the walk I did from Haydon Bridge where I managed to encounter all the old lead works, the old gin gangs and lime kilns. So you put it together, take a picture of everything you see and over the next few weeks see if you can plot it all together.

The good thing is that coal, sports, shipbuilding all blend into each other. You can do a shipyard – they often had a football team like the Neptune Yards in Walker. You find the grounds, you find who they played against. It's exactly the same with churches, it's the same with collieries as well. It's just a beautiful interwoven fabric where it all dives into each other.

Individual stories sometimes emerge but it's not my biggest focus. There are a lot of people who are way better than me at finding the individual stories and figures. But it does happen. For example I recently did a walk from Ashington through Choppington because I wanted to tick off places. Walking near Choppington Railway station, I was aware used to be an old Unitarian chapel there, a tin one.

I found that Thomas Burt used to work at the colliery up the road - he used to preach there. And he used to take part in a lot of events. It sowed the seed for a very local radicalism around Choppington. He was associated with another preacher who moved to Australia and ended up being one of the leaders of the unions there. It is stuff like that that lends itself to a really romantic storytelling narrative of these places.

People deride places these days for all looking like each other and not having a story to tell. But all you have to do is look beneath the undergrowth and consider the buildings that are around in every single place in this region. Every place is unique. They have their own traditions, their own stories to tell, their own figures that come out of the woodwork. Even at the faintest whiff of a little research project.

I'm currently working on a walk from Walker to Gosforth. There was a rugby club next to Welbeck Road, where Scrogg Road Social Club is. Before it was a social club it was an inn… they used that as the changing room for the Rugby club and used to play on the field next door. So you build this whole web of connections and relationships between all of these places. That's what I find really passionate and what I always end up diving into.

It's the synergy, it's the relationships between buildings and plots of land that don't exist anymore. That's what really drives me

About community. I always come back to using the word congregation

and it's not just a term of spirituality. Industry, sports and faith all are underpinned by congregation. Whether they saw themselves at church or at chapel, on a Sunday morning or a Saturday afternoon at football or through the week at the shipyard, it is all underpinned by this idea of community and congregation. These narratives and strands of stories all underpin each other. Community is important. Obviously, we all strive for a feeling of belonging all the time. Communities were so insular, had everything on their doorstep – institutes, libraries, post offices, smithies, quarries, all within this small area. It must have been incredibly easy to get these things set up because you were surrounded by the same people all the time.

I guess when railways started getting faster, and these villages and towns were able to meet other football clubs, were able to commune, this feeling of community only expanded. As Newcastle got bigger and bigger these communities started to coalesce. That's what's so interesting because all of these places were not the same as they seem to be today. That's the point – understanding how they have changed. Understanding how these feelings transformed from small and insular to what they are today. These stories are just infinite, you could just go on forever.

That's why I don't think this project has a lifespan because there's just too much you can tell, that's the beauty of it.

The project is at a bit of a crossroads. It's as big as I can get it in my current situation [because of time]. So at the moment it's about keeping it as it is but keeping the quality and the passion. This was started not necessarily for other people but because I love it. It was never meant to be a business or an entity or an institution. It was always meant to be a project. I don't want it to scale or anything like that.

The book club is a unique form of authorship with hard copy on offer but mostly online. It is about authenticity – finding the people who really care, who are really passionate. You can see the day to day work they put in for years. They might want to sell a book – those are the people who deserve a platform.

I try do a mix of national interest and local stuff. For example, the current book is about coastal paths. About the way before motorisation of the postal service, you used to have post people walking 17 miles out in the wild. Although he is not local it favours what we are interested in, it's about community. Its people like him who will walk these paths, who will speak to these people and that authenticity will, I hope, drive history going forwards.

The website has a good few thousand views a week. The football section has just reached three figures. So it's healthy but not massive. It's self-sustaining which is the key thing. And it's constantly driving interest, which keeps me interested. It's more about the discussions it drives and the engagement and interaction you get from people. Every day I'll have a couple of messages in my inbox. 'I saw your recent post about this church. My mum went to this church. And did you know about these bell pits that are still sitting in this wood?'

I find that incredibly rewarding because that person would not have had the opportunity to discuss that if it wasn't highlighted. I keep coming back to this word, synergy. But this collaboration between normal people to understand the world around us is incredibly valuable.

That's where I find the value in this, it's not really the numbers. If the numbers were a quarter of what they are, I reckon the same people would still be messaging and I would be messaging them. It's the grassroots, it's the people who really care and take an interest; that's what I really love about all of this and getting to meet all of these people.

There's obviously a lot of division and you see a lot in the news about how people slag off their own place.

There's a huge problem with that I think has been recognised … people are thinking how do we bring pride back into our communities. And it's by understanding them. So trying to get young people into local history has been absolutely fantastic.

It's reflected in for example the social we did the other week. One of the comments I got was that it's really nice to see younger people alongside the older generation. They all have those common interests...

Also there's a lot of younger people who have not had the space to meet people with the same interests. A guy I speak to a lot, he's a stereotypical Newcastle football fan. But he absolutely loves history but … there's never really been a place to speak about it or engage with other people. It's been nice to have these spaces, these socials and things, where all of these people can combine. There was a pitman there that used to work at Wearmouth Colliery. And there was me, a 28 year old and there was a 23 and a 24 year old all talking about what it was like to be down the pit and what he did in his spare time. Bringing together these different generations is such a privilege. And it's not just me.

Through speaking to normal people with normal lived experiences and by understanding the world around us by going outside and looking at it myself - that's where I've learned

There's a lot of people who you can't win over in terms of pride and respect in the community. There's a lot of people who are just very stuck in not believing in the area and their communities. But there's a whole lot of people who are willing to listen and do have a lot of pride. It's trying to speak to everyone and saying look, there's so much to be proud of and all you have to do is look at a street corner to see how unique your place is, that you belong here and that your mam and dad and grandad and nana built this. That's been one of the biggest things …it's the connection between us and the land around us and what we see.

Thank you to everyone who contributes to the site. There's a lot of people in terms of authors, who put pieces on the site, who, I don't like to use this but are just normal everyday folk who might not have a degree and things but just have a passion. So we've got a few pieces on sports right now and we just have a whole mix of people who want to write and share what they love. And I want to specifically say thank you to all the people who help support this project because I feel like it's found its own space. And without their help it wouldn't be nearly where it is.

I make up an annual contribution summary at the end of the year. If anyone wants to contribute a piece I would be happy to put it in, I'm

always looking for writers. I'm not looking for a particular structure, I'm not looking for a particular way of writing, all I'm looking for is people who believe passionately in what they are writing.

So I just want to say, just as a little footnote at the end. There's a whole lot of people in this region who really believe in it who deserve to be listened to".

Rosie Serdiville

All quotation material taken from an interview with Kieran Carter in April 2025

Power to all people? The 1960s fight for Byker

Sally Watson and Silvie Fisch

This article was first published in North East History Compendium. We are grateful to Kieran Carter for permission to reproduce it here. It accompanies an interview with Kieran about the North East Heritage Library which you will find in this edition of the Journal.

The Byker housing development (constructed 1969-1983) in Newcastle upon Tyne is internationally renowned for its pioneering practices in community participation. It represented a significant move away from the top-down comprehensive redevelopment practices of the 1950s and 1960s. These had transformed neighbourhoods with little input from local people. Its style also represented a major break with the modernist architectural orthodoxy of the time and its innovative design principles have inspired numerous socially inclusive and community-focused housing projects globally and consequently influenced the community architecture movement.

The main name associated with the estate's redevelopment remains that of its leading architect, Ralph Erskine. But while he achieved lasting fame, he actually arrived quite late on the scene. In contrast, faced with the demolition of the old 'slum' area, the people who initiated the action that subsequently led to a change in approach remain largely unnoticed. It was the 'Byker Study Group', comprising local civic leaders and residents, who lobbied Newcastle City Council with their demands for people to

be allowed to stay in Byker and for them to be involved in plans for its redevelopment.

Approximately 20,000 people lived in Byker in the late 1960s, mostly in steep terraces of 19th century Tyneside flats running downhill to meet the Tyne. A small area of Byker's working class housing had already been condemned as unfit and earmarked for redevelopment in 1953. By 1963, the whole area was included in the aspirational housing clearance programme of the Labour Council Leader T. Dan Smith and his City Planning Officer Wilfred Burns.[1] Demolition in Byker began in 1966, with the condemned housing adjacent to Shields Road being cleared to provide space for a planned future motorway.[2]

But by the end of the decade, a general shift in attitudes based on the experiences of slum clearance had emerged. In particular, the dispersal of local communities drew widespread criticism. This was a period of progressive change, with a focus on community participation in decisions about housing included among the many reforms of Harold Wilson's Labour government.[3] Wilfred Burns himself was influential in promoting housing improvement policies and had a keen interest in public participation. In 1969, the Skeffington Committee, of which Burns was an enthusiastic member, produced their report 'People and Planning', examining how the public's views could be better represented.[4] But when the Planning Department under Burns proposed participation for working class neighbourhoods slated for redevelopment or revitalisation, other senior officers, such as the Housing Architect and Housing Officer pushed back on this forcibly.[5] Consequently, middle class Jesmond was the only neighbourhood where this was attempted during the 1960s. Council officials believed, misguidedly as it would turn out, that middle class residents would understand their plans in a way that working class people would not.[6] There was also a reluctance to engage with working class residents who would want to know when and where they would be rehoused, information that officers felt they would not necessarily be in a position to disseminate.

Meanwhile, a local clergyman in Byker, the Reverend Clarke of the Presbyterian Church, had called as early as 1962 for residents of housing proposed for clearance to be allowed to stay in Byker. But it was only after Council officers held meetings with Jesmond residents in 1966 to seek their views on the Local Plan for Jesmond that a small group of local civic leaders came together to demand the same for Byker. In 1967, a regular 'Luncheon Club' meeting between church leaders and social workers in Byker was founded, an initiative prompted by the Newcastle Council of Churches.[7] This offered an opportunity to debate the future of Byker and its people.

One clergyman who had strong views on the proposed clearance was the Reverend John Bunker of St. Michael's Church. He had trained as an architect at Northern Polytechnic in London before moving up north. Here, he introduced the idea of adapting the traditional church layout to bring the people and the priest together around the altar. This 'facing the people' rite went on to become a convention of North East churches. Bunker was worried about the community in Byker being destroyed alongside the housing. He found an ally in the Byker Community Centre warden Mr. Vlaeminke, who also felt that the Luncheon Club could not adequately represent the views of local people.

Frustrated that the Luncheon Club were not doing more to halt or influence the clearance programme and in an attempt to stir the local community into action, the Reverend Bunker and Mr. Vlaeminke arranged a series of talks at the Community Centre, formerly St Michael's church hall, titled 'Byker: Past, Present and Future'. Between May and June 1968, around 100 people attended talks delivered by Jim Elliott, a 'local historian', representatives of the City Council's Planning, Housing and Housing Architects departments and researcher Richard Batley, who was conducting a study on slum clearance and community in Byker.

Richard Batley had experienced slum clearance first-hand in Birmingham between 1962 and 1965, before volunteering for the UN Development programme in Pakistan from 1965-1966. Here he

became acquainted with the many new ideas around slum and squatter settlements which were emerging internationally. As a research assistant in Gateshead, he was involved in a larger study on participation and local government, and, by his own choice, conducted his own local study 'Byker: A Study of Communication between Planners and the Public in an area affected by Slum Clearance'.[8] He remembers: 'Newcastle at that point was behind the curve. There was a lot of resistance to any idea that the public, particularly the poor public, had any right to comment on what planners were doing.'[9]



Richard Batley back in Byker 2024 (Silvie Fisch)

Contrary to expectation (and recurring nostalgic opinions), Batley found that in Byker 80% of the sizeable survey of residents approved of demolition and rebuilding but that 67% of residents wanted to remain living in Byker. However, members of the working men's clubs

and local churches had not engaged with the Council on the plans for redevelopment.

Batley suggests 'It wasn't their sort of language perhaps. (…) Byker was a very strong community by all objective measurements, but without any self-belief, I suppose, in their capacity to influence the wider world.'[10]

Following the talks at the Community Centre, Bunker, Vlaeminke and several others formed the Byker Study Group to try to act on behalf of residents' interests during the clearance, which had already begun. Batley remembers Bunker as an 'untypical Vicar, very ordinary, articulate but not posh, and well able to connect with people'.[11] Jim Elliott, according to Batley was also a 'key person' in this group. Poor health had resulted in Elliott attending a special school and then the trade union-supported Fircroft College in Birmingham. From there he made it into Ruskin College, Oxford and eventually ended up teaching in Brisbane, at the University of Queensland. Batley remembers that 'He was one of the very few, let's say, who broke out of Byker. (…) He was one of these multigenerational residents'.[12] Indeed, his mother continued to live in Byker, where she died as a centenarian.

Through their connections, the group were aware of local concerns and made it their mission to take on a mediatory role between residents and, as Batley describes it, 'a domineering city council which knew all the answers for these people and didn't like to be told that they didn't know everything'.[13] They hoped that after an initial period of outside leadership, residents would come to manage this group.

They wrote a letter to Newcastle City Council with three demands:

1) Information be supplied periodically and on a regular basis to the residents of Byker by those officials and elected representatives who have the most complete knowledge on the state of the plans for clearance and rebuilding in the Byker area.

2) Building and clearance be so planned as to make it possible for a high proportion of those now living in Byker to continue to do so.

3) Provision be made for the consultation of local groups and organisations

on the plans intended for the redevelopment of the area, and the Byker Study Group be considered as one of the groups to be consulted.[14]

Their letter was greeted with a twenty-five minute uproar at a full council meeting on 4th July 1968. There was a strong view across the board that the group should not have made this representation and that they should have instead gone through councillors. Representatives of each party accused Mr. Vlaeminke, who was a public official, of secret affiliation to the other. And the general view was that the Community Centre should not have become 'politically involved'.[15]

But soon the anger settled down and Richard Batley was called in by the Leader of the Council, Arthur Grey, and the Principal City Officer, Frank Harris, to give an account of their activities and intentions. The next Study Group meeting was attended by the Byker councillors (two Labour and one Conservative), and it was agreed that more information on the plans should be provided to residents. Senior officers also gave further commitments to public consultation. The new City Planning Officer, Kenneth Galley, who had replaced Wilfred Burns earlier that year, promised that: 'We will come to you with ideas which are not crystallised. Knock them on the head and throw them out of the window'.[16] This change of heart was no doubt influenced by a relatively new Conservative administration that also included a local councillor in Byker, wanting to show that they would do things differently.

A year passed and there were still no public discussions. Meanwhile, the architect Ralph Erskine was working on a housing scheme for Killingworth in August 1968 when contractor Stanley Miller introduced him to Arthur Grey. By November that year, Erskine had submitted a reappraisal of the redevelopment. In this reappraisal, he expressed his aim to pay 'special attention to the needs of special groups - small children, teenagers, old people, invalids, etc.'[17] His appointment was eventually confirmed by the Housing Committee in July 1969.[18]

When a new report by Newcastle City Council was eventually produced in February 1969, it contained many features of the earlier

plans. But it did recognise that 'a strong community spirit exists among the 20,000 residents and there is a clear desire on their part to continue to live in an area where they have their roots, and to take part in replanning Byker'.[19] The Study Group's demands had without doubt been crucial in persuading the new Conservative administration to adopt a different approach, albeit one that remained top-down.



Demolition (Richard Batley)

Erskine proposed founding an office in Byker that would 'form the base for a team, consisting of a sociologist/social anthropologist, working with local contacts, and a community development officer with a supporting team'.[20] Vernon Gracie was appointed to run the Newcastle office and by September 1970 he had a team of three staff, based in a former funeral parlour on Brinkburn Street. Their ways of working have been recorded elsewhere, but are nicely epitomised by architect Bengt Ahlqvist's recollection that 'The former mourning room housed an attractive object: one of only four telephones in Byker at the time. So, we had people sitting around the walls, moving towards the telephone, making their

calls and then out again. And that was a very effective way of getting in touch with the local people.'[21]

The outcome of this participation is another story, but it is pertinent to note that while council estates in Britain face widespread demolition, Byker is now Grade II* listed.[22] After many ups and downs and continued challenges, it is still standing strong.

This article is based on archival research and interviews conducted by Dr Sally Watson and Silvie Fisch. Thanks to all those who have supported and contributed to this research, with particular mention to Emeritus Professor Richard Batley, University of Birmingham, whose 1971 MA thesis provides an invaluable account of events in Byker during the 1960s.

Silvie and Sally are currently developing a Community Archive in Byker.

1 City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne, Development Plan Review, 1963.

2 City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne, *Byker Neighbourhood: Guidelines for Redevelopment,* 1966.

3 In particular, there was a strong emphasis on participation in housing improvement following the Housing Act 1969.

4 Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *People and Planning: report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning*, 1969, London: H.M.S.O.

5 Batley, Richard Alan, *Byker: a study of communication between planners and the public in an area affected by slum clearance*, 1971. Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/10426/

6 Meetings to discuss the Jesmond Local Plan with residents were held in the summer of 1966. The plan was highly controversial and attracted upwards of 400 people at a meeting in West Jesmond Primary School, with a follow-up meeting taking place at the Flora Robson Playhouse. '"New Jesmond" talks at theatre', The Newcastle Journal, 22nd June 1966.

7 Batley, Richard Alan, *Byker: a study*, 1971.

8 Ibid.

9 Sally Watson, Interview with Richard Batley, 17th November 2020.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 JBatley, Richard Alan, *Byker: a study*, 1971.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid, p.332.

17 Ralph Erskine, *Memorandum on Byker - Newcastle*, 1968. RIBA Collections: Byker, Archive Box 259.

18 Report of Housing Committee to Meeting of Newcastle City Council, 3 July. RIBA Collections: Byker, Archive Box 270.

19 City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne, *Byker Neighbourhood Redevelopment*, 1969. RIBA Collections: Byker, Archive Box 270.

20 Ralph Erskine, *Report on the Byker Redevelopment Area*, January 1970. RIBA Collections: Byker, Archive Box 270.

21 Silvie Fisch, Interview with Arne Nilson, Bengt Ahlqvist and Per Hederus, 23rd May 202.

22 For an account of the redevelopment of Byker from the perspective of one of its architects, see Drage, Mike, 'Byker: Surprising the Colleagues for 35 Years - A Social History of Ralph Erskine's Arkitektkontor AB in Newcastle', *Twentieth Century Architecture*, 2008.

Redhills Renewed: Durham Miners Hall brought back to life

Ross Forbes



Introduction

On a chill November evening in 1869 a group of radical miners gathered in the Market Tavern, Durham. Here, the group, mainly of Primitive Methodists, began the Durham Miners Association (DMA). Within two years they defeated the hated Bond – a feudal form of employment contract that bound miners to a colliery and owner. In the same year, 1871, the first Durham Miners Gala was held. Within six years they opened the DMA's first Miners Hall in Durham's North Road. By the turn of the 19th century the association was a wealthy, numerate and literate organisation heralded as 'a model of labour organisation'. It grew into a powerful, unstoppable political force which demanded larger and more august headquarters.

Redhills

It chose Red Hill in Durham for the site of its new building and duly purchased the land from a group of financially compromised nuns who had hoped to build a convent within the grounds. The magnificent Miners Hall opened in October 1915. Delegates from over 180 collieries, representing over 300,000 miners and allied trades, took their seats in its now famous Pitman's Parliament. Their mission was to transform conditions for the working class of County Durham and beyond – and they set about this with gusto. The collective endeavour of the DMA and others built miners' welfare halls; sports grounds; homes for retired miners; clean water systems and metalled roads in every town and village in the county. The union became a powerhouse in the developing labour and trade union movement and took control of the first Labour-controlled county council in 1919.

The DMA, in its golden years, became political king-makers and defenders of worker's' rights and justice. It was the body politic and protector of its members, their families and communities. But the DMA's power dwindled after the Second World War as the coalfield declined in favour of oil and nuclear power. The thin seams of west Durham were deemed no longer viable or profitable, even for a nationalised industry. The 1960's saw the most spectacular decline of probably the world's largest deep mine coalfield the world will ever see. With it, the Miners Hall became increasingly neglected and less maintained. By the end of the great Miners' Strike of 1984-85 the fabric of the building was decaying with little prospect of any major refurbishment. The following decades saw further decline and, by 2016, the Westmorland slate roof was ready to collapse or crash to the ground. Several campaigns and grant applications to save the Pitman's Parliament had failed, despite a dedicated group of people who kept Redhills (as we colloquially know the Miners Hall) open and alive.

Rebirth

It was now time to get the campaign and the fundraising right if this vital symbol of organised labour's heritage was to be preserved. The remaining members of the DMA board – it was no longer a trade union – agreed to gift the building back to the people of County Durham. A charity was established as the proxy for the communities and work ploughed ahead. The aims and objectives were clear. To rebuild Redhills not as a museum of artefacts, but as a living centre of education, culture and convening of communities.

If it were to be a museum of anything it was of values. The values which gave rise to the collective effort, organisation and discipline of the working class. A museum of collective action by a group of people which brought about co-operative, self-made material improvements. The construction and funding tasks were forbidding but we set about our work with a sense of belief over strategy. A 'coalition of the willing' was gathered and the campaign began in earnest.

Core funding for the immediate work to secure the roof came from Durham County Council. The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NHLF) was engaged and work began to raise the funds. Trades unions, trust funds, Durham County Council and, of course, the NLHF, were among the 42 donors who helped us raise over £12m to complete the job. At the time of writing (2025), we are starting the process of returning the banners, paintings and other artefacts to Redhills.

The construction work has included:

- A new extension to allow conferencing and catering.
- A complete refit of all mechanical and electrical elements.
- Complete renewal of the Pitman's Parliament.
- Installation of state-of-the art audio visual equipment.
- A 'virtual coal mine' in the basement cinema room.
- Extensive landscaping.

- Installation of a ground source heat pump with 8,000 feet of bore holes to tap the energy from 130 metres below the earth.

Conclusion

Redhills is now ready to fulfil its role as a convenor of community need and organisation. It will also be a major conference centre and stager of concerts and plays. The renewal started with extensive early consultation held with people who used and would use the building. Hundreds of people and organisations responded to the call for their aspirations to be heard. Their voice was clear – that Redhills should reflect the collective values of its pioneers and act as a beacon for future generations. The numbers on the seats in the Pitman's Parliament remain, each one representing a former colliery and community. They are testament to the three million miners, their families and communities who looked for moral, social and political guidance from Redhills. They are testament to self-made communities who valued sharing and co-operation to build better futures. They are testament to working class organisation which achieved unprecedented social change towards a welfare state.

The Redhills renewal has taken almost 10 years. From its inception we used a motto from the Durham Colliery Mechanics Association banner – the past we inherit, the future we build. Now, as its doors open we can get started on the future.

If you want to organise a meeting, conference or event contact bookings@redhillsdurham.org.

Ross Forbes

The Land of Oak & Iron

Val Scully

Between Blaydon and Ryton, on the south bank of the Tyne, I live in the centre of a square mile that is so packed with rich and varied history, including unexpected international links, that it beggars belief. It was as a blow-in from Manchester forty years ago, stuffing envelopes with other volunteers in the Lit & Phil, [Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne] that I overheard the chance remark that alerted me to a hidden world. *A library for 18th century workers in Winlaton?* I can see Winlaton from my study window: it's on top of the escarpment on the other side of Blaydon Burn. The stream runs parallel to our street - Summerhill - on the final part of its route into the Tyne. Where apparently there had been a brickworks.

I was a full-time English teacher then: there was no time to do any real research, and by the time I retired, all I wanted to do was be outside, away from desks. I volunteered to help in the gardens at Gibside, four miles away as the crow flies, and the rest is history.

Novels and the move into local history

When I decided to write *My Name is Eleanor* (2015) it was with the aim of creating an accessible novelisation of the story of Mary Eleanor Bowes: the tale of one woman's 'scandalous' life, for which read abuse, resilience, survival and ultimate legal triumph. But the background research began to interest me far more than I expected. I knew nothing about industrial history, and I didn't want to romanticise the doting father, coal czar George Bowes, if he had been a particularly exploitative mine-owner. So it was

reassuring to read relevant sections in *The Making of an Industrial Society*[1] and anecdotal evidence from *A Fighting Trade*[2] which enabled me to give a superficial impression, stemming from the stewardship of his mother, of the Bowes family as employers whose treatment of their workers and tenants garnered respect. The miners, estate labourers, farmers and tenants play a vital role in *My Name is Eleanor*, and it was important to portray the lives of the people on whose efforts these great estates were built. An early encounter with graffiti on a newly excavated planting plate in the walled garden had been an epiphany for me. Naïve as I was: real people with no machinery did all this digging and building! By hand! I was struck by the loyalty that the workers and tenants displayed when Eleanor was at her most desperate: they sent secret food parcels to her London hiding place.[3] When her abusive husband abducted her from London and brought her to Streatlam Castle in Durham, over 300 miners lit fires around the building to try to prevent him escaping in the night with his captive before the London constables could get there.[4]

I was hooked now: social history was fascinating! And what's more, my next novel would take me into a period I was already interested in. My first proper job, aged 18, was in Manchester Central Library in St Peter's Square. When I learnt what had happened at Peterloo it changed my political thinking completely. While I was finishing the book, I was brewing on how to tell the story of Gibside from the death of Mary Eleanor in 1800 to the creation of the Bowes Museum in the 1870s. My mind was on the wider picture, and Peterloo had to play a major part. In debtors' prison, Stoney Bowes had sired five more children. When he died, they and their poor mother were released onto the streets of Victorian London, never to be heard of again. I would give one of them a fictional life and use her as a vehicle for the social history I wanted to portray: *Molly Bowes* was born.

By marvellous synchronicity, I'd been invited to get involved in the Land of Oak & Iron project. This was a Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership set up by the charity Groundwork North East & Cumbria 'to conserve, enhance and celebrate the unique heritage of the

Derwent Valley'. The project had been triggered by excavations of the Crowley Dam.[5] This was the first I'd heard about the vast ironworks that had once been centred on Winlaton. I joined Winlaton & District Local History Society and learnt about Crowley's from Susan Lynn, whose piece on the subject was published in this Journal.[6] The rich natural resources of the lower Derwent Valley and the fast-running river made it an ideal area for developing industries, and the advent of Ambrose Crowley and his ironworks in 1691, probably sponsored by Sir William Bowes[7], marked the beginning of the industrial revolution in the area. But it also revolutionised its social and political culture. Crowley was a Quaker; though sadly his beliefs didn't stop him being heavily involved in the slave trade.[8] By providing housing, medical care and pensions for his workmen and their families, as well as education for their children, Crowley helped gave birth to a radically different society which had profound social repercussions that echo down the centuries.

There was so much astonishingly diverse history in this small area that I set up a website, *The Land of Oak & Iron Local History Portal*, to record and share the resources I was finding. It soon became clear that what was going on in the valley in the 19th century was far too fascinating to be kept in the background of the novel. The lightbulb moment was when I heard that in the wake of Peterloo, there had been an enormous demonstration on the Town Moor.[9] The contingent from Winlaton was led by a young blacksmith called Joe Cowen.[10] Not only can I see Winlaton from my window, the site of Cowen's brickworks is a few yards from my front door and the grounds of Stella Hall are over the back fence. From that point on, Molly was destined to live in one of the pair of 1852 cottages that now formed our house.

My heroine's story arc suddenly became clear. In the chaos of Peterloo, her daughter would vanish. She would make her way to the North-East in search of help from the powerful family to whom she believed she was related. Because she was destined to be involved with John and Josephine Bowes' creation of a museum for the people of Durham, I would find a

way of making her story move between the cultured world of Newcastle's artistic and literary society and the lives of the miners, ironworkers and chartists of Blaydon and Winlaton. Oak and iron were perfect metaphors for the people of this area, and it seems remarkably prescient that in *My Name is Eleanor*, George Bowes wishes for his daughter 'a heart of oak and a will of iron.'

The research took me in all kinds of directions: it was like spinning plates. Along the way, I had other, darker epiphanies. One was the Stargate pit disaster, in which 37 miners died, many of them from Winlaton. What had caused it? Candles? Why were miners taking candles into a pit, especially when it had been closed for 72 hours? Surely they all had lamps by then - it was over ten years since they'd been invented!

And they'd had to buy the candles themselves.[11]

Crowley's Ironworks

I learnt an enormous amount from Men of Iron, which is not only the definitive book about the Crowley Ironworks, but also an important text in the social history of Western Europe. Last published in 1962 by the Edinburgh University Press, a copy was hard to find, even in local libraries. The Land of Oak & Iron project had awoken local interest in the unique industrial heritage of the Derwent Valley, so I decided to try to get the book back into print. I tracked down the late author's sons, who agreed to give us formal permission to publish a new edition of their father's book. Dr William Lancaster, who had delivered the inaugural Joseph Cowen lecture presented by Explore Lifelong Learning at Newcastle's Lit & Phil on 19th September 2018, agreed to be the speaker at the book's launch in April 2019.

It wasn't until we were subsequently visited by Czech film director Stan Neumann that I fully appreciated the international status of Crowley's: he was working on what became a four-part Franco German documentary called *A History of the European Working Class*.[12]

I learnt that Swedish iron-master Reinhold Angerstein (1718-1760)

had written an account of his 1754 visit to Crowley's - [13] it was a revelation to find in it a diagram of the Gibside column under construction. Thanks to the cash books in DCRO[14], we know that local carpenter Joseph Palliser built the scaffolding and shed at the top for the use of the sculptor, followed by the old lady who gilded Liberty. To make a more accessible version of the Crowley story and throw more light on the Derwent Valley in the 18th century, I asked permission to use Susan Lynn's essay along with excerpts from Angerstein to create an A4 illustrated book simply called *Crowley's*.

Place & Population

It was striking to this novice how much the geology had affected the industrial and social evolution of the area. Sixteen miles from the sea, the river Derwent enters the Tyne at Derwenthaugh. To the east, Whickham stands high above, looking over the steep-sided valley of the Derwent and across the Tyne. To the west, Winlaton perches on another steep escarpment 450 feet above Blaydon, down in the Tyne Valley, where the river is tidal as far as Ryton Willows. Tyneside coal seams were exposed up there on the hills. The name Blaydon (black hill) was probably originally used to mean the Winlaton escarpment, because down by the river, there was no Blaydon on the outside bend of a tidal river. There were only a few keelmen's cottages on the 1670 map.[15]

In the valley of the Derwent, Gibside grew rich on its perfect, accessible 'rounds' of coal and the Crowleys expanded their business until the Winlaton Mill works were the largest ironworks in Europe. It wasn't only the mineral wealth of the valley that determined its future but also its topography, which necessitated the development of wagonways to get the coal and iron to the Tyne and thence to London for the best prices.

This area was naturally rich, not only in coal, wood and water, but also in its mix of people from all over continental Europe: Romans, Vikings, Germanic Anglo-Saxons, Irish, Scots, Belgian ironworkers brought from Liege by the Crowleys, German swordmakers who mysteriously settled in Shotley Bridge at the same time; and French immigrants fleeing religious

persecution. From outlying rural areas and other parts of Britain people moved here for more reliable and better-paid work. Potential employment in the mines and factories drew people from Scotland, Ireland and the Midlands. The building of the railways brought an influx of Irish families fleeing the famine. Throughout the post-Reformation persecutions, Stella had drawn hundreds of Irish families to a Catholic enclave under the protection of the Tempests and Widdringtons. From the 1830s, more came because plenty of work was available as the Tyne was deepened and straightened and industry blossomed. Much of this was down to the Cowen family, evolved directly from the Crowley tradition.

What could have been a parochial, singularly blessed valley had developed unexpected links with the rest of the world: through the migration of workers and refugees, political activity, inventions, trade, visits of eminent European craftsmen, architects, artists and musicians to Gibside and Axwell Hall. This mix gave a stimulating freshness to the evolution of the area's folk culture. The environment of relative paternalism represented by wealthy local employers such as the Crowleys, the Bowes, the Claverings and the Cowens meant that the working classes were in a better position to move up the social ladder: local labourers learnt from European craftsmen and immigrants, notably the Belgians and Germans. Clever working-class boys were sent to Craiggy's school in Crawcrook, established by Sir Henry Liddell and John Simpson, two prominent local coal owners, to learn about geology, mathematics and civil engineering, which would directly lead to the foundation of the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers.[16]

Bill Lancaster's essay, 'The Lower Derwent Valley and the Making of the Modern World' had only been available on the Portal. In 2021, in the build-up to Glasgow hosting COP26, I read Peter Stark's essay 'North East England and the Climate Crisis: from cause to effect'.[17] So we put the two together and published an accessible illustrated book called *Releasing the Genie of Coal: The Lower Derwent Valley, the Great Northern Coalfield and the Climate Crisis.*

Legends

The next book we chose to create was *Tales of Derwentdale*, which had originally been set down in 1902 by Satley's James William Fawcett. Researching and writing a memoir of the extraordinary Fawcett, whose memory had been preserved in no small part by 'Red Ray' Thompson of Consett, proved fascinating and very surprising, taking another gifted local lad - a linguistic prodigy - to Egypt, Malta and Australia, even Khartoum in the close company of Lord Kitchener.

To give children easy access to their heritage, Roly Veitch, a local historian, composer and musician, had the idea of putting together a book and CD for schools, using one of the available community grants from the Land of Oak & Iron. Roly chose which songs he wanted to include, and together we wrote some text aimed at children aged 10-15 to explain and illustrate the history behind the lyric, which was printed on the opposite page. A CD of the songs would be included, along with a poster and some online resources such as links to audio-visual materials. In 2019, a copy of *A Legend Evermore* was offered free to every school in the Land of Oak & Iron: a class set was made available for loan.

Gibside Workers

Since I found that graffiti on a newly excavated planting plate in the walled garden on my first gardening shift at Gibside, I'd been aware of the generations of graft that built the place, literally as well as financially. The question of who those workers were had preoccupied me. The long-neglected estate had been taken over incrementally by the National Trust in the last decades of the twentieth century, following almost a hundred years of neglect after the death of John Bowes. Covid restrictions brought an opportunity. My thoughts about Gibside had long since cohered around the story of the workers – now was the time to research them properly. George 'Glory' Bowes erected his golden statue to British Liberty in 1757, at the height of his power and influence. He collected fine art, bred the finest racehorses and brought world-famous musicians,

architects and landscape designers to his estate. Local workers would have been employed to plaster the walls on which the pictures hung, build the stages for the outdoor operas, execute the designs for what became one of the finest landscape gardens of the Georgian era. The place was and is a lasting testament to hard graft: the miners who gouged the coal out of the ground, the workmen who moved huge weights of earth, the carpenters, stonemasons, gardeners, servants, the men and women, the skilled and the unskilled, the craftsmen and the labourers. And their families, generations of whom lived and worked on this singularly permeable estate, bounded only by rivers, roads and hahas. The history of Gibside is central to the history of the Derwent Valley and all the settlements around the edges of the estate. It was shaped, along with land use by the geology. Mining, the transport systems developed to get the coal to market, the coming of the Crowley ironworks, the influx of people from elsewhere, the arrival of the navvies who built the Derwent valley railway, lived in turf huts and poached rabbits from across the river.[18]

A People's History of Gibside (2021) began as a lockdown project. Records of the estate's history are fragmented, the evidence scattered to the four winds because of the nature of the human story that governed its fate. The paybills for 1752 give us details of the work done by 148 estate workers. It seems the wages paid at Gibside were above the going rate.[19] The few surviving accounts ledgers had been laboriously transcribed for Margaret Wills' seminal book[20], and from them we learn the names of workers: William Dodgson, the bricklayer who built the walled garden in 1734-6; Richard Stephenson, the talented young stonemason who carved the urns for the roof of the Orangery but died before he could be paid - his father had signed for his wages[21]. Joseph Palliser the joiner, who, like many craftsmen, was succeeded by his son; the plasterers who laboured for Swiss stucco artist Danieli.

Politics in the Derwent Valley

Things I'd referenced in the background of the two novels could now be

explored more fully: the French Revolution of 1789 had sent shockwaves through Europe: how had they been felt in the Derwent Valley? Devotion to the Hanoverian monarchy was intense among the ironworkers, who were thriving and clannish in their uniquely protected social order:[22] As long as those Royal Navy contracts kept rolling in, the establishment was supported and its stability robustly defended. The widespread ritual burning of an effigy of the 'traitor' Tom Paine was embraced with particular ferocity in the Derwent Valley.[23]

The keelmen, whose employment and way of life were increasingly being threatened, were traditionally of the opposite persuasion. While the Crowley workmen were 'noted for their strong high-Tory principles… the keelmen in Swalwell and the neighbourhood were adherents of the Whig Party. Lawless displays in favour of "our glorious constitution in church and state" were not uncommon and lively scenes were frequently enacted by the rival political parties in adjusting their differences'.[24]

The Napoleonic Wars brought increased prosperity to the ironworkers: there was great demand for chains and anchors as well as nails and weapons. 1815 brought a dramatic slump in orders and massive social hardship rapidly ensued. 'And in the iron trade great distress prevailed among Crowley's workmen at Winlaton and Swalwell. Soup kitchens were established in the villages and hundreds of workmen were employed on the roads at a shilling a day.' Desperate men took desperate measures and it must have been a shocking day for a community who for so long had administered their own justice when in July 1816 a court for the trial of delinquents at Crowley's iron works was opened for the first time at Swalwell.[25] The civil unrest that had begun around the time of the French Revolution had been exacerbated by widespread unemployment after the Napoleonic Wars, crop failures, the Peterloo massacre and related draconian law-enforcement, the New Poor Law and the continuing refusal of the British establishment to reform parliament.

Gibside became obliquely associated with Chartism. In 1819, the year before the 10th Earl died, the Peterloo Massacre had caused a surge of

outrage, radicalisation and increased activism across the country. 'The men of Winlaton were ardent and active politicians. Under the old regime, the ironworkers were noted for their strong high-Tory principles - any meeting held in the village calling for reform in Church or State, would have been for the promoters a dangerous proceeding. But about the beginning of the present century a change seems to have taken place in the political sentiments of the ironworkers of Winlaton. For at the first public meeting held in the open air at Newcastle, on the Parade Ground in Percy Street, October 11th, 1819, Crowley's Crew were present in great numbers, and Mr. Thomas Hodgson of Winlaton was one of the speakers.

Crowley's Crew on that occasion seems to have spread terror; for in a letter from the Mayor of Newcastle to the then Home Secretary, he states that "seven hundred men who came from a village about three miles distant were prepared with arms to resist the civil power".

'It matters little whether the village referred to by the Mayor was Winlaton or Swalwell, for at both of these villages, arms were manufactured by the workmen, to protect themselves against what they considered to be the actions of a despotic government… The Winlaton Chartists, more active and daring than their brethren, were active in preparing for punitive measures, and occupied every leisure moment in the manufacture of thousands of "caltrops," (an iron-pronged instrument for the annoyance of cavalry). The caltrop was better known among the workmen as the "craa-foot." Pike-heads were made in great numbers and sold to the Chartists in other places for 1s. 6d. a piece'.[26]

Chartists had adopted as their symbol the red Cap of Liberty worn by French revolutionaries. It was known across the nation that the headquarters of North-Eastern Chartism were in Winlaton. Not only did Gibside's Statue to British Liberty hold the Cap of Liberty and Staff of Maintenance; oak staffs had become another symbol of the English Chartists. It seems Lang Jack and his colleagues helped themselves to Gibside saplings for their making. 'At a meeting in Newcastle on 15th May 1832, Charles Larkin expanded into a howl of defiance against the throne

and the aristocracy that echoed and re-echoed all over the kingdom. A forest of hands were uplifted in imitation of the speaker, and in solemn cadence the vast multitude enunciated that memorable vow, "In these principles I will live and die." Scarcely had the hands disappeared when a forest of oak saplings was uplifted, and remained there for some minutes, amidst profound yet most significant silence'.[27]

At Gibside it seems the estate workers and tenants were well cared for by their benevolent and beloved employer who had provided secure work throughout the Napoleonic wars: 'Few places for good keeping could equal Gibside during the lifetime of the late Earl. About 30 men were employed all the summer season on mowing the lawns in the pleasure grounds and the numerous green drives through the woods'.[28] There was plenty of work for builders and plasterers while the hall was being dramatically altered by the removal of the top floor and the addition of a battlemented parapet.

This paternalistic idyll abruptly came to an end with the death of John Bowes in 1885: Gibside entered a state of initially managed decline and the generations of loyal estate workers mostly moved out into the real world. (Except the Cheesemans, whose home and duties as curators of Paine's Palladian Chapel continued for another hundred years.)

In 1907, a row broke out between the occupants of the hall and their working-class neighbours that would have been previously unthinkable. Victor Grunhut, a social-climbing solicitor from North Shields, was renting the Hall and enjoying hobnobbing and hunting. He did not want 'the people' to be wandering around his estate and staring in at the windows, so he tried to stop access. The row that broke out in the local papers was an absolute hoot because of the wit of the unimpressed and defiant locals. Grunhut complained to his landlord, the Earl of Strathmore, and the case went to court, leading to a mass trespass which made the national press. The story of the Gibside Trespass Case is beautifully told by Helen Macfarlane, and you can read it in *A People's History of Gibside*.[29]

The Depression

After WW1, a curious craze for historical pageants began to get a grip on Great Britain. Some were planned with a political agenda in mind - especially true in the 1920s, a time of great political unrest. After the General Strike, precipitated by the miners' lockout of 1926, there was terrible hardship, especially in mining areas. In 1929, the then Prince of Wales visited the area, and was photographed 'trudging through the snow at Winlaton yesterday during his tour of mining towns and villages in the stricken Durham coalfield. His visit came as a surprise, but everywhere he received what a miner described as 'a reet welcome'. He talked with workless men and careworn women of their experiences in the struggle against hunger and he examined with keen interest and sympathy the domestic conditions in some of the worst quarters'.[30]

The national Conservative Party was deeply unpopular, but local Conservative organisations were more successful at retaining support, particularly by having low membership fees, putting on social events and selling cheap beer in their club premises! The Blaydon Conservative Party's Divisional Unionist Association, who mounted the Gibside Pageant of 1928, had apparently attracted a crowd of nearly five thousand to a rally two years previously, in the midst of the 1926 strike. One speaker later remarked that *'it was certainly a stimulating sight to see a great gathering such as that in the heart of what one might call, from a political point of view, a somewhat enemy country'*.[31]

On August Bank Holiday Monday 1928, 12,000 people entered Gibside to watch 600 performers enact uplifting scenes from the history of these islands. Some might have slipped away before the politicians took the stage at 4.30pm, but no doubt some will have eagerly returned to their seats to be inspired by fine words or simply to hear the results of the draws for the Lucky Prize Draw or the Pig! Either way, the Journal and North Star account tells us that the grounds of Gibside soon rang to a dire warning: *'Socialism Would Mean Slavery!'*

Brickworks

One of the sources for the Gibside book was unpublished work by Peter Davison of Sunniside. We corresponded by letter and as soon as I saw his handwriting, I realised he was the writer of *Brickworks of the North-East*, a handwritten marvel of which only 100 copies had been made in the 1980s by Gateshead library. Its 300 pages of A4 contained detailed accounts, descriptions and drawings all done with Wainwright levels of art and precision. When he realised that the closure of mines in the 1980s was resulting in the loss of the myriad attached small-scale brickworks, Peter had toured the north-east on his motorbike, learning about working conditions as well as industrial practices from the employees.

In 2022, I asked him whether he'd allow me to make a new edition to raise funds for Path Head Water Mill, at the top of our street, where the paths are lined with Cowen's bricks. Brick enthusiasts, of whom there are many, were thrilled and I was swamped with orders. One of them, Chris Tilney of Consett, offered to build a feature wall of heritage bricks at the mill, using local bricks, all with their beautiful stamps facing out. This is now a star attraction at the mill and regular Brick Swap events take place there, attended by enthusiasts from as far away as Torquay!

The mill was saved from dereliction in 1994, when Gateshead Council sold it to the Vale Mill Trust, which had been set up by Trevor Underwood, initially to renovate a mill in Jesmond Dene. I thought the story of how Trevor and his son and their army of volunteers had rebuilt a ruin into a working water mill ought to be preserved, so using his notes and newspaper cuttings, I pieced together the story and then interviewed his son Ben, publishing *Path Head Water Mill* in 2022.

Pit Villages

That same year, John Boothroyd, the Ryton historian who had written an introduction for the Brickworks book, asked for help in making a new edition of *Addison: The rise and fall of a pit village 1864-1963*. A Category D village between Blaydon and Ryton, Addison was demolished

in 1958. It was written by Nan Smith, who grew up there, and had last been published by Bernicia Books in 1991. The history of the village, still a cherished memory for many, is more than just statistics in the Coal Company's books. Side by side with the maps, tables and photographs of coal mining, Nan had recorded her own personal reminiscences of life in the village, along with testimony from others with similar wistful memories.

The success of the re-publication of this book led to an approach from Harry Watson, whose father's 1997 book, *Clara Vale: the story of a pit village* was similarly in need of a new edition. Both books, published under the aegis of the thriving Ryton Local History Society, now sell steadily.

The Wheel of Time

My interest in the area around our house had been ignited in the Lit & Phil way back in 1988, and ever since then I had been learning, collecting books and pamphlets, references, anecdotes, photographs and maps. By 2023, I felt it was time to write it all up. It was all connected: everything fell into place.

The legacy of Crowley's doctrine of workers' rights, education, solidarity and mutual support meant that in the troubled times that came after the Napoleonic Wars, when employment slumped and the residual company of Crowley and Millington broke apart, young Joseph Cowen became a founder member of the Winlaton Blacksmiths' Friendly Society. He had turned out to be the same Joseph Cowen who was knighted for his work on the Tyne River Commission, which had deepened and straightened this stretch of the tidal river so that it was transformed from the sandy shallows and islands that Bewick knew into a navigable channel. Could that have been a cause of the ferry disaster 1875? – Yes, that and the icebergs!

The turning point in his own fortunes and those of the whole area came when he married Mary Forster in 1822 and went into business with her brother John, making firebricks and then gas-retorts at Blaydon Burn. Rapid expansion led to a rise in status and power: he became an MP, was

knighted for his work with the Tyne River Commission, and bought Stella Hall. This had been a Roman Catholic stronghold throughout the years of persecution: English priests trained at Douai in France were smuggled to the landing stages near the mouth of Blaydon Burn and into the protection of the Tempests and later the Widdringtons, one of whom very nearly lost his head in 1716 for his part in the Jacobite Rebellion (for whom those German swordmakers may well have been making weapons). Cowen's son brought European rebel leaders to Stella, notably Garibaldi, whose statue once adorned the summit of Summerhill (or did it?) where Bronze Age burials were found in the 1930s: his own statue stands on Westgate Road. Steeped in the Crowley tradition of education, community, paternalism and self-help, the Cowens brought to Blaydon employment, worker education, a Mechanics' Institute, structural expansion, domestic gas, clean water and the first Co-op in the north-east. His son extended the family's political influence into Europe, bringing foreign radicals and freedom fighters to Blaydon and connecting local working people to the class struggle across the continent. The tradition of philanthropy continued with Joseph Junior's daughter, Jane, the last owner of Stella Hall.

As for the Burn itself. Such rich pickings for the archaeologist and the social historian alike: visitors to Path Head's working watermill talked of their ancestors who had run the eight mills that had once clacked along its course, ultimately existing alongside the railway that the Cowens laid to bring their bricks down to the lower yard, next to the Crowley warehouse. It all comes full circle.

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21 *A People's History of Gibside*, p.214. Peter Davison reference in endnote 33.

22 *Men of Iron*, pages 247-248

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29 Helen MacFarlane. 'A Little Local Difficulty' – Chapter 6 of *A People's History of Gibside*.

30 *Daily Sketch*, 30th January 1929.

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Maureen Callcott, the story continued

Sue Ward

This piece is a follow-up to the oral history interview published in North East History 55 (2024), which took Maureen's biography broadly up to the age of 55, when she took early retirement from her job at Newcastle Polytechnic (as it then was). It is based on notes taken at an interview with Maureen in August 2024, when she was aged 91, and brings her biography up to date.

Maureen was a lecturer at Newcastle Polytechnic (now Northumbria University) from 1972 to 1988, and a part-time tutor-counsellor at the Open University, also from 1972 for the next 30 years, while her three children were growing up at home in Whickham.

Sadly, in the early 1980s, her husband Bill began showing symptoms of motor neurone disease, and these progressively worsened over time until he was largely paralysed. In 1988, when Maureen was 55, she took the decision to take early retirement from the Polytechnic job, and she cared for him until his death four years later when she was 59. Bill received much support from Newcastle social services and the NHS, and of course their own children. They took him and Maureen on holidays in France and in the Lake District, with her son Andrew regularly hiring a furniture van to take them and all Bill's equipment over to the Lakes.

By then, they had sold the large house in Whickham – it had been built as a pit manager's house – and bought a smaller one in Osborne Road, in Jesmond, and also a house in Borrowdale, larger but less expensive than the Jesmond one. Over the years, the family made a great deal of use of the Borrowdale house.

She was able to continue working part-time at the OU, throughout Bill's illness. But over the following years she kept trying to give it up, stopping at the end of one academic year only to be offered more work at the beginning of the next. Her tasks included running courses at Acklington Prison in Northumberland. She used to enjoy the work, including going to Milton Keynes for meetings. She would travel down to London one evening, stay in a modest hotel near the LSE, and then go to the OU offices the next morning. Only at 65, when she knew she would need time off for an operation, did she convince the OU she would be resigning after 30 years' service.

After Bill's death, she also became very busy with Newcastle's Literary and Philosophical Society (the Lit and Phil). She was Chair of the Lectures sub-committee, and could spend as much as two or three evenings in a week introducing lecturers and entertaining them to dinner afterwards in local restaurants. At the same time, she was travelling quite a lot, going to America once or twice most years to see her friend Barbara, and walking with her at different times in the American West and North. One trip was with the Appalachian Mountain Club, walking in that region. She was visiting another friend who was an academic at Brown University, in Rhode Island in 2001 when the World Trade Centre in New York was struck, not something one could ever forget.

Before that, she had been invited, unexpectedly and at short notice, to go for a three month semester to Mexico, along with her friend Barbara, as part of a group being taken by a professor from Rutgers University. She flew out on Boxing Day 1999, and returned later in the spring. The group travelled mainly in the Yucatan, and she learnt a great deal, despite speaking no Spanish (unlike the rest of the group).

Back home, she has remained much involved in the North East Labour History Society, of which she was close to being a founder member while at the then Polytechnic. It has gone up and down over her time with them, but is currently thriving. Since 2021 she has been President, and remains on the committee, while not taking any very active role.

As for the Quakers, her family had no history of membership, and she is not sure when she began with them, Her school had played sports against a Quaker school, and she became interested and read up on their views. She particularly appreciated their view that nuclear arms were criminal. As she recalls, she had found out more about the Quakers during her work editing Ruth Dodds' diaries, and had wanted to see the meeting house which Ruth attended regularly.

The opportunity had arisen through her M Litt research, some years earlier during her first attempt to get back into academia. The late Professor Norman McCord had set her researching the interwar Labour Party in County Durham. Ruth Dodds was a key figure in Gateshead Labour Party, and was still living in the 1960s and 1970s with her two sisters in Low Fell. Maureen interviewed her at length about the interwar years, and Ruth often read from her diaries in order to explain or confirm a fact.

When Bill became ill and she had to leave work, Maureen said, she was essentially looking for something to do and thought about those diaries. By this time, Ruth herself had died, but Maureen was able to obtain them through her executors, and spent time transcribing them. At the time, she and Bill had only one word processor between them, and they had to take it in turns, which made for slow work. She only finished editing them after Bill's death, and they were published in 1995 by Bewick Press in Whitley Bay.[1]

Other activities included walking in the Lake District, based at their house in Borrowdale. She had returned to walking only a month or so after Bill's death. During her first one in February 1970 she was caught in a blizzard, not having told anyone where she was going, and was lucky to return safely. Her walking companion was often Liz, the then librarian at the Lit and Phil, with whom she tackled all 24 Wainwright fells, but she also walked alone and with others. The only time that Mountain Rescue were called out, however, was when she and fellow-academic Temple Wilcox set out to walk from Blanchland to Twice Brewed on a winter afternoon, and got lost. As they finally came down from the fells in the dark, having

wandered round in circles for some time, they met the Mountain Rescue coming up.

By the time she was in her late 70s, the house in Osborne Road needed quite a lot spending on it, including having a new roof. Rather than do this, she sold it and moved to a much smaller house in Heaton, and then again after about 10 years to her present home, back very close to the Osborne Road house, in a sheltered development called Woodland Mews.

[Written up from notes taken by Sue Ward 13 Aug 2024, checked with Maureen 21 Jan 2025]

1 A Pilgrimage of Grace: the diaries of Ruth Dodds, 1905-1974

From Our Archive
Labour Women In North East England

Maureen Callcott

This article taken from our 1983 bulletin demonstrates Maureen's skill at weaving personal testimony with archival material to vividly depict the lives and aspirations of women activists.

When, at the end of the First World War, it became possible for women to join the Labour Party as individual members through a change in the Party's constitution, women in the North East responded enthusiastically and probably in larger numbers than anywhere else. This most strikingly rapid and widespread grass roots movement of women in the region has largely been overlooked, yet their contribution to the growth of the Labour Party in an area which became a Labour stronghold between the two world wars, and, perhaps, most important of all, the value of their participation in relation to the quality of their own lives, are well worth examining. Ultimately, it involves not only an account of national and local organisations, but also the life-histories of large numbers of individuals so far hidden from history. This essay merely attempts to provide an introductory outline of the early participation of women in the Labour Party in the region, primarily between 1918 and 1939.

While 1918 is the take-off year, there is evidence of the existence of local branches of the Women's Labour League, founded in 1904, although not a lot is yet known about their size and activities. By 1908 there were branches functioning in Newcastle upon Tyne, Jarrow and Crook, and in 1911 Mrs Simms from Newcastle was a member of the National Executive Committee. The Annual Report of the League of that year provides the first substantial amount of information about its growth though there is

little account of activities or number of members. A list of branches and secretaries is included. Nationally there were 110 branches, thirteen being in the North East at Birtley, Bishop Auckland, Blyth, Crook, Gateshead, Hebburn Colliery and Hebburn Quay, Jarrow, Newcastle, Shildon, North and South Shields and Sunderland. Outline reports were printed of activities at Jarrow, Newcastle and Shildon, though without membership or attendance figures. Miss Grace Lloyd, the Jarrow secretary, wrote that, "The League members' leading objective has been to educate themselves in Labour politics and with this aim in view lectures have been followed by discussion on 'Socialism and the Child', 'Evolution of Man', 'William Morris', 'Baby Clinics', 'Food Prices.'. Discussion also had dealt with 'Reformation', 'Suffrage', 'the Worker's Educational Association' and 'the Minimum Wage'." League members had assisted at local elections and assisted the I.L.P. by arranging the social side of their work, as well as sending delegates to all local conferences. "Thus", wrote Miss Lloyd, "we feel ourselves more capable of taking part in Labour politics."

The Newcastle Branch, which held ten meetings in the previous year, had 25 members and had studied similarly serious and relevant subjects including 'Work on the Board of Guardians' and 'The Work of Education Committees' and also members had attended district conferences held at Hebburn, Gateshead, Crook, Jarrow as well as the national conference at Leicester. Dr. Ethel Bentham had addressed a public meeting on her pioneering work in the London Baby Clinics. Shildon reported 23 meetings.

After the adoption of the new Labour Party constitution in 1918, as soon as the Great War ended the task of mobilising women's activity began and Mrs Lilian Fenn was appointed as a member of the national Labour Party staff to organise a recruiting campaign in the north of England. Before the election on 14 December, she had visited Durham, Spennymoor, Consett, Sedgefield and Seaham. In most of these places the meetings she called were the first ever held by the Labour Party, and for many of the women who attended they marked the beginning of a greatly

widened and enhanced social experience, centred on political activity. After the election, Mrs Fenn continued to call and address meetings all over the North East, and The Labour Woman for 1919 reported the setting up of women's sections at Shildon, Houghton-le-Spring, Stockton, Chester-le-Street, Grange Villa, Birtley, Eighton Banks, Pelton Fell, Crawcrook, Dunston, Greenside, Ferryhill, Brandon Colliery,Blackhall, Crookhill, New Herrington, Ryhope, Spennymoor, Trimdon, Frosterley, Stanhope, Trimdon Colliery & Trimdon Grange. We are fortunate to have the acute recollections of Margaret Gibb, now aged 91, of her first involvement in the Labour Party during Lilian Fenn's recruiting campaign. Margaret Harrison, as she then was, was a teacher in her twenties, living at Dunston at the time. It was particularly her critical reaction to the length and nature of the First World War which had accelerated a political awareness which had found no outlet until she saw "a very extensive, very clear, well- produced notice of a meeting for women under the auspices of the Blaydon Divisional Labour Party....to be addressed by someone known as… Mrs Anderson Fenn, B.Sc….to be held in the Spiritualists Hall in Dunston ... and I decided that come what may I would go to that meeting because, as far as Dunston was concerned, I knew very little of any people connected with the Labour Party.

There were exactly four women present …we were addressed as though we were a gathering of a thousand. … Mrs Fenn gave a brilliant address, and at the end said, "I take it you want to join so we'll get on with it", and she immediately appointed a Mrs Thompson to be Chairman, Mrs Heslop to be Treasurer and Mrs Davidson to be Vice-Chairman and turned to me and said, "You will be secretary". That was my introduction to a place in the Labour Party'. The Dunston group grew very rapidly, soon holding fortnightly meetings with over 70 women. This peak was not maintained, but the regular membership steadied at between 30 and 40 women. This sort of progress was occurring all over the North East, but was particularly successful in Durham, where the newly appointed political agents of the Durham Miners' Association (D.M.A.) provided backing of every sort.

Margaret Gibb subsequently married a Labour Party Agent, and in 1929 became a Party organiser for the North East region until she retired in 1956*

The activities of each women's section, as they were called, were soon co-ordinated and encouraged by the formation of the Durham Labour Women's Advisory Council in 1920, which comprised representatives from the federation of sections forming in each constituency. Two of the founder members of the Advisory Council are still living, Margaret Gibb, whose introduction to the Labour Party has already been described, and Bella Jolly of Stanley. Bella Jolly was a very young miner's wife at the time of the Stanley Pit disaster of 1909 when 57 miners were killed. She and her husband joined the I.L.P. after Keir Hardie's visit to the stricken town. Another founder member was Ada Lawson, wife of Jack (later Lord) Lawson, M.P. for Chester-le-Street. She had spent two years in domestic service in Oxford to accompany and help support her husband at Ruskin College. After the formation of the Durham Advisory Council (followed soon by Northumberland and Cleveland) Labour women's political activity was rapidly furthered with a dynamic new structure. The minute books of Council Meetings and Conference Reports reveal a care for the correct procedures and a regular and expanding series of activities. The main objective the women devised for themselves, assisted always by able national party staff organisers like Lilian Fenn and Dr Marion Phillips (an economist and Chief Woman's Officer of the Labour Party 1918-1932), was education in political and social concerns in order that they could function more effectively in advancing the still relatively new Labour Party locally and nationally. This is evident from the programmes set for study and in the themes for meetings, conferences and 'schools'.

The majority of the women involved did not work outside their homes being the wives of industrial workers, mainly miners, since they were unaccustomed to public activity, the skills necessary for conducting meetings, writing reports, keeping minute and account books, etc. had to be included in the educational activity. The enthusiasm for all aspects of

this is demonstrated as early as 1922, when arrangements were put under way for the first of the Summer Schools which are still an annual feature of women's activity in the region's Labour Party. The first was held in the Lake District, and 64 Durham women applied to take a three-hour examination on two set books, Sidney Webb's 'History of the Durham Miners' and Elizabeth Gaskell's 'Mary Barton' together with questions on current affairs. The size of the response surprised the Council, which agreed to raise the number of scholarships from six to ten. By 1928 the number of awards had been increased to 32 and, in that year, 89 women took the test. Other activities organised by the Councils were half-yearly day conferences when between 300 and 500 (as at Bishop Auckland in 1928) would attend to hear lectures and discuss a wide range of topics.

For example, it was reported in 1927 that "a real lively discussion took place on resolutions concerning the Miners' Lock-Out, Franchise, Birth Control, Family Endowment, Blanesburgh Report, Chinese Situation, Women's Trade Union Guilds, Widow's Pensions, Communism." In October 1927 an Emergency Resolution was passed in response to the government's punitive Trades Disputes Act of that year. "This Conference of Labour Women recognising the handicap under which the Trade Union Dispute Act is designed to place the Labour Movement, pledge ourselves to do all possible to counteract it by seeing our menfolk, husbands, sons and brothers, contract into the Political Fund. In addition, we will use every possible means to increase individual membership of the Party, to raise funds, and to return Labour majorities at Local Government elections next spring."

Beatrice Webb, whose husband Sidney was M.P. for Seaham 1922-1929, confirmed in her diaries both the rapid growth of the women's participation and their anxiety to become better informed. When Sidney was adopted as candidate in 1920, she encouraged the formation of the women's sections, which were just beginning to crop up in the villages, and wrote them a fairly scholarly monthly letter to circulate. She noted that at her meetings her welcome was 'better than a tutorial class'. In 1923

she recorded the progress made. "There is far more enthusiasm than a year ago, far more voluntary work always a group of 60 or 70 at the meetings. Last year if there were two or three one was agreeably surprised There is something very touching in these few hundred miners' wives with here and there a professional woman gathering around me with a sort of hero worship."

A central event for the Durham women was the Annual Gala from 1923 onwards when Labour women marched in procession through Durham City, accompanied by colliery bands and carrying their beautifully-made banners. The Galas always featured addresses by a notable Labour woman and local and national M.P.s. Individual sections held weekly or fortnightly meetings which were crucial for the involvement of large numbers of women but the Advisory Councils played a further significant role. Margaret Gibb summed it up in this way, "The big thing which it set out to do and did, not only very well but very quickly, was the drawing together of the women all over the county, and women who exchanged ideas, every one of them widened their experience through it ... we did a lot of interchange, we built up panels of speakers ... in other cases people in the organisation who had gone into clinics would go and exchange views on the way their respective clients worked... In addition we got the opportunity at this time to send two women to Russia (in 1926) to state the case for the miners' wives and children in Britain ... the fact that we got two women (Sally Johnson from Northumberland and Anne Errington from Durham) and they would come back and talk of how they went around the various centres in Russia was very, very effective indeed and aroused tremendous interest on a far wider scale than you got simply within your Party membership."

A considerable advance in self-awareness was made when Durham Labour women decided to sponsor the adoption of a woman for a Durham constituency. Unlike their male counterparts, they do not appear to have considered encouraging their own members towards Parliament.

In Durham the miners made strenuous efforts to obtain mining M.P.s

in every county seat; their wives remained more self-effacing. It was decided in 1925 to nominate Dr Marion Phillips, who had spoken at Galas, for either Barnard Castle, South Shields or Sunderland, and £70 taken in the street collection on Gala Day was placed towards an agent's salary in a separate Parliamentary Fund and the same sum afterwards contributed annually. Marion Phillips became M.P. for Sunderland in 1929. She would have been Durham's first woman M.P. had it not been for the unusual circumstance that Ruth Dalton won Bishop Auckland, where her husband was prospective candidate, in a by-election earlier that year, and held it until Hugh Dalton won it in the general election.

The inter-war years were notoriously difficult times, especially for families dependent on the traditional staple industries of the region and the scope of political and social activity was often curtailed. For example, the galas and the Summer School were cancelled in 1926, the year of the prolonged miners' lock-out and attempts to organise an excursion to London in 1927 and 1928 were abandoned as the Durham Conference Minutes put it, in view of the appalling poverty'. For some years in the 1930s the Summer Schools, often held at Cloughton, near Scarborough, during this period, moved from the Hall into huts to keep the cost down to enable the poorer sections to send members. Alderman Margaret Murray, of Newcastle, recalls that her mother attended a week's School during this period at which the total spending money between all the women was less than £1. Events had to be organised on a shoe-string budget. The organiser described an attempt to arrange a grander than usual social evening for the Shinwells at a cost of 6d per head. But there was no possibility of charging more than 4d. Conditions, even in this severely afflicted region varied but there were many pockets of dire distress not only at Jarrow and in West Durham but also in Cleveland, where at a meeting in Lingdale of 80 women not one husband was working. A further set-back was caused by the collapse of the Labour government in August 1931 and the devastating loss of parliamentary seats in the October election, Yet the scale of activities and numbers involved continued to increase, and in 1936 two Summer

Schools were held because of the large demand.

By 1939 Labour women in their organisations in North East England had gained considerable experience and some solid achievements. In Durham alone there were 126 sections and over 4,000 paid-up members. The majority of these women and, one must suppose, also their families and some of their friends, had enhanced and increased their political and social awareness. For some women, previously unaccustomed to responsibility outside their homes, sufficient confidence and conviction had been acquired to enable them to become chairman, secretary, treasurer or conference delegate. Others had found a place in local government. Yet awareness of the possibilities of public life seems to have come slowly. An admirably advanced series of resolutions on a wide range of local, national and international affairs emerged from conferences. Labour women were quite evidently as much concerned with making policy as making tea. The reports of their meetings illustrate an intensely earnest endeavour to create a better world and also the practical ability to work for this end. The organisation of Labour women in the region appears to have been quite exceptionally vigorous and well-supported. Apart from London this was the only area to regularly organise Summer Schools for members and often, as when in 1934, over 70 women from the region attended a week's School, this was double the total from the whole of London. At conferences organised in 1927 only Ebbw Vale and Cardiff drew greater numbers of women (800 each) than those held at Ashington which 600 women attended and Durham where there were 300. The Welsh women do not appear to have consolidated these manifestations of support in the manner of the north east women. Thus the measure of the advance of Labour women in public life in the region is disappointing in the light of these other factors. In 1939 Mrs Thomasina Todd of Boldon, Secretary to Durham Advisory Council, pointed out that there were still only two Labour women County Councillors, 12 on rural councils, 63 on parish councils and 12 magistrates. Nonetheless, the access of over 4,000 women members in Durham alone meant more than this in terms of contribution

to the establishment of a Labour stronghold in the region. And it must also have been the case that further immeasurable gains were in the extended horizons, experience and education of the women themselves and inevitably thereby in the quality of their impact on the lives of their families for generations to come.

*For an account of Margaret Gibb's work see Bulletin No. 11, 1977.

The closure of North East Shipbuilders Ltd: The inside story

Martin Spence

1. Introduction

In April 1986, despite a global shipbuilding recession, Sunderland had reason for optimism. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was in town to launch the 'Stena Seawell', built by Sunderland Shipbuilders for the Swedish Stena line, and she heaped praise on the yard and its workers:

> "It is a very proud day for Sunderland Shipbuilders and for Britain, and I am proud to be part of it. This is the most modern ship, with the latest technology, that can be built anywhere in the world, and this management and this workforce have done it superbly … It teaches us that we can use the new technology and use it well. We have the skills and we have the enterprise".[1]

As she spoke, Sunderland Shipbuilders was merging with Austin and Pickersgill to create North East Shipbuilders Ltd. (NESL), a subsidiary of publicly-owned British Shipbuilders (BS). NESL's managing director claimed that it had "the best orderbook in the world", which looked like an unfortunate boast when the company suffered a series of contractual problems over the following year.[2] But even so, as 1988 opened, there was no sense of crisis.

In April 1988, everything changed. The Government declared that it had sold the Govan yard on the Clyde and that other BS yards were also up for sale.[3] Eight months of frantic activity followed to save NESL. Supporters pointed to its state-of-the-art facilities, and to a major shipowner waiting in the wings with a large order. But the order was not secured, a buyer was not found, and in December 1988 NESL closed, bringing seven centuries of shipbuilding on the River Wear to an end.

The closure has always looked bizarre. Why was a buyer found for an ageing yard on the Clyde, but not for sophisticated modern yards on the Wear? If a shipowner was keen to sign a contract, what prevented it? Almost forty years later, answers to these questions are starting to emerge. Government records which for years were confidential are now publicly accessible, revealing the inside story of the death of shipbuilding on the Wear.

2. Background

2.1. World market

Throughout the 1980s, world merchant shipbuilding was in a slump, with 50% overcapacity.[4] Shipyards everywhere relied on state subsidies, justified in terms of shipbuilding's status as a strategic industry underwriting jobs, skills and investment throughout the economy. Also, the ageing world fleet would soon need replacing, and the slump was expected to end in the early 1990s[5] So shipbuilding countries subsidised their yards to keep them going until the upturn.

2.2. UK shipbuilding and the European Community

In Britain, Callaghan's Labour Government had created BS and nationalised most merchant yards in 1977. Under the Conservatives, BS's workforce fell from 24,000 at its creation to 10,500 in early

1986, but even so their aim was not to close shipbuilding down. They still celebrated its successes: hence Thatcher's presence at the launch of the 'Stena Seawell'; and hence also the creation of NESL. A major redundancy was pushed through in late 1986, scrapping another 3,500 jobs, but this was intended to be the last.[6] Paul Channon, Secretary of State at the Department of Trade and industry (DTI), thought that BS, and its workforce, were now about the right size.[7]

Member states of the European Community (EC), including the UK, subsidised their shipbuilders up to a maximum level agreed through the EC. Each instance of subsidy or 'state aid' had to be signed off by the European Commission. So for instance, the UK cutbacks of 1986 involved public spending beyond the normally permitted level, but the Commission was prepared to be indulgent.[8] The senior official involved in the negotiation:

> "… said that, as the loss compensation went hand in hand with substantial closures, she expected that it would be accepted by the Commission on political grounds"[9].

1986 was a busy year for the Commission, which was working on a new shipbuilding Directive. Previous EC policy sought to protect European yards against the global depression, but the new Directive, the Sixth, was different. It aimed to respond to global overcapacity by deliberately *reducing* European capacity, setting state aid at a level which would drive loss-making yards out of business which, it argued, would improve the prospects of 'efficient' yards.[10] The British Government enthusiastically supported this approach, and the Commission's proposal to redefine state aid to cover all forms of subsidy.[11]

However, this redefinition rebounded on the UK. BS's running costs had always been funded through 'Public Dividend Capital' (PDC) payments, defined as 'equity investment'. Previously the European Commission had accepted this, but under the Sixth Directive's

new definition, PDC counted as state aid. Suddenly, the UK was a profligate subsidiser, using up its annual state-aid allowance in just two or three months, and heading for an embarrassing public row with the Commission.[12]

But the Sixth Directive, while creating this new problem, also offered a solution. The new state aid regime was merely a means to its primary goal, which was to reduce capacity. So, a member state with excessive state aid could be forgiven so long as it closed down shipyards – a point which was not lost on UK ministers.

3. Total closure

3.1. Victory

Early in 1987 Channon appointed John Lister as the new Chair of BS, charged with turning the corporation around and securing its future. Lister started work on 1st May.[13] In the following month, Thatcher won her third consecutive General Election victory and chose a new Cabinet. At the DTI Channon was out, replaced by two of her favourites, Lord Young and Kenneth Clarke, who had worked together at the Department of Education. Young was made Secretary of State, with Clarke as DTI minister and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster with a direct line to the Prime Minister's office. At Education, Clarke had introduced job clubs and inner city task forces to restructure local labour markets.[14] At the DTI he could use Enterprise Zones to restructure whole local economies.[15]

3.2. Options

One of Clarke's first acts was to ask Lister to produce a Strategy Paper setting out BS's future options. The Paper was delivered in September, and focused on BS's two remaining large shipbuilders, Govan on the

Clyde and NESL on the Wear. Lister endorsed the industry consensus that the world market would recover in 1990-1 and offered four options:

> Option 1: Close Govan and NESL as their current workload came to an end.
> Option 2. Close either Govan or NESL and focus new investment on the survivor.
> Option 3. Retain both Govan and NESL and restructure them into a single industrial operation across two sites.
> Option 4. Close either Govan or NESL, with the survivor receiving no new investment.[16]

Lister was presumably under instructions to include Option 1, total closure, because he himself was passionately opposed to it. He favoured Option 3: retain Govan and NESL combined into a single industrial operation to achieve 'critical mass'. But if he were forced to accept Options 2 or 4, he would prefer technically-advanced NESL to survive, rather than ageing Govan.

3.3. DTI versus Treasury

Following a triumphant Conservative Party Conference in October, Thatcher received a memo from Clarke on the future of BS. He had considered Lister's Strategy Paper and favoured Option 1: total closure. He rejected Lister's argument on restructuring and insisted that there was "no realistic prospect of BS ever becoming commercially viable". Nor was he interested in privatisation. Instead, he wanted closure and Enterprise Zones:

> "I have come to the conclusion that the only sensible solution is to close down BS as fast as possible and to make substantial

> new efforts to help establish alternative employment and enterprise which can offer a real future to the communities affected, notably on the Clyde and in Sunderland".[17]

Standard practice in such circumstances is to create an ad hoc Cabinet committee to thrash out ideas, and this is what Thatcher did. The ad hoc shipbuilding committee first met on 27th October and Clarke set the agenda, arguing for total closure of all BS's subsidiaries, with Govan and NESL closing "as soon as the present work runs out". In both areas he wanted local measures:

> "… designed to persuade people on the Clyde and the Wear to look away from a dying industry and part of their industrial past and to look instead to new and profitable enterprises on which to build their future".

Finally, significantly, the meeting noted that:

> " … although Option 1 (closure) would not give rise to difficulties in Brussels, the support levels envisaged in Option 3 (Lister's recommendation) would seriously breach the Sixth Directive and require an accommodation from the Commission which might well not be forthcoming".[18]

This marked a radically new approach. Any residual notion of shipbuilding as a strategic activity was ditched. Instead BS was treated simply as a failing business unable to turn a profit. But Clarke's argument that BS yards should close as current work ran out was not sufficiently hardline for the Treasury. Nigel Lawson, John Major and their officials wanted orders cancelled and yards closed immediately.[19] Only when it emerged that Thatcher herself had helped win a big Chinese contract for Govan did Treasury ministers retreat, since cancelling this order

would be embarrassing for her personally. But they compensated by arguing even more vehemently for contract cancellation and swift closure at NESL.[20] As early as November 1987, NESL was becoming a favoured candidate for closure.

In addition to arguments about current orders, there was also a debate on new orders. Everyone agreed that yards intended to close should not take on new work but disagreed on how to achieve it. Clarke favoured a publicly announced embargo, but the Treasury argued that this would give shipyard workers time to organise protest campaigns; and might give the world market time to recover and undermine the whole rationale for closure.[21] Thatcher shared these fears:

"To announce ultimate closure now and to forbid yards even to look for and accept new orders would be considered perverse and unreasonable. The public outcry would be intense … The employment consequences are pretty appalling … We should not underestimate the political gift to the Opposition … ".[22]

By the end of 1987, however, Clarke had got his way. The ad hoc committee agreed that "there was a strong case" for closing BS's yards when current orders were completed, and for an embargo on new orders to be announced in February 1988. Work began on a Sunderland employment package, involving Nissan, an Enterprise Zone, and an enterprise company. Clarke stressed that:

> "… never before has a nationalised concern been simply shut down …. I feel that we shall need to have some 'flagship' proposals for Sunderland in particular … ".[24]

At the Treasury, meanwhile, ministers and officials grumbled at the price-tag on Clarke's "expensive package".[25]

4. Privatisation and closure

4.1. Kvaerner and Govan

In early 1988, the closure strategy agreed by the ad hoc committee was thrown into confusion when a new player entered the game. Kvaerner was a Norwegian company active in chemicals, engineering, shipping and shipbuilding.[26] Norway was outside the European Community and offered only modest shipbuilding subsidies, so Kvaerner decided to acquire a yard inside the Community where it could build ships for its own fleet subsidised by a higher level of state aid.[27] Company officials started to explore potential target-yards and Bob Clay, Labour MP for Sunderland North, recalls them visiting NESL.[28] However, Kvaerner seems to have been steered towards Govan, presumably by the DTI, and presumably because of Thatcher's personal connection with its Chinese contract. In February 1988 Kvaerner confirmed to the Government its interest in buying Govan.

Clarke reported this to Thatcher who was delighted.[29] The previous – still secret – decision to close down BS had been based on the assumption that its yards were commercial failures which no private owner would want, but this sudden interest from a major industrial company proved otherwise. BS was instructed to open confidential negotiations.

This put Kvaerner in a powerful bargaining position. It could see that the UK Government was desperate for the sale to go through, and it knew that there were no other bidders. Its main goal was access to state aid, but it reckoned – correctly – that it could get a lot more. The final deal involved a nominal purchase price paid by Kvaerner, set off against a larger 'sweetener' or 'dowry' paid to Kvaerner as compensation for taking Govan off BS's hands, plus access to state aid. The Treasury accepted the dowry but objected to a Norwegian-owned yard receiving British state aid - but it was over-ruled by Thatcher.[30] Kvaerner was

now both owner and customer of Govan, allowing price-fixing which would be subsidised by UK tax-payers. Treasury ministers Major and Lamont condemned the whole affair as a bad deal, but by then it was too late.[31]

4.2. Danish ferries

Kvaerner's purchase of Govan became public knowledge in April and was clearly bad news for NESL.[32] It deprived BS of the 'critical mass' which underpinned Lister's survival strategy, and left NESL exposed as the only large shipbuilder in the BS estate. What's more, it coincided with another failed contract at NESL, when its Danish customer defaulted on a bulk order for small ferries.[33] The fact that the contract had been sabotaged by the customer could not prevent damage to NESL's reputation, and hostile observers could portray it as the latest in a series of failures since 1986.[34]

4.3. The Cuban order

Kvaerner's acquisition of Govan prompted the Government to alter its approach to BS, substituting privatisation for closure. The Treasury resisted the change but from the spring of 1988 privatisation was the publicly declared policy; it was easier to sell to the public, appeared less brutal than outright closure, and was more in line with previous Thatcherite practice.[35] There was, however, a downside. Unlike closure, privatisation did not offer a solution to the Government's state aid problem with the European Commission. Mere change of ownership would not convince the Commission to drop its objections to the UK's historically accumulated state aid; only shipyard closure would do that.

NESL was covered by the new privatisation policy but its position was unique. It now accounted for almost all of BS's shipbuilding capacity

and half of its workforce, and powerful voices within Government continued to insist that, privatisation notwithstanding, NESL should close. In late March Lawson declared:

> "Closure of NESL seems inevitable, and I would support an early statement to that effect".[36]

Two days later a meeting of the ad doc committee concluded that:

> "There was no doubt that the Sunderland yards would have to close".[37]

And in May a senior DTI official wrote:

> "Disposal of NESL is unlikely … Major redundancies there are inevitable".[38]

This talking-down of NESL may have been influenced by its recent failed contracts, even if they were often beyond its control. But even more likely, it reflected the appreciation that, if a substantial shipyard closure were required to mollify the European Commission, NESL was the only remaining candidate.

However, delivering NESL's closure would not be easy, because it had an eager customer. Sunderland's yards had a long relationship with Mambisa of Cuba, a well-respected shipping company generating hard currency for the Cuban economy, and a valued client of Lloyds Bank. Mambisa had been considering placing an order with NESL since 1986, and by the spring of 1988 discussions focused on a contract for ten cargo ships with a value of £100 million.[40]

If NESL had been earmarked for closure, it followed that the Government needed its privatisation to fail. The Cuban order was therefore a problem; it might encourage strong bidders to emerge and

make a successful privatisation hard to resist. Hence the contortions of ministers and officials over the next few months, as they sought to maintain the appearance that they were committed to NESL's successful privatisation, while in fact undermining it by undermining the Cuban order. Clarke's tactics between can be divided into three phases: Denial, Delay, and Obfuscation.

The 'Denial' phase in April and May cast doubt on the 'reality' of the Cuban order. Clarke denied its reality at a meeting with NESL's shop stewards in April, and Lord Young insisted in May that the DTI needed time " … to see how real it is …".[41] Lister, closer to the Cubans, regarded their interest as sufficiently 'real' to make a formal request for state aid support.[42] But despite this the strategy of denial worked, because it created uncertainty which dampened interest among potential buyers. Four bids came in, three of which were weak.[43] The strongest was from Peter Zacchi, who had been involved in NESL's disastrous Danish ferries contract.[44] Zacchi did at least have experience of shipbuilding, and had impressive contacts in the industry, but his credibility was undermined by his refusal to reveal the identity of his investors.[45]

In June, Clarke unwisely informed the House of Commons Trade and Industry Select Committee that BS had not requested state aid support for the Cuban order. This was untrue, as Lister promptly revealed.[46] Unable to maintain the pretence that Mambisa's interest was not 'real', Clarke therefore moved from Denial to Delay. He told Lister that he needed:

> "… to think very deeply before committing the Government to that subsidy".[47]

And he briefed the press that in making this decision he:

> "… refused to be hurried".[48]

Insiders knew what he was up to and Major expressed support:

> "I am sure you are right to refuse to countenance support for BS to take the Cuban order".[49]

However, despite this active hostility, the Cubans stubbornly hung on. In June they extended their tender deadline to give Clarke more time, and in July they said that they would wait until privatisation was completed.[50] There was even brief speculation that they might put in a bid for NESL themselves.[51]

In July, shortly before leaving the DTI for a new job, Clarke resorted to his final tactic: Obfuscation. He tangled up the Cuban order, state aid, and privatisation, by ruling that the Government would only consider state aid for the Cuban order after NESL had been successfully privatised.[52] This created a lose-lose situation for the yards. By insisting on a successful privatisation in the absence of a firm order, Clarke rendered it virtually impossible, because he was inviting bidders to buy empty yards. Lloyds List commented:

> "The DTI says it will not give aid while NESL remains state-owned – which has created a Catch-22 situation as the yards are only attractive to buyers if the order is already secured".[53]

Clarke's cynicism was thrown into sharp relief by the very different approach of his DTI successor, Tony Newton. Newton tried to make NESL's privatisation work, and seems to have been unaware of the view that its closure was a price worth paying to strike a deal with the European Commission. Unlike Clarke, he actually visited NESL and was impressed by its technical sophistication. On two occasions he allowed bidders more time by rescheduling deadlines.[54] And when none of the original four bidders was deemed acceptable, he re-opened the process to allow three new bidders to set out their stalls.[55]

In the background however, despite Clarke's departure, some civil servants seem still to have been pursuing his policy. In October Mambisa told the DTI that:

> "We remain interested in placing orders for vessels built in the NESL yards … We wish to sign a letter of intent by 10th November 1988 … ".[56]

A crunch meeting in Cuba was organised with Lloyds Bank and the DTI on the attendance list. However, the DTI official never turned up at the airport for the flight to Havana.[57] His absence effectively torpedoed the meeting and has never been explained. Certainly he was not acting on the instructions of Newton, who only learned that he wasn't on the plane from Labour MP Bob Clay, who had been tipped off by the Lloyds Bank representative.[58]

By the end of November the Cuban order was no further forward, none of the three late bids was deemed acceptable, and no other credible bidder had expressed interest. On 7th December, therefore, Newton stood up in the House of Commons to announce that NESL would close. But, being Newton, he still tried to keep the show on the road: he added that the yards' plant and facilities would be mothballed until June 1989 to allow time for further "serious proposals" about the yards' future.[59] This caused renewed anxiety in the Treasury:

> "… the DTI may yet try to cobble together something with the Cubans".[60]

5. The December Agreement

Newton's closure announcement triggered negotiations with the European Commission to be concluded by 31st December.[61] One reason for the deadline was that on that day Peter Sutherland, the long-serving

Competition Commissioner, would step down to be replaced by Leon Brittan.[62] Because Brittan was British, and new in post, he would have been under pressure to prove his European credentials by taking a hard line. From the UK's point of view, it was better to deal with Sutherland, a consummate insider with nothing to prove.

> The UK-EC agreement of December 1988 – technically a treaty – has never been published. The only evidence of its content appears in a few carefully phrased letters from Brittan, who inherited it as a fait accompli, addressed to UK ministers and MPs. Taken together, these suggest that the agreement had three key elements:
>
> 1. NESL would close, permanently and irrevocably;
> 2. The UK Government would provide £45 million of state aid for an 'alternative employment and enterprise' package in Sunderland;
> 3. The Commission agreed to 'average out' accumulated UK state aid across financial years, which helped to bring it within an acceptable range; and to define the remainder as Government debt, financed by normal commercial borrowing.[63]
>
> Astonishingly, Newton did not know the Agreement's terms. He believed, quite wrongly, that its key element was denial of future access to state aid, and that NESL could re-open so long as its new owner did not seek public subsidy. He said as much in a letter to Clay:
>
> > "Should anyone wish to purchase some or all of the Sunderland facilities for shipbuilding without any form of assistance, that would entail only the negotiation with BS of acceptable terms for acquiring the facilities in question".[64]

The Treasury was appalled by Newton's conviction that NESL might yet be revived. Lawson wrote to Major:

> "… we are going to have to inject some tough talk into this saga of vacillation".[65]

And Major drafted a blistering letter to Newton, insisting on the "irrevocable and irretrievable" end to shipbuilding on the Wear, and even claiming that he personally had helped Newton by agreeing to:

> "… a series of dubious if not frankly rotten financial deals to save other yards from closure … to ease your burden in presenting the unavoidable bad news on NESL … Rather than trying to argue the European Commission into agreeing a resurrection, you should remind them that the elimination of NESL capacity was the price they sought for agreeing to exceptional state aid in the other cases"[66].

This is breathtakingly dishonest. Major's suggestion that the privatisation of Govan or BS's small subsidiaries were *quid pro quos* for NESL's closure is simply untrue; they were standalone deals concluded months earlier. Nor is it true that the Commission "sought" NESL's closure. The agency that consistently sought, and finally achieved, NESL's closure, was the UK Government to which Major belonged.

6. Summary

The EC Sixth Directive created the context for the closure of NESL, but did not directly cause it. Its redefinition of state aid posed a problem for the UK, for which closure offered a solution. But the choice of which yards would close was a decision made in Britain.

Several factors led to the choice of NESL. The secret policy to close BS, in autumn 1987, made drastic closure thinkable among ministers and officials. Thatcher's personal connection with Govan, and its potential for embarrassment, created a consensus that Govan required careful handling, which perhaps contributed to Kvaerner buying Govan, rather than NESL, in 1988. Finally, NESL's record of contractual problems allowed it to be portrayed – inaccurately – as a failure.

The policy shift from closure to privatisation in spring 1988 left the European Commission's problem with UK state aid unresolved. Closure of one or more large yards remained the obvious solution, for which NESL was now the only available candidate. To achieve this would require its privatisation to fail, an outcome which was threatened by the Cuban order, which if confirmed might have attracted a credible private buyer. However, a combination of denial, delay and obfuscation held the Cubans at bay and delivered NESL's closure in December 1988. An agreement with the European Commission, highly satisfactory to the British Government, swiftly followed.

7. Acknowledgement

This paper was originally inspired by Bob Clay, and benefitted from his constant enthusiasm, insights and recollections. Both of us see it as part of a continuing work in progress.

Martin Spence

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A Teesside Volunteer in the Lincoln Battalion

Tony Fox

Thirty two Teesside born volunteers served in the International Brigade, of these nine were born in the borough of Stockton-on-Tees. What is exceptional about this small group of volunteers is that more than half played leading roles in Spain, five rose to the rank of Lieutenant and one served as the British Battalion Commander. Two of these Stockton born volunteers; Wilf Cowan and Patrick Maroney, served in Spain as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion in the XVth International Brigade.

Stockton was no more noteworthy than most towns in the North East of England in the 1920s and 1930s; high unemployment was not exceptional and the local authority's response to the post-war economic slump was no different to those of other authorities locally and nationally. What makes Stockton-on-Tees exceptional in this period is the small and very active Teesside Communist Party. This small group was led by George Short, the Communist Party district organiser for Teesside from 1928 until 1971. From its base in Stockton the Communists carried out a number of successful campaigns to alleviate the worst aspects of the economic downturn, it raised awareness of international events and challenged the rise of fascism both locally and nationally. When the Spanish Civil War broke out it is not surprising to find these Teesside Communists responding and responding exceptionally.

Teesside in the 1930's was dominated by the heavy industries of shipbuilding, steelmaking and chemical production. Unsurprisingly most of the Stockton volunteers for the International Brigade were employed in

these industries. Maroney's employment was as a foundry worker at the Stockton Steel Foundry, on the banks of the River Tees. He was a member of the Irish Republican Congress (IRC) founded in 1934 when pro-communist Irish republicans broke away from the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The IRC was led by activists including George Gilmore, Peadar O'Donnell and most famously Frank Ryan. There seems to be links between the IRA and the CPGB on Teesside as a further three Teesside volunteers were linked to the IRC. We know that Maroney was interviewed by George Short in his Thornaby home and then left for Spain in late December 1936.

The research into the documentation on Maroney's service in Spain was a laborious process, we were fortunate to find the date Patrick left for Spain in a very unusual source - his MI5 file. Special Branch interviewed Patrick on his return from Spain, as he stepped off the boat at Newhaven on June 17, 1937. This interview gave us both his date of departure and the exact date of his repatriation. A summary of the interview states:

> **General History**
> *2.1.37. Went to Spain via France*
> *17.6.37. Returned from Spain via Dieppe giving false reason for his visit there. Denied having been member of any military force in Spain & would give no information as to his activities there or his political opinions. (SB8 rep. no ref. no.)*
> *Travelled on Emergency Certificate from Barcelona to London dated 11.6.37. Signed Norman King (Consul General)*
> **National Archives KV2 PF 45877**

Research into the records of the British battalion held in the Russian State Archives of Social and Political History, (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoi istorii - RGASPI), hereafter Russian Archives[1], was less successful. Maroney does not appear in the British records until five months after his arrival. The briefest of entries, written in June 1937, shows simply – P Maroney against the number 1007. There is no additional

information, no address, no trade nor does his file have an index card. We found it odd that despite having been in Spain for almost six months there seems to be no evidence of where he had been and what he had been doing.

The Connelly Column

A further breakthrough came a few months later when I found a note in the Russian Archives dated 8th February 1937, this indicated that Maroney enrolled in the Lincoln Battalion and implied that he had been there for some time.

> BATTALION HEADQUARTERS
> February 8, 1937
> General Order #13 Subject Permanent Cooks
> The names of the following men are to be stricken from the various company rosters:
> Robinson, J.
> O'Donnell, V
> Greenleaf R.
> Maroney, P
> Fennelly, W
> Thurston, G.
> Peck, S.
> These men are assigned to permanent duty as Cooks.
> By Order of Battalion Clerk **RGASPI 545/3/499**

The date of the note led to the hypothesis that Maroney was part of the small group of Irish republicans who left the British Battalion for the Lincoln Battalion[2] on 12th January 1937. Richard Baxell, author of *Unlikely Warriors* records:

> *A meeting was called on the 12th January by, it appears, Dave Springhall, the battalion commissar, which was attended by*

> *approximately 45 Irish members of the battalion. During a stormy session, a number demanded that the group leave the British dominated battalion, whilst others, who wished to remain, vigorously argued 'that distinctions must be made between anti-fascist working-class comrades from Britain and British imperialism.' At the end of the meeting, the Irish group voted by a ratio of two to one (26-11) to leave and join the Americans in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion at nearby Villanueva de la Jara.* ***[https://richardbaxell.info/irish-volunteers/]***

Frank Ryan was in Madrid at the time of the meeting, he returned and persuaded half of the 26 men to return to the British Battalion, but Maroney was not one of these. As the 8th February note shows, he was with the Americans as part of 'The Irish Section' three weeks after this. As more Irishmen, and Americans with Irish descent, arrived at Albacete many were placed in what they began to call 'The Connelly Column', a distinctly Irish unit within the American Battalion.

Maroney is also mentioned in the pamphlet The Story of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, written in the trenches of Spain. In the version found in the Russian Archives the Lincoln Battalion volunteer Vincent O'Donnell mentions Maroney in a report describing the death of American volunteer Robert "Slim" Greenleaf , it begins:

> *The following story of Slim Greenleaf comes from the pen of V. O'Donnell. "On the night of our offensive, February 23rd, Maroney, Slim Greenleaf and myself left the farm house at six p.m. as usual, with the battalion's supper on our Truck. RGASPI 545/3/176*

This information is corroborated by the 8th February 1937 document because all three: Greenleaf, Maroney and O'Donnell are mentioned as

being assigned to permanent duty as Cooks. O'Donnell describes the adventures they have before the three men arrive at the British Battalion munitions dump. It is here where they unload the food they have prepared and then carry up to the Lincoln's in the front-line trenches. When they arrive, they heard about a Cuban comrade who had been lying wounded between the trenches since that morning, Vincent takes up the story:

> *"Whatever was passing in Slim's mind that night we shall never know. His thin and youthful face cleared as he said 'Come on, boys, let's go!' Slim and Maroney were to join the other comrades of the rescue at the Dressing Station, one hundred meters further on, near the bend of the road. As the night closed around them, Slim appeared to be silent, while Maroney was doing the talking."*
> *"An hour passed at least when Maroney returned. He was alone. An explosive bullet had killed Slim as he crawled along four meters behind his companions."* **RGASPI 545/3/176**

We also have in the Russian Archives another document where another Lincoln Battalion volunteer, Jacob Menelowitz (Joe Gordon), also describes the death of Robert Greenleaf. It is especially poignant because Jacob was an American and had travelled to Spain with Robert 'Ralph' Greenleaf.

> *Our first aid man Ralph Greenleaf and another comrade from the food truck, Tanz and myself. We took a stretcher with us. and started to go out again. Two of the first aid men came in, both were wounded in the legs, I don't know how they managed it. The firing was almost nil, we started walking up the road almost to the halfway mark when we bump into Paul Burns and another comrade (Gomez) carrying in Scott. Telling the other comrades to wait for us Toplianos and I took the stretcher and carried Scott into the first aid station. Scott was still alive, I felt very glad all our efforts had not been in vain.*

> *Toplianos and I went up the road again, we caught up with the other comrades, comrade Tanz was not around. We got off the road and started crawling, they opened up bursts of fire. Whenever they opened up we would be still and then continue. After a hard burst of fire at us had ended, I pushed the comrade next to me and said 'lets go'. He didn't move, I looked at him and we found that comrade Greenleaf had been shot right through the helmet, he died instantly without a sign, a pool of blood forming quickly.* **RGASPI 545/3/479**

It appears that Maroney, the "another comrade from the food truck", served with the Lincoln Battalion through the winter months of the battalion's trench vigil on the Jarama Front. The conditions at the front – cold weather, poor shelter, and the Spanish diet may have contributed to the decline in Maroney's health and ultimately resulted in his repatriation. My friend and colleague Peter Verburgh found the reason for Maroney's repatriation in a medical note in the Russian Archives, it was typed in French and lists 45 men. Verburgh's translation tells us about Maroney's state of health:

> 21/4/37 REPORT OF THE MEDICAL COMMISSION COMPOSED OF Dr.Bachrach and Littwack
>
> 4 - Maroney Patrick - 28 years old – English - Spain on 2/1/37 – accountant -S.R.I. 2-15 Bri Bat.
> Lincoln - Stomach tumour? diabetes? – treatment in Murcia
> **RGASPI 545/3/696**

Finding a Photograph

While raising money for the Stockton memorial, on which Maroney is named, we produced a number of items, including the Golden Smog Warriors Basketball team's shirt in Republican colours and the book I *Sing of My Comrades* that describes the stories of the eight men named on the

memorial and their time in Spain. For each volunteer we also produced a 'Brigadisas' badge with their name and image, Maroney and Bill Carson were the two volunteers for whom we had no photograph; we could only use Stockton's castle and anchor emblem.

Complicating the matter was the fact that Maroney's family does not have any photographs of him, not even in later life. Tam Watter, the son of a volunteer himself, led us to a likely image of Maroney. Watter found a contemporary article in a folder in the Russian Archives. The article was about the Irish section of the Lincoln Battalion, and the accompanying picture's caption suggested that the image showed the Irish section prior to the Battle of Jarama. This got us excited as the picture showed thirteen men, the exact number who remained with the Americans.

Working with Watter, Verburgh and Dr. Ray Hoff an active researcher on American and Canadian volunteers (and also like Tam Watters, a son of a veteran), consensus was reached that Maroney was most likely in an earlier picture which Ray has demonstrated shows the Irish section at Jarama, evidence available strongly suggested that Patrick Maroney could not be in the picture that accompanied the Russian Archive report or another two photographs showing the "Irish Section."



Company 1, Section 2 - The James Connolly Column, on the Jarama Front.

A further complication came when we found that Maurice Moran, an Irish American volunteer, was one of those named in the photograph labelled Company 1, Section 2 - The James Connolly Column, on the Jarama Front. Moran was born in County Mayo, Ireland in 1911, his family moved to American when he was a child. Maurice travelled from America on December 26, 1936 and arrived in Spain at the same time as Patrick Maroney. In Spain he went by "Patrick," thus we had a Patrick Moran and a Patrick Maroney in the same unit and possibly in the same picture.

Hoff was able to provide names for ten of the twelve men shown the photograph . The two unknowns are in the back row at the end of the row, standing next to Patrick Moran. Without other photographs to compare we reached a point where we had to be content with the knowledge that Maroney served with these men and a possibility that Patrick was in this photograph. This was much better than what we had up until this point.

My research into the volunteers has taught me that it is always worth testing a supposition. Even when this has proved incorrect, we usually gain valuable information. I sent the photograph without any labels to Mich Maroney, the great niece of Patrick Maroney, not telling her we knew the names of most of the men. I asked her to examine the photograph to see if she recognised any family resemblance in any of the men. Mich replied that one in particular had a very strong resemblance and if any of them was Patrick it was "the little guy on the end." I must admit I also thought that this guy bore a striking resemblance to Patrick's great nephew Chris, but I had kept this to myself as I did not want to influence others. The man she pointed out was one of the unknowns at the end of the back row, he is significantly shorter than the others.



Chris Hill, Great nephew of Patrick at the Stockton Memorial

I also showed the photograph to Chris, Patrick Maroney's great nephew. I did not share what Mich had said before showing him the unlabelled picture. Chris did not hesitate before saying that the little guy on the end,

"if he was wearing glasses, is the double of my Uncle Michael."

While Maroney's grand-niece and nephew were looking at the Jarama Photograph Hoff and Verburgh were working to identifying the two unknowns in the back row. Verburgh has been my mentor for a number of years, guiding me through the Russian archives and providing valuable information. I cannot praise him highly enough because he always seems to come up with an answer to a problem, mostly using an ingenious method. This time he surpassed even his very high standards.

Verburgh examined the photograph and told me that Patrick Power; the man kneeling in front of the man we were now interested in, was holding a M1891 Mosin Nagat rifle. The M1891 rifle was supplied by the Soviets to Republican Spain. The reason this was of interest was that Verburgh knew that this rifle was 1,304mm long. This allowed him to identify the approximate height of the unknown volunteer. Using the known height of the rifle Verburgh identified that the unknown man standing behind Powers was approximately 1650mm tall, which converts roughly to 5 feet 5 inches. Manroney's MI5 interview at Newhaven on 12th June 1937 contained a physical description:

> *"Height, about 5'5" slim build, hair fair, eyes blue, fresh complexion…"* **NA KV2 PF 45877**

Based on the tentative identification from relatives and Verburgh's work it strongly suggested that "the little guy on the end" in the photograph was the 5'5" tall Patrick Maroney. We therefore feel fairly confident in saying it is likely that we have found the only photograph to show Maroney in Spain or anywhere else.

Recalling The Dedication

We were thrilled that Maroney's family took part in the dedication of our Stockton memorial in April 2023. Maroney's niece, grand nieces and nephews were present. His grand-niece Katie spoke on behalf of the

family, telling us how proud they were to see Maroney's service in Spain commemorated.

The Stockton international Brigade memorial was dedicated in April 2023 after a five-year campaign led by Stockton publican John Christie. Relatives of Patrick travelled from as far away as Ireland and London to join those living locally for this dedication. The day of events began with the Golden Smog Warriors basketball team holding their Otto Estensen trophy competition, an annual event held in honor of the Stockton Brigader. Elizabeth, Otto's daughter, awarded the trophy to the winning team. It was Elizabeth and the Golden Smog Warriors, with Patrick's and other relatives of Teesside volunteers that led the procession up Stockton's historic High Street to the Market Cross which stands outside the Town Hall. A dedication ceremony was later held at the new International Brigade memorial in the Wasps Nest Yard in the heart of Stockton's cultural quarter. An evening of music and talks finished the day of events for the large crowd of supporters and participants. [for more detail see: https://foxburg.edublogs.org/2023/06/02/the-stockton-memorial/]

I am immensely pleased that we now have a photograph likely to show Patrick Maroney in Spain and to have found a little about his service in Spain. I am grateful to Tam Watter, Dr. Ray Hoff, and Peter Verburgh for their support, and am equally grateful to Maroney's relatives who have encouraged me to continue to look into his fascinating story. Patrick Maroney, together with the other Stockton volunteers, is honoured on the Stockton International Brigade Memorial and we will continue to commemorate him and all of the Teesside Brigaders at our annual events and remember these men as brave and valiant volunteers for liberty.

The eight men named on the Stockton memorial:

***George Bright**. Born 1895, Thornaby. Carpenter.*
Arrived in Spain December 1936.
Killed 12th February 1937. Jarama. https://www.facebook.com/share/p/

G9V5qHFg7grt6g87/
***William Henry Carson**. Born 1905, Stockton. Bank Clerk*
Arrived in Spain February 1937. Wounded once.
Repatriated July 1937 - https://www.facebook.com/share/p/4Wg2miXjLw4Mwsno/
***Wilfred Cowan**. Born 1917, Stockton. Painter.*
Arrived in Spain April 1937. Wounded three times.
Repatriated January 1939. - https://www.facebook.com/share/p/TkLj6JtsH9A2GsQy/
***Otto Estensen**. Born 1910, Thornaby. Seaman.*
Arrived in Spain April 1937. Wounded three times.
Repatriated December 1938. - https://www.facebook.com/share/p/6ZzrRuEJ3eENesnY/
***Joseph Myles Harding**. Born 1909, Stockton. Scaffolder.*
Arrived in Spain January 1937. Wounded twice.
Killed 23rd September 1938. Ebro. https://www.facebook.com/share/p/YtS5QM6viMDfqsnp/
***John Edward Longstaff**. Born 1919. Stockton. Rolling Mill Labourer.*
Arrived in Spain April 1938. Wounded three times.
Repatriated December 1938. https://www.facebook.com/share/p/gfxtVBWZu5Kpekmd/
***Patrick Joseph Maroney**. Born 1908, Stockton. Foundry labourer.*
Arrived in Spain January 1937. Wounded once.
Repatriated June 1937.
***Bert Overton**. Born 1904. Stockton. Dock worker.*
Arrived in Spain December 1936. Wounded once.
Killed 6th July 1937 Brunete. https://www.facebook.com/share/p/PuMDRhs5w4sCpDkW/

The ninth Stockton volunteer is Ron Dennison, he is not named on the memorial, due to an error made in 1939 - https://foxburg.edublogs.org/2023/07/01/ron-dennison/ but we are working on a memorial for

him in Billingham and plan to put a small memorial in the Wasps Nest to accompany the Stockton memorial; we didn't think it was appropriate to alter the Stockton memorial.

1 The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) is the Russian state archive based in Moscow,it holds pre-1952 archives of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). As the International Brigade was organised by the Communist International (Comintern) at the end of the Spanish Civil War the International Brigade records were taken to Moscow, where each document was photographed, these images are available online at https://sovdoc.rusarchives.ru/

2 To try to overcome linguistic difficulties, volunteers were placed in linguistic units which grew in size from Sections to Companies and then Battalions. At Jarama in February 1937 the XV International Brigade contained four battalions: the 16th British, the 17th Lincoln Battalion and two non-English-speaking battalions: the Balkan Dimitrov Battalion and the Franco-Belgian Sixth February Battalion. When the Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion was incorporated the numbers changed to 57th British, 58th American, 59th Spanish and 60th Canadian.

3 Vincent Francis William O'Donnell. Born Dublin 27th August 1904, was living in London when he volunteered. Arrived in Spain 26th January 1937. Served with the XV International Brigade, Lincoln Battalion. Taken prisoner during March 1938 retreats and incarcerated in San Pedro de Cardeña, released 7th February 1939.

4 Robert Webster 'Slim' Greenleaf Born 14th October 1914, New Bedford, Massachusetts. Sailed 9th January 1937. Served with the XV International Brigade, Lincoln Battalion. Killed during the Battalion's first action on 23rd February 1937; he was shot through the head while assisting in the evacuation of John Scott.

North East Labour History Society



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

Reviews

John Tomaney, Maeve Blackman, Lucy Natarajan, Dimitrios Panyotopolous-Tsiros, and Myfanwy Taylor. ***Social Infrastructure and Left behind places*** (Routledge, 2024) eBook ISBN 9781032710051

The abstract for this book announces that, "This book explores the making, unmaking and remaking of social infrastructure in "left behind" places." This makes it an interesting and an important work. It also reminds us how quickly the political climate can change. Tomaney et al's research for this book was conducted in the wake of the collapse of the so called "Red Wall" in 2019. Much of this electoral disaster for the Labour party was attributed to the promise made by the Conservatives that they would concentrate on "levelling up" for "left behind" places. The irony always was that these communities had been decimated by deindustrialisation, accelerated by Thatcherism in the 1980's and compounded by the austerity forced upon them by the Tories and Liberal Democrats from 2010 onwards.

At the book's publication in February 2024, one could have been forgiven for having cautious optimism that an imminent general election would return a Labour majority which would properly address these communities' issues. Whilst a Labour landslide was delivered, the actions of Starmer's administration have done little to provide any hope to "left behind "places. Proposed cuts to winter fuel payments and disability benefits has made many feel that they are under attack by Labour. Consequently, in May 2025 voters chose the right-wing populism offered by Reform UK.

However, Tomaney and the research team are not concerned with the short term. Indeed, politically driven quick fixes are identified as a key component which hinders the ability of social infrastructure to grow and thrive. Instead, they opt for a conducting a "deep case study" of one place, Sacriston, County Durham. This approach, using a case study to illustrate ideas and issues is well established within the Social Sciences and allows the

flexibility to report on a place's unique features whilst allowing it to also serve as a valid representative of its type.

At 108 pages this book is easy to digest. The initial chapters set up and explore the issues and concepts of "Left behind "communities and the importance of "social infrastructure ". The focus then turns to Sacriston, essentially, we are offered a concise biography of a community typical of many in the Durham Coalfield. It owes its existence to the establishment of coal mining in the early 19th Century, and the Pit dominated economic and social relations in the village until its closure. Of course its legacy persists 50 years on.

The authors illustrate how social infrastructure was established to improve the quality of life in the late 19th and early 20th Century. The prime movers are identified by the authors as the local Union Lodge, the local Co-Op and Miners Welfare and Social club. Also important was the establishment of Churches and Chapels, strongly represented amongst union leaders and local government. In Sacriston these included a Catholic Church for the sizeable Irish migrant community and the Methodists' Woodshed Workshop ,a social enterprise that trains young people who are not in education, employment or training in woodworking skills. Other less obvious institutions are argued to be important parts of social infrastructure such as the Cricket Club founded in 1871 which still thrives today.

The authors point out how these institutions were funded by the "pennies and sixpences" collected in the community often levied from colliery wages.

The decline of Sacriston's social infrastructure is charted from the 1960's onwards, pit closure in 1985 dominates, but other reasons such as changes to local government are also explored.

This work however also wants to look forward so it engages with projects and social enterprises. For example, the Co-op buildings have been regenerated and now house a gym, a youth development project and the Woodshed Workshop.

Ultimately the authors stress how important it is "to enable communities

to help themselves" but also lament how difficult this currently is. Building social infrastructure is rightly seen as requiring long term commitment. However, the current funding model frustrates this by locking projects into "endless competition for short-term resources."

In conclusion, this book is not just about the past and those expecting a very detailed history of Sacriston might find themselves disappointed. Instead, this book asks what can be learnt from the past in order to establish the social infrastructure that could make all the difference for this community and those like it across post-industrial Britain in the future.

Jon Warren

Margaret Renn, Paul Foot, A life in Politics,
(Verso 2024), ISBN 978-1-80429-190-0, 371 pp. hardback, with photographs, £30

Paul Foot was born into a privileged and well-known political family. His uncle, Michael, was a leader of the Labour party, his father was a diplomat. He seemed to carry this lightly through Shrewsbury school, national service and Oxford into his entry to journalism and radical politics. Unlike some, he didn't adopt the mantle of a working-class hero, rather remaining what he was and successfully connecting with others from very different backgrounds. He liked people and they liked him. He also made them laugh, an asset.

Margaret Renn's vivid and very readable account of his life is mainly written as chapters of his big campaigns, some of them egregious persecution of innocent individuals. She is right to do it this way because his unstinting commitment and dedication to the cause of justice explains his essence. There is a saying from somewhere that you are what you do. It certainly applies to Paul Foot. He was also a superb and prolific writer.

Foot took to socialism as a natural reaction to the manifest flaws and injustices of the ruling order, some of which he had been able to examine

from the inside. Whilst working for the Daily Record in Glasgow he found his place in the International Socialists (later renamed the Socialist Workers Party) where he remained for the rest of his life.

He detested racism. When the army sent him to Jamaica, a place and people for whom he had great affection, he was told that because he would be working with Jamaican troops he would get extra pay, described to him as 'wog money'. Later, he was deeply shocked by the Tory candidate for Smethwick in the 1964 general election who employed the notorious 'if you want a n****r for a neighbour, vote Labour'. As is frequently the case, the Labour Party were generally unwilling to stand up for the right thing.

Paul Foot and his collaborators undertook large amounts of detailed, forensic investigation to achieve their many successes and Renn's account is assiduous in explaining this. Her telling depicts a constant crowding out of existing preoccupations by new causes that he felt he must take-up, leading to huge efforts to meet competing deadlines and commitments.

Among the causes he took up was Colin Wallace, a British Army intelligence officer who spent six years in prison after being framed for manslaughter by MI5 because he had the effrontery to refuse to take part in their campaign of disinformation about Harold Wilson, then prime minister. Foot's friend Jim Nichol, a lawyer, did the extensive legal work required for this case. My wife, my daughter and I were recently riveted by Jim's telling of the Wallace story, leading my daughter to try to track down a copy of Foot's book, Who Framed Colin Wallace?

Paul Foot's journalistic career took him from, among others, the Daily Record, to the Sunday Telegraph, the Daily Mirror, Private Eye and Socialist Worker. At both the Mirror and Socialist Worker, Margaret Renn worked with him, providing her with valuable insights into his personality and his life. She employs this to great advantage, portraying the man as well as his work.

His was a life well-lived, constantly busy but also with a lighter side. One time, Renn tells us, he and three friends wagged-off from an important International Socialist meeting to watch his beloved West Indies take England

to task at Lords. They were only caught out when a brilliant West Indies shot, tracked by the TV camera, landed at their feet.

Paul Foot died in 2004 at the relatively young age of 66 from a heart attack. On the Journalists' Fleet Street Forum website, one posted, 'So farewell then Footie. I'm sure that crooks and swindlers the length and breadth of the country are breathing a sigh of relief.'

His gravestone in Highgate cemetery carries the last lines of Shelley's Masque of Anarchy, ending with 'We are the many, they are the few'.

Peter Nicklin

John Charlton. ***RED ALL THE WAY, Politics and Life*** (Brown Dog Books & The Self-Publishing Partnership, 2025) 187pp. ISBN: 978-1-83952-910-8 £10.99 pbk/ISBN 978-1-8952-911-5 e-book

When asked if I would review John Charlton's book, I accepted readily for I had been his Labour friend and comrade from 1959 until the time that he left for Yorkshire. This part of his autobiography fills the gap between then and his return to Newcastle in 1995. As the sub title says, it is both the story of a committed far-left political campaigner and of a young academic earning a living and bringing up a family.

The beginning of the story is his introduction to political activity via CND, the Labour Party youth section and the 59 Society, (later Young Socialists or YS). At the 1961 Easter YS Conference ,seeing the two entrist youth Trotskyist groupuscules, supporters of the youth political newspapers *" Young Guard"* and *"Keep Left"* eventually gave him his political *"mission"*

In September 1961 he met Tony Cliff, a founding member of what became the International Socialist

Workers' Party {SWP}. This was a major political signpost. The strapline on the front page of their paper the Socialist Worker, "Neither Washington nor Moscow but International Socialism", echoed his beliefs and led to

the formation of a Tyneside International Socialist Group with prominent speakers from the wider movement.

Alongside this there is a personal story. John became a married man with an unintended child on the way and a living to earn and left Newcastle for a teaching job in Selby, Yorkshire. He gives a description of his new teaching post, fellow co-workers and the teachers' unions. However "politics *had taken hold in the previous five years"* and he joined York IS. This group by origin was linked to the university. Discussions were formidable, and thought provoking and stimulated him to seek a university place. Candidly, he writes, in retrospect, he ignored his wife, Marion's, lack of any intellectual challenge intensified by domesticity and, by now, two children under five.

He had his first taste of police violence at a Vietnam Solidarity Campaign demonstration in Grosvenor Square in 1968. Subsequently, along with his fellow IS members, he widened his participation in active workers struggles .By the 1970s, with John now in Leeds, the successful Miners' Strike of 1972, and increasing industrial militancy, drew in many new members. This needed a change of IS constitution, setting up a Central Executive Committee to which John was selected as an "out of London comrade." The regular trips to London proved the final straw in John's marriage. He writes of Marion's "justifiable" estrangement and they parted. He left the Executive Committee after a year because of his family responsibilities and employment pressures.

He then gives an account of his international political journeys.

A party of IS Members went to Portugal in 1975, after the rising in 1974. This was to witness social/political changes, engage and make contacts. In this instance he had agreement to take his twelve-year-old son, Mick, with them. Their first stop was in Estoril, a coastal resort where they stopped for a week's break by the sea. Then onto Lisbon for a hectic fortnight where they attended a demonstration at the US Embassy, a workers' council, a rural co-operative and small demos organised by political parties. This is a most interesting account of "an advanced revolutionary crisis since 1917" of which little has been written.

Then in 1976 came the first of his trips to America, from east, mid-west, west and Canada. This is a great personal and informative read giving a brief insight into some US revolutionary political groups.

As the seventies came to an end, Charlton writes of the growth of direct threats to IS activists from Nazism in Leeds. A violent physical attack had him in hospital. Now working at the Poly-technic, his political life was enhanced by Rock Against Racism and the Anti- Nazi League (ANL). The ANL establishment was after IS recognising the requirement of a "broader movement well beyond the small revolutionary left". As most readers of this review will know, the successful broad alliance of MPs, 'celebrities' and communities was countrywide.

The trauma of John's divorce settlement brought on depression, not improved by the arrival of Margaret Thatcher in power

However he had not abandoned his links with the IS and it was at an IS rally in Skegness that he met Sally at a holiday camp. She was to become his partner in life.

Of course the mid '80s could not pass without analysis with references to the 1984 Miners' Strike, collections, visits to picket lines, donations and the repercussions. Then comes his response to the changing international scene with John writing a PhD and Sally working as a psychiatrist.

There is an interesting section on the London Anti-Poll Tax March which he and Sally attended with their young children. He recalls the anxiety and fears when they heard in, Downing Street, of the mayhem in Trafalgar Square. Returning immediately to the bus to journey back, he gives an account of the emotions, mood and confusion too often missed in the left's accounts of demos. Nevertheless this demo (and the numbers refusing to pay this tax) ended Thatcher's premiership and saw her replaced by John Major.

He talks about the good turnout at the London anti-Gulf War demo in Trafalgar Square but he did not share the elation of some. The war ended, but the bombing continued.

Then comes another trip to the USA, this time with Sally and their

youngsters. But he was then off then to give a talk. He had an interesting break, visiting a friend who worked in IT. It turned out to be at Microsoft, where, surprisingly, he met Bill Gates.

What was left of the mines were to be privatised, so a March in London was called by the TUC. The turnout was large, but lack of leadership meant it did not bring about the change expected on the left. SWP small branch strategy and outcomes are underlined by the statement "As revolutionary socialists we learned always to move on.

This autobiography concludes at 1995-6, with John leaving Leeds as Sally obtained a job in Sunderland as a consultant psychiatrist. There was some trepidation about uprooting a young family and leaving 3 young adult children behind. Plus his political involvement had been tied closely to Yorkshire but now it was back to a home base in Newcastle.

What we have here are candid memoirs, followed by a final look forward, a place to which John Charlton always returns.

John Creaby

Never Stop Learning, 'The Time of our Lives' Women's Education in Washington New Town, pbk, free., 38 pages

This booklet is a collection of six individual accounts from people who were closely involved in women's education in Washington New Town in the late 1970's into the 1990's. It has been circulated as part of the Washington at 60 celebrations.

Thousands of women joined the huge range of Washington courses and community-based women's organisations over the years, developing confidence, skills, understanding and friendships. The organisations included the Workers' Educational Association Washington Women's Branch, the Bridge project and Washington Playgroups Association. They were supported by the library service, local community centres and schools,

Washington New Town Development Corporation and Sunderland Local Authority as well as by European Social Funds.

Courses ranged from Women's History and Literature to Child Development, Assertiveness, Sociology, Woodwork and Welding. Most women participants went on to volunteer, to go into paid work or to study and gain higher qualifications. Many made positive changes to their lives and to the lives of their families and communities.

It was an exciting time to challenge the unequal status quo for women, with financial support and investment in community adult education helping that along. But there were multiple barriers to success to that required hard work, determination, and creative collective action to overcome. The Equal Pay Act had only just come into force in 1975. The Sex Discrimination Act, followed by the 1985 Equal Pay Amendment Act were all responses to that challenge.

The contributors bring the era to life with individual stories as well as giving us an overview of the differing projects and the impact they had on those participating. Gloria Finnegan, who wrote the section on Washington Women's Branch of the WEA, sums it up wonderfully in her description of a 1970's trip to the Lake District in the bright yellow community bus they had borrowed;

"We studied the Brontes and visited the parsonage at Haworth, where we walked the bleak moors and visited the graveyard there. I can remember it being freezing in our bed and breakfast and getting coats to put on the beds and wearing hats in bed. Overall, some great memories were made and we had great fun learning and enjoying ourselves, while the men stayed at home and did the childcare for a weekend"

The pity of it is that there are still barriers to women accessing education and opportunities and leading fulfilling lives and that, sadly, there are fewer community resources to help to overcome these.

The booklet was produced by the Never Stop Learning Group (NSL), born out of the changes wrought in the WEA over the last decade. In particular, NSL are concerned that the WEA appears to have moved away

from the tradition of providing democratically organised community and adult learning. They are a legacy group – people who were involved in and remain committed to the retention of democratically organised adult education.

The group has produced a paper outlining what went wrong. You can find a link to it on Platform60.org.uk/never-stop-learning/

Here's how they describe the process of putting together their first publication.

"The Never Stop Learning group firstly got together and reviewed what was missing from the learning offers available to adults today. We concluded that it was the democratic model which was developed between learners and tutors by the WEA. It was a well known and much loved way to learn and the Never Stop Learning group say it is needed more than ever in these difficult times. In order to demonstrate how the traditional WEA model works best for learners, the group members researched and wrote up a great example of collective learning and action in 1970's and '80's Washington New Town. The example focuses on teaching and learning developed by and for women.

Through the Never Stop Learning group we are spreading knowledge about democracy in education and explaining how it makes a vital difference. Our 'Time of Our Lives' publication is the first of many that we plan to write and produce collectively. For example, we intend to publish booklets on Trade Union involvement in member education, lessons from the successful Return to Learning programme and, international education for adult learners. Above all, we want to make sure that the legacy of the WEA in the North East and our key values continue to bring benefits for future generations.

We hope that these accounts give a flavour of the times and that they may now help to inspire others to see the benefits of community development and democratic adult education and the positive and long-lasting impact these can have on women's lives and the wider community. Above all we hope we can show that learning together as adults can be great fun."

This booklet certainly does make their point very effectively.

Contributors:
Marilyn Charlton
Gloria Finnegan
Victor Cadaxa
Maureen Marsden
Anne Staines
Moyra Risborough
Lyn Carruthers
Keith Hodgson
Graham Brown

Free copies can also be ordered by emailing marilyn.charlton@tiscali.co.uk

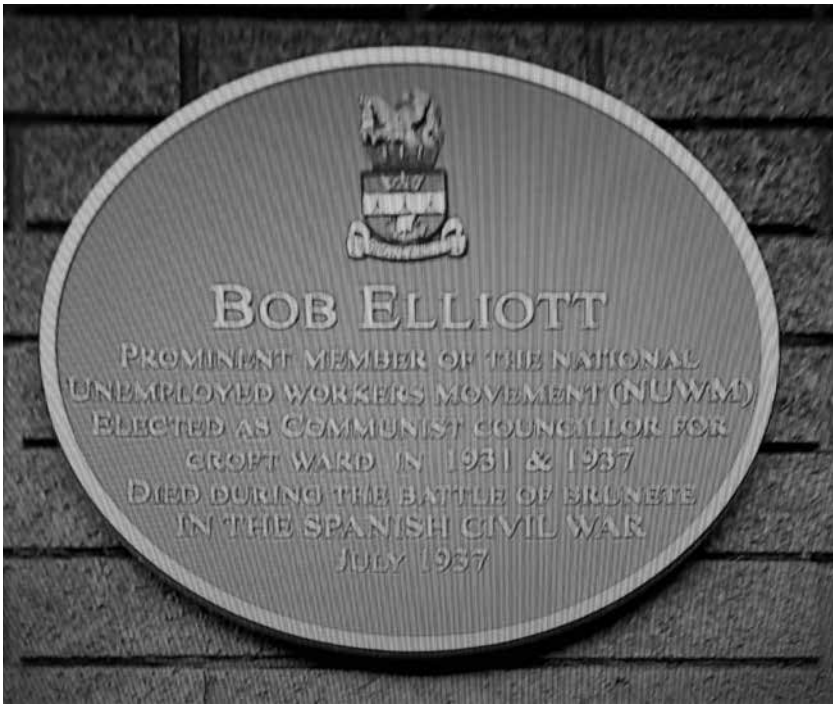
Rosie Serdiville

North East Labour History Society



Commemorations

Memorializing Bob Elliott



Bob Elliott's plaque

Bob Elliott (1900-1937) seems to be the only Communist in the north east to have a blue plaque memorial, or at least it seems that his is the only blue plaque in the region to include the word Communist.

Parish records and census information show that he was born in Cambois where his father, Robert, was a miner and mother, Mary, worked in domestic service. He had three sisters. By 1911 Robert senior had been killed in a colliery accident; eventually son Bob became a miner too. In 1926, presumably during the miners' lockout which followed the failure of

the General Strike, he was unemployed and active in the Communist Party. Until his death during the Spanish Civil War his life was centred around political and advocacy work with the unemployed, particularly in the Croft area of Blyth, then a close-knit community of terraced streets where work for men meant the collieries, docks and shipyards.

During the 1930s the Communist Party won three council seats in Croft Ward: Bob Elliott and Billy Breadin held seats on the Town Council and Breadin held an additional seat on Northumberland County Council. This success was entirely due to the efforts these men and others extended in the National Unemployed Workers' Movement in the Blyth area.

National Unemployed Workers' Movement

Elliott, Breadin and other NUWM volunteers offered advice sessions on benefits outside the labour exchange; led deputations and arranged meetings with exchange managers to challenge unjust treatment; took up cases where benefits had been reduced and successfully argued that they should be brought back up to scale. At regular outdoor public meetings in Blyth Market Place NUWM activists reported back on their activities and other developments. As elected councillors they raised issues in the council chamber that had been brought up at NUWM meetings. In one example the town council was persuaded to lobby the Unemployment Assistance Board to stop reducing benefits where children of the unemployed were receiving free school meals. Bob Elliott's own particular speciality was the Court of Referees, the panels who assessed appeals against benefit claims which had been turned down. Then - as now – it was the case that appellants who had access to advice and representation were more likely to have their appeals upheld than those who did not. The NUWM consistently tried to build unity between the employed and the unemployed, pressing for unemployment work relief schemes to pay union rates, and campaigning against using high unemployment to undermine wages. It also consistently argued that only a socialist arrangement of society could resolve the problems both groups faced.

In 1936 he persuaded Blyth Council to support the National Hunger March against the Means Test but the Labour group on the council soon fell back into line with the official Labour policy of not supporting initiatives by 'unofficial' organizations. Elliott himself was one of the leaders of the North East contingent on that Hunger March; unable to take part in his own election campaign as it coincided with the march, he was nonetheless returned with an increased majority.

Comintern

Bob Elliott was a North East delegate to the NUWM National Committee where he was involved in steering the organization as a whole. There are hints in archives and recollections that he played a role in the Communist International and its clandestine activity. Tommy Chilvers recalled how he and another Communist merchant seaman from Teesside, Otto Estensen, were provided with pamphlets to take into Nazi Germany when they were due to sail there. Elliott was their contact for the pamphlets but he was informed by the anti-Nazi resistance in Hamburg that the Gestapo had been alerted. Elliott got a warning message to the two sailors who then ensured that nothing was found when the vessel was searched. It would seem from this that Councillor Elliott was involved in the Comintern and its network of activists who took political material, money and messages to the anti-fascist resistance.

Spanish Civil War

He was an early volunteer for the International Brigade in Spain, enlisting with the British Battalion in January 1937. He took part in the battle at Jarama the following month and was given the role of political commissar. As such his work involved maintaining morale in what became extremely difficult conditions. His experience as a Hunger March leader would have been invaluable for this role. A participant on the 1936 march, Walter Gregory, has recalled how Elliott 'worked many minor miracles on that march to London, ensuring that men who were far from being in peak

physical condition after months of unemployment and a poor diet, kept on walking through the winter weather.' Serving in the front line he took part in the fighting outside Brunete that summer. The British Battalion was ordered to encircle the strategic village of Villanueva de la Canada on the 6th of July but were held up by heavy resistance. Elliott suffered a head wound on the 7th July and died from it three days later. His death (and that of many others like him in Spain) would have been a set-back to the radical movement in the north east.

Memorials

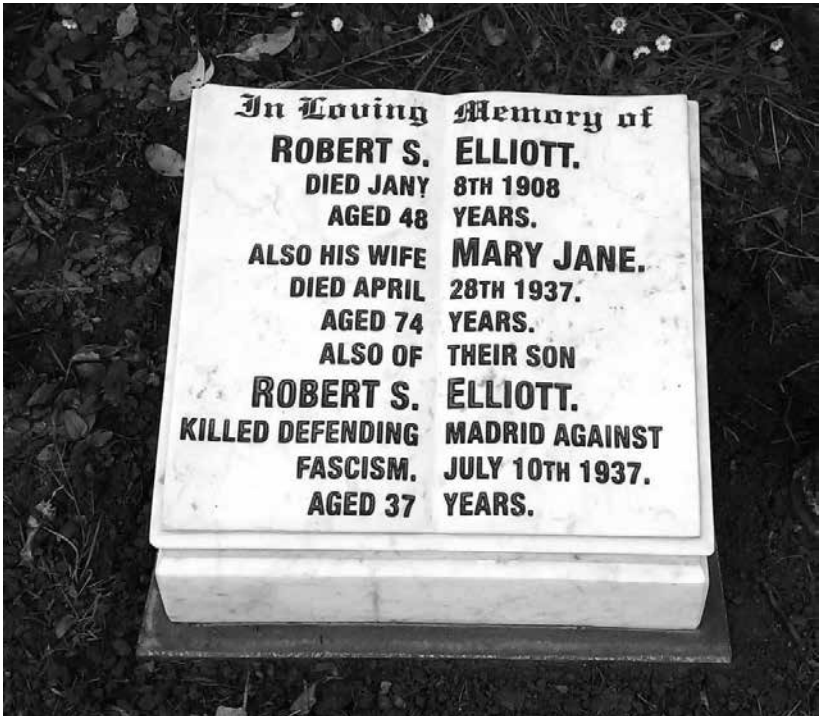
When his death in action was announced the Blyth Labour councillors were fulsome in their tributes; ironically so given that their reactions to their Communist colleague when he was alive and active were not always so positive. Hopefully this was not just a courtesy but an ability to see past party hostilities to recognise his contribution to the socialist cause.

Blyth Trades Council prepared and presented a framed photograph of Elliott to be hung in the council chamber, and for a number of years local Communists placed an in memoriam notice in the local press on the anniversary of his death. His name appears on the first memorial in the north east to International Brigade volunteers killed in Spain, one which is quite probably also the first in Britain. This was the decorated wooden board produced by Teesside Communists in 1939 which is now installed in Middlesbrough Town Hall. Elliott's inclusion on it reflected his status in the regional Communist movement and the NUWM. When Blyth Council opened a 30-flat supported accommodation facility in Croft Ward in 1986 it was named Bob Elliott House. Thus some fifty years after his death in Spain he was still present enough in the public memory for this to happen. The framed photograph of him which had hung in the council chamber was moved to the new facility. The Newcastle Journal, presumably quoting a council press release, stated that the new building was named in honour of the 'former leading Blyth Councillor who spent his life fighting for working-class rights.' It did not mention that he had been a Communist councillor.

Around 2020 the then Mayor of Blyth, Alistair Gibbs-Barton, realised that the town had absolutely no memorial blue plaques and resolved to remedy that. Thus began the installation of plaques to mark significant people and buildings in the town and the walking trail that links them all. The Mayor had an historical interest in the Spanish Civil War and thus Bob Elliott was included; his blue plaque is appropriately placed on the wall of Bob Elliott House in the Croft area. The wording records the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, his elections as a Communist on Blyth Town Council and his death in Spain.

In 2023 North East Labour History Society member Kevin Davies, searching genealogy websites, came across an image of the Elliott family headstone in St. Peter's churchyard in West Sleekburn. Under the names and dates of Mary Elliott and Robert senior was the inscription 'and also of their son, Robert Elliott, killed defending Madrid against Fascism, July 10th 1937, aged 37 years.' Both parents predeceased him, his mother two months previously, and so this inscription would have been added later. Given the wording it would have been commissioned by his political supporters. The image showed that the headstone was seriously worn and a visit to the churchyard confirmed that it had deteriorated badly, with many letters missing from the inscriptions. A fund-raising effort made sure that the headstone was renovated to a high standard and then re-installed in 2024. Bob Elliott is thus commemorated in Blyth in several ways.

As a National Unemployed Workers' Movement activist, Hunger March



Bob Elliott's restored headstone

leader, Communist town councillor and International Brigade officer killed in action this is certainly deserved.

Thanks to Kevin Davies, Tony Fox and Alistair Gibbs-Barton for information.

Don Watson

Brenda Corcoran (nee Ingleby) 27 April 1941 – 15 April 2025



Many of us were saddened to learn of the death of Brenda Corcoran recently.

Brenda was born in Gilsland Hall, on the Northumberland- Cumberland border on 27th April 1942 after the maternity ward in Newcastle was evacuated during WW2. Her family lived in Newcastle's West End where the streets that sloped down to the Tyne were a target for the air-raids. Her parents were from a mining community in North Durham - they had moved to the city when her father started work for the Mine Rescue Service.

She started school at South Benwell Primary, near the famous Scotswood Road, but shortly moved to Pendower Estate near her father's work at Benwell Towers. From there, she won a scholarship to Dame Allan's Girls School in Fenham - a huge step across the class divide in those days. There she acquired her lifelong love of English literature, especially Shakespeare. Brenda also loved the classic Church of England hymns which she used to sing along to on BBC's Songs of Praise. Despite winning prizes for verse reading and elocution, she never abandoned her working-class roots or, indeed, her love for all things Geordie, including Newcastle United.

She stood as a Labour candidate in Dame Allen's mock elections (gaining one vote). She continued her socialist activism when she moved to Leeds University and as a member of the 59 Society and Young Socialists in Newcastle. She marched with CND to Aldermaston to ban the bomb, remembered by many for her commitment to the cause and for maintaining her sense of style while she was at it. The high heels were only given up at Reading.

That love of fashion and style were mentioned by many who knew her along with a deep enjoyment of culture and a zest for life.

Always hoping that the next Labour government would achieve some of her ideals, she went to Harold Wilson rallies and was delighted when Dan Smith won Newcastle. She wanted politics to be a campaign of kindness. She was very much a Christian Socialist, becoming great friends with some of the priests from St Dominic's in the seventies.

She was a committed feminist, part of the group who campaigned successfully for safe houses for victims of domestic violence at a time when the issue was only starting to be discussed. One of the most moving moments at her memorial service came when her daughter, Bridget, recalled her mother's encouragement of her as a daughter, a woman and a feminist.

That powerful positive influence on the young was echoed by many who spoke of her time as a teacher at Benfield School, Newcastle.

Brenda had been a higher-grade tax officer for a couple of years but then retrained, going on to become head of the English Department at Benfield. This was her true vocation, where she was really happy and fulfilled. She usually walked the mile to school every morning, often in her miniskirt and high heels. A popular member of staff, she made many friends for life there, amongst both teachers and students. They formed Benfield Amateur Theatrical Society (BATS) which, led by her old friend Christine Heckels, presented many successful productions. Brenda loved drama and used to go to "the gods" at the Theatre Royal, where she saw some of her idols, especially Richard Burton.

It is striking how many of her former students have moved into a life in the arts, citing her as both the inspiration and as the teacher who gave them the confidence to find their own voices. "she gave me a belief in myself that carried me into writing". (Facebook tribute, Benfield School 1975 - 1985). For Brenda, literature and performance were for everyone and she saw the potential in all her pupils. The school trips to see the RSC at Stratford must have been demanding to organise but they had a lifelong impact.

Brenda loved her extended Greenwell family and they were always a strong influence on her values and her life. Brenda met Tony with her friends and her brother, Michael, at the Dun Cow in Claremont Road. Although

Brenda was at Leeds University and Tony was at King's College, they began an unlikely love affair, married young and had two lovely children. They lived in Wingrove Avenue and then bought their first house in Heaton.

Her circle of friends included journalists, performers and broadcasters, including Alex Glasgow, Jim Walker (who co-wrote the Socialist ABC), and Chris Johnson from Radio Newcastle. For a while she even broadcast herself – 'Last Night on the Telly' for BBC North. She took Tony to a party at a flat in Jesmond where a local Irish folk band were guests and when she told them her husband played the fiddle she started his long association with The Newcastle Beggarmen and Irish Dance music.

Her home in Lesbury Road became a regular party house with many, now famous, performers (such as Christy Moore, Seamus Ennis and Ewan McColl) staying over. Brenda could never turn anyone away. The perils of a five-bedroom house caught up with her when two Irish musicians who had been playing the Chillingham Arms Folk Club came for a couple of nights and stayed nine months!

Brenda had lost her father when he flew home from his mining contract in Korea and survived only three days before succumbing to bone cancer in the RVI. She was thirteen. Her mother, Jenny, became a guiding hand to the family and her daughter's best friend. She had two brothers of whom she was very fond - Colin and Michael. She was badly affected by her mother's death in 1990 and that of Michael at the age of forty-seven, one year later.

In her late fifties, Brenda developed health problems. She took early retirement and left her lovely job. She got a new lease of life in 2020 when she and Tony bought Glebe House - her pride and joy. She enjoyed an active social life and her huge knowledge of all types of literature was a boon to her numerous quiz teams.

She was a regular at concerts at the Irish Centre, where she was member number 34 in a roll of 2000. She was also a regular helper at the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Eireann festivals and competitions in Britain and Ireland. Always a friend and an encouragement to the young.

Brenda loved to travel, attending many folk dance festivals in Flanders,

Austria, Italy, Brittany and Holland. She had a brilliant ear for languages. On a family tour of France, her brother-in-law, Mick Corcoran, remarked, 'we would have starved if we had not had Brenda and her French'. Amongst her many excursions, the coastal regions of Northern Spain were a late and happy discovery for her.

Recently, she yearned to return to these places and to visit her many friends in Ireland again. But her health issues limited her. There were, of course, magic moments, including the recent the NUFC Wembley triumph and she looked forward to a few more quality years. Alas, it was not to be.

Her death was sudden and a huge shock to Tony, Bill and Bridget. She had been relatively well the previous day but developed symptoms around midnight on Monday and slipped quietly away eight hours later in Cramlington Hospital. Her husband, son and daughter were by her side and read her a much loved poem - Shakespeare's, Sonnet 18.

Her passing leaves a huge void in the lives of her family and friends which only our happy memories may go some way to fill. Her old friend Christine Heckels, read another poem much loved by Brenda at her memorial service.

Fear no more the heat of the sun,
Nor the furious winter rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages.

Shakespeare, Cymbeline.

Rosie Serdiville (using material prepared by Tony, Bill and Bridget Corcoran)

Norman McCord 1930 - 2024

We were very sorry to learn of the death of Norman McCord In October 2024. At the time Brian Bennison wrote, "Norman was an early member and officer of the NELHS. Many of us will remember Norman fondly as a tutor, supervisor and examiner. Many others in the wider community will have had the benefit of his advice and encouragement in pursuit of the region's history, and his willingness to address local groups".

Norman's interests were wide ranging. Fascinated by social and economic history, he wrote a number of books exploring North East England in the 19th and 20th centuries. He had an eye for the detail of everyday life:

"In the Newcastle of 1900, a Salvation Army officer could still look over some of the old slums, and reflect bitterly on their significance. *I stood by the dead body of a child in a third floor room of a miserable house, in a congested Newcastle slum, and from the window looked down upon a mass of ugly houses, with broken roofs and leaning walls, many of them in ruins, an unlovely picture of squalor and decay. In such a room the heirs of all the ages, the joint owners of the Empire on which the sun never sets, live and die unconscious of the heritage acquired at their expense*".[1]

This appreciation of him by Tony Barrow first appeared in the newsletter of the Society Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne (SANT). We are grateful to Tony and to SANT for permission to reproduce it.

"Norman was fascinated by naval warfare and the strategic role played by warships throughout history.

"The national history community and those associated with the regional history and archaeology of N.E. England were saddened to learn that Professor Norman McCord died in Cramlington Hospital on 25th October aged 94. Few historians acquired his significance or have contributed more to the development and popularisation of historical study in this region. Norman McCord was a giant of historical scholarship whose legacy of teaching, research and publication was recognised by his election as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Association and a personal chair as Professor

of Social History at the University of Newcastle.

Uniquely, in addition to his national status as an eminent historian Norman continued to pursue a lifelong interest in all aspects of archaeology and at his death had been a member of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne for 75 years and was its President in 1988–89.

Norman was born at Boldon Colliery on 14th April 1930 the son of a pitman. As an infant he moved with his family to North Shields where his parents owned a small corner shop. At the outbreak of the Second World War he was evacuated to Millfield in Northumberland returning to Tyneside in 1941 after passing his 11+ examination.

He attended Tynemouth Municipal High School 1941–48 where he was taught history by George Jobey, a teacher who had a profound influence on Norman's professional life and career.

As a first year undergraduate at King's College in 1949 he attended the First Congress of Roman Frontier Studies and fondly recalled an incident packed summer vacation visiting Roman archaeological sites in French North Africa in 1950. Subsequently he participated in numerous excavations including some on the Antonine Wall and acted as site supervisor at Corbridge in the 1960s.

He was a pioneer of aerial photography, initially, according to Norman, on the rather doubtful grounds that he had served in the RAF during his National Service and the History Department had obtained a small grant and a decent camera! His extensive collection of aerial photographs, now digitised in the SINE [Structual Images of the North East] archive, captured many previously unrecorded archaeological sites.

The SINE archive and the multi disciplinary McCord Centre for Landscape are legacies for which he was justly proud.

After completing his Ph.D at Cambridge in 1956, Norman held various academic posts before his appointment as Lecturer in Modern History at King's College (later Newcastle University) in 1960 and taught there for the rest of his career. Paul Kennedy, later Professor of History and International Relations at Yale, was one of Norman's early students; hundreds of others

benefitted from his knowledge and expertise over the years.

Norman McCord actively supported the development of Adult Education throughout his career. He contributed to extra mural courses, was an external examiner for the Open University, and an early advocate of the value of integrating fieldwork with academic study.

Along with other well known academics Norman contributed to the expansion of Victorian Studies in the 1960s and 70s. The quality and range of his published work inspired many others to research and write in the fields of Public Health, Poor Law Reform, Regional Politics, Maritime History, Labour and Industrial History. His collaboration with David Rowe led to important articles on the economic development of North East England.

As an empirical historian, Norman was often critical of the influence of political theory on historical writing and a tendency to view the past with the prejudices of the present. He warned his students to beware anachronisms and what he saw as the dangers of crudely labelling ideas and institutions of the past.

Yet for all his eminence and relaxed authority as a historian, for those who knew him he was simply 'Norman'. He will be remembered for his warmth and generosity of spirit, his sociability and sense of fun. Even as his health declined, he never tired of sharing his knowledge or spending time with those who sought his advice.

He will be sadly missed.

Tony Barrow"

[1] Some Aspects of Change in the Nineteenth-Century North East
Norman McCord, Pages 241-266 | Published online: 20 Nov 2013, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/007817295790175273
Accessed 30.6.25

Secretary's Report 2024-25

The Society has 172 members with another 141 people receiving our mailings. Unless indicated otherwise the following meetings have been held at the Irish Centre in Newcastle and we greatly appreciate their unstinting support:

6 August – *Sir Charles Trevelyan and the Irish Famine, 'The Victorian Cromwell'?*, Mike Fraser

10 September – Society Annual General Meeting at the Lit & Phil with Joe Redmond on *Women and Shipbuilding*

15 October – *The Wheel of Time: A People's History of Path Head, Stella, Blaydon and Summerhill*, Val Scully

19 November – *The effects of Deindustrialisation on a 1960s Railway Town*, Peter Smith, held online

17 December – *Christmas Quiz and Social* with Peter Brabban

7 January – *Miners' Banners of Northumberland and Durham*, Ken Smith

4 February – *Citizens Advice Cases in 1950s Tyneside, Divorce, Domestics and Rehousing*, Margaret Bozic

11 March – *The role of the Tyne built Carpathia in the rescue of survivors from the Titanic*, Ken Smith

13 May - *"Who Stopped the War?", Women and the Jolly George*, Kate Connelly

1 July - *On the Edge? A 1960s trade union arts festival in Newcastle*, John Stirling

This year's issue of *North East History* has been produced by the Editorial Board who are: Rosie Serdiville (Editor), Brian Bennison, John Charlton,

Steve Grinter, John Stirling, Win Stokes and Don Watson. The Society wishes to record its thanks for their work.

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

We are working with the Labour and Society Research Group and the Oral History Unit at Newcastle University to mark the centenary of the General Strike and the Miners' Lockout.

An article promoting the work of the Society written by Peter Sagar was published in North East Bylines in April.

The Sid Chaplin Prize for 2024 was awarded to Abbie Urquhart-Arnold (Newcastle University) for her dissertation, *"Hark to that agonizing wail": The Power of Ballads and Elegies in Unveiling the Grief of Widows and their Families following the 1880 Seaham Pit disaster and the 1909 West Stanley disaster.*

Officers:

President:	Maureen Callcott
Vice President:	To be appointed
Chair:	Liz O'Donnell
Vice Chair:	Kath Connolly
Treasurer:	Judith McSwain
Secretary:	David Connolly
Journal Editors:	Rosie Serdiville (Editor), Brian Bennison, John Charlton, Steve Grinter, John Stirling, Win Stokes and Don Watson

Committee Members:

Brian Bennison (Gosforth)
John Charlton (Newcastle)
John Creaby (Chester-le-Street)
Mike Greatbatch (Newcastle)
Steve Grinter (Wylam)
Peter Nicklin (Newcastle)
Wendy Palace (Stanley)
Peter Sagar (Newcastle)
Rosie Serdiville (Newcastle)
John Stirling (Morpeth)
Win Stokes (Tynemouth)
Don Watson (North Shields)

How to contact the Society

Email: secretary@nelh.net

Constitution of The North East Labour History Society

Name:
The name of the Society shall be the North East Labour History Society.

Objects:
a. To bring together those interested in labour history in North East England.
b. To promote the study, teaching and research of labour history.
c. To assist in the preservation of relevant records.
d. To increase public knowledge and awareness of labour history.

Membership:
Membership shall be open to all those actively interested in the aims of the Society.

Annual General Meeting:
An AGM shall be held open to all members of the Society. Organisations that are members of the Society shall carry one vote only at the AGM

Subscriptions:
The annual subscription shall be determined at the AGM of the Society.

Finance:
All money raised by or on behalf of the Society shall be applied to further the above objects. An audited account shall be presented to the AGM.

Dissolution
a. If the members resolve to dissolve the Society the members of the Committee will remain in office as such and will be responsible for winding up the affairs of the Society.

b. The Committee shall collect in all the assets of the Society and pay or provide for payment of all the liabilities of the Society.
c. The Committee shall apply any remaining assets or money of the Society:
i. directly for the objects of the Society;
ii. by transfer to any other society having the same or similar to the objects of the Society;
d. In no circumstances shall the net assets of the Society be paid to or distributed among the members of the Society.

Officers and committee:
The business of the Society shall be conducted by a Committee composed of Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer plus six ordinary members. The Committee shall have the power to co-opt additional members. The Committee and Officers shall be elected at the AGM. The Quorum for all Committee meetings shall be one third of its membership, including attendance of the Chair or Vice Chair. The Committee's agenda shall be drawn up by the Secretary in consultation with the Chair.

Honorary Officers:
There shall be a President elected at the AGM and not subject to re-election. There shall be one or more Vice Presidents elected at the AGM and not subject to re-election. The President and Vice President(s) shall be ex officio members of the Committee with full voting rights.

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

Changes to the Constitution:
Changes to the Constitution can only be made at the AGM, and a motion outlining proposals for change must be submitted in writing to the Secretary at least 28 days before the date of AGM.

The Sid Chaplin Labour History Trophy



Sid Chaplin

The author Sid Chaplin was a founder member of the Society and his Memorial Trophy is awarded each year to the winner of our labour history essay competition. The aim of the competition is to foster interest in North East labour history under the following conditions:

1. The Trophy will be awarded for the best essay submitted on any aspect of the history of labour in the North East. The essay should show some knowledge and use of original sources. It should be word- processed and not more than 10,000 words in length.

2. The competition will be open to anyone who is not employed full-time as a professional teacher or writer of history.

3. An Adjudication Panel, drawn from the Society, will judge the essays and the Adjudicators' decision will be final in all matters affecting the award of the Trophy.

4. All entries must be submitted to the Secretary of the society and received not later than 30th June each year.



Past winners

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

The results will be published in the Society's Journal. The Trophy is a miner's lamp with the name of each winner inscribed on it. Winners may keep the Trophy for one year. The winner also receives a £100 book token.

North East Labour History Society Founder's Award

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

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

Those wishing to be considered for the award should submit a statement about themselves (less than one thousand words please). Additional material in the form of press cuttings, photographs etc may be attached. Submissions should be sent to secretary@nelh.net by the end of January 2026.

Join Us

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

Annual subscription rates are:

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

Add £5 for international postage of our annual Journal

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

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

https://nelh.net

Heaton History Group

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

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

- Stranded: Heaton ship's engineer Bert Williamson's Arctic ordeal
- Master Sinker's Medal: Thomas Bewick-designed colliery memento
- John Glover: chemist and inventor of the 'Glover Tower'
- Coxlodge Waggonway: a line through time

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



North East History Volume 56

- It was sixty years ago today....
- The 1761 Hexham Riot
- Pit Elegies and Ballads
- Coal Face: Exegesis
- The North East Heritage Library: An interview with Kieran Carter
- Power to all people?
- Redhills Renewed: Durham Miners Hall brought back to life
- The Land of Oak and Iron
- Maureen Callcott: The Story Continued
- From Our Archive: Labour Women in North East England
- The Closure of North East Shipbuilders: The Inside Story
- A Teesside Volunteer in the Lincoln Battalion



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

Journal of the North East Labour History Society

http://nelh.net/