Education, Work and Social Change in Britain's Former Coalfield Communities

The Ghost of Coal

Edited by
Robin Simmons · Kat Simpson

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Foreword

There is something fundamental about the whole notion of the 'working classes' that policy and other elites simply don't get, and this book beautifully nails it by puncturing the problem—through some remarkably insightful analyses of former coalmining communities.

The fact that these elites are either not bright enough to 'get it', or so self-absorbed within the hermetically sealed bubble of their own lives, as to continue to blunder on in complete ignorance, has profound implications for the way social policies are formed and their deleterious effects on the lives they are inflicted upon. This elision is not simply an accidental oversight, nor is it an innocent omission, but is, I would argue, a deliberate attempt to keep these communities in a state of servile domestication.

By failing to understand, or even attempting to understand, the vernacular meanings of former coalmining communities, and hoping that they will remain invisible and therefore not troublesome, is fanciful in the extreme. Diane Reay (2006) argues that until education policy elites begin to understand the potency of social class in education as a central motif, then class will 'remain the troublesome un-dead of the

English education system' (p. 289). Well, there we have the essence of this book in a nutshell!

The contributors to this book show what social injustice looks like in graphic terms, when the lives, cultures, aspirations and histories of former coalmining communities are besmirched—the very structure and social fabric of society are threatened. As Simmons and Simpson put it in the conclusion to this volume, those who are 'disregarded or forgotten' cannot be rendered invisible forever. Their inference is that we cannot make coalmining communities 'redundant', and not expect serious social ramifications.

This remarkable collection of essays goes some way towards reversing this wilful neglect, but in a form that amounts to some concrete steps that constitute a genuine move towards reclaiming the lives of working-class children, their families and communities.

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Contents

Notes on Contributors

Beynon Huw is Emeritus Professor in Social Science at Cardiff University having previously held posts at the Universities of Manchester, Durham, Illinois and Bristol. He has written widely on changes in working-class experience since World War II. Huw's latest book, with Ray Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine* has been described by David Edgerton as a 'brilliant analysis…and required reading for those who would speak for this working class' (Timed Literary Supplement).

Emery Jay is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at the University of Sheffield. Following doctoral research on belonging and affective memory in the former Nottinghamshire coalfield, Jay's current research focuses on senses of alienation in deindustrialising towns.

Gater Richard is a Postgraduate Researcher at the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University. His fields of interest include education, employment, social class and masculinity. His Ph.D. is a qualitative study in an ex-coal mining community in South Wales, UK, and explores the school-to-work transition of a group of working-class young men on the

margins. His research engages with the themes of masculinity and social class, whilst also considering predicted future employment changes and the possible implication of these changes in relation to the participants' educational experiences and employment aspirations.

Gibbs Ewan lectures in Economic and Social History at the University of Glasgow. He is a scholar of working-class politics and protest, deindustrialisation and energy economies. His work has focused on collective memory and heritage, including public engagement and education activities themed around commemorating the industrial past. He published his first book, *Coal Country: The Meaning and Memory of Deindustrialization in Postwar Scotland*, with the University of London Press in 2021. He is now working on a B.A.-Wolfson fellowship which assesses experience of energy transitions in the UK since the mid-twentieth century from a community and workplace perspective.

Dr. Henderson-Bone Susan is Lecturer in Childhood Studies at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS). With a background in cultural geography and primary education, her previous research has concerned applications and theorisations of pedagogy, learning and curriculum-making in different spaces of education. Her most recent projects include working alongside Dr. Ewan Gibbs to explore how a place-responsive approach can enable different understandings of intergenerational learning, industrial heritage and trade union activism. She maintains an interest in her Ph.D. research through her role in Scotland's 'Vision Schools' initiative, which supports teachers to achieve excellence in Holocaust education.

Jackson Lucy is currently a secondary school teacher. She was formerly Lecturer in Qualitative Methods at the Sheffield Methods Institute, University of Sheffield. Her research involves investigating the everyday politics associated with sex and gender particularly regarding reproductive rights and contested identities. Her work on reproductive rights has been funded by the RGS-IBG with a project looking at the historical narratives of reproductive agency in Northern Ireland. She has previously worked on large-scale projects associated with lived identity and difference, including the ERC funding project 'Living with Difference'.

Pattison James is Lecturer in Sociology in the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lincoln. His research works at the intersection of race, class and place, with an interest in urban processes including territorial stigmatisation, deindustrialisation and regeneration. Methodologically, he is interested in ethnography and visual research methods. Previously, he was an ESRC Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Sociology, at the University of Manchester and has held teaching and research posts at the University of Nottingham, where he also completed his Ph.D.

Reay Diane grew up as a free school meal pupil on a large council estate and was the first in her family to go to university. She became an inner city, primary school teacher for 20 years, trying to make education a more positive experience for working-class children than it had been for her. It was her failure to achieve this that led to a change in direction and a research career in order to understand working-class educational experiences. She is now a Visiting Professor at the LSE and Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Cambridge.

Richards Gill is Emeritus Professor of Special Education, Equity and Inclusion at Nottingham Trent University. She has previously worked in schools, special education and youth work settings. She currently works with schools to develop their research culture and supports teachers to publish their research findings in her edited series 'A View into the Classroom'. Her research interests include the aspirations and achievements of girls living in areas of disadvantage. She is author of *Working-Class Girls, Education and Post-Industrial Britain. Aspirations and Reality in an Ex-coalmining Community*, published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Simmons Robin is Professor of Education at the University of Huddersfield, UK. His research interests lie in the sociology of education, education policy and the history of education. He has led research funded by leading bodies including the Raymond Williams Foundation, Gatsby Charitable Foundation and the Leverhulme Trust. He has written extensively on social class, particularly in relation to young people's experiences of participation and non-participation in education, employment and work-based learning. He is co-editor of *Education and Working-Class*

Youth: Reshaping the Politics of Inclusion published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2018.

Simpson Kat is Senior Lecturer in Education and Community Studies at the University of Huddersfield, UK. Her research interests lie in education and social class, especially pupils' and teachers' experiences of schooling in former coalmining communities. She has written extensively on different aspects of deindustrialisation and social haunting. Methodologically, she is interested in Marxist ethnography and critical policy analysis. Her book *Social Haunting, Education and the Working Class: Reimagining Schooling in a Former Mining Community* was published in 2021.

Strangleman Tim is Professor of Sociology, in the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, University of Kent, Canterbury. He has written widely on work, identity, culture and meaning; traditional industries in decline and deindustrialisation. He is an historical sociologist who uses oral history and visual methods in his research. He has researched a wide variety of industries, including coal, rail, shipbuilding, brewing, engineering and construction. His recent books include *Voices of Guinness: An Oral History of the Park Royal Brewery* (2019, Oxford University Press) and co-editor of Routledge *International Handbook of Working-Class Studies* (2021, Routledge).

Stubbs Nicky is a Postgraduate Researcher at the University of Bath, teaches politics at the University of Sheffield and researches at Leeds University Business School. He grew up in Grimethorpe, a former colliery community at the edge of Barnsley, in the 1990s. His research focuses on the transformation of class politics and the long-term sociopolitical consequences of deindustrialisation, economic reconstruction and social reconfiguration. He has experience as a researcher for the National Union of Mineworkers, has worked in regional government and currently sits on Coalfields Regeneration Trust board of trustees.

Thomlinson Natalie is Associate Professor of Modern British Cultural History at the University of Reading. She is a historian of feminism and gender in modern Britain, and her first monograph, Race and ethnicity in the women's movement in England, 1968–93, explored debates

around race in 'second-wave' feminism. She has been co-Investigator on the AHRC-funded project '*Women and the Miners' Strike, 1984–5: Charting changing gender roles in working-class communities in post-war Britain*'.

Walker Martyn has taught in schools, colleges and in higher education. He was Head of Department for Post-Compulsory Education and Training at the University of Huddersfield and was most recently at the University of Bolton where he taught on the Doctor of Education programme and supervised postgraduate researchers. His research interests lie in the history of education, especially the mechanics institutes and working-class education in industrial settings. He is author of *The Development of the Mechanics' Institute Movement in Britain and Beyond* published by Routledge.

Abbreviations

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AHRC	Art and Humanities Research Council
A-Level	Advanced Level
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CSE	Certificate of Secondary Education
CV	Curriculum Vitae
CWLG	Caterpillar Workers' Legacy Group
EU	European Union
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HS2	High Speed 2
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDTA	International Dance Teachers Association
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
JOC	Joint Occupation Committee
JTF	Just Transition Fund
JTM	Just Transition Mechanism
LEA	Local Education Authority

MP	Member of Parliament
NCB	National Coal Board
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
O-Level	Ordinary Level
RJB Mining	Richard John Budge Mining
SNP	Scottish National Party
TA	Teaching Assistant
TOTP	Tracks of the Past
UDM	Union of Democratic Mineworkers
UK	United Kingdom
US	United State

List of Figures

List of Tables

Introduction: Education, Work and Social Change in Britain's Former Coalfield Communities

Robin Simmons and Kat Simpson

This book focuses on education, work and social change in Britain's former coalfields. It brings together established and emerging scholars from different disciplines and makes a significant contribution to the growing literature on coalmining communities, in particular that which deals with the impact of deindustrialisation on the social, economic and affective fabric of such locales. The genesis of the book, however, lies in a combination of the editors' academic interests, their experiences as educators working in coalmining communities and their life trajectories more broadly. It also builds on their recent research (see Simpson & Simmons, 2021; Simpson, 2021) which draws on Avery

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© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022
R. Simmons and K. Simpson (eds.), *Education, Work and Social Change in Britain's Former Coalfield Communities*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10792-4_1

1

Gordon's (2008) notion of haunting and other research which deals with past and present injustices in deindustrialised communities, particularly in terms of the affective domain (see, for example, Linkon, 2018; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012).

The Coalfields in Context

Before considering such matters further, it is, however, worth thinking about the role of education in society. Official discourses position education as performing numerous positive functions for the individual and society. These range from driving social mobility, promoting social inclusion and preventing violent extremism, to 'upskilling' the workforce and fuelling economic growth. Over time, many children, young people and adults have, undoubtedly, benefited socially, culturally and economically from education and training, not only in schools, colleges and universities, but also via workplace learning and the various sites of informal and community-based education which characterised many coalfield communities. Education has nevertheless always been associated with the production and reproduction of inequality in terms, for example, of gender, 'race', ethnicity and other forms of difference. Research on the relationship between education and social class draws on different traditions including Marxist and functionalist analyses, and that which uses the work of Bernstein, Bourdieu, Foucault and other thinkers. There is also an extensive literature on the classroom experiences of working-class learners which draws on different understandings of the relationship between education and social class. This goes back to the likes of Corrigan (1979), Willis (1997), and Jackson and Marsden (1966), for example.

Diane Reay (2017) has written about how the norms, values, customs and habits of those from working-class backgrounds are misrecognised and devalued in schools, universities and other educational settings. Such processes were often painfully evident to us as teachers working in the former coalfields. Before entering academia, Kat worked as a primary school teacher in a former-pit village in West Yorkshire; Robin taught in a secondary school and in further education colleges in South Yorkshire

and in County Durham. This was complex and demanding work trying to mediate contradictions between dominant discourses about the role of education and the realities of trying to engage children and young people at a time of profound social and economic change. Some of the assumptions, ideas and actions we encountered in schools and colleges were also deeply problematic. These ranged from the headteacher who casually reduced her pupils' prospects to stacking shelves in the local supermarket, to college 'outreach workers' whose practice, despite being superficially well-meaning, was undoubtedly rooted in discourses of deficit about former coalmining communities.

The roots of this book can also be traced back to our experiences more generally of growing up 'in the shadow of coal'. Both editors come from the former central coalfield[1]—an area characterised by deep-shaft mining for over 100 years which produced some of the highest-quality coal in the world. Perhaps unusually for academics, we both still live in the places where we were born and went to school. But, whilst our backgrounds and experiences are in some ways similar, there are important differences too. This, in part, relates to age. For Robin, the miners' strikes of the 1970s are a vivid childhood memory and the Great Strike of 1984–1985 was a part of early adulthood. The coal industry was, at that time, still an important part of the national and local economy, not only in relation to employment but also in terms of social life, leisure and cultural identity. Although the local pit had closed before Kat was born, her hometown, South Kirkby, still retains many of the characteristics of what Gilbert (1991) described as a 'miners' town'. It is, in other words, still a largely socially homogeneous, geographically isolated settlement, where social relations are still shaped by the legacy of coalmining. Its history and culture are, in some ways, similar to the nearby town of Featherstone where Dennis et al. (1956) conducted their study of a coalmining community in the 1950s. The intergenerational effects of the industrial past in such places are examined in several chapters in this book as various authors seek to understand how the social and economic,

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[1] The central coalfield encompassed the West Riding of Yorkshire, North Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

cultural and political complexities of deindustrialisation shape working-class ways of being, identities and landscapes long after the closure of their industries.

'Mining towns' were, in contrast, generally larger, more urbanised places. They also tended to be more diverse, socially, culturally and in terms of employment—characteristics which affected localised understandings of place and community (Gilbert, 1991, p. 265). Doncaster, where Robin is from, was a typical mining town inasmuch as coal played a significant role in the social and economic life of the town, but business, commerce and other forms of industry were also important. Nowadays, Doncaster is more well known as an archetypal 'Brexit town', one of those places whose residents are derided as stupid, uncouth and prejudiced for voting Leave in the 2016 European Union (EU) Referendum, at least in certain circles (see Goodhart, 2017). It is, like similar places, also part of the Labour Party's crumbling Red Wall with one of Doncaster's three traditionally Labour-voting constituencies returning a Conservative MP at the 2019 General Election. Either way, coming from but especially continuing to live in somewhere like Doncaster is normally met with quiet incredulity, especially among academic colleagues.

It is unsurprising that the former coalfields have undergone far-reaching change. In the early-twentieth century, there were some 1,300 collieries in Britain and over one million men worked in coalmining, whereas today there are none. The demise of coal is often associated with the aftermath of the Great Strike of 1984–1985, but the industry was in long-term decline from the late-1950s onwards. Exhausted pits, especially in Scotland, Wales, Durham and Northumberland; changes in mining technology; and the rise of gas and oil as alternative forms of energy meant falling production, serial pit closures and redundancies became commonplace outside the more profitable coalfield of Yorkshire and the midlands (Beynon & Hudson, 2021). There were, however, still almost 250,000 men employed in the coal industry in the mid-1970s and 174 working collieries at the beginning of the Great Strike. Thirty years later, the British coal industry had effectively ceased to exist with the last working colliery, Kellingley, closing in 2015. Whilst much time, energy and resources have been spent trying to 'regenerate' the former coalfields socially, economically and physically, generally

they still compare unfavourably with national averages in relation to earnings; health; welfare dependency; and educational attainment, especially in terms of participation in higher education. Unemployment in the former coalfields is also above the national average, although true rates are masked by out-of-work incapacity benefits. Meanwhile, those jobs which exist are disproportionately low skilled, with relatively little 'professional' or high-skill employment (Beatty et al., 2019). The demise of the coal industry has, however, also hurt individuals and communities, their spirit, well-being and morale. Royce Turner's (2000) research vividly illustrates some of the toxic effects of pit closure on everyday life in Featherstone—the setting for Dennis et al.'s (1956) *Coal Is Our Life.* Waddington et al. (2001) describe some of the deleterious effects of redundancy on miners and their families in and around Doncaster during the 1990s, including difficulties securing alternative employment; pressure on household income; drink and substance abuse; and deteriorating personal relationships—although such factors were either ameliorated or exacerbated by the possession (or otherwise) of alternative vocational skills; family support systems; and individual attitudes and dispositions to education, work and life more broadly.

Coalminers have often been presented as the ultimate proletarians and communitarians—the argument being that the dirty, dangerous nature of mining and the adversity associated with colliery disasters and industrial disputes bound families, neighbourhoods and communities together (Gilbert, 1994). The fact that recreation and leisure were also often closely bound up with the industry is frequently linked with notions of camaraderie and tight-knit community—miners' galas, brass bands, trips to the coast and nights out at the local miners' institute exemplifying all this. The reality is, however, more complicated. Diane Reay's chapter in this book challenges some of the stereotypical assumptions made about coalmining communities and notions of pride, solidarity and unity often said to characterise them. Reay deals with the lived experience of growing up as a miner's daughter in the 1950s and the 1960s, and highlights some of the divisions and conflicts which characterised mining communities at that time. It also documents her difficult relationship with school and its ongoing impact on different facets of life. It is, more generally, important to be aware of what Cowie and Heathcott (2003) describe as 'smokestack

nostalgia'. Migrants from the 'peripheral' coalfields in Scotland, Wales and the North East of England were not always well-received by 'host communities' in Yorkshire and the midlands. Distrust of outsiders was, alongside sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination, often part and parcel of the social milieu in mining communities (Simmons et al., 2014).

Structure and Organisation of the Book

Chapter Two, by Tim Strangleman, examines what the former coalfields and their communities can tell us about loss—in terms of industry, identity, work ethic and a sense of industrial rootedness. It explores how that story of loss has, to some degree, ironed out complexity and contradiction. Tim's chapter attempts to understand industrial loss through various accounts of an industry which, he argues, has not only been the subject of much academic interest, but also occupies a special place in popular imagination. It explores some of these ideas through two films set in coalfield communities: *Kes* and *Billy Elliot*. He goes on to look at the coalfields in relation to wider discourses of deindustrialisation, mobilising Sherry Linkon's (2018) notion of the 'half-life' of deindustrialisation. The coalfields, Tim argues, can be seen as a kind of post-industrial laboratory through which we tell part of Britain's industrial and post-industrial story.

In Chapter Three, Nicky Stubbs reflects on growing up in Grimethorpe in the aftermath of the colliery closures of the 1990s. Nicky draws on his experiences of working with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, on archival work conducted for the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign, and on ethnographic data from his PhD research. He pieces together these insights to clarify how we might think about the wider impact of pit closures on the social systems that were built on and organised in coalmining communities. Nicky mobilises the Gramscian (1971) notion of interregnum in arguing that pit closure effectively resulted in a social and economic interregnum. The interregnum, it is explained, helps us understand the vast socio-political changes that have occurred, and

which continue to drive the changing political landscape, in Britain, the US and across Europe. It is through this lens that Nicky argues we can understand the implications for 'collectively incapacitated individualised individuals, struggling to protect themselves from looming accidents in their social and economic lives' (Streeck, 2016, p. 69).

In Chapter Four, Diane Reay reflects on her youth and life experiences in a coalmining community in South Derbyshire. She contests some of the over-simplified claims about working-class history and unravels the lived complexities experienced by coalmining families during the twentieth century. It is a highly personal account recognising the divisive inheritance that comes with being a coalminer's daughter—in terms, for example, of the tension between socialist traditions and more deferential conformist ones; between a commitment to equality and deeply entrenched racism and sexism; and between trade unionism and collusion with management, including within the NUM itself. Diane's critically reflective account provides a powerful counter-narrative to some of the damagingly nostalgic views of coalminers and coalmining communities we are often presented with in popular culture and elsewhere.

Chapter Five, by Martyn Walker, focuses on the history of education and training for coalminers and presents data from archival research and interviews from an oral history project with former miners from various coalfields across the north of England. The chapter initially traces the development of vocational education for mineworkers back to the rapid expansion of the coal industry demands of industrialisation and the technological advances which took place from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. It presents data which show the numerous ways in which miners benefitted from different forms of education and training, either during their time as mineworkers or after leaving the coal industry. Martyn's data challenges popular assertions about working-class orientations to learning, especially in terms of participation in post-compulsory education and training. Whilst participation in higher education, especially among young men, is substantially lower in the former coalfields than national averages, data Martyn presents shows how miners—from face workers to colliery managers—engaged in post-compulsory education and training, in colleges, at universities and via work-based learning.

The next chapter, by Richard Gater, is set in the South Wales Valleys. It explores the orientations of young working-class men to different forms of work. Richard's data suggest that participants' relationships with employment are influenced by long-standing community traditions and a working-class masculinity associated with heavy industrial work, including stoicism, risk-taking and toughness. Those who took part in the research were dismissive of much service sector work, especially that which entails emotional labour, preferring manual employment, especially certain outdoor work perceived to provide health-related benefits and enhance personal well-being. Most participants, however, held negative views about coalmining, especially the dirty, dangerous nature of underground work. So, whilst Richard's research demonstrates a degree of continuity with traditional working-class orientations to masculinity and employment, it also suggests some shift in the way participants regard the formerly hyper-masculine occupation of coalmining.

Chapter Seven, by Kat Simpson, complicates Avery Gordon's notion of a haunting to examine the multiple ways in which spectral dimensions of the industrial past shape the rhythms, structures and ways of being at a primary school in Lillydown, a former miners' town in South Yorkshire. Drawing on data from a critical Marxist ethnography, Kat acknowledges the far-reaching damage caused by the closure of the mining industry and the potential of education to reproduce inequality. But she also argues that it is necessary to come to know how the 'goodness' of the past can work to create a sense of belonging which promotes a level of trust and respect between pupils and teachers. The central thesis of the chapter is that only by coming to know and harness the fullness of ghosts can processes and experiences of schooling in the former coalfields be refashioned in more encouraging ways—although it is also recognised that harnessing ghosts in the context of neoliberal capitalist schooling is fraught with tension and complexity.

Whilst Kat's chapter deals largely with the hidden curriculum, Chapter Eight, by Ewan Gibbs and Susan Henderson-Bone, focuses on how the formal curriculum can be used to address the legacy of deindustrialisation and encourage pupils to engage with questions of economic and social justice. Their chapter draws on data from Tracks of the Past, a Carnegie Trust funded project which aimed to devise a series of secondary school

lessons examining a workers' occupation of the local Caterpillar tractor factory in Tannochside, a former coalmining community in Lanarkshire, Scotland. Whilst the occupation, which took place in 1987, was basically unknown to pupils who had grown up knowing Lanarkshire only as a service sector economy, lessons which focused on the workers' occupation were used to engage young people with questions of democracy, globalisation and social justice in contemporary society. The chapter demonstrates the value of teaching industrial history after deindustrialisation and helps us consider ways in which cultural distance from industry can be overcome through creating a shared investment in place.

Chapter Nine, by Natalie Tomlinson, draws on data from AHRC-funded research on the experiences of women during the Great Strike of 1984–1985. Natalie focuses on participants' historical experiences of secondary school. It is difficult, she argues, to establish a coherent narrative about their experiences, which is understandable as almost 100 women who attended grammar, secondary modern and comprehensive schools in different parts of Britain between the 1940s and the late-1980s took part in the research. Some participants loved school; some hated it; others were indifferent. Sometimes a range of attitudes were expressed by the same individual. Often fond memories co-existed alongside resentment at teachers' low of expectations for working-class girls. What is evident, however, is that school helped shape participants' sense of self. Natalie explores how school influenced their subjectivities and the frameworks they use to interpret their educational experiences.

Gill Richards also deals with girls' experiences of schooling in Chapter Ten. Gill's chapter, however, focuses on one particular setting—an exmining community in an area of severe disadvantage in England's East Midlands. Set against official and popular discourses about aspiration and social mobility, Gill draws on data from interviews with 89 girls at three primary schools and two secondary schools, and follow-up research with 46 of the original participants in early adulthood. The first round of interviews discussed the girls' aspirations, hopes and fears about education, work and adult life. In the second set of interviews, beginning six years later, participants reflect on how their life has changed over time. Findings suggest that keeping aspirations on track takes more than trying to inspire young people. Relationships, Gill argues, are key to the girls'

future prospects. Where relationships provide positive support, participants generally had the confidence and resilience to deal with 'scary' new situations. Without this, the girls often made choices that limited them socially and educationally irrespective of initial aspirations. Building relationships with families can, Gill suggests, help in understanding some of the complex contextual challenges young people face. This would, she argues, avoid misplaced generalisations about disadvantage and initiatives which often fail to help those for whom they are intended.

In the final chapter, Jay Emery and colleagues, all of whom grew up in coalfields communities, engage in processes of collective remembering. The authors discuss notions of belonging in relation to education in the former coalfields in a period of flux whereby localised, intergenerational formations of class and gender were often at odds with transforming coalfield landscapes. Despite some significant differences in their experiences of schooling, remembering together instilled a sense of solidarity within the group. This related, on the one hand, to notions of pride about where they come from but also to shared post-school experiences of higher education and working in academia thereafter. These experiences, though outside the coalfields, were nevertheless shaped by the authors' experiences within them and can be seen as common threads entwining their life courses. It is evident that all the authors felt alienated, to some extent, by the middle-class culture of university life, either as students or more latterly as employees. This is telling—whilst participation in higher education has risen substantially over time, growth has been uneven both in terms of social demographics and across different locations. Much of the increase has entailed the greater inclusion of middle class and more privileged groups. Working-class participation not only remains substantially lower, but the institutions they attend and the subjects they study differ substantially from their more affluent peers (Reay, 2017). Whilst there is variation between places, young people from the former coalfields are significantly less likely to go to university than those from elsewhere (Beatty et al., 2019).

Understanding processes and experiences of education, work and social change in the former coalfields are important not only because we then begin to understand the intergenerational rhythms, ruptures and continuities of the past but also begin to disentangle, question and

conjure about the futurity of the former coalfields. As Linkon (2018) reminds us, even though the conscious memory of industrialisation may fade, the past, present and future are interconnected and are perhaps even mutually dependent (p. 4).

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Contextualising the Coalfields: Mapping the Socio-Economic and Cultural Loss of the Coal Industry

Tim Strangleman

Introduction

I have been teaching the sociology of work for over two decades and each year I get students to develop their own essay questions for the course and then engage in a review of the topic. Some years ago, a young woman in the class said she was interested in doing 'something on coalfield communities'. I asked where she wanted to look at and she replied, 'somewhere up north where the coal mines used to be'. For those outside the UK, I teach at the University of Kent, in South-East England. The student, born and bred in Kent, was completely taken aback when I informed her that Kent had a small but vibrant coalfield for much of the twentieth century, and that she actually lived near the site of one of the former collieries. I knew at the time this encounter would be the basis of a good anecdote, but the more I have considered it over the years, I have come

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13

to see it as telling, for this lack of knowledge about place and industry reveals the way an important industry can be eradicated so quickly from popular imagination (Byrne & Doyle, 2004).[1] It also shows the enduring popularity of the coalfields and their communities to study and understand what has happened to the UK over the last two and a half centuries, and especially over the last seven decades.

Coal underpinned and drove the industrial revolution from the mid-eighteenth century. It facilitated the growth of new industries by supplying cheap regular power. Coal was at the heart of the railway revolution beginning in the 1820s. Demand for coal threw up new settlements and gave importance to areas of the country which sat on coalfields. By World War I, there were over a million men and boys employed in the industry, a huge proportion of the industrial workforce (Ashworth, 1960; Mathias, 1969). In the interwar period, with its economic depression, coal and coal miners were central to political, social and economic questions of the day. The coalfields are often a byword for industrial distress (Powell, 1993). In the 1947, the industry was nationalised by Clement Attlee's reforming administration (Fishman, 1993). In the wake of nationalisation came investment and a rationalisation programme. Soon too, successive governments attempted to wean the UK off its overreliance on coal, seeking to diversify the energy mix through cheap oil and nuclear power (Hall, 1981; Powell, 1993). In the 1970s, industrial relations in the coal industry once again took centre stage with a series of strikes and disputes that ultimately brought down the Heath government in 1974 (Richards, 1996). By the 1980s, coal was once again thrust into public debate, first by the miners' strike of 1984–1985 and then the long aftermath of pit closure and privatisation. This period is also marked by a new focus on the problems of the former coalfields—the coalfields serving as exemplars of post-industrial ruination and its associated problems (Beynon & Hudson, 2021).

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[1] Bryne and Doyle highlight the irony of this historical eradication when they note the lack of evidence of the mining industry and South Tyneside: "…there is actually more visible evidence of the Roman occupation, which ended in the fourth century AD and has no historical connection to any contemporary experience, than of an industry which at its peak in the 1920s directly employed more than 12,000 men as miners" (p. 166).

Over my adult life, I've had an ongoing relationship with coal in various ways. I was a young railway worker on the London Underground during the 1984–1985 strike dropping change into collection buckets on the streets of the capital. I wore solidarity badges (NUM/NUR) at work and helped raise funds for the dispute through my union branch. I attended an access course at Ruskin College Oxford in the late-1980s where some of my peers were former miners and other redundant industrial workers escaping the ravages of deindustrialisation. I did my undergraduate degree at Durham University, seeking out early in my first week the sanctuary of the Durham Miners Hall at Red Hills, a grand Edwardian pile on the fringe of the city, built with a non-conformist style meeting hall in a large horse-shoe pattern. As a post-doctoral researcher, I gained a post in 1997 looking at economic and social change in four coalfield regions of England and Wales: Easington in County Durham; Mansfield in the East Midlands; St Helens in the North West; and Cynon Valley in South Wales (Strangleman, 2001; Strangleman et al., 1999). After that two-year project, I thought I had left coal behind as I studied a variety of other sectors and workers experiencing industrial decline, loss and closure. But somehow, coal kept dragging me back through teaching undergraduates from coalfield regions and especially graduate students studying the coalfields as part of their PhDs. Gradually, I've come to realise just how important coal was, is and will be in future in understanding who we are—economically, socially, culturally and politically as a post-industrial nation.

This chapter explores what the coalfields and their communities can tell us about loss—loss of industry, identity, work ethic and a sense of industrial rootedness. I want to explore how that story of loss has, to some extent, ironed out complexity and contradiction. Fundamentally, this is an attempt to understand industrial loss through various accounts of an industry that has been central to academics, as well as occupying a special central place in popular imagination. The next section explores some of these themes through two films made thirty years apart: *Kes* and *Billy Elliot*. I then look at the question of the coalfields in relation to wider narratives of deindustrialisation, especially using the notion of the 'half-life of deindustrialisation' (Linkon, 2018). Finally, I suggest that the

coalfields act as a kind of post-industrial laboratory against which we tell at least part of our Island's industrial and post-industrial story.

The Tale of Two Billys

Two characters both named Billy were the main focus of a pair of films set in the English coalfields some three decades apart. *Kes* was adapted from Barry Hines' (1968) book *A Kestrel for a Knave*. Released in 1969, *and set* in and around the South Yorkshire coalfields, *Kes* centres around fifteen-year-old Billy Casper, the younger son of a single mother (Loach, 1969).[2] Billy is on the cusp of leaving school and has an older step-brother—Jud—with whom he shares a bedroom. His home is devoid of love and comfort. Ignored by his mother, and bullied by Jud, Billy seeks solace in training a kestrel he acquires and names Kes. Thirty years later, another Billy starred in the 2000 film *Billy Elliot*, set in the fictional village of Everington—in reality Easington Colliery on the coast of County Durham (Daldry, 2000). He too comes from a single-parent household, this time headed by his grieving father, and, like Billy Casper, Billy Elliot also has an older brother who works down the pit. While *Kes* was set contemporaneously, the later film was based on the events of the 1984–1985 miners' strike a decade and a half before.

Both films tell us much about post-war England, about growing up in an industrial landscape in transition. They speak to issues of place, home, identity, work, expectation, aspiration and above all class. Both films reveal a multitude of aspects of the coalfields, past, present and future, and uncover multiple tensions at the heart of the working-class experience. Billy's Casper and Elliot both want to escape their immediate and projected futures down the pit. For Billy Casper, temporary escape comes from his befriending of Kes and his discovery of nature in and around his local village. Nature affords him the opportunity to escape from his life of being bullied and humiliated by most adults in

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[2] The 2000 Penguin Classic reprinting of the book includes an afterword by Hines reflecting on the character of Billy Casper and his role in the book. Hines returned to the topic of mining and mining communities in his later book—*The Price of Coal*.

his life. But equally the plot of *Kes* allows Billy to dream of escaping the destiny of working in the coal industry. Throughout the film, Billy Casper is reminded that he has little choice but to follow his stepbrother down the pit, a refrain taken up by his mother, stepbrother and the well-meaning Youth Employment Officer who assures him that coal is the future: '…there are good opportunities in mining…Conditions have improved tremendously' (Loach, 1969). Billy Casper aspires to anything *but* the pits but has few clues as to what the alternatives could be.

We never learn if Billy Casper becomes a miner. If he did, he would have entered an industry on the brink of upheaval. After a period during the 1950s and 1960s, where cheap oil was used to diversify the UK's energy mix, coal was about to make a comeback. This shift strengthened the miners' bargaining position and led to a series of industrial disputes that eventually brought down the Heath Conservative government of the early-1970s. These disputes were themselves born of the frustrations felt in the industry at terms and conditions and, above all, pay (see, for example, Richards, 1996; Taylor, 2003). *Kes* captures the era on a cusp well. There is full employment in the village, coal is in its pomp and workers were enjoying the backend of the long boom, the near thirty years of rising living standards that lifted all working-class lives. Pay careful attention to the scenes in *Kes* and the viewer sees a mixed picture of contemporary affluence (see, Lawrence, 2019). To be sure, the pit has been modernised in the wake of nationalisation; but look carefully and you see more than traces of poverty and depravation. Post-war England still bears the hallmark of its nineteenth-century industrialisation alongside signs of loss and decline of other industries that sprang up around the coalfields (Coates & Silburn, 1970). Equally, the coal industry itself had been contracting from the start of nationalisation as uneconomic, smaller or exhausted pits closed, miners and their families relocated, and, in some cases, whole villages bulldozed and abandoned (Gibbs, 2021; Pattinson, 2004; Taylor, 2003). Kes itself is set in an area and time where wages were depressed by wage restraint policies and rationalisation.

Billy Casper's school is a recently opened secondary modern designed by a more generous post-war welfare state. But for all its plate-glass modernity, it forms part of a deeply divisive educational system which separates the academically gifted children who pass the eleven plus test

and go to grammar school, and the rest who enter secondary moderns or technical schools where kids were funnelled into routine clerical, retail jobs, manual labour, factory work or, of course, coalmines. Coalfield communities are at once similar and distinct from other working-class communities. In many ways, Billy Casper could be one of the characters in Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour*. Though Billy Casper cannot be simply categorised as either one of Willis' 'Lads', nor 'ear'ols', Billy is a non-conforming non-conformist. The irony that Willis pointed out was that his 'Lads' ended up reproducing the industrial workforce because their rebellion against school cut off other avenues and opportunities. Both *Kes* and the novel *Kestrel for a Knave* on which it is based beautifully illustrate those same processes at work in Yorkshire. The 'Lads' found employment in the still vibrant light industry of the Black Country. Billy Casper and his secondary modern peers had a narrower set of options. One of the features of the coal industry was the way mines were often located in isolated settings. Poor transport and a lack of other employment, often deliberately excluded from coal areas, meant coal had to be *their* life.[3] *Kes* captured the parochial nature of coal communities well. Billy Casper wants to escape but has few clues as to how to make that move. This sense of entrapment is geographic, age related, economic but especially classed. To Billy Casper, the world outside his community is a strange and hostile place, one where he doesn't understand the rules, where his cultural capital, such as it is, has little or no value.

For all the modernising zeal of Coal Board publicity, coalfield communities occupied a different space in the academic imagination. Since the beginnings of post-war British sociology, the coal industry held an important attraction. In 1956, Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter (1956) published their classic study *Coal is our Life*, based on research in 'Ashton' a mining village of some 14,000 people. The real-life Ashton was Featherstone a few miles from Athersley

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[3] *Learning to Labour* is something of a touchstone in terms of sociological/ cultural accounts of the working class and the transition of the economy from 'Fordism' to post-Fordism. See Dolby, N., Dimitriadis, G., & Willis, P. (Eds.). (2004). *Learning to labor in new times*. Routledge. For studies framed in relation to Willis' book, see McDowell, L. (2003). *Redundant masculinities: Employment change and white working-class youth*. Blackwell; Ward, M. (2015). *From labouring to learning: Working-class masculinities, education and de-industrialization*. Palgrave Macmillan.

and Hoyland where *Kes* was filmed. *Coal is our Life* rendered a sympathetic account of coal communities looking in turn at the community, the work of the miner, trade unionism, leisure and the family. It was part of a wave of community studies spurred on by an ethnographic impulse to study the working class in their own environment as earlier anthropologists had understood remote tribes in faraway lands (see Roberts, 1999; Savage, 2010). Arguably, Dennis and colleagues gave a more balanced account than earlier anthropologists or the first wave of community studies after World War II. *Coal is our Life* has enjoyed an important half-life.

It was an early British study of an occupational community. Its relative homogeneity served well in an era where sociologists wanted to develop ideal typologies to interrogate and understand the world around them.[4] The people of Ashton then exemplified what were later labelled as 'traditional workers'. Sociologist David Lockwood (1975) noted in his seminal essay, *Sources in Variation in Working-class Images of Society*, that traditional workers were:

> …to be found in industries and communities which, to an ever-increasing extent, are backwaters of national industrial and urban development. The sorts of industries which employ deferential and proletarian workers are declining relatively to more modern industries. (p. 20)

Coal is our Life acted as an example of a traditional community in the process of eclipse, a particular type of working-class culture now overtaken by the newly emerging industries taking root outside the established industrial areas of the UK.[5]

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[4] See the prominent place *Coal is Our Life* is given in Frankenberg, R. (1965). *Communities in Britain: Social life in town and country*. Pelican. This sets *Coal is Our Life* as one of the foundational studies of British sociology. *Coal is our Life* was republished in 1969 in the wake of Frankenberg's volume. Later Graham Crow devotes a chapter to the centrality of mining community literature, especially the impact of *Coal is our Life*, in Crow, G. (2002). *Social solidarities: Theories, identities and social change*. Open University Press.

[5] There was a political fear on the left that post-war prosperity was weakening ties between labour and the manual working class. The miners are important here and so the perceived decline or marginalisation of the industry takes on a new significance. See Abrams, M., and Rose, R. (1960). *Must Labour Lose?* Penguin. See also the *Affluent Worker* Studies which sought to examine the notion of embourgeoisement. Although the groups of workers studied did not

If Billy Casper had stayed in the industry by the eve of the 1984–1985 miners' strike, he would have been in his early thirties, probably with a young family and a mortgage. It was this generation of miners that had most to lose by the planned closures which were the catalyst for the dispute. This cohort were too young to retire but had few alternative opportunities given their education and the state of the contemporary labour market. Perhaps now is a good point to leave Billy Casper and pick up on the life of our other Billy.

Billy Elliot is the eponymous hero of the 2000 film set in the midst of the 1984–1985 miners' strike; shot on location in Easington Colliery on the North-East Durham coast. The essential plot is that Billy Elliot discovers a latent passion for dance after being sent to boxing lessons. Accidentally stumbling in on a ballet lesson held in the same venue, he eventually joins in as the only boy in the group. Initially resistant, his family eventually come to accept and facilitate Billy's aspiration to train at the Royal Ballet School in London. The film plays out over the period of the strike with the pit row houses and the police lines acting as a backdrop to Billy's dancing. *Billy Elliot* is a lighter film than *Kes*, somewhat ironically given the comparison between the two periods in which they are set.[6] While the strike exposes suffering and to some degree violence, most of the characters are sympathetic in themselves, and towards Billy. The real parallels with *Kes* are in the portrayal of a community where aspiration is discouraged or crushed. In the latter film, aspiration is highly gendered and part of the reluctance to speak of, or later countenance, a career in ballet that is seen as the threat to the established hegemonic masculinity of the area. But this question of aspiration—crushed or realised—is revealing in a number of ways. While gender norms in coalfield areas is the obvious transgression taking place in *Billy Elliot,* we can also see the way this is a film profoundly about class rooted in a particular place and industrial culture. Resistance here

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include miners, they were part of the traditional foil against which the emerging affluent workers were contrasted. See Goldthorpe, J., Lockwood, D., Bechhofer, F., & Platt, J. (1969). *The affluent worker in the class structure*. Cambridge University Press.

[6] Comparing unemployment statistics between 1970 and 1984, we can see that seasonally adjusted unemployment was around 3% in 1970 but had peaked at 11.9% by 1984. By the time, the later film was made the rate had fallen back to nearer 5%. Office for National Statistics Unemployment rate (aged 16 and over, seasonally adjusted) 1971–2021.

is partially played out on the grounds of authentic work based on mining and a classed rejection of work/leisure/pleasure based on mining. Thus, work identity intertwines and overlays a masculine identity and culture present in a coalfield area (Nayak, 2003; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012; Ward, 2015). Importantly, place is gendered here too. The working-class masculinity of the coalfield is silently juxtaposed to the effeminacy of London and South-East England and its culture (Russell, 2004). In order to fulfil his dream, Billy has to escape Everington. He is less obviously alienated from his home village and has to confront both class and place estrangement in his new home in the south.

Although three decades apart, the films reflect similar themes around work expectations, culture and class. Both speak to the restricted and restricting culture of mining communities and the difficulties involved in developing and realising aspirations—in education, employment and more broadly. But what I have long found interesting about *Billy Elliot* is that there is an unremarked central contradiction at the heart of the story. It is perhaps ironic that the same venue where Billy initially tries his hand at ballet is a miners' welfare hall. These places were a central feature of many coalfield communities, funded sometimes by employers but always by levies raised on miners themselves. One reading, therefore, of Billy Elliot's journey is that far from blocking aspiration, working-class mining culture and the physical and social structure of an industrial district allow Billy to follow his dream. In the wake of deindustrialisation, many welfare halls closed down, and so the likelihood of a place like Easington producing another *Billy Elliot* is reduced (Emery, 2020). It is to that aspect of the coalfields that we now turn, examining the relationship of coal to broader understandings of deindustrialisation.

The Half-Life of Coal and the Half-Life of Deindustrialisation

The modern study of deindustrialisation really began with the publication of Bluestone and Harrison's (1982) *The Deindustrialisation of America*, which defined deindustrialisation as the systematic reduction in industrial capacity in formally industrially developed areas. Bluestone

and Harrison's volume placed social and community factors as central alongside economic and political considerations of industrial change. Early writing on deindustrialisation focused primarily on plant closures and the immediate responses of workers, politicians and unions (Hoerr, 1988; Lynd, 1982; Massey & Meegan, 1982; Staudohar & Brown, 1987; Westergaard et al., 1989). Interest lay in the number of job losses, shifts in the rates of unemployment, changes in employment within different sectors of the economy, and the spatial distribution of industry and its loss—what Cowie and Heathcott (2003) describe as the 'body count' approach. As an alternative, Cowie and Heathcott argued for a broader more historical account of industrial decline, seeking to understand individual plant or site loss in a wider, richer, more nuanced context.

Gradually, however, those working in the field of deindustrialisation have tried to incorporate a broader set of narratives into their accounts, examining issues of culture, community and identity (Strangleman & Rhodes, 2014). The catalyst for recasting the field was the insight provided by Linkon's (2018) notion of 'the half-life of deindustrialisation'. Like all the best ideas, Linkon's is beautifully simple. Essentially, it is the notion that, like radioactivity, industrial loss has a half-life:

> For these communities, deindustrialization is not an event of the past. It remains an active and significant part of the present. Like toxic waste, the persistent and dangerous residue from the production of nuclear power and weapons, deindustrialization has a half-life. Its influence may be waning, slowly, over time, but it remains potent, and it remains potent, and it cannot simply be forgotten or ignored. (p. 2)

One of the virtues of the notion of half-life is that it holds in tension the past, present and future. It allows us to appreciate the roots of issues that go back decades or centuries. It speaks equally to the present, to the here and now and how the past shapes the present. Equally, it allows us to make informed guesses as to what the future holds. The half-life confronts us with uncertainty and liminality. By implication, the past is over, but the future is unclear and uncertain.

In my own work on deindustrialisation, I have theorised with the idea of the half-life (Strangleman, 2017a). I chose to look back to the writing

of E. P. Thompson (1963/1968) who, in his preface to his classic *The Making of the English Working Class*, argued that historians needed to appreciate that there was a pre-industrial culture in common with which the nascent working class took with them in the early stages of the industrial revolution (see also, Thompson, 1991, 1993). This was a developed moral order—a set of customs, norms and values which help shape an understanding of changes occurring around people and communities. I tried to capture this in Fig. 1.

Building on Thompson's ideas, I drew on the conceptual work of economist Karl Polanyi (1944) and cultural Marxist Raymond Williams (1977). Polanyi popularised notions of disembedding and re-embedding, which he used to describe the process whereby economic change pulls up established social, economic, political and cultural practice and then re-embeds them in a different socio-economic pattern. Thus, for Polanyi, the industrial revolution was a gigantic process of disembedding and re-embedding, from a traditional rural economy to a new industrial economy with profoundly different relationships. Raymond Williams is important as he also speaks to this process through his idea of structure of feeling, again, like Thompson, this hints at shared values and ways of seeing culture and society (Williams, 1973, 1977). Structures of feelings are not fixed but constantly in the process of being made, remade
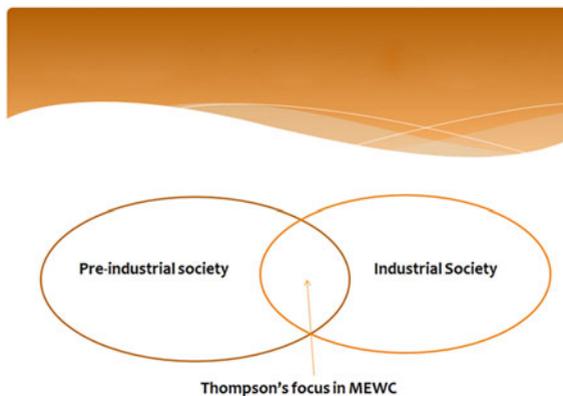
Fig. 1 Thompson on industrial change

and eroded. Williams imagined three forms of structure of feeling—emergent, dominant and residual. For the purposes of this chapter, perhaps this last form is the most vital. A residual structure of feeling speaks to a process of loss, marginalisation and eventually erasure. Taken together, Linkon's half-life, Polanyi's notion of dis- and re-embedding, and Williams' residual structure of feeling allow us purchase on the liminal space that opens up after industrial closure. Developing Fig. 1, I have tried to capture these various shifts in Fig. 2.

To return then to the coal industry, while keeping those theoretical conceptualisations at hand, we can see that the coal industry and coal communities stand out as the sector that has attracted sustained attention—as an entire industry, specific coalfields and even particular villages (see Strangleman, 2017b). This perhaps allows us to colour in this diagram, to populate it with previous studies and understand the sense making of change in context. For example, a number of studies have examined the early coalmining industry and how it created, and was created by, the industrial revolution (Samuel, 1977). We can cite other studies examining the industry in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and expansion under private ownership (Beynon & Austrin,
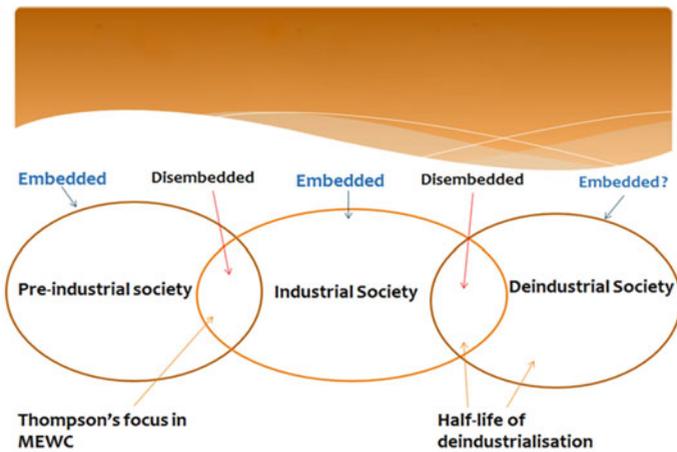
Fig. 2 Theoretical understandings of industrial change

1994; Harrison, 1978). In the 1950s, *Coal is our Life* was one of the ways of understanding working-class community as noted above (see also Williamson, 1982). But coal was also an important way of conceptualising work and organisational change as well as trade unionism and industrial relations (see Allen, 1981; Brown, 1992; Hall, 1981; Scott et al., 1963; Trist & Bamford, 1951). This interest is sustained through debates about the decline in 'traditional workers' and 'traditional communities' during the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s, coalmining again draws attention primarily through the lens of politics and the 1984–1985 miners' strike. It was in the wake of that dispute that closure, loss and deindustrialisation begin to become the focus of attention. It is because of that sedimented academic and popular knowledge that the notion of half-life is important. It is the ability for scholars to understand the trajectory of place over decades and generations that gives special appeal and salience to coalfield studies.

If coal has enjoyed more than its fair share of attention, certain places attracted multiple studies across years. Sociologically, two places stand out in this regard, Featherstone in West Yorkshire and Easington in the North East. Featherstone was the original site for Dennis and his colleagues' study *Coal is our Life* discussed above, and has been revisited in books such as *Coal, Capital and Culture* by Warwick and Littlejohn (1992), and Royce Turner's (2000) *Coal was our Life*.[7] Warwick and Littlejohn's book examined the strike period and its immediate aftermath but had prescient things to say in the final chapter about the likely fate of the coalfields after closure. In particular, they trace the economic and cultural legacies of the coal industry and show how these shaped the experience of loss and were likely to continue to unravel later on. Warwick and Littlejohn emphasised the toxic mix of social problems facing former mining communities, including large numbers of semi- and unskilled men being dumped on the labour market in a short period, low educational attainment, poor transport and communication as well as embedded health issues. All these factors were compounded by

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[7] In terms of Easington and the Durham coalfield, see Beynon and Austrin (1994), Strangleman et al. (1999), and Bulmer (1978).

the coalfield areas being situated in economically depressed regions, and where resources for economic transformation were likely to be stretched:

> The mining communities which we have discussed are being restructured by such forces, largely out of the control of the people who live there. The certainty of employment in a local industry, always subject to the constraints of the market for coal, the geological conditions and the organisation of production, has now virtually disappeared. What may have been a dream, or a nightmare, for boys in these localities [coal employment] is now no more than a fading shadow. (p. 206)

Coal, Capital and Culture drew out the historical specificity of coalfield areas like West Yorkshire in understanding both the problems being faced concurrently around closure as well as projecting the likely trajectory of the long-term effects of decline. Using Bourdieu's (1979) notion of different types of capital, Warwick and Littlejohn (1992) struck a depressing note as to the fate of the communities they study:

> The local cultural capital which has been created in the four communities is likely to be eroded within a generation as the reality of coal mining as employment as that basis for social and political organisation disappears. The disadvantage which this will reinforce ought to be the subject of much more scrutiny than it is receiving. (p. 206)

For these writers, working in a sociological tradition, an important link is made between the long-standing industrial heritage of an area and the way this shapes both the present and future possibilities. The focus on cultural and social capital is noteworthy as it gives insights as to how sociologists conceptualise the ability of communities, families and individuals to exercise agency. While some of the forms of capital developed in working-class coal regions was transferable, Warwick and Littlejohn stressed that much of that capacity was as redundant in the wake of closure as the actual plant and machinery of the mines being lost.

Royce Turner's (1992) *Coal was our Life* was an even more deliberate attempt to revisit the 'Ashton' of *Coal is our Life*. Turner's book was a brutal account of Featherstone in the wake of closure. He relentlessly related the multiple problems facing inhabitants of the town while

stressing how all but the most affluent of residents were trapped by poverty and lack of economic opportunity. Turner's final chapter was unrelenting bleak, relating a series of dark vignettes of life for young and old at the margins. Towards the end of chapter, his anger breaks through:

> You walk around, and you want to help them. You want an economic, and a social, and a cultural, revolution. You want to remember them, as they were, full of pride and hope for the future. You want them strong, and confident, knowing that their day is still to come, but it will come, as they used to believe. But you know it isn't. And you know that you can't really do anything about it. (pp. 270–271)

Turner too drew on notions of social and cultural capital. He made the link between Warwick and Littlejohn's use of the concept in their book and with the way the authors of *Coal is our Life* drew on similar ideas, although not of course using that same terminology. At the end, the epilogue for *Coal was our Life* Turner notes the way social capital was effectively destroyed by the loss of the coal industry. While he noted the efforts to retrain workers in coalfield communities, he says: 'But rebuilding social capital, rebuilding the spirit, may take a lot longer. And it may well be too late' (p. 280).

This all reflects the Bordieuan turn in sociological discussions of class around the turn of the millennium. Here again, the notion of the half-life is useful in getting at the complexity of what is going on in the former coalfields generationally. Even post-coal the social structures of the industry are important. When I was researching coalfield community regeneration in the late-1990s, it was apparent the multiple ways in which there was a residual legacy of knowledge within the areas studied—the North West, North East, East Midlands and South Wales. This knowledge manifested itself in numerous ways—most notably in terms of knowledge about the benefits system and the ability to claim invalidity support. However, one of the most poignant for me was witnessing the continued duty of care felt by former miners towards each other (Strangleman, 2001).

One example from my research in the former North-East coalfield sticks with me. Frank was in his late forties when made redundant from

Easington Colliery in 1993. For a time, he had, in his words, 'been completely lost'. His way of coping had been through support networks from other, slightly older, former miners—if not quite father figures, then certainly caring older 'brothers'. Frank was adopted into a group of older men, each accompanied by a dog, who took extended walks along the Durham coastal paths. Every weekday this group would set off at 9am and sometimes walk up to eight miles 'setting the world to rights'. Though left unsaid, the start time seems to have allowed these grandfathers to help in grandchild care while still providing the discipline of a relatively early start. Frank's wife indicated that the group had been 'the saving of him', in that it had given him back a routine, regular male contact, some purpose and status. On reflection, there was more going on in this simple example. There is a series of adjustments occurring—from working life to forced retirement; to playing a more active role in caring for grandchildren and in the process re-establishing caring relationships with adult children. But Frank's story also highlights the ongoing role of homo-sociability, caring and nurturing. Frank was in need of care; this was given willingly by men who had already experienced the transition from work to retirement—forced or voluntary. This willingness and ability to provide care were itself rooted in a caring industrial social identity that was being made residual by economic change. Finally, Frank's need for care gave extra purpose to his older comrades; in the giving of care, they were themselves drawn into social life, the kind of generational relationship Faludi (2000) noted in the shipyards. I've made the argument elsewhere that deindustrialised communities were often able to cope as well as they did because of the industrial structures of feeling, care and support still present even as they were being made marginal. Through personal embeddedness in an industrial culture, redundant men could still enjoy some of the benefits of that culture (Strangleman, 2001). But what of the younger people in the coalfields who had never known coalmining directly?

Here again, we can see the value of Linkon's (2018) half-life model, which has at its heart the need to pay close attention not so much to the generation who lost their jobs, but to the generations thereafter—the sons and daughters, or increasingly grandsons and granddaughters of

industrial workers. Linkon's point is that the generation that lost industrial work have some roots and links to an industrial past. Economically, they may have received some kind of compensation or continue with health care and pensions. It is the subsequent generations for whom the reality of deindustrialisation is often unmediated by compensations of the past. Linkon looks for clues in how the post-industrial generation make sense of their world through literature and other forms of creative writing—including in former coalfield areas.

In the context specifically of coalfields in the UK, there is a growing number of scholars researching and writing on precisely those people.[8] Some of the most impressive work makes use of Avery Gordon's (2008) work on 'haunting'—examples of which are found elsewhere in this collection. One of the first to see value in Gordon's work applied to the former coalfields was Geoff Bright. Bright's paper on young people in former coal areas and the way their oppositional stand was rooted in the social, cultural and political legacy of working-class life (Bright, 2016). It was, for Bright, a sense that the coalfields remained haunted by their past and that social structures were still shaped by an industrial past that the students he interviewed had little or no knowledge of and often connection to. He is attracted to Gordon's work because it encapsulates the absent presence of the coal industry and its structures of feeling which continue, long after their death, to shape everyday experience.

Finally, I want to examine a new impulse in the interest in the coalfields, in particular the role they played in the Brexit vote of 2016 and its aftermath. One of the standout features of that vote and the later 2019 General Election was the crumbling of the so-called Red Wall of Labour Party seats across northern England. Often these were constituencies strongly associated with coalmining—the story of Labour's loss was amplified because these were mining seats which had gone through the events of 1984–1985 and the subsequent dismantling of the industry.[9]

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[8] See some of the other contributions to this volume.

[9] See Gibbs (2021) for how the SNP has become the dominant progressive force in Scottish politics. Also see Beynon and Hudson (2021).

Discussion

What are we to make of the breadth and depth of academic writing on coalfield communities? Why do they continue to exert such a strong fascination for scholars? What more is there to say about an industry which saw its last deep mine closed in 2015? The answers to those questions are many and varied. As I've argued here and elsewhere, the coalfields are important because they were important. We have at present the ability to see through the lens of one industry the rise and fall of a wider industrial Britain. The miners and their communities have always fascinated academics as they as workers, their families and communities stand apart. Miners were once viewed as archetypal working-class workers and their communities as ideal typical industrial settlements. Mining has long been studied in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Part of that fascination was that as the social sciences emerged after World War II, mining provided vivid examples of industrial culture, occupational communities as a type of work simultaneously modern and premodern. The passage of time and the decline of the industry have intensified the richness of the story. This sedimented knowledge about the industry is itself important. Coalfield areas act now as a post-industrial laboratory—valuable precisely because we know so much about them. They remain, often, relatively isolated places—perhaps adding to their attraction where other variables can be held apart. Thinking back to the model of industrial change I offered above, we can see how mining can populate each of the parts of the model—pre-industrial, industrial, post-industrial. For me, the power of the model in relation to mining is it helps us place many of the studies of the last five decades, and in particular those that focus on deindustrialisation and transition. The overlapping section in my diagram between industrial and post-industrial is precisely where Linkon's half-life analysis is so vital. This is where we make sense of people on the ground who themselves are sense making. Using coal as our example, the notion of half-life offers a range of possibilities. Some deindustrialised places are noted for a wide range of social, cultural, economic and health problems. US industrial anthropologist Kate Dudley (2021) recently described a rust belt community she studied as marked by opioid addiction which

was both cause and effect of the despair felt by many. More worrying still, she notes the 'loss of futurity', the collective and individual sense of the pointlessness of hope in future—the futility of believing in the idea of a better future. This is certainly one aspect of former coalfields. This inability to see hope, or imagine something positive may risk normlessness, or raise the rise of far-right extreme politics, such as the AfD in Germany.

More positively, the space afforded by the half-life might represent a chance to reassess sedimented norms, to reorientate to a more progressive future. Here again, literature recently emerging from the coalfield speaks in part to this. Gibbs (2021) suggests that the early closure of the coal industry in Scotland, as part of a wider, deeper deindustrialisation process has seen a space cleared for a more progressive politics based on a rejection of the Labour Party and an embrace of a progressive Scottish Nationalist Party. Here, the industrial past is used as a contextual tool for understanding the possibilities afforded by a post-carbon future.

To answer my last question—what else is there to say about coalfield areas and the legacies of the mining industry? For a time in the early-2000s, I was repeatedly asked to act as a referee on prospective articles on various aspects of coal—community, culture and politics. Many of these pieces seemed to be exercises in a kind of academic left nostalgia with little new to say, few insights to offer. One of the really impressive things about researchers examining coal is that they represent a new generation who enter the field bringing new ideas, concepts and questions. They are a generation of scholars of the half-life trying to ask novel questions of the world around them. That is why there will always be new things to say about coal. It is their scholarship that will help us identify loss, new possibilities, emerging and receding options, futures hopes and fears.

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Growing-Up in the Interregnum: Accounts from the South Yorkshire Coalfield

Nicky Stubbs

Introduction

This chapter reflects on my perceptions of deindustrialisation growing up in the aftermath of pit closures in the 1990s in Grimethorpe, a former pit village near Barnsley. It draws upon archival research conducted for the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign in relation to the 1984–85 miners' strike, which sets the backdrop to changes in the socio-political psyche of coalfield communities and the cultural significance of the strike. It also draws upon data collected during my PhD research, an ethnographic account of the experiences of economic restructuring and the legacies of industrial closure, many of which can be attributed to the state (mis)management of closures and restructuring during the 1980s and 1990s, a process whereby communities were ostracised in the planned

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37

decline of the coalmining industry. It reflects my experiences working with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. The chapter pieces together these insights, whilst embarking on an exercise of conceptual clarification vis-à-vis considering the wider impact of pit closures on the social systems organised around a unique form of industrial life, and which formed an integral part of the fabric of coalmining communities. The chapter borrows the term *interregnum* from Antonio Gramsci (1971) to argue that the immediate aftermath of closure constituted a social and economic interregnum, in which every aspect of social, political and economic life was implicated, and in which social and civic organisations crumbled into the industrial void. Such an insight is important as it gives us the conceptual basis from which we can understand the 'crumbling cultures' of former industrial communities (Strangleman et al., 2013). The interregnum forms part of the experience of deindustrialisation and economic restructuring and it is from those experiences that spring the various socio-economic conditions that embody the 'half-life' of deindustrialisation (Linkon, 2018). The interregnum is in itself a distinct phase of deindustrialisation we must take into account when considering the vast socio-political changes that have occurred and which underpin—and continue to drive changes to—the political landscapes in Britain, the US and Europe. It is in this context, I suggest, where we can best understand the implications for "collectively incapacitated individualised individuals, struggling to protect themselves from looming accidents in their social and economic lives" as they negotiate the future (Streeck, 2016, p. 69).

The chapter begins from the premise that what we would traditionally call working-class communities, built on heavy industry, have transformed dramatically over recent decades. Accounts of this have been documented by scholars working in the field of deindustrialisation. Deindustrialisation is the long-term series of processes that is linked with capital mobility and flows from the flight of capital from a particular locale (Cowie, 1999). It is now a field of study within its own right (Strangleman & Rhodes, 2014), but requires an interdisciplinary approach to appreciate the scale of the challenges it presents for society more widely. High et al. (2017) brought together scholars—many of whom had lived through deindustrialisation themselves—to present

accounts of the transformative power that capital mobility has over individual communities, towns and regions, as well as the persisting effects. The implications are far-reaching and include health and disability (McIvor, 2017; Storey, 2017); the environment (MacKinnon, 2017); the experiences of young people (Parnaby, 2017); and class identities (Contrepois, 2017). It is increasingly clear that the politics of deindustrialisation have significant implications for contemporary political systems. Brexit, Trump and the rise of the right on the continent have refocussed attentions on the political consequences of economic changes in 'left behind' communities (Goodwin & Heath, 2016). The persisting effects of deindustrialisation are found in policy dialogues that seek to address regional economic imbalances and informed Trump's promise to 'Bring back jobs' (Burns et al., 2016) to America, as well as the UK government's promise to 'level up' British regions (UK Government, 2021). What this demonstrates is that the events that occurred decades ago—and the political management of those events—are as relevant today as they ever have been.

State Management of Economic Change

This section reflects on the state's role in managing economic transition, drawing on two particular instances. The first is the ongoing project by the European Union (EU) to assist carbon-intensive industrial communities affected by the European Green Deal, the overarching aim of which is to make Europe the first 'climate-neutral bloc in the world by 2050' (European Commission, 2021). Second is the experience of British coalfield communities during the 1980s and 1990s—and specifically their treatment by Conservative governments during those years. This comparison aims to draw out differences between two occasions where the state has, in response to political pressures, identified a requirement for the restructuring of economies and marshalled levers of state to initiate those changes. As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, restructuring is a process that, when unmitigated, can have immense consequences for the social and physical landscape of capital,

as businesses, communities and workers are forced to adapt to new political-economic realities.

In May 2021, the European Parliament adopted the Just Transition Fund (JTF) as part of the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM), a policy instrument created to mitigate industrial and sectoral transition in regions that will be severely affected by the European Green Deal. Member States are expected to work with partners across industrial zones dependent on carbon-intensive industries to prepare 'territorial just transition plans' that will help address the social and economic effects of the transition to a low-carbon economy. According to the trade union IndustriAll, which represents industrial workers in several countries across Europe, the critical challenge facing policymakers is providing the toolbox to help regions support a Just Transition that will deliver 'decarbonisation without deindustrialisation' (Barthès & Kirton-Darling, 2021). The path to achieving this, IndustriAll suggests, requires the provision of policy mechanisms, financial instruments *and* a legal framework that anticipates challenges that lie ahead, and which ensures no one is left behind.

The European Commission projects their targeted support will mobilise between €65 and €75 billion between 2021 and 2027—a combination of public and private sector funding which is hoped will smooth the process of economic transition for those affected (European Commission, 2021). For IndustriAll, the adoption of the JTF by the European institutions represents a significant victory for trade unionists that have been calling for resources to mitigate the socio-economic consequences of economic restructuring (Barthès & Kirton-Darling, 2021). It is a significant programme which could potentially demonstrate the value of soft politics—the power to convene—through a process of resource pooling and knowledge exchange that Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, claims is based on the principle of solidarity (Timmermans, 2021). The policy requires interventions across a whole range of policy areas, most obviously in environmental regulation; labour and employment; education and skills policy; business support; research and innovation; infrastructure upgrading; and transport and energy.

The programme is an example of where the EU is attempting to co-ordinate stakeholders to provide a framework able to manage change where the political and economic agenda—that of international commitments to tackling climate change—demands restructuring to face the challenges of the future, and it has the potential to manage that change by bringing those implicated onboard in an inclusive way. This is not to suggest that the situation in Europe is harmonious. On the contrary, the climate change agenda is in some quarters controversial, for instance in Poland where in 2021, thousands of trade unionists took to the streets to protest the shift away from coal production (Scislowska, 2021). Nonetheless, it is an example where, anticipating disharmony, the EU is working with communities to attempt to give them a sense of ownership over their futures.

This approach contrasts with that of the British state in its proactive, yet covert, micromanagement of the decline of the British coalmining industry during the 1980s and 1990s. Successive governments throughout those decades pursued pit closure programmes that resulted in the closure of most of Britain's deep coalmines. The closures followed the bitter, year-long dispute of the 1984–1985 miners' strike, fought out between the Conservative government and the NUM, which signalled the death knell for the tripartite system of industrial governance and transformed, seemingly irreversibly, British industrial relations. In direct contrast to the approach thirty-six years later by the EU, the British state was instrumental in a highly politicised rundown of the industry, with severe consequences for the communities affected, whilst, at the same time, engaging in a deliberate strategy of institutional, rule-based and preference-shaping de-politicisation (Flinders & Buller, 2006) in suggesting that closure was an unplanned, inevitable consequence of market forces.

For trade unionists, the dispute was crucial as it would set the scene for the following decades not only in terms of their ability to defend and represent workers' interests, but in terms of the kind of futures that coalfield communities would face. They believed that a dispute in the coal industry was inevitable, in that it had been meticulously planned by government over a number of years, a claim publicly denied. An analysis of cabinet papers covering this period, however, suggests that the

Conservative Party was planning to provoke a strike as part of a wide plan for the privatisation of nationalised industries. The document that most pertinently supports these claims is the *Final Report of the Nationalised Industries Policy Group*—widely known as the 'Ridley Plan' after Conservative MP Nicholas Ridley (Ridley, 1977). Prepared following the Heath Government's defeat by the NUM in 1974, the Ridley Plan set out the broad policy context required for "returning nationalised industries to the private sector", to be achieved "more or less by stealth" (p. 15). In order to be prepared for the challenge of 'countering the political threat', the report suggested five key policies. First, it suggests that government "design [their] return on capital figures to allow some scope…for paying a higher wage claim than the going rate" (p. 24), which would undermine solidarity by turning workers in different industries against each other. Second, the government "might try and provoke a battle in a non-vulnerable industry, where we can win…A victory on ground of our choosing would discourage an attack on more vulnerable ground" (p. 24). Third, it suggested government "must take every precaution possible to strengthen our defences against all-out attack in a highly vulnerable industry". It identified the 'most likely area [as] coal', recommending the stock piling of coal and contingency plans to "arrange for certain haulage companies to recruit in advance a core of non-union lorry drivers to help us move coal where necessary" (p. 25). Fourth, the report proposed that government 'cut off the supply of money to the strikers' and that such a policy should be "put into effect quickly and that it be sufficiently tough to act as a major deterrent" (p. 25). Finally, it suggested that government deal with picketing, by having a "large, mobile squad of police who are equipped and prepared to uphold the law" (p. 25). It concluded that the five policies would provide an integrated approach to 'provide a pretty strong defence' and "enable us to hold the fort until the long-term strategy of fragmentation can begin" (p. 26). The significance of the Ridley Plan cannot be overstated. The strike, as Shaw (2015) puts it, "was the defining industrial conflict of the post-war years in the UK. It began as a dual battle of revenge and replication as both factions, fuelled by their memories of their 1972/1974 struggles, sought to rectify or revive past results". It illustrates the determination of the Conservative

government to provoke a strike and win, and in doing so settle old scores with the unions which had brought down Heath in 1974.

In the run up to the 1984–1985 miners' strike, many in the industry believed the attitude of the National Coal Board (NCB) executive during negotiations was designed to lure the NUM into calling a national strike, against what transpired to be an employer backed by a well-prepared government. Mick Clapham, who was the NUM's head of industrial relations (1983–1992), and later served as a Labour MP, recalled a meeting with NCB deputy chairman, Jimmy Cowan, on 3 March 1983:

> He didn't go into a great deal of discussion…he made it quite plain that they were going to take out about 8.2 million tonnes [of coal from production] – that would be 20,000 jobs. Then the guy just folded his arms and sort of laid back in his chair with his eyes closed and started to rock himself back and forth…he did that for all the rest of the meeting, despite the fact that people from various areas was asking him in a proper manner, 'where are the jobs going to go?' We need to pass the news onto our men, so they can plan for them and their families. We need to be able to consider how we might move forward in the future. He just refused to answer. (Interview Data)

Clapham said such an attitude was prevalent in the dealings with senior NCB managers and was instrumental in strengthening the determination of workplace reps, union officials and rank and file members throughout the industry to resist closures. It was also believed that NCB plans existed that surpassed those disclosed, which formed part of a broader strategy to rundown the industry in preparation for its privatisation, a claim which was also publicly denied. Thatcher's (1993) memoirs confirmed this:

> During the autumn and winter of 1983-4 Ian MacGregor [NCB chairman] formulated his plans. At that time manpower in the industry was 202,000. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission had produced a report into the coal industry in 1983 which showed that some 75 percent of the pits were making a loss. Faced with this, Mr MacGregor began with the aim of bringing the industry to break-even by 1988. In September

1983 he told Government that he intended to cut the workforce by some 64,000 over three years, reducing capacity by 25 million tons. (p. 343)

The revelation in her memoirs rings true with the official record. A note of a meeting in Downing Street on 15 September 1983, chaired by Thatcher, records that the then Energy Secretary Peter Walker said:

…which would reduce the workforce by some 55,000 and reduce capacity by some 20 million tonnes: and then a further 11, with manpower reductions of 9,000 and capacity reduction of a further 5 million tonnes. There should be no closure list, but a pit-by-pit procedure. The manpower at the end of that time in the industry would be down to 138,000 from its current level of 202,000.

…there would be considerable problems in all this. The manpower reductions would bite heavily in particular areas: two-thirds of Welsh miners would become redundant, 35 percent of miners in Scotland, 48 percent in the North East, 50 percent in South Yorkshire and 46 percent in the South Midlands (which included the whole of the Kent coalfield). From end-1984 onwards it would not be possible to offer redundant miners' other employment in the mining industry. There would also be unfortunate effects on the mining equipment supply industry. (Scholar, 1983)

Keen the colliery closure plans should be kept secret, discussions were held at the beginning of meetings as to "how to arrange…meetings so that as little as possible of the more sensitive aspects is committed to paper", alongside the suggestion to ministers to give a 'short oral briefing' (Gregson, 1983, p. 1). Time and again during the strike, the existence of a plan for the closure of pits was denied by ministers, and the sanitisation of minutes makes it difficult to establish the nature of plans at any given stage. It is clear, however, from the minutes available in September 1983, six months before the strike, that plans existed to reduce the workforce by 64,000 men, far beyond the 20,000 repeatedly claimed the NCB. Thatcher personally approved a letter from the chairman of the NCB sent to all miners in June 1984, denying such plans:

This is a strike which should never have happened. It is based on very serious misrepresentation and distortion of the facts. At great financial cost miners have supported the strike for fourteen weeks because your leaders have told you this...That the Coal Board is out to butcher the coal industry. That we plan to do away with 70,000 jobs. That we plan to close down around 86 pits, leaving only 100 working collieries. (MacGregor, 1984)

The letter claims that the NUM leadership had 'deliberately misled' miners into supporting the strike. There is also evidence that significant pressures were placed on the police and the judiciary to deal severely with cases arising from the dispute. Following complaints in the first few weeks of the strike from MacGregor that 'no arrests had been made' (Turnbull, 1984a), Thatcher intervened at a wider meeting of ministers that same day, directing that:

It was essential to stiffen the resolve of Chief Constables to ensure that they fulfilled their duty to uphold the law. The Police were now well paid and well equipped and individual forces had good arrangements for mutual support. (Turnbull, 1984b)

Consequently, pressure was placed on the Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, to personally make interventions with police chiefs:

…his department had alerted Police Chiefs earlier in the week on the extent of their powers, but he was not satisfied with the response…He had gone to the limit of what the Home Secretary could do while respecting the constitutional independence of Police Forces. (Turnbull, 1984b)

Summing up, Thatcher said:

The meeting endorsed the action of the Home Secretary to ensure that Chief Constables carried out their duties fully. The matter should be discussed again at Cabinet when it would be clearer whether the Police were adopting the more vigorous interpretation of their duties which was being sought. (Turnbull, 1984b)

The papers showed that ministers put pressure on local magistrates to accelerate the rate of prosecutions—whilst also threatening local magistrates' court committees with the appointment of stipendiary magistrates without a request from individual court committees, outside the normal judicial appointment processes. Thatcher expressed frustration that violence was going undeterred (Cabinet, 1984), and the Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham, told advisors that 'the cabinet were…concerned by the apparently light sentences in the cases which had been heard'. Though this summary represents a snapshot of the pressures placed on institutions such as the police and the courts, it demonstrates a plan that had been years in the making to dramatically reduce the size of the coal industry, and that despite the denials of government, they were responsible for micro-managing the dispute, including where that jeopardised the constitutional independence of the police and judicial process. The general point to be made here is that these were exceptional times in which the state was prepared to interfere in juridical processes in order to secure victory over a group of its own citizens, who it saw as a 'political threat' (Ridley, 1977, p. 28), and who Thatcher infamously branded 'the enemy within' (Thatcher, 1984).

Whilst it is not the intention here to rehearse each twist and turn of the strike, the papers referenced exemplify a government that utilised the vast resource of the state to clear the way for its economic reforms, and in doing so face down institutions that represented the interests of coalmining communities. The experience of striking miners, their families and other coalfield residents went far beyond losing an industrial dispute (High et al., 2017, p. 3). It was the beginning of the end of a form of industrial life that had built up over generations. No coalfield region went unaffected. In Nottinghamshire, some miners opposed the NUM leadership in its belief that the strike was necessary and in their handling of it. Recent research identified mutual support between the government and the breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM) (Daniels, 2019). Daniels shows that the UDM received favourable treatment for fitting the 'Thatcherite model' of a 'moderate' trade union, but that support was removed in the late-1980s and early-1990s once the longer-term plans for the industry had set in.

Table 1 shows the scale of the closures between 1984 and 1994—the year the NCB was privatised and bought up by RJB mining—with 122 collieries closing during that period (BBC News, 2004). The consequences of pit closures and the lack of a clear plan from the UK government to provide effective support for communities to transition to a life beyond coal not only affected those miners, but others living in the British coalfields.

Whilst experiences of industrial decline vary between regions, legacies of industrial closure are a common and prevalent feature of Britain's former coalfield communities. Research for the Coalfields Regeneration Trust showed that on almost every socio-economic indicator coalfield communities lagged behind other regions of the UK (Foden et al., 2014). It found that job density (the ratio between jobs within a particular area and the number of residents of working age); employment rates; and business formation rates are all below national averages. They also found that "coalfield residents in work are more likely to be employed in lower-grade or manual occupations, and the coalfield workforce is more likely to lack higher grade qualifications" (p. 5). In addition, it found that the proportion of residents suffering from ill-health is double that in South-East England as evidenced by rates of residents claiming Disability Living Allowance. A combination of these factors resulted in one in seven working-age adults unemployed and receiving benefits. This picture was only 'marginally widened' by the 2008 recession, with deprivation and disadvantage being "deep-seated rather than rooted in the 2008-post recession" (pp. 35–36). In sum, Foden et al. (2014) stated that evidence provided a "compelling case that most of the coalfield communities of England, Scotland and Wales require support. The miners' strike of 1984–1985 may be receding into history but the job losses that followed in its wake are still part of the everyday economic reality of most mining communities" (p. 37). A more recent report found that although coalfield communities had benefited from the economic upturn, progress was still hampered by weaknesses in local economies, evident by the persisting "extent of economic and social disadvantage, and the incidence of ill health" (Beatty et al., 2019, p. 7). It shows that despite a significant passage of time since the miners' strike, political decisions taken during those years, which bypassed the communities affected by pit closures, left

Table 1 Colliery closures between March 1984 and 1994

1984, March Onwards
Bearpark, Co Durham   Cronton, Merseyside

1985

Aberpergwm, South Wales	Abertillery, South Wales	Ackton Hall, Yorkshire
Bedwas, South Wales	Bold, Merseyside	Brenkley, Tyne and Wear
Brookhouse, Yorkshire	Cortonwood, Yorkshire	Emley Moor, Yorkshire
Fryston, Yorkshire	Garw, South Wales	Haig, Cumbria
Herrington, Co Durham	Margam, South Wales	MoorGreen, Nottinghamshire
Penrhiwceiber, South Wales	Pye Hill, Nottinghamshire	Sacriston, Co Durham
St Johns, South Wales	Savile, Yorkshire	Treforgan, South Wales
Wolstanton, Staffordshire	Yorkshire Main, Yorkshire	

1986

Babbington, Nottinghamshire	Bates, Northumberland	Bersham, North Wales
Birch Coppice, Warwickshire	Cadeby, Yorkshire	Comrie, Fife
Cwm, South Wales	Eppleton, Co Durham	Glasshoughton, Yorkshire
Horden, Co Durham	Kinsley, Yorkshire	Ledston Luck, Yorkshire
Nantgarw/Winsor, South Wales	Polkemmet, West Lothian	Tilmanstone, Kent
Whitwell, Nottinghamshire	Whitwick/South Leicester, Leicestershire	

1987

Newstead, Nottinghamshire	Nostell, Yorkshire	Polmaise 3/4, Stirling
Snowdown, Kent	Wheldale, Yorkshire	Whittal, Co Durham
Woolley, Yorkshire	Silverwood, Yorkshire	

1988

Abernant, South Wales	Arkwright, Derbyshire	Ashington, Northumberland
Cadley Hill, Derbyshire	Lady Winsor/Abercynon, South Wales	Linby, Nottinghamshire
Mansfield, Nottinghamshire	Manvers Complex, Yorkshire	Seafield/Francis, Fife
South Kirkby/Riddings, Yorkshire		

1989

Baddesley, Warwickshire	**Barnburgh**, Yorkshire	**Barony**, Ayrshire
Betteshanger, Kent	**Bilston Glen**, Mid Lothian	**Blidworth**, Nottinghamshire
Cynheidre, South Wales	**Holditch**, Staffordshire	**Marine/Six Bells**, South Wales
Merthyr Vale, South Wales	**Oakdale**, South Wales	**Renishaw Park**, Yorkshire
Royston, Yorkshire	**Sutton**, Nottinghamshire	**Trelewis**, South Wales
Warsop, Nottinghamshire		

1990

Agecroft, Lancashire	**Ellistown**, Leicestershire	**Lea Hall**, Staffordshire
Littleton, Staffordshire	**Shireoaks/Steetley**, Nottinghamshire	**Treeton**, Yorkshire
Donnisthorpe/Rawdon, Leicestershire	**Florence**, Cumbria	

1991

Askern, Yorkshire	**Bagworth**, Leicestershire	**Barnsley Main**, Yorkshire
Creswell, Derbyshire	**Dawdon**, Co Durham	**Dearne Valley**, Yorkshire
Deep Navigation, South Wales	**Denby Grange**, Yorkshire	**Dinnington**, Yorkshire
Gedling, Nottinghamshire	**Murton**, Co Durham	**Penallta**, South Wales
Sutton Manor, Merseyside	**Thurcroft**, Yorkshire	

1992

Allerton Bywater, Yorkshire	**Bickershaw Complex**, Lancashire	**Cotgrave**, Nottinghamshire
Sherwood, Nottinghamshire	**Shirebrook**, Derbyshire	**Silverhill**, Nottinghamshire

1993

Bentley, Yorkshire	**Bolsover**, Derbyshire	**Easington**, Co Durham
Frickley/South Elmsall, Yorkshire	**Grimethorpe**, Yorkshire	**Houghton/Darfield**, Yorkshire
Parkside, Merseyside	**Rufford**, Nottinghamshire	**Sharlston**, Yorkshire
Taff Merthyr, South Wales	**Vane Tempest/Seaham**, Co Durham	**Westoe**, Tyne and Wear
Goldthorpe/Hickleton, Yorkshire	**Kiveton Park**, Yorkshire	**Markham**, Derbyshire
Manton, Nottinghamshire	**Ollerton**, Nottinghamshire	**Wearmouth**, Co Durham

legacies on coalfield communities that continue to affect everyday life in such locales.

An Economic Interregnum

Industrial closure had a dramatic impact on the physical and psychic landscape of mining towns as communities faced a future without the industry they were built on. Turner (1995) noted of Grimethorpe that:

> [The] physical structure and appearance of the place diminished considerably. Petty crime increased dramatically. The employers that remained talked of pulling out…demoralisation on this scale is hardly conductive to the 'dynamism' widely perceived to be a prerequisite of economic success in the 1990s. (p. 27)

In 1994, two years after the closure of Grimethorpe Colliery, the Coalfield Communities Campaign found that 44 per cent of former Grimethorpe miners were out of work, and that only a small proportion of those that had found employment since leaving the pit were earning a similar wage or more than the average miners' wage (Guy, 1994). Grimethorpe was identified in 1994 as the most deprived village in Britain and the fourth most deprived in Europe (Charlesworth, 2003). Steve Houghton, leader of Barnsley Council, said that the deterioration of Grimethorpe led to discussions about:

> [W]hether we should just flatten it – flatten the lot – you'll never recover it, just flatten in, move it out and turn it into grass. These kinds of serious discussions were going on – what do we do here? How do we turn these places around? (Interview Data)

Similar challenges were faced in communities nearby also suffering from the decline of economic infrastructure associated with the collieries. Thurnscoe and Goldthorpe, and South Kirkby and South Elmsall, for example, formed geographical clusters of former mining villages whose defining characteristics had been their industrial homogeneity, and geographical isolation faced severe socio-economic decline. The

only viable way out of the situation was to create conditions for long-term inward investment and, in the short term, to arrest the decline, or as Steve Houghton said, 'stop the rot'. But pit closure went much deeper than this—the closure of collieries and their associated infrastructure in coalfield communities represented a moment of rupture, whereby old cultures, traditions and social systems became obsolete to the new economic landscape. It deeply penetrated socially and culturally engrained rhythms and ways of being that had embedded within community life over generations.

What this constitutes is a form of *interregnum*—a period in which the economic order around which the entire social systems were organised crumbled into the void left by the closure of industry. It is within this discontinuity of economic order that the totality of community life, the cultures, norms and values, and the institutions that developed within it, begin to crumble. Although initially associated with the reign of monarchs, Gramsci wrote in his prison diaries that the "crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci, quoted in Streeck, 2016). This point about crisis holds salience in coalmining communities, particularly where levels of economic diversification were low, as industrial closure saw a loss of purpose and represented an existential crisis for those communities. The concept of the *interregnum* suggests that there is a time-lag between closure and economic reconstruction, and a period plagued by uncertainty, decline and social desperation. Communities that had historically been self-policing witnessed problems never before experienced, such as drug abuse and high levels of crime (Turner, 1996). As one local councillor explained, there was a sense of desperation about the place:

> No chance of a job, no sense of going anywhere, falling into drugs, falling into drink, falling into worklessness and you're just on a downward spiral. So, you've got to stop that somehow. So, a lot of community work going on with young people trying to arrest the decline…you're not necessarily going to make it any better but you're trying to stop it getting worse and growing beyond what it already was. (Interview Data)

These were the costs associated with the decline of the social and civic organisations that gave a sense of purpose, discipline and respect to community life outside the workplace.

The impact of closure on those organisations and the role they played within the community is an important dynamic that determines whether those communities pull together or fall apart. The NUM, for instance, which historically played a central role in the life of the community, was wiped out as an effective political force. As current General Secretary Chris Kitchen said:

> …it wa' power that was based at the pit that gave you the influence in the community and it was how important the pit was to that community and to people's lives. When you lost the pit, you lost the power and the influence. (Interview Data)

Aside from the political power that the union had, there was a respect forged between miners and their union representatives that solidified the role of the union and its officials:

> …you'd got natural leaders that people respected underground but it didn't stop when you left the pit gates…they still had that respect and authority within the community and because you'd got that hierarchy it kept people…their behaviour…within tolerable levels. (Interview Data)

Whether the union was able to maintain links to particular areas and continue to provide support to former miners and the wider community following the closure of pits depended on whether strong links existed previously, and whether able and willing union representatives lived in those communities.

During a focus group with four former miners at Houghton Main Miners Welfare Sports and Social Club in Middlecliffe, one former miner said that there was a distinct loss of the collective that permeated every aspect of community relations:

> People got a bit more hedonistic…it was every man for himself…I mean Thatcher brought the council house sales in…that's another topic in itself like…we've lost a massive amount of social housing haven't we to private

sector…and I don't know…everybody…where I grew up…ourselves and half a dozen people around us used to walk into each other's houses…-doors were open and there was no thieving…but after that, it seemed to be a gear shift in society and people…a lot more navel gazing and looking after number one. (Houghton Main, Focus Group)

Bauman's (2001) liquid modernity offers some explanation for the difficulties communities faced in organising collective responses to their predicament. He argued that in a society that changes so rapidly, constant and solid structures no longer stand, and the uncertainty individual's experience serves as a 'powerful *individualising* force' (p.24). The period after the closure of the coalmining industry marked a retreat from communitarianism, where there was an 'intrinsic dignity to manual labour' and where "workers drew much value and meaning from the toil that provided their livelihoods" (McIvor, 2017, p. 25), to an environment that many wanted to escape. During the Houghton Main focus group, one former miner explained his decision to emigrate to New Zealand:

It just turned into a shit hole mate…it was my kids more than anything…New Zealand is a great place to bring kids up…there's the same problems but it's on a smaller scale…I used to live in Thurnscoe and I used to walk my daughter in the pram…round to the local playground and there were needles and stuff all over place…it's not a good place to bring kids up. (Houghton Main, Focus Group)

Scott, who grew up in Grimethorpe, recalled a sense pride that his family had played a role in the political struggle but felt lucky that no one in his household lost their livelihoods when the pit closed:

'92 pit shut…I was born that year…quite fortunate that my dad was a bricklayer my Grandad worked in pit…he was the union leader for Grimey…he walked them out and walked them back in…so I'm obviously quite aware and quite proud…but my dad was from Cudworth and he was a bricklayer…I was quite lucky in that respect. (Interview Data)

The effect of the interregnum was, nevertheless, unavoidable and almost normalised as an everyday part of life:

> I remember walking down village…old seaside estate…they were building down back of there and it's where all druggies used to go and I remember seeing people laid out took too much and gone to sleep…that was normal…you weren't scared by that because a lot of people saw it…ten-years-old…you'd just kick the ball at his head and keep walking…you weren't scared…it was just normal…you'd see it most days. (Interview Data)

Scott recalled instances from his childhood where the effects of social deprivation stood out as moments that at the time seemed insignificant but with the passage of time and reflection, brought to bear a powerful illustration of a social condition that was palpable throughout everyday life:

> When I looked at my friends whose dads did work down the pit…no I wasn't aware at the time how bad things were…not until I look back now because that's all we knew…your mate coming into school with two left shoes on…coming into reception class with two left shoes on…'he's got two left shoes on…different trainers'…now you look back and think 'how did that happen?' These kids had such chaotic homelives, but they were our mates…didn't notice at time 'cos it was just normal, but they just weren't as lucky as me, I guess. (Interview Data)

Whilst experiences of deindustrialisation differ, the most negative effects can be traced back to that temporal moment of closure and the socio-economic decline that flowed from it. From the interregnum flow the disintegration of community life and the retreat of labour as a collective category that held meaning outside the workplace as well as within. These conditions were all symptomatic of a community struggling to come to terms with a future beyond industry. Tragedy was that it was an interregnum with no transitional plan. The condition of communities like Grimethorpe in the years following closure was heightened by other factors. These included an over-reliance on a single industry, the geographic isolation, and a form of patriarchal labourism in which

communities depended on the social and civic institutions, such as trade unions, to bring political expression to their lives and exercise their political agency. Most significantly, there is a very real intergenerational sense that the fate of such places was not inevitable, but a political destruction forced on communities. Thus, rather than being the 'creative destruction' of a form of capital, this period marked a form of *enforced* destruction by the state, which had become the political form of capital.

A New Form of Social Rule?

The regeneration of coalfield communities—to which the EU was a critical ally—came when the tapestry of industry, community and various institutions that underpinned them had been destroyed. This created a void in which processes of decline significantly disrupted community life—the physical, the aesthetic, the social, cultural, economic and, eventually, the political. Within the interregnum grew an identity that draws its character from both the past and present in terms of the struggle and experience of economic alienation. Emerging from the interregnum required concerted effort, predominantly from local authorities, but also from communities themselves. Interviews with council leaders and policymakers illustrated the scale of the challenge, with a wide ranging and long-term series of policy interventions. These were aimed in the short term at addressing social problems and stopping further decline, whilst in the longer term creating the conditions for inward investment, through large-scale infrastructure projects such as clearing old colliery sites and building new link roads to develop new business sites. This eventually attracted inward investment. New jobs in warehousing and distribution centres such as ASOS are, however, largely subject to agency working, 'flexible' contracts and workplaces where there are concerted efforts from management to supress worker voice.

The legacies of pit closures mean communities in places like Barnsley are coming from a low economic base, which continues to raise significant challenges for local authorities. Strategies such as the 'More and Better Jobs' strategy (BMBC, 2016) show that significant challenges remain in building conditions for higher-skilled, better paid jobs. Such

strategies are a reminder that 'recovery' from deindustrialisation has largely been built on low-pay jobs in warehousing, manufacturing and distribution. In 2017, the Resolution Foundation identified Sheffield City Region as the low-pay centre of Britain, with Barnsley the worst of all (Clarke, 2017). Whilst the interregnum might be over, many of its effects still form a significant part of everyday life in coalfield communities. As Steve Houghton describes:

> Young people who do well at college and school…they leave – great! We used to have a saying about our young people, which was 'the very least we can do is give them the means to get out. The very most we can do is give them a reason so stay'. That's what we're trying to do. (Interview Data)

The JTM and JTF potentially provides an opportunity for communities in Europe to avoid the negative experiences of economic transition that occurred in Britain's coalmining communities. As the project develops, it may provide further opportunities to conduct research with industrial communities undergoing change. For those who grew up in the aftermath of pit closures, the consequences of the interregnum were normalised as part of belonging to a coalfield community. Perhaps the most enduring consequence of the interregnum is that such locales are now largely hubs of low-pay, low-skilled work where organisations seek to advance the position of workers who struggle to organise and function effectively.

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A Conflictual Legacy: Being a Coalminer's Daughter

Diane Reay

Introduction

There is a rage that comes with being a coalminer's daughter, a sense of frustrated indignation about the way the world is but also the way you are seen within that world. In a post-Brexit, COVID-19 era that distorted image is now increasingly being deployed as a central motif in the relentless attack against the political left (Coman, 2020). Yet, the solidarist, oppositional section of the mining community I grew up in had been under attack for decades from right-wing politicians and the media long before Thatcher destroyed the mining industry. We heard little of the miners' voice while those destructive processes were under way. The celebration of coalmining communities has always been an empty gesture, primarily a rhetorical device rather than any commitment

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61

that has resulted in progressive change in the coalfields, either before or after the destruction of the coalmining industry.

Nothing revealed the lived complexities of mining communities more than the 1984–1985 miners' strike. It exposed a deep, damaging fracture throughout mining communities that was particularly evident in South Derbyshire, where I grew up. Coming to terms with those divisions which set miner against miner was a brutally unsettling and dispiriting process. But in socialist families like my own, we had always recognised and been wary of 'the sell-outs', those miners who saw their interests as lying more with the bosses than fellow workers. As Daniels (2019) asserts, files from the National Archives revealed that leaders of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM), the breakaway union opposed to the strike, supported the privatisation of coalmines and colluded with the Thatcher government against the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). While the very public schism caused by the setting up of the UDM and its subsequent conniving with Conservative governments were at a totally different scale of division and internal betrayal, histories of coalmining families like my own expose many smaller-scale fractures and challenges to solidarity. They emerge in my grandfather's account of the general strike and my father's experiences of working as a miner in the second half of the twentieth century.

Experiences and relationships to the world are shaped by what Walkerdine (2016) calls, "the ghosts of past experiences transmitted across generations" (p. 700). I never expected to be treated well by any of the authority figures, such as teachers and policemen, who loomed over my childhood. I seemed to know intuitively from an early age that the treatment meted out to the working classes, especially families like mine that did not conform to middle-class codes, was at worst censorious, judgmental disapproval, at best benign distanced condescension. That intuitive understanding was confirmed over and over again. A powerful lesson instilled from early on in my childhood was to expect little and have little expected of you, unless it was hard domestic work. The most positive report I received from primary school concluded that if I tried really hard, I *might* do 'quite well'. A constant stream of low expectations fine honed some of my strongest assets and greatest liabilities—an ability to cope with rejection and to be able to keep fighting unnoticed. But

luckily my family gave me another invaluable disposition, the tenacity to hold on to a communitarian, egalitarian value system even when it was under siege from wider society. In particular, my maternal family's unflinching commitment to socialism as a means of achieving justice for the working classes has been a moral anchor throughout my life, not just an intellectual belief but as a visceral way of being in the world. I know that freedom, security and prosperity for myself are devalued unless it also means freedom, prosperity and security for all humankind. And with that conviction comes the recognition that I must continue to struggle to make the world a fairer place regardless of how secure and prosperous my own circumstances are.

Hard Lives: Four Generations of a Coalmining Family

In the rest of this chapter, I attempt to illuminate the themes of lived complexities and divisive inheritance by drawing on my own family history. I begin with my great grandparents born in the mid- and late-1800s and move through the generations to my own childhood in the 1950s and 1960s. My uncle Ray wrote many poems in later life, most recounting his life experiences, but the only one that describes our family history was one he wrote in praise of his mother, my maternal grandmother. However, the poem also brings vividly to life the hardships and misdemeanours of my notorious great-grandmother, Alice, and her reprobate husband, John:

> My dad was a collier in Rawdon, my mum was in service in Crewe.
>   My grandmother, she was a drunkard, and we know what drinking can do.
>
> In her day she was really famous for her love of the 'evil brew',
>   as she drank her way into the papers – it's awful what papers can do.
>
> The headline said 'Alice, Where Art Thou?' because forty-nine times she's been through,

the courthouse in Ashby (of the Zouches) to show her what justice could do.

Her husband, John, was caught poaching by a constable dressed in blue.
    John pushed him so hard he fell over, then found out what prison could do.

My father had trouble speaking, as a child he was beaten so much.
    Pem healed him with her caring, and her tender, compassionate touch.
    (Smart, 2014, p. 31)

Later verses eulogise my wonderful nan. But it is the events touched on in these earlier verses that I want to expand on. First, the illustrious Alice who frequented both the pub and the prison cell with temerity. When I was a child, an elderly neighbour spoke of how Alice would sleep under the hedgerows and alluded to rumours of her 'gypsy blood', but in view of the 49 court appearances for being drunk and disorderly, she may just have been sleeping off a drinking bout. She was renowned locally both for her drunkenness and for breaking the first plate-glass window installed in a shop by a prosperous local businessman whose descendants are now wealthy property developers and Tory councillors. Alice's husband, John, was working at Measham colliery in Derbyshire when they married in 1891, and he was still listed as collier in the 1901 census, but by the time of the 1911 census when he was 52 years old, his occupation was described as casual labourer. My grandfather said he had a couple of minor accidents underground and decided to try his luck in a less dangerous job. However, over 40 convictions for being drunk and disorderly may have had some bearing on him leaving the colliery. He also spent two spells in prison, one in his twenties for affray and grievous bodily harm, and much later during the depression when he took to poaching to feed his starving family and had the bad luck of encountering a police constable on the way home with his booty. After being convicted in October 1902 for yet again being drunk and disorderly, John stood up in court citing police harassment, arguing that 'It was not his fault as he could never move a step from his house without being taken by the police whether he was drunk or not'. This anti-authority

stance was married to a defiant republicanism. My nan used to recount with a mixture of shock and admiration how her mother-in-law would always spit at the wireless when a member of the royal family or an aristocrat was speaking, yelling expletives to drown out their voices. It tells a lot about my mother's family's political allegiances that both the breaking of the plate-glass window and the assault on the police constable were recounted frequently with pride and defiance. Both local businessmen and police officers represented forces of exploitation, one the extractor of unfair profit and the other the welder of unjust authority. However, the drunkenness and frequent domestic violence within the household were spoken about in more hushed tones.

Campbell (2000) writes of 'genealogies of victimisation and radicalism' passed down through Scottish mining families as a result of the 1926 lock out, and a similar still has a hold on my political consciousness. Perhaps the most powerful message communicated through the repeated tales of family trials and tribulations was that working-class life was one long struggle against injustice. My grandparents' and my mother's lives were blighted by the pitiless wage-cutting of the coalmine owners and their victimisation of union activists after the 1921 and 1926 lock-outs (Campbell, 2006). I would often sit on my grandfather's lap as he cheerily sang 'show me the way to go home' and 'my old man said follow the van', but at other times he would retell what he called 'a great sadness in his life', the ignominious death of his mother, Alice. My mothers' family had been living in precarity since 1919 with my grandfather either laid off, working reduced hours, on strike, or on the few occasions when he was in full-time employment, being paid woefully inadequate wages.

A few days after my mother was born, suffering from malnutrition, Jack Lawson, a Durham MP, told the House of Commons:

> Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the miners, by agreement, during the past two years have submitted to considerable reductions in earnings, and that it has had no effect upon the industry worth anything at all, but many of them are starving; and are we to understand that they are only going to be taken seriously when they take such action as is common to many people in desperate circumstances? (Hansard, 6th December 1922)

My grandfather rarely spoke of the hardships his family endured during the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s, but on one of the few occasions he did he said, 'the miners at his pit were resolved that if they had to starve, they would starve above ground fighting for better pay rather than die like rats underground'. There was a fierce pride in being one of the last men to submit to the coalmine owners. However, he also said that when they finally did go back after strike action, they went back to lower pay, and my nan's version, that the union men had to crawl back on their knees, was one of humiliation and abject defeat.

The national coalmining dispute of 1926 was one of the longest and most bitter conflicts in the history of British industrial relations. Against almost insurmountable odds, miners, like my grandfather, and their families fought for seven months a determined rearguard action to protect standards which were already desperately low (Stevens, 1984). As W.P. Richardson, general secretary of the Durham Miners Association at the time, wrote, "the miners are at the bottom and have been compelled to accept dictated and unjust terms" (Garside, 1971, p. 226). In November 1926, despite the capitulation of the Trades Union Congress (Todd, 2014), my grandfather was on strike, a union member and one of the last miners to go back to work, refusing to accept the cruel pay cuts being inflicted on his industry. His mother was in the local infirmary together with his oldest son, both suffering from tuberculosis. He and my nan were just about managing to scrape together the two shillings a week to keep them there when his mother went into a coma, suffering from meningitis. He then had to make what he called the 'most difficult decision of my life' to move his mother into the workhouse so he could release the shilling needed to pay for my mother's hospital care. Alice never came out of the workhouse. My grandparents' financial plight worsened rather than improved, and they could not even afford medication to relieve her pain. She died there months later.

There was another great-grandmother the poem does not mention. Harriet, my grandmother's mother, ran an illicit gin distillery, and had a side-line in spiritualism, holding séances for the bereaved and reading tea leaves. Born in 1847, in the 1851 census, her parents' occupations are listed as bricklayer and knitter, but by 1861 her father was an agricultural labourer. Harriet went on to have fourteen children most of whom were

illegitimate, including my nan. She had married a man who deserted her, leaving her with four children. She spent some time as a lone mother and had a further child, finally ending up with a coalminer with whom she had another nine children.

My mother's family suffered from poverty and destitution throughout the 1920s and 1930s. My nan said that my grandfather was often unemployed and the times he was in work, he was paid starvation wages. But both she and my mother also told me, 'You need to draw a curtain in your head to keep all the bad memories at bay'. The miseries of the past were rarely spoken about, but they still had a tangible presence in our lives, most notably in my mother's constant fears about not having enough money to make ends meet. The experiences of mining families in Derbyshire in the early-1930s are articulated in a novel written by a coalminer about his own bitter experiences at the time. Walter Brierley (1935) writes of:

> The agony with the deadening hopelessness in between. Hopeless, hopeless, hopeless. Another month of pointless living, then the agony. (p. 279)

Both my maternal grandparents growing up in mining families were used to suffering and penury, but there was also a ferocious pride and a rejection of charity. My nan used to say, 'we can do without the slops of the rich'. I have a powerful visceral memory of my mother taking me to the door of the local parish church hall which had been converted into a soup kitchen for mining families when I was a teenager, and vehemently exclaiming, 'I'd rather slit my children's throats than have them accept charity'. Berger (1980) writes eloquently about how the present absorbs the past which is inseparable from it in a process through which 'I am' includes all that has made me so. There is a mutual haunting, mostly echoes, whispers, but sometimes howls across time (Sahota, 2021).

I have internalised my mother and my nan's sense of outrage. My childhood was permeated with family narratives of the destructive force of charity particularly as it was manifested in the workhouse. I have already described the shame of Alice's death in the workhouse, but another repeated story also had a powerful impact. My mother, who was born in 1922, experienced an unexpected expansion of her household in

the late-1920s when her aunt died in childbirth and her three cousins came to live with them, and share a bed that already had two siblings in it. Faith, Hope and Charity (I am afraid that was what they were called) lived with my grandparents until the early-1930s. At the beginning of the Great Depression, when my grandfather was out of work and could no longer afford to feed his expanded family, Faith, Hope and Charity had to be sent to the local workhouse. My mother talked poignantly about going to peer through the workhouse railings to look for them and wave. After a few years, Faith and Hope were shipped off to Canada 'for a better life'—a better life that turned out to be enforced labour on one of the enormous Canadian prairie farms. Charity was considered 'too feeble' and remained in the workhouse until it closed in the late-1930s whereupon she was transferred to the local lunatic asylum. She was still there when she died in her late 30s. In the twenty-first century, food banks have become the prevalent form of middle-class compassion. They may be a more benign form of charity than the benighted workhouse, but I hate them, and the message they convey, with a vehemence that reverberates down through my family history of public charity. They may engender gratitude and relief in families suffering from food deprivation, but they also provoke a sense of shame, humiliation and powerlessness. Echoing my parents and grandparents, I believe working-class families should be given sufficient funds to feed themselves instead of being forced to rely on 'the slops' of those who are more affluent.

The idealising of heroic coalminers in left-wing rhetoric always brings a wry smile to my face because the bottom line surely is that it was a dirty, dangerous and dehumanising job. The lived complexity of being a coalminer demands the juxtaposition of the image of the dignified heroic worker with the acknowledgement of its impossibility (Dicks, 2008). In the end, my nan had to rescue my grandfather from the pit. He was in his 50s and the night terrors he'd suffered since he first went down the pit aged 15 were getting worse. He would scream out about the suffocating darkness and overwhelming sense of being trapped and wake up weeping. My nan, by then a lay preacher in the Baptist Chapel, used her chapel connections to get him a surface job and he became a caretaker at the new local secondary modern school. He also became a much calmer, happier and less fearful man.

While my mother's family came from generations of miners and before that farm labourers, my father's family were south Londoners, dispensing with education, and scratching a living by doing whatever came to hand. Before my father became a coalminer, his ancestors had mainly been servants, the men footman, chauffeurs, one even rising to the heady heights of being a butler, the women scullery maids, washerwomen and charladies. His own father became a brewer's drayman while his mother took in washing. There was little solidarity, political awareness or pride in being working class in his family, just the need to get by and keep going against the odds. His family tree is littered with dead babies and adults continuing to do hard manual work until they died. Maybe that was why there was no space for sentiment or even caring of any kind. My father spoke of unbelievable cruelties, of a father who caught the tram back from the brewery after making my father shovel up all the horse shit leaving him to try and keep pace with it. A severe beating was then meted out when my father failed. Figure 1 is one of the only two surviving photographs of my father's family, taken in 1918 two years before he was born. His father had just knocked his mother's front teeth out in a drunken rage. There is just one photograph of my mother when she was growing up, and none of the family. As she said, matter-of-factly, 'when there is no money to put food on the table you don't have your picture taken'.

Figure 2 shows my mum and dad in 1948 just after they got married. My dad became a coalminer because he fell in love with my mother. It was the war, and they were both stationed in Aldershot. The war brought my father the only real recognition he ever received. Not only did he get promoted into the Officer Corp, because of his high score on the entry IQ test he sat, but he also received a medal for bravery at Buckingham Palace from the King. But after the war, he ended up in the South Derbyshire coalfields as a trainee miner with a growing brood of children to feed. Any sense of value he had managed to acquire was quickly buried under an accumulation of coal dust. He often looked bowed and dejected. The image Carolyn Steedman (1986) presents of her own father's impotence is seared into my memory. She writes of the humiliation of her father by an authority figure who shouts at him for infringing a rule. I can still see the hunching of my father's shoulders in

Fig. 1 My father's family (1918)

his shabby raincoat as he tried to make himself seem smaller as we walked past a teacher from my grammar school, both of us weighed down with shopping. In retrospect, she probably did not notice him anyway, and if she did, it would only have been with a fleeting feeling of discomfort. But I have an enduring sense of shame at the palpable embarrassment I

felt at the time being with a father with coal dust on his face and a hem that was hanging down. That double shame is a powerful part of my legacy of being a coalminer's daughter, in which trying to hold on to the pride is constantly undermined by the knowledge that it is, for the most part, illusory, that in the wider world your kind is considered as lesser, however much the myths of heroic coalminers are perpetuated. There was always a powerful sense of a beleaguered 'us' and a superior, oppressive 'them'. My father would often say 'Remember you are just as good as anyone else', but the message communicated was complicated. His words were more about wish-fulfilment than reality, expressing a longing that grew out of adversity. The phrase always felt just as much a plea for recognition as any proud assertion of value.

Fig. 2   My mother and father (1948)

That powerful binary of 'us' and 'them' (Hoggart, 1957) defined my childhood just as it did my mother's and my grandparents'. In Fig. 3 of my mother from the 1950s, I recognise the habitual look of resolute defiance that defined much of her relationship to the outside world. But I can also glimpse the fierce pride and her unyielding stubbornness. My father shared that refusal to comply with the way the world was. He scoffed at being offered the opportunity to train as a pit deputy because there was no way he was becoming one of 'them' and leaving 'the men' behind. Later, when I failed to get an NUM scholarship, which was awarded instead to a son of one of the colliery managers, my father rationalised that people like us would never succeed because the spoils always went to the bosses. Unlike Hoggart, I do not see the rhetoric of 'Us' and 'Them' as a proud statement of difference, but more a defensive response to the positioning as 'other' by, primarily, the middle and upper classes, but also a self-defined 'respectable' working class. My experiences of growing up were of a divide that was rigorously policed by a 'them' who, for the most part, would have no truck with miners' families from the estate. There were myriad occasions of such policing throughout my childhood from the refusal of 'Tawny Owl', the leader of the Brownie pack, and a doctor's wife, to accept me into her pack because I had 'the wrong address'—to the insistence of the householders of the adjoining private estate that the council erect a six-foot fence between our estate and theirs. Decades of such disrespect, distaste and disregard have blighted mining communities. The collective lashing out against a 'them' "who hold sway over you, tell you what to do, and control your life from a distance" (Turton, 2020, p. 9) that contributed to Brexit has had over a century of gestation.

The figure of the coalminer has conjured up many conflicting images over the centuries: heroic and villainous, frightening and pitiful, special and ordinary (Arnold, 2018). However, although there have been periods when the English coalminer has been characterised as the 'hero of the working classes' (Howard, 1991), for the most part, he was depicted through negative stereotypes. The description in Elie Halevy's (1924) celebrated work *A History of the English People* is particularly striking, but others at the time were equally deleterious:

Fig. 3 My mother with children in the 1950s

> The miners lived like utter savages absolutely cut off not merely from the middle class, but also from other sections of the laboring classes. Savages are always careless, and the miners lived, as we said before, like absolute savages both in dirty ruined villages in which they spent the night and in the subterranean galleries where there was less supervision than in the workshops or factories. (p. 43)

More recently, Margaret Thatcher accused the mineworkers in a speech at the Conservative backbench 1922 Committee of being the 'enemy within', stating in her autobiography that "by the 1970s the coalmining industry had come to symbolize everything that was wrong with Britain" (Thatcher, 1993, p. 340). Public perceptions were generally less extreme but still routinely judgmental. Looking out from a mining community at perceptions of miners and their families in wider society, as a child and young adult it was impossible not to feel we were looked down on, seen as intellectually and culturally inferior.

Coalmining communities have consistently experienced contempt and disdain from those who consider themselves better and superior. As Tony Benn asserted, "the only time working-class people are allowed to become heroes is when they are trapped, dying or dead…If there is a pit disaster [the miners are heroes], if there is a wage claim, they are militants" (Benn, 1989, pp. 400–471). The valorising has always remained at the level of iconography.

My father saw himself as 'a Scargill man' and frequently complained about the passivity of his younger colleagues. He also differentiated between faceworkers like himself who were solid union men and the surface workers who he often labelled as 'apolitical'. However, he was even more frustrated by what he saw as the intransigence and collusion of the union with management, and growing levels of supervision, accompanied by increased numbers of supervisors. He would have agreed with Douglass' (1973, p. 1) assessment of the coalface work situation in the early-1970s:

> The new face systems push more and more officials onto our backs. Where once a face would have a single deputy and a district [comprising a group of faces] had one over-man, we now have three deputies and an over-man to a face, plus an under-manager for each district. An absurd situation.

When I was in my late teens, he once threatened to go on strike on his own if working conditions were not improved. When the strike began in 1972, I had just started work as a primary school teacher in Holloway, North London. It was the first year I was not going home on a regular basis, so I have little recollection of everyday talk about the strike and my dad's experience of it, but I do recall on the visit home in January that year that he complained as much about the actions of the NUM as he did the Coal Board and Government. He compared the upper echelons of the NUM who he said were speaking for the bosses with union officials like Scargill who were 'speaking for the men'. His growing discontent reflected prevailing attitudes among coalface workers more generally who were angry with both the Labour Government and the NUM leadership, primarily for failing to support their wage claims despite miners'

wages being relatively low in comparison with other public sector and manual workers (Beynon & Hudson, 2021). Research into the 1972 strike describes how the NUM became increasingly out of step with mineworkers as it sought to contain, rather than support, the grievances of the workforce, and was shown to be more allied to the interests of the Coal Board, than it was to those of its own members (Moores, 2020). Eventually, the strike was won, despite the right-wing leadership of Joe Gormley, because the independent initiative and momentum from below were so powerful (Darlington & Upchurch, 2011).

In early-1978, my father complained to the colliery management that the haulage chain on the coalface conveyor belt was not in alignment and was a danger to men working at the coalface. No action was taken and from then on, as the most experienced worker in his gang, my dad ensured he was the first miner to begin working at the face when they started a shift. A few days later in the words of the accident report "the haulage chain flipped to the roof striking Arthur James Sutton in the face". The report concluded "additional chain arrestors needed to be fitted". That day my father emerged from the pit on a stretcher with a seriously fractured skull, leaving behind his left eye on the coalface. After two lots of brain surgery and a period of rehabilitation, he was examined by a clinical psychologist to assess the amount of cognitive damage he had suffered. The psychologist found there was little cognitive impairment but told my mother he needed to warn her that the test results revealed a degree of paranoia. On the bus back from the hospital mum said, 'nothing to worry about then, your dad's always been paranoid'. Yet, I would argue that there is a state of justified paranoia, a warranted response to a world that has scant regard and proffers little care and support for people like you.

Challenging Over-Simplified Narratives: Unravelling the Lived Complexities of Mining Communities

In this chapter, I have attempted to present a different version from either the idealised iconography of the heroic coalminer or the demonised image of workers viewed as less than human. Rather than heroism or savagery, it is an overwhelming sense of constriction that comes through my grandfather's huge anxiety and repressed fears of being underground, and my father's unmet potential that festered into an impotent rage at being trapped in society's low expectations of people like him. For both men, in different ways, the pit represented a prison. It prevented my grandfather from achieving any semblance of equanimity and peace of mind. Just as damagingly, it prevented my father, with his unrecognised scholarly dispositions, from realising his intellectual potential. For both of them, an investment in collectivity and a seeking of strength in solidarity were a defence against trauma as much as it was a political stance.

What also permeated both my grandfather's and my father's experiences of being a coalminer was the constant lack of safety. It was evident in the very real threat of physical danger and injury, and it also haunted their relationships to wider society and mainstream institutions. A sense of danger also afflicted wives and children. Particularly before the establishment of the welfare state, there were regular periods of impoverishment and serious ill-health, and the ever-present threat of the workhouse. However, the lingering fears generated by experiences of malnutrition and destitution swept over later generations. It resulted in a pervasive sense of insecurity and financial threat not only in my parents' generation where it was borne out by experiences of precarity, but also in my own where it was not. Again, we see the ghosts of the past in the present (Walkerdine, 2016).

As Simpson and Simmons (2021) cogently summarise, "traditional working-class culture was often harsh and sometimes cruel, and mono-industrial communities, such as those based on coal or steel, could

be insular, parochial and intolerant of difference" (p. 5). The much-proclaimed solidarity of coalmining communities has always had a defensive, protective quality. There is a strong resonance with Walker-dine's (2010) notion of 'a second skin' which provides a degree of security and a sense of being contained for communities beset with dangers and uncertainties yet generates rigidity and intolerance towards those on the outside. Forged through experiences of adversity, dangerous work conditions and the close working proximity of miners, strong solidarities were most noticeable during strikes and disputes (Dicks, 2008). However, as both the strikes of 1926 and 1984–1985 demonstrate, it is also the periods of high external threat that constitute the greatest danger to internal solidarity and cohesion. The solidarity of mining communities may have seemed impregnable from the outside, but from the inside solidarity had a more fragile quality. My family history presents a view of coalminers and coalmining communities that largely reflects the divisions and divisiveness of the rest of English society. It wasn't only the hierarchical divisions between supervisors and coalminers that my father complained about, there were divides between underground and surface workers, and non-union and union members which caused tension between mining workers. In addition, my dad often recalled being treated with some scepticism as an 'outsider'. Being a southerner who had moved from London to take a job at the mine was the cause of some animosity towards him for at least his first ten years at Rawdon colliery. And the small but steady inflow of miners, deployed from other areas of Britain, shared that experience of scepticism and lingering mistrust. That distrust of outsiders, while having a powerful protective element, was part of a wider web of prejudice and discrimination. Sexism, racism and homophobia were often part of the fabric of life in mining communities (Simmons et al., 2014). Yet, for the most part, all the internal fractures were subordinate to an overwhelming oppositional sense of 'them' and 'us', overlaid with an informed political consciousness I have always been grateful for. As Crow (2002) argues, "the centrifugal forces that threatened to generate fragmentation were more or less effectively counteracted by centripetal forces bringing and keeping people together" (p. 76).

Conclusion

> It's hard down a coal mine
> But you wouldn't understand
> I've never actually been down one
> Yet the coal dust clogs my mind
> I haven't got an ounce of creativity in me
> Vicarious coal mining swallowed it up in misery
> **(a Poem written in the early-1970s when I was working in the ILEA as a reception class teacher)**

I've included this attempt at poetry not to demonstrate any poetic ability, I clearly recognised there was not any, but to convey the extent to which coalmining shaped and continues to shape my relationship to the world. Although coal dust has not stained my skin like it did my father's and grandfather's, it has seared my consciousness. There has always been a legacy of painful generational memories which, though faded and dim for much of the time, still have the ability to break through and resonate in the present. Then, there is the constant rage about social injustices and unfairness that has not dimmed despite my old age. Even now I am in my 70s, it still has the power to surge through my body with a familiar but unsettling influence, rendering me in equal measure the driven, hyperactive and determined 'over-achiever' and the impotent unheard, unseen seething 'other'. More than ever, feelings that there is so much injustice to be fought and challenged, and a countervailing sense of being able to do so little about it, haunt me.

As Linkon (2014) asserts:

> People and communities are shaped by their histories, by experience, by memory, and by the way the economic and social practices of the past frame the structures, ideas, and values that influence our lives long after those practices have ceased to be productive. (p. 1)

With the hegemony of neoliberal individualism comes the belief that we can break free from our pasts. The cruel fantasies perpetuated by the rich and powerful from the Obamas (Obama, 2018, 2020) to David Cameron (2012) present a past that only gently touches our present and

frees us to become whatever we desire. British society, along with American society, has made a wholesale investment in meritocracy, believing that 'the best and brightest' will inevitably rise. Yet, for many of us, the past grips like a vice. This is not to espouse a belief in determinism. It does not have to be this way. The limited opportunities and economic cruelties experienced by past and present generations of working-class families like my own are a result of choices. But those choices have been made primarily by others with much greater economic and political power. The material deprivations and psychological abuse inflicted on earlier generations of my family are still being wreaked on working-class communities by an archaic, cruel and out-of-touch elite who govern only in their own interests. And that careless elite are choosing with impunity to locate the responsibility for poverty and destitution with the poor and destitute themselves. It is unsurprising that shame exemplifies the working-class legacy just as shamelessness defines that of the elite (Okwonga, 2021). As a consequence, the contemporary desolation of ex-coalmining areas mirrors the past era of the General Strike and the Great Depression when my grandparents were impoverished to the extent that they could no longer care for their own family let alone contribute to wider society. The hopelessness and despair they felt still echo in the present. Then as now, shame, despair and a sense of humiliation actively undermine care, empathy and fellow feeling towards others.

Yet, despite the toxic policies of the powerful, I suggest there is a different sense of self in coalmining areas to the neoliberal ideal. The valorisation of competitive individualism and personal ambition central in neoliberal ideology fits discordantly into communities where the predominant sense of self is one that exists above all in connection with others. Throughout 30 years of research into social-class experiences, one enduring feature has been the much greater propensity of the working classes I have interviewed to draw on a collective 'we' in their narratives rather than the individualised 'I' of their middle and upper-class peers. That is why neoliberalism makes no sense in relation to the deeply ingrained value system within mining communities where a very different moral economy operates (Lawson, 2020). Despite a degree of fragility, a sense of solidarity consistently worked to tie mining communities together, overriding internal divisions, especially

at times when those communities faced a threat (Barron, 2009). The individual is pointless, it is the connection with others that gives life its value. When these communities are thriving, such connections are imbued with practices of being cared for and caring for others. But in austerity-riven, post-Brexit Britain coalmining communities have been increasingly stripped of the resources that enable its members to care and be cared for, just as they were depleted in the depression ridden early-twentieth century.

I only learnt to be proud of being a coalminer's daughter as an adult, ironically at a stage in my life when most people would no longer consider me to be working class. Before then, when I was actually living that identity, there was too much humiliation, shame and fear clogging up any sense of pride. Resentment, defiance and recalcitrance coloured my response to how others treated me. Throughout my teens and early twenties, I must have been told over a hundred times that I had a chip on my shoulder. Yet, through dark days of despair and feeling worthless, it was that chip on the shoulder, a righteous sense of indignation that I was neither being treated fairly nor having my value recognised, that kept me struggling to realise a potential that more powerful others could not see.

I have kept countless things from my past, badly written poems as well as taped interviews with my parents, and many of the almost daily letters my mum and I wrote to each other when I was at university. Among these artefacts is a congratulations letter from my mum and dad when I received my PhD. It says, 'we are very, very proud of you'. My father even took the whole family out for a meal in the London West End which he insisted on paying for himself. I, in my turn, am very proud to be able to keep on fighting for the people I love and others like them who have never been accorded the dignity, respect and value they deserve (Reay, 2017). That is the richest legacy I have inherited from being a coalminer's daughter.

But that history is also a sullied legacy. Working-class pride has always had a fragile quality in mining communities, despite celebratory histories of, for example, Northern brass bands and Welsh male choirs. How could it have been otherwise when the powerful in society have always treated us as an inferior, despicable and ultimately disposable other? And now in

the twenty-first century ex-coal mining communities have been tossed on the scrap heap of society. Recent research (Beatty et al., 2019) shows the former coalfields lagging behind the rest of the country in relation to economic and social disadvantage, the weakness of the local economy, and ill-health and disability. There can be no proud working-class history without a proud working class. I have tried to illustrate through my own family history, that as a result of both material and symbolic violence meted out by more powerful others, that pride has always been vulnerable and under threat. Today, when there are no coalmines just former coalfields, the people living in those areas are still being robbed of dignity, security, pride and the opportunity to realise their potential just as my grandparents and parents were generations before. We are left with a sullied history but also a sullied present.

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How Education and Training Developed the Mining Workforce: Oral Recollection and Testimonies

Martyn Walker

Introduction

The trajectory of Britain's coal industry is well documented from the collection of sea coal on Northumberland beaches in Roman times, to its decline from the mid-twentieth century onwards (Ashworth, 1986; Galloway, 1969). Less attention has, however, been paid to the impact that education and training had on both the day-to-day operations of the coal industry and the lives of those mineworkers who engaged in such learning. This chapter begins to address that deficit. It traces the development of mining qualifications from the 1850 Coal Mines Inspection Act, the role of the Miners' Welfare Fund and the increasing involvement of technical colleges during the early years of the twentieth century. It then focuses on the growth of provision following the nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947. This provides the backdrop

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85

for the next section which presents recollections of former miners who undertook different forms of education and training ranging from the compulsory introductory mining certificate through to degree-level qualifications between the 1960s and the 1980s. This data collected as part of an oral history project provides important insights into participants' experiences of learning, its effect on their personal and professional development—and, in some cases, how this influenced their career trajectories after leaving the mining industry. The chapter goes some way towards challenging popular assumptions about former coalmining communities, particularly their supposed resistance to formal education, and their historical lack of participation in further and higher education.

Education and Training for the Coal Industry: Early Beginnings

Coalmining in Britain can be traced back to ancient times but grew rapidly to supply the great rise in demand for coal driven by industrialisation, urbanisation and increasing population from the early-nineteenth century onwards. The process of mining also became more complex over time, due largely to the development of deep shaft mining necessary to meet increased demand. Whereas traditionally coal was accessed either by tunnelling into hillsides or by shallow-shaft mining, deep mining brought increased threats from flooding, roof falls and methane gas. It required new technology and working methods which meant that colliers were expected to be able to read and write and operate and maintain more complex and expensive tools and machinery. Colliery owners were also concerned about loss of production caused by injury and loss of life, as well as costs associated with damaged or poorly maintained equipment (Strong, 1988, p. 3). The 1850 Coal Mines Inspection Act identified "an urgent need to foster and establish mining institutes in order to concentrate on finding solutions to unique problems arising from the mining of coal" (p. 3). Thereafter, specialist mining institutes began to be established offering instruction in reading and writing as well as the technical aspects of mining—including courses in geology, surveying, the sinking of shafts and prevention of flooding. Provision

expanded rapidly into other branches of mining engineering, science and technology. By the 1880s, Wigan Mining and Mechanical School was, for example, offering courses including geology; boring; breaking new ground, shafts and levels; ventilation; and lighting of mines (Wigan Mining and Mechanical School, 1880).

The ongoing expansion of the coal industry during the early-twentieth century meant a more comprehensive and structured approach to education and training was necessary. Significant development followed the 1902 Education Act which established local education authorities (LEAs) empowered to provide or support the provision of education and training in England and Wales (with similar legislation in Scotland). This signalled substantial growth in vocational education with many new technical colleges established during the first half of the century. In coalmining areas, it was common to find the term 'Mining' incorporated into the name of the college—examples being Barnsley Mining and Technical College; Burnley Mining and Technical Institute; Wigan and District Mining and Technical College. New initiatives included education and training in coal haulage, winding, descent and ascent, surveying, and methods of underground working. Higher-level provision involved substantial amounts of arithmetic, technical drawing, mechanics, physics and chemistry. Thereafter, the 1911 Coal Mines Act laid the foundation upon which education and training for the industry were built—the Act requiring not only "a high standard of qualification for all colliery officials" but also that all miners should have the opportunity to gain relevant qualifications examined by the Board of Mining Education (Roderick & Stephens, 1972, p. 110). Meanwhile, technological developments including the introduction of steam boilers; compressed air machines; advances in electric power; and underground railways drove demand for more specialist forms of education and training (Bryson, 1928).

Often mine owners were landowners wishing to invest in coal rather than running the mining process directly so competent managers were required and colliery managers' examinations were introduced as the industry expanded and became more complex. The 1911 Act also required technical colleges to offer courses which would allow miners to uprate their vocational skills and knowledge by attending college on

a 'day-release' basis whilst in employment. Later, one of the recommendations of the 1919 Royal Commission for Coal[1] was the need to provide financial support for the welfare of miners and their communities. Subsequently, the 1920 Mining Industry Act introduced a levy of one penny (1d) per ton of coal from every mine to be allocated to the Miners' Welfare Fund[2] (Venables, 1956, p. 34). After 1926, an additional 5% levy came from coal royalties. Between 1920 and 1952, more than £30 million was spent on pithead baths; health and recreation facilities; colliery canteens; research into mines safety; and education and training, including university scholarships for mining qualifications (Miners' Welfare Committee and Commission, 1952). Wigan College, for example, received £20,000 from the Miners' Welfare Fund to provide 'additional accommodation in supporting mining education' and a further £5000 for equipment. The resultant extension of the mining department included a library, science and engineering laboratories, and additional classrooms. Thereafter, a geology laboratory was introduced. In 1920, support from the Miners' Welfare Fund helped Burnley mining department establish a laboratory with a "wide range of apparatus for the analysis of coal, coal dust and mine gases" (Burnley Municipal Technical Institute, 1920, p. 10). The principal at Burnley stated that:

> A Mining School [department], like that in the College, can render a considerable service by spreading an understanding of the scientific principles lying at the base of the [coal] industry, and of the many technical applications of those principles to both ordinary and special problems that arise in their operation. (p. 11)

In 1924, the Miners' Welfare Fund provided Burnley College with a further £1,400 to support of a new diploma course. The principal claimed the College was now:

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[1] The Royal Commission on Coal was established to consider the management and potential nationalisation of the coal industry and miners' working, conditions, wages and hours.

[2] The Miners' Welfare Fund was set up under the provisions of the 1920 Mining Industry Act to support coalminers' living conditions, recreation and well-being.

[C]apable of satisfying the 70 square miles of the Burnley Basin with educational requirements of every grade of worker and official in or about the pits. (Burnley Municipal Technical Institute, 1924, p. 16)

At the start of 1929–1930, the Miners' Welfare Fund provided Burnley with £1,500 which was used to set up a mining power laboratory featuring electrical and mechanical machinery (Burnley Municipal Technical Institute, 1930). Burnley students were often rapidly promoted as they had up-to-date knowledge of the principles of electricity and compressed air which were becoming the main sources of power at the pits. In 1934, Burnley received a further Miners' Welfare Fund grant of £1,400 used to purchase a steam turbine, dynamometer and diesel engine for the engine's laboratory. Transformers, a compressed air turbine, underground telephone equipment, electrical furnaces, gas-analysis apparatus and modern flame and electric safety lamps were also brought for the general mining laboratory.

In 1938, Wigan's Principal stated that:

Not only does our mining department, both in equipment and in standing, compare favourably with that of any university in the country, but our long tradition and high reputation in the mining industry gives us standing which is hardly to be rivalled by any other institution in the world. (Burnley Municipal Technical Institute, 1938, p. 3)

There were also talks with Manchester Victoria University about granting Wigan degree-awarding powers for mining degrees, although this never came to pass.[3] However, between 1927 and 1961, over 50% of students who completed advanced mining courses at Wigan went on to gain degrees in mining at Manchester University.[4]

Burnley College, like similar institutions, identified that it had a responsibility in supporting the present and future of mining through providing courses for "youths and men who desire to know more about their jobs or to prepare themselves for the statutory examinations" (Burnley Municipal Technical Institute, 1940, p. 72). Such provision

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[3] Letters exchanged between Wigan College Principal and Manchester University Governors.
[4] Wigan and District Technical College, Mining and Geology Prospectus, 1961–1962.

supported the expanding mining industry but also encouraged professional development and promotion opportunities for mineworkers. Progression to higher-level qualifications could—in theory and sometimes in practice—enable miners to progress onto higher-paid roles such as foremen, under managers and, in some cases, managers and area managers (see Table 1).

Nationalisation of the Coal Industry: Expansion and Growth of Provision

Partnership between the Miners' Welfare Fund and LEAs was central to providing education and training for mineworkers, especially in technical college settings, although individual collieries also provided workforce training. Until 1947, all mines were privately owned, and smaller collieries often lacked the inclination or means to support significant amounts of education and training, although many larger collieries did so. Following nationalisation, the National Coal Board (NCB) offered sponsorships to employees, although the Miners' Welfare Fund continued to be an important source of funding and the levy on coal was raised from 1 to 3d per ton to support education and training (Griffin, 1999, p. 263).

A preliminary mining course for young workers, minimum age of seventeen, was introduced by the Mining Examinations Board in the 1940s. Similar provision existed for adults reluctant to attend classes alongside young people. The Mining Examinations Board was also responsible for the colliery fireman's certificate for those operating and maintaining pumps, electric motors, compressed air engines and similar equipment. An under-manager's course was offered for those supported by their collieries to gain positions of responsibility in the industry. Mine surveying courses, for example, covered drawing, surveying, geology, mechanical engineering, winning and working coal. In order to complete these qualifications, the NCB had to give permission for practical work to be carried out in collieries. Meanwhile, degrees in surveying and geology were offered through the London University Extension Scheme

which allowed such qualifications to be studied on a part-time basis at local technical colleges—an arrangement which continued until 1968.

In 1958, the Carr Report recommended a 50% increase in students on advanced courses at technical colleges and the ambition to double the number of day-release students on 'low-level part-time courses' (Barnsley College, 1963, p. 2). The Carr Committee identified that the number of 15-year-olds had risen from 640,000 in 1956 to 712,000 by 1958 and estimated that numbers would reach 929,000 by 1962. It also highlighted there would be between 200,000 and 250,000 young men available almost immediately for civilian employment with the end of National Service, and so work-related training should be a high priority. The NCB was keen to attract workers adopting slogans such as:

> A career for tomorrow for young lads of today. You're paid to learn a trade in the Country's coalmines.
>
> I'm going into Mining – they train you for a skilled job and you earn while you learn.[5]

By the 1950s, technical colleges offered Ordinary National Certificates in mining mechanical engineering; mining electrical engineering; and mine surveying. General Certificates in Education (GCE) O-Levels were offered in surveying and geology, through London University. During the 1960s, Higher National certificates (HNCs) in surveying, colliery electrical engineering and GCE A-Level Geology were available. Coal mining technicians' courses were introduced as part-time three-year courses to replace existing City and Guilds craft courses (see Burnley Municipal Technical Institute, 1968).

Different technical colleges developed their own specialist provision. Wigan specialised in Associate Membership Examination for the Institute of Mining Engineers and the Mining Diploma approved by the Ministry of Power. It also offered a three-year sandwich course—the National Diploma in Mining—and technical and managerial courses for those employed in the industry either undertaking or aspiring to perform such roles (Wigan and District Mining and Technical College, 1961).

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[5] During the 1960s, the NCB launched a national poster campaign aimed at recruiting young men into the coal industry.

Wigan was effectively a national centre for higher-level courses for the mining industry whereas smaller colleges often lacked the equipment or expertise required to run advanced courses. Provision was therefore uneven across the country and the ability of mineworkers to access learning varied according to local and personal circumstances. Education and training, nevertheless, provided a ladder of opportunity, at least for some coalminers.

The 1964 Industrial Training Act led to increases in LEA funding for both part-time and full-time post-school education and training, including support for those working in the mining industry. The resultant increase in student numbers was mainly in day-release students, such as apprentices, technicians, craft operatives and other young workers, many of whom were employed in mining, engineering and manufacturing (Hyland & Merrill, 2003, p. 12).

Former Labour MP, Tom Ellis, was a coalminer in North Wales between the 1940s and 1960s. He sat examinations at Wigan and became a colliery manager at the relatively young age of 33 before becoming MP for Wrexham in 1970. Ellis recalled:

> It will be a surprise to Lancastrians to know that we in the North Wales fraternity had impressions of Wigan which were overwhelmingly if not exclusively academic...when a proud mother said her boy was going to Weegeen, she meant that he was going to sit his colliery manager's certificate. (Ellis, 1971, p. 13)

Ellis explains what it felt like to pass the colliery manager's certificate:

> I will always remember the thrill I got on the Saturday morning late in January 1953 when I met the postman...with the official envelope from the Ministry of Fuel and Power. I had passed the exam...I felt like a man who had received a million pounds. (Ellis, 1971, p. 57)

In 1962, Barnsley College published coal industry management salaries in its prospectus, listed in Table 1. This was meant to inspire school-leavers to work in the industry and also to encourage experienced miners to enrol on courses at the College.

Table 1 Salaries in the mining industry in relation to qualifications for 1962

Management posts	Annual salary	Equivalent in 2021
Under manager	£1,125–£1,500	£35,000
Manager	£1,400–£2,100	£48,500
Agent	£1,700–£2,400	£55,500
Group manager	£2,000–£2,750	£63,750
Production manager	£2,250–£3,000	£69,000
Area manager	Up to £4,000	£92,000
Colliery engineer	£900–£1,400	£32,500
Group engineer	£1,005–£1,600	£37,000
Area engineer	£1,550–£2,150	£50,000
Divisional ENGINEER	£2,000–£2,750	£64,000
The NCB also provided scholarships to university		

Source Adapted from Barnsley College of Mining, Guide to Courses (1962, p. 7)

Such initiatives were increasingly required as it became apparent that some young men were becoming reluctant to work in the coal industry and it was not uncommon for fathers to discourage sons from following them into mining—as is illustrated by the words of Jack, which appear in the section below. Meanwhile, there were opportunities in other industries and new forms of service sector work, especially in the expanding public sector, which was significantly cleaner and safer than coalmining and often better paid, at least until after the miners' strikes of the 1970s.[6]

Technical colleges were central to education and training for the coal industry, but mining departments were also established at universities and university colleges as early as 1900. These included the Universities of Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Nottingham and Durham University's Newcastle campus. Herriot Watt and Cardiff fulfilled similar roles in Scotland and Wales (Roderick & Stephens, 1972, p. 111). These 'civic universities' saw the potential of vocational learning, rather than just the traditional diet of academic degrees favoured by Oxford and Cambridge. The NCB supported miners to go to university through its sponsorship arrangements. This enabled the Coal Board to develop expertise necessary to meet the demands of an increasingly technologically complex industry, but such qualifications could also facilitate

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[6] British Coalminers were awarded a 27% pay increase on recommendation of the 1972 Wilberforce Inquiry.

significant career advancement. Progression within technical or managerial roles was the norm for those who gained HNCs, diplomas or degrees, and some later become college or university lecturers, passing on knowledge and skills to the next generation. Many staff at Barnsley Mining College, for example, worked in the coal industry and gained mining degrees from the University of Sheffield prior to going into teaching. The Miners' Welfare Fund provided support for advanced part-time courses in technical colleges through scholarships for fees, books, instruments and travel expenses (Burnley Municipal Technical Institute, 1940, pp. 75–77).

Technical colleges were often built close to collieries, but Rose (2001) explains how 'traditions of working-class independence' meant that miners often established their own networks of libraries and institutes (p. 59). In some areas of the country, miners agreed to wage deductions to pay for their children's education, and when fees for elementary schools were finally abolished in 1891, money was redirected towards libraries and institutes for adult learning (Rose, 2001, p. 237). Woodin (2007) believes that self-help organisations in industrial communities "were themselves built upon entrepreneurial understanding and skills" which were required for the commercial success of local communities (p. 489). This tradition of self-improvement was, however, essentially lost as the mining industry declined. In 1967, mining courses at Wigan, for example, were rationalised due to the decline of the local mining industry and much of the equipment was sold to Stoke-on-Trent College and to the Camborne School of Mines in Cornwall, both of which retained mining departments (Walker, 2015). In 1968, geology courses ceased at Burnley, as did degree provision. In 1971, mining at Rotherham merged with the electrical engineering department due to falling student numbers and mining courses had ceased altogether by 1980 (Rotherham College, 1971, 1980). Barnsley and Wigan followed soon thereafter, and all such provision had ceased to exist by the early twenty-first century (Walker, 2009).

Miners' Recollections of Their Education and Training

The notion of 'student voice' is currently popular but, whilst different individuals and groups are more or less likely to heard, there is a paucity of research on the learning experiences of those who worked in the coal industry. Data presented in this section derives from a small-scale oral history project conducted with former mineworkers as part of a broader programme of research on education and training in the coal industry (see Walker, 2009, 2015). The data presented below is taken from interviews conducted between 2011 and 2020. It focuses on participants' recollections about the perceived benefits of the courses they took—both during their time as coalminers and after they ceased working in the industry. Whilst it cannot be claimed that data reflects the experiences of all former coalminers, they go some way towards addressing a significant gap in knowledge and capture the voices of former colliers from the last generation to have worked in the British coal industry.

The five men who took part in the research were born in northern England between the 1930s and the 1960s, and all but one went into coalmining immediately after leaving school. Participants were employed in roles including surveying, colliery management and coalface work, and undertook programmes of vocational education and training ranging from the basic mining certificate up to and including degree-level qualifications. But, whilst the participants constitute something of a cross-section of former mineworkers, it cannot be claimed that they are a representative sample, or that their views and opinions are typical of all ex-miners. Neither is the fact that three participants went to university after being made redundant the norm among former mineworkers—although nor was such a trajectory particularly unusual. Participants were accessed via personal and professional contacts, drawing on previous research and localised knowledge from having previously studied at Wigan and District Mining and Technical College, and having lived in a number of former mining towns, including Burnley and Durham. The men's stories are presented below.

The Mining Surveyor

Rob began work at a colliery near his home in East Lancashire straight after leaving school in 1969 at the age of sixteen. He said that he "completed the compulsory certificate in mining and then specialised as mine surveyor at a local college". The surveying course "included examinations in geology…local fieldtrips, and surveying both above and below ground". Rob explained that:

> The visits were great because we were in the fresh air…and we were getting paid for it! The Gorge was ideal for pit surveying. It's a glacial valley which allowed geological mapping with several old pits which could be accessed and one working mine, Copy Pit was small with small coal seams.

Rob explained that practical assessments took place underground "with opportunities to experience various scenarios associated with surveying":

> We worked alongside experienced surveyors who provided practical experience with theory being carried out by college lecturers who themselves had been mining surveyors.

Soon though, Rob realised that the local collieries were becoming exhausted and "decided to relocate to Agecroft Colliery in Manchester, rather than take redundancy". However, by the late-1970s, Agecroft was also under threat of closure and Rob decided that his future lay outside the coal industry. He then applied to numerous construction companies looking for surveyors:

> I assumed that there would be a lot of competition as the local pits were closing so I was surprised that my first application resulted in me getting a surveying post at a national company based in Manchester.

Rob went on to work for several building companies and found that his qualifications and experience in the coal industry were highly valued by employers:

[E]mployers preferred experienced mining surveyors as they had worked underground in dangerous and difficult conditions which were damp, wet, busy and unstable. Mining surveyors could work in any environment.

Rob now owns his own building company and described how he also recruited those who worked in the pits as they had 'skills and expertise' around building and construction relating to mining.

Area Mining Manager

Jack was born in a Northumberland pit village in the 1930s, where his father was a miner. He passed the eleven-plus examination and attended grammar school where he studied science A-Levels and was planning to read medicine at university: "My parents were very pleased and proud of my future career in medicine". However, things changed when Jack went on a school visit to a nearby colliery:

We went to Ashington Colliery, which was then the largest one in Europe…To be honest, I cannot remember why we went. It may have been for the geography students and us science students filled the coach. I didn't think it was a careers' visit, although at the time the NCB was heavily into marketing jobs. Whatever the reason, the opportunity to go underground in one of the most up-to-date collieries…would be life-changing for me.

Jack said he immediately became 'hooked' on becoming a miner after going underground:

While on the visit, we talked to both managers and miners about working in the coal industry. It was the miners who had most charisma and I for one was really impressed with the job opportunities…It was a job for life with the opportunity for promotion, and management salaries were excellent.

He was also impressed by the extensive opportunities for education and training:

> I worked it out it would not be a financial burden to my parents…taking a medical degree was expensive with many additional costs over and above the local authority's funding of fees and accommodation…Some of the miners I met had done engineering degrees at Newcastle University and not only did the NCB fund their degrees, but they also earned a good wage while completing them. Of course, you had to go to a local university as you had to work between lectures. I wasn't bothered about going away…mixing with posh people.

Jack's parents were not happy when he informed them of his intentions:

> My dad was furious…mum was upset because she had seen how hard he had worked in the pits for not a great deal of money. It took them some time to come round. I think they were proud of me going to grammar school and becoming a doctor. It was a status thing which I quite understood.

Jack, nevertheless, applied to the NCB and was taken on at a colliery near Newcastle. After completing his initial certificate, he went on to study for an engineering degree—"I got my A-Levels and O-Level Latin and so it was progression for me…it was win, win".
He explained how his career then developed:

> I really did enjoy the work and got promoted to junior management posts. However, I realised…if I wanted to apply for higher management posts, I would have to do so across all the coalfields.

Jack eventually moved to South Yorkshire where he became an Area Manager before retiring in 1984:

> My dad…was a Union man. When I did go into top office (management) he was proud of me and my mum too. By then, I had left home and married so he played down the management aspect with his work colleagues. I knew they had got over their disappointment that I hadn't gone into medicine when they came to my graduation and had photos of me in my fancy hat and gown.

Jack's story provides us with important insights into the role of mining education, not least that he regarded working for the NCB as a viable alternative to medicine—an opportunity for working-class youth which ceased to exist with the demise of the coal industry.

Mining Apprentice to Author

Andrew left school in the early-1970s and went to art college. But after completing his course, he decided to go into mining as it was a well-paid job with career opportunities:

> I had been interested in the coal industry since I was a boy being brought up on the Lancashire Coalfield. I had been to art college, and I enjoyed it, but I couldn't see a real career in it anyway. I completed the initial training to be able to work underground and quickly got into the work.

Andrew then enrolled on a part-time HNC in mining surveying, supported by the NCB. Like Jack, he was encouraged by the fees being paid and earning a wage at the same time. Andrew shared his thoughts and feelings about working in the coal industry and about his own professional development:

> Camaraderie was so important. You worked in teams and knew what your job was. Not only was it important to work together in an efficient way…but also looking out for everyone for help, support and safety. I really enjoyed working in the coal industry and also attending college. However, I always felt that while I was at college, I was letting down my work colleagues because I was not down the pit and someone from a different team…replaced me.

Unfortunately, the NCB withdrew funding in the third year of Andrew's HNC as he had taken industrial action during the 1984–1985 Miners' Strike:

> I was gutted but as a young man I couldn't let down my community and go back to work just to finish off my course. I assumed that once it was

finally sorted out, we would all…pick up where we left off in both the pit and on the course.

Andrew did not, however, complete his course. After the strike, he went back to work but his colliery closed a few years thereafter. Andrew nevertheless continued working in the mining industry as a health and safety consultant for those few collieries still in operation. He said:

I still do some consulting. It might be a small pit with handful of men working it or developers wanting to know if it is safe to build houses or business near abandoned pits. It keeps my hand in.

Nowadays, the mines are gone but Andrew maintains an active interest in the industry and has written several books on the history of mining.

From Miners to Librarians

Pete and Larry were born in South Yorkshire in the 1960s and went into coalmining straight after leaving school. Both completed the compulsory mining certificate and were employed as coalface colliers, but it soon became apparent that there was little future in the coal industry. Pete said:

We were in the same pit together. The industry was in decline and the NCB sent information that it would fund degrees for successful applicants and there was no pressure to complete mining qualifications as everyone knew the coal industry was coming to an end…We grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

It was evident to Pete that they would not be able to stay in coalmining indefinitely:

The closure of collieries was imminent…We both completed English degrees and librarian studies at Sheffield University. When we lost our mining jobs…we applied to colleges of further education and were lucky

as we both got jobs locally and didn't need to move our families…We taught English and became librarians, jobs we are still doing.

Pete made some important observations about mining communities and participation in higher education:

The public think that the first generation of graduates are quite recent…but this is not true. The first working-class graduates came from mining communities…and often became university and college lecturers…It meant blue-collar became white-collar workers. There are some staff here who were miners and still do some teaching.

Larry described how the NCB funded the professional development of support staff, many of whom were women:

Secretaries in the pit offices were funded to complete secretarial courses through the Royal Society of Arts and national diplomas such as Pitman shorthand, and of course typing. When the pits closed, they went to work for other businesses and some I know taught office skills in local colleges. I remember looking through the classroom windows watching them type to music!

Both Pete and Larry talked about how books, articles and television documentaries have depicted the devastation of mining communities when the local collieries closed. But Pete said:

No-one picked up just how the NCB and NUM had supported advanced qualifications in mining.

Larry added:

Well-qualified miners had been role models for their children and grandchildren to work hard at school and college so they could get qualifications to set them up for life.

But Pete recognised how the social and economic impact of deindustrialisation has attenuated opportunities in former mining communities:

Those who had gone on to college and gained qualifications still have not really had careers unless they left the area in search of good jobs. Their own families are in the same situation.

Larry said: "Many lost interest in life, getting in trouble, committing crimes and drug taking…It was and still is so sad". Both Pete and Larry see their role now as motivating young people to learn and help them in finding jobs.

From Miner to Ornithologist

Sam was born in the East Lancashire coalfields in the 1960s and left full-time education at the age of sixteen. Sam said he was lazy at school and that he enjoyed working with his hands rather than his head. He was employed as a coalface worker after completing the compulsory mining certificate but showed little interest in further education until he was made redundant:

I didn't take the opportunities to better myself with qualifications and put certificates on the wall…I much preferred operating machinery to listening to lecturers. When Thatcher made me redundant, I banked my redundancy and decided then to go to university. I was mature and wanted to show my two sons that I was actually clever. I used the money…to study ornithology at Bradford University, which I love.

Sam enjoyed ornithology when not at work. He described how he "loved the peace and quiet, the fresh air and blue sky" and how this then became his work:

I became a self-employed consultant for both English Heritage and more recently HS2 to count bird species and identify likely impact on bird life. I get paid for walking in the hills and valleys across the country.

Sam is an example of a miner who found success through education after leaving the coal industry. He was less ambitious in his youth, but it is important to note that many miners were happy to gain their basic

mining qualifications and cease formal education and training thereafter. Coalmining could, after all, provide employment upon which a secure future could be built.

Conclusion

This chapter identifies a range of qualifications available to those who worked in the coal industry, from the introductory certificate up to degree-level qualifications. It highlights key developments which led to the establishment and growth of education and training from the nineteenth century up until the 1970s, by which time coalmining was in secular decline. I highlight the synergy between further, adult and higher education in offering different forms of learning for miners and coalmining communities. Whilst technological developments drove significant expansion and growth in mining education which, in turn, provided many men with progression within the industry, the learning which mineworkers undertook also helped some find new careers following closure of the pits.

Some of the earliest forms of education and training for miners were based on local 'independent' endeavour and funded either by mine owners or mineworkers themselves. As the industry expanded and the demand for skills grew, state funding via LEAs enabled the growth of education and training for the mining industry, although the nature and coverage of provision—and concomitant opportunities for development—varied significantly across different parts of the country. The Miners' Welfare Fund provided substantial financial assistance to support the establishment and expansion of the mining departments in technical colleges. Following nationalisation, the NCB promoted learning, partly to keep pace with technological change but also to continue to attract new recruits into the industry. Many employees had the opportunity to develop their careers through gaining technical and managerial qualifications. Oral testimonies of the men in this chapter provide some flavour of the opportunities available to mineworkers and the influence of mining education, sometimes even after they had left the coal industry. They also challenge popular assertions about working-class orientations

to education and provide some insight into the far-reaching impact that pit closures had on opportunities for working-class youth in Britain's former coalfields, especially in terms of rates of participation in higher education, which now lag significantly below national averages, especially for young men (Beatty et al., 2019).

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'Dirty, Dirty Job. Not Good for Your Health': Working-Class Men and Their Experiences and Relationships with Employment

Richard Gater

Introduction

This chapter draws on data from qualitative research undertaken in Aber Valley, an ex-coalmining community in the South Wales Valleys, which previously had two coalmines providing significant source of employment for men locally. The area now suffers from high levels of deprivation across a number social and economic indices. Unemployment rates, especially for men, are significantly above the national average. Male unemployment in Aber Valley is currently 9.4% compared with the UK average of 5%, although female unemployment at 4.8% is only slightly above the UK average of 4.5% (ONS, 2021a, 2021b). The long-term sick or disabled rate in Aber Valley stands at 9.4% compared with 5.8% for Great Britain as a whole (Beatty et al., 2019;

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ONS, 2021a). Nearly 35% of Aber Valley residents have no academic qualifications (ONS, 2021a).

The study on which this chapter is based explores the employment experiences and relationships of a group of working-class men who had rejected school and education more broadly based on its perceived irrelevance. Using data from semi-structured interviews, combined with visual methods, findings indicate that participants' experiences and relationships with employment are influenced by community traditions and a working-class masculinity associated with attributes previously conducive to heavy industrial work including stoicism, risk-taking and toughness. This led them to favour some but not all forms of manual employment, whilst dismissing sedentary service sector work and emotional labour. The appeal of manual employment is attributed to its physical nature, perceived health-related benefits and participants' awareness of personal well-being. These findings contribute to contemporary understandings of working-class men, employment and masculinity within the context of industrial change. It identifies some adherence to the cultural values historically associated with working-class masculinity, whilst revealing some shift in the men's perspectives on work and employment-related gender practices.

Post-World War II employment-related literature identified the significance of social relations and the inheritance of a masculine identity associated with stoicism, risk-taking and toughness (Cheng, 1999; Connell, 1995; Tolson, 1977)—characteristics which helped colliers withstand the dangerous, physical nature of their work. The inheritance of this identity led some working-class men towards forms of manual employment supporting the expression of such characteristics, yet often led to monotonous, unrewarding jobs (Ashton & Field, 1976; Beynon, 1973; Carter, 1966; Veness, 1962). However, the UK's rapid deindustrialisation from the 1970s onwards led to a secular decline in such work and an increase in service sector employment, although much of the latter consists of low-skilled, poorly-paid jobs, especially for those from working-class backgrounds (Lindsay & McQuaid, 2004). Much service sector employment also requires traditionally 'feminine' attributes associated, for example, with customer service, interpersonal communication and the presentation of self.

Despite all this, much research continues to identify the importance of a traditional masculine identity in the UK, especially among sections of working-class youth in former industrial locales once reliant on coal, steel and manufacturing. Whilst such employment has been severely reduced, many scholars have sought to understand how young men attempt to cope with the demands of education and work in post-industrial Britain (see, for example, Jimenez & Walkerdine, 2011; McDowell, 2003; Nayak, 2006; Nixon, 2018; Ward, 2015). There is, alongside such work, research documenting the changing nature of masculinity, including the supposed emergence of certain hybrid and inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2009; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Roberts (2018) suggests there is also a 'missing middle' of working-class youth (who have not disengaged from school/employment, yet neither achieved degree-level education or a professional occupation), who no longer fully subscribe to traditional gender norms and are instead modelling more inclusive forms of masculinity more in tune with the demands of much service sector work.

The empirical part of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first part demonstrates participants' attraction to manual work, the significance of place and space, and its role in shaping the men's views on employment and masculinity. The second empirical section illustrates participants' rejection of service sector work due to a stated inability to manage their feelings, the demands of customer service and the sedentary nature of the work. The final empirical section explores participants' view of coalmining and their perhaps surprising notional rejection of such work as too 'dirty', 'risky' and 'hazardous'. These findings contribute to contemporary understanding of working-class men, employment and masculinity within the context of industrial change. It illustrates a degree of compliance to certain traditional cultural values associated with working-class masculinity, whilst also demonstrating something of a shift in orientations towards the most arduous forms of labour—as illustrated in their attitudes towards coalmining as a form of employment.

Literature Review

Post-World War Two Studies

Traditionally, for many working-class men, employment decisions were largely influenced by local conditions and the types of employment available. Most important, however, was the importance of kin and community, which Veness (1962) explains through the use of her traditional-direction model. This model refers to the situation whereby a working-class young man's choice of employment is substantially influenced by friends and family, with fathers being especially influential. Walker and Hunt (1988) argue that in working-class families, notions of physical masculine toughness were often emphasised to the extent that non-manual employment was viewed as demeaning. Willis (1977) suggests that such views were often compounded by a masculine working-class culture, whereby practical skills were generally deemed superior to theoretical knowledge based on their perceived functional purpose. The following section discusses the employment experience of working-class men in post-war Britain.

Experience of Work

For thirty years after the end of World War II, the transition into work was relatively straightforward for many young working-class men. Willis (1977) suggests that some of 'the lads' in his study inherited and honed a masculine identity associated with stoicism, risk-taking and toughness imbued through social connections including family and peer group. Willis also suggests that much manual work has an intrinsic link to masculinity. Such employment often enabled young men to express aspects of a certain cultural identity, characterised by resistance to authority, banter and distrust of theoretical work. The often difficult and uncomfortable conditions associated with industrial employment were commonly associated with prestige rooted in assumptions that others

could not cope with the demands of such labour. Mental work or 'pen-pushing' was, in contrast, often viewed as effeminate or as not 'real work' (Harvey, 1990).

The notion that traditional forms of manual employment are 'dead-end' and offer little enjoyment due to the limited room for independence, judgement or autonomy, is a central theme across much early literature relating to working-class jobs (see, for example, Carter, 1966; Veness, 1962; Walker & Hunt, 1988). Such research relates to a period of relatively high rates of manual employment, with many working-class men employed in manufacturing and forms of heavy industry constructed as inherently masculine due to their physical and dangerous nature (Nixon, 2018). However, as subsequent sections of this chapter demonstrate, mass deindustrialisation has significantly decreased working-class men's access to jobs considered 'appropriately manly for their social class' (Harris, 2018, p. 29).

The Shift from Manual to Service Sector Work

Structural changes in the labour market and economy have led to a move away from industrial work towards service sector employment across much of the Global North, although this is particularly apparent in the UK. This shift has been detrimental to many coalfield areas, most of which have failed to effectively replace work lost with the demise of the coal industry. Employment in such locales now consists mainly of low-skilled, poorly-paid work in sectors traditionally dominated by feminised forms of labour (Beatty et al., 2019).

Service sector employment ranges from well-paid high-tech and professional occupations to low-status, insecure jobs in retail, leisure, hotel and catering, and similar forms of labour. Particular forms of low-skill, poorly-paid service sector work including protective services; warehousing; and distribution are frequently performed by working-class men (Roberts, 2018). Nixon (2006) argues that this is often determined by the nature of the work and the subsequent ability of working-class men to express a masculine identity, together with the inability to attain more prestigious, better-paid service jobs due to minimal educational

attainment. Lindsay and McQuaid (2004), however, report that unemployed men's refusal to engage in much service sector work, including customer service, and sales and hospitality, is also due to low pay and their aversion to aesthetic and emotional labour. For Nixon (2018), such forms of work may be "particularly challenging for [working-class] men, whose embodied masculinity seems particularly at odds with the kinds of skills, attributes and dispositions required" (p. 64). But, as the following discussion illustrates, some working-class young men seem to have found ways to refashion a form of masculine identity within the confines of service sector work.

Contemporary Studies

Some contemporary research demonstrates a degree of continuity with Veness' (1962) traditional-directional model. This includes Nayak's (2003, 2006) work in the North East of England which identified low-skilled, poorly-educated working-class young men who expressed elements of an industrial heritage embodied in an appreciation of skilled physical labour. Many of Nayak's participants were reluctant to engage in 'feminine' service sector employment. Others did, however, undertake such work, although this was largely influenced by the threat of unemployment. There are nevertheless certain continuities between Nayak's participants and 'the lads' in Willis' (1977) study, including significant commitment to the traditional working-class masculine ideal of 'hard graft' and a feeling that school was of little importance to their future. Resistance to service sector work was also identified by Jimenez and Walkerdine's study (2011) in South Wales. Their research identified working-class young men who were reluctant to engage in low-paid, low-status service sector work due to the negative connotations associated with 'feminine' forms of labour.

Nixon (2009) demonstrates how some low-skilled, poorly-educated working-class men are able to refashion traditional forms of masculine identity within the confines of service sector work. Those who took

part in Nixon's research gravitated towards a narrow range of 'masculine' service sector jobs including distribution, transportation and warehousing—forms of labour where customer interaction and emotional labour are minimal. Such employment allows a greater sense of freedom and provides at least some opportunities to engage in typical forms of industrial masculinity including 'piss-taking', winding-up and practical joking—forms of expression deemed unacceptable in public-facing service sector environments (Nixon, 2009). Such studies demonstrate a degree of continuity in traditional working-class masculinity and young men's employment relationships and experiences (Connell, 1995). However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that "masculinities are configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time", with hegemonic masculinity being malleable and susceptible to change (p. 852). This is evident in recent literature concerning masculinities and research regarding working-class young men and employment.

Anderson's (2009) notion of inclusive masculinity suggests that some heterosexual young men exhibit a 'softer' version of masculinity consisting of "increased peer tactility, emotional openness and close friendship based on emotional disclosure" (Anderson & McCormack, 2016, p. 547). Such assertions have, however, been critiqued due to its focus on a predominantly white, middle-class sample and their relatively privileged position which arguably enables them to "engage in traditionally feminised practices without having their masculinity diminished" (Gough, 2018, p. 10). Additional developments in contemporary masculinity theory include Bridges and Pascoe's (2014) notion of hybrid masculinities which refers to the "selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalised and subordinated masculinities and – at times – femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities" (p. 246). Essentially, hybrid masculinities suggest that some men (particularly those occupying privileged social categories) display softer masculine characteristics in an attempt to distance themselves from a hegemonic masculine position. Gough (2018), however, argues that some men are engaging in traditionally associated feminine practices including 'diet, grooming, substance

use, and make-up application' (p. 19). However, rather than demonstrating a decline in conventional masculinity, these behaviours are, arguably, a reworking and repackaged form of traditional masculinity that corresponds with a more image-conscious, consumer-orientated society.

Roberts (2018) suggests that the 'missing middle' embraces retail and similar service sector employment. He argues that this can be explained through the contemporary nature of his research and participants' detachment from previous ways of being due to the decline in heavy industry, and the coinciding rise in service sector work. In other words, Roberts' participants are not tied to traditional predispositions but have developed a form of inclusive masculinity more in tune with the emotional demands of retail. There is, however, an important distinction between Roberts' (2018) participants and much previous research inasmuch as they had all possessed at least Level 2 National Vocational Qualifications, or equivalent. This level of educational attainment is generally associated with written and verbal skills, and other attributes, which help facilitate the expression of a softer, inclusive masculine identity, attuned to the requirements of retail work (Nixon, 2018). In contrast, Nixon's (2009) participants had no academic qualifications which hindered "the reflexive reconstruction of their masculine occupational identities" and their subsequent ability to engage in retail-related service sector work (Nixon, 2018, p. 64).

Contextual Information and Methodology

Data presented below derives from a two-stage hypothesis-generating case study used to generate questions for a larger study on the changing nature of masculinity in a post-industrial locale. The first stage was inspired by the studies discussed above and explored the relationship between place and identity, men, and their active rejection of education. The research was conducted in the Aber Valley, a location which previously had two coalmines: the Windsor and Universal Collieries. Their opening in the 1890s transformed the Aber Valley from a rural farming area with a population of 86 to an industrial community of 11,000

people and, at their peak, the two pits employed almost 5,000 men (Llywelyn, 2013; Phillips, 1991).[1] The Aber Valley has, however, failed to replace the jobs lost with the demise of the coal industry, especially in terms of male employment. Nowadays, many locals seek work in neighbouring areas. Currently, the three most significant forms of employment for Aber Valley residents are manufacturing (21%), wholesale and retail (14%) and human health and social work activities (12.3%) (ONS, 2021b).

The Aber Valley is the place where I was born and continue to reside. Despite the challenges associated with 'insider' research (see, for example, DeLyser, 2001), my familiarity with the local area enabled me to recruit five working-class men with whom I had a good rapport, and whose anti-school history was known to me. These participants were prepared to talk on an informal basis and helped to inform the direction of future research. Mutual trust and a degree of rapport created a relaxed and open environment.

Initial findings established that all participants were employed in manual work and favoured active, physical jobs. This fed into the second stage of the research, which was based on the following research questions:

1. How did the men initially become involved in manual labour?
2. Why do the men favour active, physical manual jobs?
3. What influences the men's preference for active, physical manual work?

Further interviews were conducted in a local pub which provided a familiar environment for participants and helped create a relaxed atmosphere and encourage open and honest discourse. The participants were Carl (age 37)—scaffolder; Geoff (age 21) and Mark (age 28)—labour-intensive factory workers; Steve (age 26)—window fitter; and William (age 21)—plasterboard fitter. Semi-structured interviews focused on their employment experiences and relationships at work. Participants were asked a range of questions about their workplace environment and job

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[1] Universal Colliery shut in 1923 but Windsor remained open until 1986.

roles. Visual methods were also used. Here, the men were presented with pictures of work in a call centre and in a coalmine. The rationale for this drew on the juxtaposition between the sedentary, stereotypically feminine nature of call centre work and the more active, physical and masculine characteristics of coalmining. Visual methods allowed me to distance myself from my insider status and any taken-for-granted assumptions about the participants and data collected (Sikes, 2006). The two pictures were displayed separately, and participants were asked to express their thoughts and feelings about the nature of work depicted. Their responses were probed and followed up with further questions where necessary. Interviews, on average, lasted one hour, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data was then analysed and coded using inductive thematic analysis.

Findings

'Most Men I Know Are in Construction and That Stuff'

Data revealed that the men's employment histories almost exclusively comprised of manual labour, apart from one participant who had worked as a bartender at the local rugby union club. Participants were asked how they became involved in their employment, and their responses suggested a continuing influence of family, friends, prominent male figures and community traditions more broadly, as previously highlighted by Veness (1962):

> I just thought that was basically what everyone does. Men do don't they? Most men I know are in construction and that stuff. I just wanted to not follow the crowd but go in that direction like. (Geoff)

> I wanted to go into construction because I thought, when I was growing up that it was a lot of money you could be made in it. My bamp (grandfather) is a site manager, and he told me the amount of money plumbers and electricians earn. (William)

I remember everyone telling me when I was younger to always get a trade behind you. My parents, my family, everyone…I have always liked being hands-on, and at the time when I was looking to do work experience, I went with my father for the week and ever since then I have just stuck to it. (Steve)

Steve demonstrates that his preference for manual labour was heavily influenced by a period of work experience with his father. He frequently used the term 'hands-on' throughout the interview process:

It's work I like doing – hands-on work. I like making stuff, fitting a brand-new window for someone. (Steve)

When asked to explain what he meant by 'hands-on', Steve replied:

There's not much paperwork or writing. You haven't got to think a lot. Once you've done the work you're done, it's something you've made. (Steve)

This is illustrative of a traditional class-based dichotomy between manual and mental work, including an aversion to 'pen-pushing' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994) and an inclination towards employment that provides material worth often valued by working-class males, especially in the former industrial heartlands (Nixon, 2018). All participants saw their job as enjoyable, even those employed as labour-intensive factory workers. Mark gained personal reward by achieving targets and knowing that he was providing financial security for his family. Geoff and Steve gained intrinsic reward by completing work tasks, and Carl achieved satisfaction in the knowledge that he was delivering a safe working environment. All participants highlighted the importance of movement and physical activity. The next section explores the men's views about the call centre picture.

'I'm Just an Active Guy and Want to Keep Moving'

All participants stated that they would be reluctant to work in a call centre. One of the overriding deterrents was the need to interact on a telephone: "I am not very good on the phone talking to people so I wouldn't be good at that job" (Mark). Mark's response acknowledges underdeveloped communication skills—a problem faced by many young men with low-level educational attainment (Nixon, 2006). Other participants demonstrated traditional working-class masculine qualities and an unwillingness to be submissive, whilst recognising their inability to control and manage their feelings and responses:

> I am not very good on the phone talking to people. You gotta have good patience see for talking on the phone to people, and they're screaming down to you, sometimes it's hard to control your emotion down the phone like. (William)

> You're stuck in a place all day…having people abuse you down the phone. I don't think I could handle that just sat down. I would end up eating a lot and being fat and lazy. And I just don't like jobs like that. (Steve)

Steve's response presents a further reason for his aversion to call centre work—its sedentary nature. Throughout the interviews, participants frequently referred to an overwhelming need to be physically active. Carl and Mark commented:

> I'm not one to sit down and go on the computer typing all day. I would rather be physically doing something for hours and hours in my day than sat there. (Carl)

> I think it's better because, like I said, I like to be on my feet and occupied. I don't want to sit down on my arse all day! I'm happy being on my feet. I'm just an active guy and want to keep moving. (Mark)

Geoff, William and Steve added:

I don't know. I just think everyone would rather be on their feet instead of sitting down all day. I like to move about. I like to be on my feet all the time. Keeps you fit don't it – constantly active as well. (Geoff)

It's constantly busy, you're carrying boards all day. It's kind of like going to the gym in a way because you're constantly lifting, you're getting good exercise which keeps you physically fit. (William)

I couldn't work in an office job. I don't mind doing a bit of grafting. There's some weight on those windows. I don't go to the gym; I don't have time to go to the gym…so it does something for tha. It's fitness at the end of the day. (Steve)

Within both William and Steve's responses, there is reference to a gym and an associated manufactured form of fitness and health awareness, as opposed to a consequential masculine embodied fitness related to heavy industrial labour (Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012). This arguably begins to challenge notions of traditional masculine orientations to employment evident in much previous research. In other words, their responses demonstrate that the significance of movement and being active is closely associated with being physically fit and healthy. Conversely, Sloan et al. (2015) argue that the traditional marker of hegemonic masculinity 'stoicism'—a desire to be self-sufficient and strong—prevents many men from "caring for their physical and psychological health since displaying a concern for one's wellbeing may be deemed feminine or weak" (p. 206). The following section relates to the coalmining image.

'Dirty, Dirty Job Like. Not Good for Your Health'

It was initially expected that the participants would comment positively on the coalmining image as it is a stereotypically hyper-masculine form of employment. However, all but one of them responded negatively to the photograph. This related largely to concerns about personal health, dirt and the hazardous nature of coalmining:

There's not the most health and safety down there. Plus, there's a lot of work to be done down there. They've probably got good friendships down there like, but it's just the environment like. They're probably breathing all types of shit into them and whatever like. It's just unhealthy. (William)

Dark, messy, sweatbox – it's got to be about 50 degrees down there. They've all got their tops off, pitch black and you're proper swinging back – they are heavy as fuck! (Geoff)

I wouldn't enjoy coalmining. Confined space, chucking at some coal, pickaxe, no health and safety, when that hits you, you're fucking dust. Stinking dirty, long hours. I wouldn't want to get down there. (Mark)

If someone said to me now, 'stop your job and go down there', I would say, 'no'. Dirty, dirty job like. Not good for your health. I wouldn't feel safe down there. Anything could fall on you couldn't it, collapse. I wouldn't like to do it. (Steve)

Such responses demonstrate particular concerns about the dirty, dangerous nature of coalmining. The identification of such aversive characteristics reveals a fragmentation of the historical link between masculinity, hard labour and dirt (McElhinny, 1994; Walkerdine & Jimenez 2012). It also demonstrates a shift away from findings of previous research in South Wales with redundant steel workers which highlights participants' nostalgic recollections: "You come home, there's no dirt under your nails, your hands are completely clean, it's not proper work" (Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012, p. 92). The disparity between such findings from earlier research and data presented in this chapter may be partly explained by the fact that my participants had not previously been directly employed in heavy industry, and by the fact that they were substantially younger than those who took part in Walkerdine and Jimenez's study. Interestingly, Carl, my oldest participant, was the most positive in his attitude towards coalmining:

It's a bit of graft which is what I like – this guy would 100 percent be on-site if this was 2018. If you're a grafter, you're a grafter. These guys

with dirty faces, they don't give a fuck about the dirt. They're not doing their hair – they're just there to graft boy. (Carl)

Carl's response contains revealing terminology. Through the comment, "These guys with dirty faces, they don't give a fuck about the dirt. They're not doing their hair", he distances miners from contemporary practices of male grooming and a focus on image consciousness sometimes described as metrosexuality (Hall, 2014). More generally, however, participants' aversion to coalmining was related to concerns about risk to their personal health and safety. Combined concerns about dirt and danger provide evidence about the changing nature of young men's masculinity, particularly in relation to forms of work traditionally associated with certain forms of machismo, prestige and hyper-masculinity.

Courtenay et al. (2002) argue that men's construction and demonstration of masculinity include embracing risk, acting fearlessly and projecting such characteristics. The exhibition of such behaviours demonstrates the appearance of being strong and a denial of weakness and vulnerability, which historically helped reinforce a distinction between male behaviours and traditional female practices such as caring for one's appearance, health and well-being. Moreover, men who reject this demonstration and fail to engage in risky behaviour may be seen as less masculine (Courtenay, 2000). Participants' aversion to risk, awareness of personal health and a rejection of work that threatens these aspects demonstrate a deviation from the traditional masculine markers of risk-taking and stoicism (Connell, 1995). Contrary to much research on working-class masculinity, my participants are more equivocal about hegemonic forms of masculinity often associated with coalmining.

Discussion and Conclusion

Data presented in this chapter highlights that, despite a decline in manual employment and the concomitant rise in service sector work, the men in this research were still generally drawn towards traditional masculine forms of employment. This can arguably be traced back to the

influence of long-standing community traditions and of friends, family and other prominent male figures (Veness, 1962). This, it is argued, led the men to view manual work as a natural and desirable choice. Contrary to the notion that unskilled and semi-skilled jobs constitute 'dead-end' work offering little enjoyment, those who took part in my research appear to gain a sense of personal satisfaction and seem to have relatively positive workplace experiences.

Participants articulated a traditional masculine desire for 'hands-on' work and emphasised the importance of physically active employment as opposed to mental or emotional labour. Through the use of visual methods, it was possible to identify particular aspects of service sector work which discouraged the men from pursuing such employment. One of the most prominent features that deterred participants from call centre work was the necessity to engage with a telephone, an aversion influenced by their unwillingness to be submissive, whilst also recognising their inability to manage their feelings and responses.

The call centre image also developed a discussion that established participants' dislike for sedentary work. But rather than reconfirming their traditional masculine identity, this dialogue was related partly to their conscious recognition of personal health and the notion that the physicality of their current employment provided them with fitness-related benefits. This concern for personal health appears to deviate, to some extent, from the health-averse and 'unhealthy' practices often associated with certain traditional discourses of masculinity (Courtenay, 2000; Garfield et al., 2008). Discussions about the coalmining image also revealed some deviation from traditional discourses and performances of masculinity based on the validation of self-worth and durability in harsh, dangerous working environments. Participants actively rejected the dirty, unsafe conditions associated with coalmining.

The notion of hybrid masculinities may go some way towards explaining participants' views and opinions. The men's attraction to manual labour demonstrates an affiliation with protest masculinity and values including toughness and stoicism (Connell, 1995; McDowell, 2003). Whereas concern for personal health may be understood as incorporating "elements associated with…subordinated masculinities and femininities" (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 246). Collectively, the men's

views and opinions, which include toughness together with an admittance of vulnerability, arguably provide some support for the notion of hybrid masculinities (Messner, 2007).

Further complexity was evident in participants' focus on physical fitness which apparently contradicts the health-averse practices often associated with traditional forms of masculinity (Courtenay, 2000; Garfield et al., 2008). However, contemporary society has become more consumerist and individualistic; the body has, for many, become a crucial source of identity; and personal health has been recast as the responsibility of the individual (Gill et al., 2005). Arguably, the men's apparent concern for personal health reflects such changes, especially given an increased awareness of issues around men's health. The coalmining image adds a further complication. My participants are employed in relatively dirty and possibly dangerous forms of work. Subsequently, one could argue that their negative response to mining is somewhat surprising, given the hyper-masculine nature of that industry. The extreme danger associated with coalmining was, however, far greater than that which is experienced by those who took part in research reported in this chapter. Carl, however, the oldest participant, notably viewed coalmining in a more positive light than the younger men who took part in the study.

Following Roberts (2018), the findings of my own research suggest that traditional forms of masculinity are undergoing some form of transition. The data also demonstrates that this transition is constrained and complex due to the influence of place-based cultural traditions linked to historical factors, including the strong association with heavy industry and an enduring legacy of traditional masculinity (Connell, 1995). The complexity of this data, coupled with the multiple potential interpretations and the narrow focus of the research, makes a precise explanation difficult. Nevertheless, the findings identify a degree of continuity in the men's gendered practices and elements related to protest masculinity were evident, including an attraction to manual work and an inability or unwillingness to engage in emotional labour. Yet, there also seems to be a possible reconfiguration in the men's view of employment, which displays an unconventional work-related health interest, aversion to extreme risk and some admittance to vulnerability.

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Education, Social Haunting, and Deindustrialisation: Attuning to Ghosts in the Hidden Curriculum

Kat Simpson

Introduction

The social, economic, and cultural legacy of Britain's industrial past remains to haunt individuals and communities in and beyond former industrial heartlands. Shifts in deindustrial research have moved towards understanding the long-term social and cultural meanings and effects of deindustrialisation, as well as its immediate effects—the 'body count' (Cowie & Heathcott, 2003)—of job losses and socio-economic decline (see, for example, Linkon, 2018; Mah, 2012; Nettleingham, 2019; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012). Scholars across disciplines have sought to examine the spectral ways in which deindustrialisation is complicated by the power of absent-presences (see, for example, Bright, 2011a, b; Edensor, 2008; Spence, 2019). Perhaps the most influential examination of spectral forces is Avery Gordon's (2008), *Ghostly Matters: Haunting*

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127

and the Sociological Imagination. Haunting is the language Gordon (2008) uses and the method of seeing and knowing the ways in which historical racial injustices and militaristic state violence remain affective, even when these events are 'supposedly over and done with', or when their oppressive nature and effects remain ignored or denied. Inspired by psychoanalysis and Marxism, Gordon's epistemology of haunting stresses a change in knowledge production towards a way of knowing and seeing that recognises complexities and contradictions of presence and absence, history and subjectivity, power and knowledge, and organised forces and structures. Although haunting registers the injuries, loss, and injustice of the past, haunting is an emergent, rather than a deterministic and foreboding, concept. When a haunting occurs, 'the present wavers', ghosts demand attention, something different from before must be done, but this something is never given in advance (Gordon et al., 2020). The 'something-to-be-done' is "interwoven into the very scene of haunting" and the ghosts' potentiality for change (Gordon, 2011, p. 3):

> The ghost registers and it incites, and that is why we have to talk to it graciously, why we have to learn how it speaks, why we have to grasp the fullness of its life world, its desires and its standpoint…ultimately haunting is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of a peaceful reconciliation. In this necessarily collective undertaking, the end, which is not an ending at all, belongs to everyone. (Gordon, 2008, pp. 207–208)

In coming to know the fullness of the ghosts' 'lifeworld', this chapter argues that it is necessary to also come to know how the 'goodness' of the past is alive and demanding our attention. Complicating the concept of haunting, and drawing on neo-Marxist analyses of education, the chapter presents a complex picture of the enactment and reproductive effects of the hidden curriculum at Lillydown Primary, a school in a former mining community. Though other aspects of schooling reinforce and reproduce class-based inequalities, this chapter focuses on tracing spectral dimensions of the social relations of schooling. It begins by providing an overview of the research upon which this chapter is based. I then locate social haunting within Marxist educational theory. The

following section presents data from ethnographic research at Lillydown Primary and provides a critical account of the enactment and effects of the hidden curriculum. It highlights how ghosts, whilst at times entangled in reproductive relations of schooling, can sometimes work to open up spaces for transformation, even though those who are haunted may not be fully conscious of the ghostly matters that manifest. By attuning to ghostly matters, I show how particular approaches to enacting the hidden curriculum reflect traditional coalfield culture, social relations, and performances of authority which work to create a sense of belonging and a level of trust and respect between both pupils and staff. The chapter concludes by arguing that knowing and harnessing the fullness of ghosts is necessary if processes and experiences of schooling in the former coalfields are to be refashioned in more encouraging ways. Harnessing ghosts is, however, complex. Tensions and risks of rupturing ghostly matters are considered alongside a call for a conscious reckoning with all facets of ghostly matters that haunt.

Lillydown and Lillydown Primary School

This chapter is based on a critical Marxist ethnography conducted at a one-form entry state primary school in a former coalmining community, in the north of England (see Simpson, 2021). Lillydown is reflective of what Gilbert (1991) described as a *miners' town*, where distinctive relations and aspects of community life are unlike "ordinary towns and villages" (p. 260). Miners' towns are characterised by socio-economic and geographical isolation, homogeneity, mono-industry, gendered divisions and roles, and strong social networks and institutions of work and leisure (see also Dennis et al., 1956; Warwick & Littlejohn, 1992). Nuances and distinctions within and between coalfields existed due to patterns of migration, pit closures, and broader socio-economic, political, and cultural change; but such characteristics remain central to, and distinctive of, the workings, rhythms, and being of an 'ideal' or 'archetypical' *miners' town* (Gilbert, 1991). *Mining towns,* on the other hand, are locales where a process of urbanisation on a much larger scale have taken place. Social and economic transformation resulted in these towns becoming

more 'complicated' socially, economically, and culturally which, in turn, affected the coalfield inhabitants' sense of being and understandings of place and community. Lillydown's social, cultural, and industrial relations were forged and maintained over a number of generations around the coal industry. Its isolation, homogeneity of occupation, cultural relationships, and social structures continue to shape community life. As Warwick and Littlejohn (1992) note, "communities may grow and they may disappear, though if a local culture has developed, it may provide the basis for a 'historical community' despite a restructured economy, maybe even for a generation or so" (p. 15).

Lillydown colliery opened in 1896 and after nationalisation it became one of the largest, most productive, and technologically advanced pits in Britain (Wain, 2014). It survived the first wave of pit closures following the Great Strike of 1984–85 but the second round of closures, in the early-1990s, signalled the end of mining in Lillydown with its pit, and associated industries, closing in 1993. Mining was the dominant source of employment in Lillydown and so, with little other immediate labour, the consequences "were always going to be serious" (Beatty et al., 2007, p. 1654). Despite various regeneration projects, unemployment, poverty, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and ill-health are all above national and regional averages, and educational achievement, especially progression to university-level study, is comparatively low (OMBC, 2020).

The ethnography discussed in this chapter took place between April–December 2016 at Lillydown Primary School, a local authority school for 3–11-year-olds. Lillydown Primary has a higher-than-average proportion of pupils qualifying for free school meals; all staff and the vast majority of pupils present as White British, reflecting the local area. Though pupils have not directly experienced Lillydown's industrial past, its echoes and murmurs provoke the present not only through hauntings inside the school but also through the material landscape as old pit carts filled with flowers stand at the front gates alongside a miniature pit wheel.

The ethnography examined how experiences and processes of education are shaped not only by current structures and relations of contemporary capitalist society but also by historical ways of being rooted in Lillydown's industrial past. Ghosts are complex and contradictory and so

studying a social haunting requires multiple methods—the utilisation of the various tools of ethnography—to see, listen, and know how traces of the past materialise and are experienced in the present. Sustained contact in the field means ethnography is a well-established method for researching lived experiences, and the relationships between structural forces and micro-cultures inside schools. Traditional ethnographies have been criticised for their lack of contribution to theory (Maisuria & Beach, 2017). Critical ethnography, particularly when influenced by Marxist theory, attempts to move beyond descriptive knowledge, and emphasises the need to demystify and uncover oppressive structures and practices. It stresses theoretical and pedagogical advancements towards a more equitable social world and political economy (Maisuria & Beach, 2017). As Cho (2008) argues, the most important method in fleshing out ghosts is knowing and demystifying what produced them and communicating their effects (p. 41). Critical Marxist ethnography's ability to "get beneath" the complexities of social life and see what's "standing in the place of a blind spot" is well-suited than to tracing ghosts (Gordon, 2018, p. 54). Combined with social haunting, critical Marxist ethnography opens up a way of seeing and knowing how historical and current socio-economic, cultural, and affective forces shape experiences and processes of education.

Around 65 days were spent in the field, with 360 hours of participant observation recorded. 18 semi-structured interviews were also conducted. This included 16 staff—six teachers, four teaching assistants (TAs), five higher-level teaching assistants (HLTAs), and the Headteacher. Two local residents were also interviewed to help gain a more holistic understanding of the historical and contemporary nature of Lillydown, and the school's place in the local community. All participants were from either Lillydown or neighbouring villages or had moved into the area through familial or personal connections.

Spectrality, Marxism, and Education

Many working-class children, young people, and adults have, over time, benefitted from various forms of formal and informal education. Education has, nevertheless, often been about discipline and social control, alienation, exclusion and failure for the working classes (see Reay, 2017; Walkerdine, 2021). Essentially, the English education system continues to reinforce and reproduce certain middle-class values, interests, and culture (Reay, 2006). Traditional working-class ways of being and doing jar especially with dominant neoliberal discourses of education and society emphasising:

- "competitive individualism rather than collaboration or solidarity;
- a capacity and preparedness to place matters of abstraction above practicality;
- rule-following and compliances involving a deference to authority;
- a deferral of immediacy in favour of an orientation to the future" (Simmons & Smyth, 2018, p. 4).

Schooling has often been aimed at shaping attitudes and conduct to create "a punctual [and] disciplined labour force" (Sarup, 1983, p. 1). Working within a Marxist tradition, it is mainly the formal and hidden curriculum that work to 'fix' the working class in "devalued educational spaces" and contribute to the re/production of class-based inequalities in education and society more broadly (Reay, 2006, p. 298).

Research on the reproductive nature of education draws on various theoretical perspectives and traditions (see, for example, Althusser, 1971; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Durkheim, 1903/1956; Gramsci, 1971). For Marxists and neo-Marxists, it is mainly through the educational state apparatus that the needs of capital are served. Education, it is argued, plays an important role in validating and reproducing class-based divisions and needs of production. Marxist theory emphasises the ways in which particular structures, relations, and processes: pedagogy; curriculum (formal and hidden); organisation of pupils; and the ownership, control, and management of schools, colleges and universities reproduce the necessary skills, knowledge, and characteristics that reflect

pupils' future position in capitalist society (see Althusser, 2006; Anyon, 2011; Bowles & Gintis, 2011). For Althusser (2006), what children learn in school is the 'know-how'—learning to read and write, together with learning other skills and knowledge, is "directly useful in the different jobs in production" (p. 88). Alongside this, they learn the 'rules of good behaviour'. For each division of labour, the workforce must be 'appropriate' and the 'rules of good behaviour', Althusser argues, reproduce and instil specific attitudes, behavioural norms, and characteristics necessary (p. 89).

For Bowles and Gintis (2011), it is through the hidden curriculum that capitalist relations of production are reproduced. Their 'correspondence' theory demonstrates how schools, through a structural correspondence between educational and economic life, validate and reproduce the needs of capital. Students from predominantly working-class schools tend to be exposed to relations of obedience, rule-following, and respect for authority—necessary skills which mirror, roughly, characteristics needed for unskilled and semi-skilled labour. Pupils from 'higher up the education ladder' are, in contrast, taught leadership skills emphasising greater autonomy and active participation, corresponding with higher levels of employment (Bowles and Gintis, 1988, p. 3). Social relations of employment are also reflected and reproduced through: "hierarchical divisions" between teachers and pupils; "alienation" that is reflected in the oppressed position of pupils (their inability to influence and control their education); and "fragmentation" which is reflected and reproduced through competition in education, such as: grouping/setting of pupils, testing, and assessments (Bowles and Gintis, 1988, p. 3).

Marxist theory attends well to education's role in the social re/production of labour power. However, such theorisations largely fail to consider how educational institutions, and those within them, are also shaped by contradictions and complexities of social, affective, and cultural domains. Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour* emphasises the creative potential of individual and collective human agency. Though Willis moves beyond mechanistic relations of economics and education, to fully understand and begin to refashion the interplay of class and education, another layer of seeing and knowing is necessary. Experiences and practices of education are not merely social, economic, and material,

they also entail 'less visible', more affective matters (Reay, 2017). Geoff Bright's (2011a) work goes some way to addressing the affective relations between young people's historical and current experiences of schooling in former mining villages. Bright uses social haunting to understand the rejection of schooling and educational disaffection of working-class young people in Derbyshire. He shows how the community's 'resistant histories' resurface in school-based conflicts between young people and their teachers. Bright acknowledges one of the difficulties with this conceptualisation is that the young people in his study are not directly connected to their past. They are, he claims, paradoxically, both 'cut off' from yet unescapably trapped and ghosted by it (Bright, 2011b). Whilst building on these ideas, this chapter focuses on social relations and haunting within the parameters of the school. A neo-Marxist analysis of education, combined with the notion of social haunting, is advocated to enable an understanding of the "history of the present" that better connects with the past towards ways of thinking that stretches "beyond the limits of what is already understandable" (Gordon, 2008, p. 195). This allows us then to understand how a community's industrial past resurfaces and effects relations and experiences of the hidden curriculum in multiple and complex ways.

The Social Relations of Schooling: Tracing Ghosts

The vast majority of staff at Lillydown Primary talked about establishing social relations that created a sense of value and belonging for their pupils. Teacher–pupil relationships founded on reciprocal trust and respect were essential for most staff:

> We have rules and we follow procedures, but very rarely do we have to go further…it is stopped by the relationships that we have got with the children…The relationships are what holds the rules, routines, and what holds the respect within the school. We've got major respect for all children and vice versa…If we didn't have the relationships, then we'd be following the sanction plan daily to the bottom. (Clara, Teacher)

Forming relationships along more equitable grounds, rather than 'top-down' modes of control and authority, were central to the rhythms and relations of the school. Staff recognised, nevertheless, a need for some regulation. Where 'rules' were enacted, pupils were given a level of reasoning and understanding behind their use: "we don't really bawl at 'em like, we just tell 'em, you know, if the' using running feet inside that it is dangerous and that" (Hazel, HLTA). Staff were observed frequently using mutual, open dialogue *with* pupils to establish and maintain structure and direction. Phrases such as, "can you", "would you like to", "do you think you can" were commonly used and met with limited resistance. This contrasts with Bright (2011a) who refers to persistent struggle between young people and teachers, particularly teachers from 'elsewhere' who talked to them "like crap" and "don't say 'please' or nothing" (p. 72). With most staff coming from Lillydown or nearby, staff and pupils' shared backgrounds significantly shaped approaches to learning. Respect, trust, and a sense of belonging were central to everyday rhythms of most classrooms. There was strong desire for pupils to have some autonomy over *their* education and to engage in collective ways of schooling:

> They have to have some ownership on it, or they will not do it…The school and the classroom are theirs. It's the only thing that is their own. They have to have the opportunity to make some decisions about what is going on…Doing that has given them some ownership over their education…Some of the first tasks we do with the class is to make our identity, so we come up with our own code of conduct…They tell you; you don't tell them…Once they have got that, then that's when the community starts to build, and you come onto the same level as each other because you have built a level of trust. (Louise, Teacher)

Although staff were in principle committed to relational and collective processes and structures of schooling, observation data showed the formulation of rules varied between classes. This seemed largely dependent on staff experience with some rules being more teacher-led, especially where staff were new to the school and/or teaching. The following field note extracts illustrate some of the varying degrees of pupil agency:

Within one classroom, class rules are pinned at the front. The rules have been handwritten by pupils:

- If they are finding things hard, help them
- Be firm but fair
- Respond to questions
- Listen
- Have a variety of sports
- Positive attitudes
- Interesting lessons – not boring
- Not to be grumpy
- Have respect

Within another classroom, the rules were rather different:

Class rules are on an image of a shield. Pupils have signed their names around them:

- Put your hand up to speak and answer
- Quiet when any adult or peer is talking
- All chair legs on the floor
- Keep hands and feet to ourselves
- Line up quietly and sensibly
- Best presentation at all times
- Take care of our work and put them in the correct place for storage (Field Notes)

The rules in the first extract are taken from a class with a member of staff who had taught at Lillydown Primary for many years. Here, the rules appear to favour a more pupil-led approach that focus on processes and expectations, for both staff and pupils, in an open, honest, and collaborative manner. In the second extract, rules appear more teacher-led focusing on obedience and control. Here, the teacher was

relatively new to the profession and in their first year of teaching at Lillydown Primary. Perhaps such a position holds less control and autonomy over specific teaching and learning activities, than more experienced and established colleagues (Sarup, 1983). Possibly, perhaps, over time, observed relations of authority between newer staff and pupils would dematerialise through more relational approaches to schooling. Most staff believed that there is scope to learn the class logic, the particular rhythms and ways of being specific to Lillydown, and to harness these as pedagogical tools.

Bowles and Gintis (2011) show how social relations of production are not only reflected and reproduced through relations between staff and pupils but also via the development of particular types of discipline, character, 'personal demeanour', 'self-presentation', and 'self-image' corresponding to the social relations of production (p. 131). For the working class, these are often relations and experiences of alienation, compliance, and control (Bowles & Gintis, 1988). At Lillydown Primary however, providing pupils with a space where they felt a sense of belonging and familiarity was more significant, for most staff, than focusing on neoliberal processes—especially the constraints of the curriculum, including assessment, testing, and setting regimes—that ignore, undermine, and devalue 'working-classness', especially the historical and lived realities for pupils:

> Really, the function of being here is to learn…not about me making 'em conform. I don't even think the' need to wear uniform, I think that is like getting people to conform to like military standards. Half of 'em haven't got '[the] right uniform and it makes 'em feel awkward and it is difficult for 'em. I don't think the' should be made to wear PE kit; I think the' should just be able to do PE if the' have not got the kit. It's not your fault if you have not got stuff and your parents haven't got it…It's not as strict here. One pupil has always got big rings and stuff on…It's fine with me, she's doing her work, she's engaging in her learning, and she will leave this school where she needs to be. If she wants to stick her nails on and put her gold jewellery on, then I don't give a shit. (Joe, Teacher)

Clara adds,

Does it make you learn better if you sit up straight? I don't think it does! I just think it is silly to have that expectation and it is not something I have consciously thought about, it is just the way I am. As long as I can see that they are trying their best, then I am okay with that. We are learning together, and it is that sort of we are an extension of their family. So, if you are in a family home are you going to be sat up straight? No. We try to continue those family values to make sure we are all together…I want everybody in my class to be comfortable…I took my shoes off this morning because my feet were hurting me, does it make you a better teacher if you are stood up formally at front? I don't think so. (Clara, Teacher)

Both Clara and Joe draw attention to how middle-class norms are often experienced by the working class. They illustrate how social relations of schooling can work to reinforce and reproduce class-based inequalities through more obvious processes of control and subordination; but also, through affective relations and rhythms where history, culture, and home life are often disregarded and/or devalued. It is through what Walkerdine (2021) calls 'microaggressions' within education—the markers of class: dress, accent, habits, and values—that class insults and injuries are embodied and reproduced. Rather than committing 'class suicide' (Simmons & Smyth, 2018, p. 4), Joe and Clara explain how educational norms, expectations, and values can be used to challenge typical accounts of the social relations of schooling. Rather than being a space of "everyday humiliations and slights" (Reay, 2017, p. 77), particular relations, values, and 'markers of class' encouragingly shape social relations and experiences of schooling, especially through being able to speak the same language as pupils:

[P]eople have different views on this but this is where we are from so I wouldn't want to pick up and correct what they say. This is where they are from, this is their identity…Accent and local dialect is definitely something that we need to celebrate and embrace. Sometimes, from a specific teaching point of view, there are things local just to Lillydown like dropping the 'h' at the beginning of a word and things like that. So, in phonics for example, when you are wanting words that begin with 'h' we have to emphasise the 'h' and it's often difficult for them. Although we

are up north, in Yorkshire, there's a language and dialect that is specific just to Lillydown…it's a fine line because we do have to correct some things. (Frances, Teacher)

Important here is not just how language is used, but the affective dynamic—the sense of being—it produces. It is through relations of collectivity and shared language, values and norms, that particular relations are forged and maintained which accord respect to pupils' histories and culture. When the social relations of schooling 'fit' and 'correspond' with the cultural resources, characteristics, and background of pupils, then this begins to open up education into a more encouraging and hospitable space for the working class. But to truly know the effects of the hidden curriculum, we must become more attuned to ghostly matters that haunt. It is this complexity of how underlying historical and affective forces are embodied in the present that the next section captures.

The Way of the Ghost

Speaking the same language is more than having the same accent and dialect, it means sharing the same humour and social and cultural experiences (Maguire, 2005). It became apparent how traditional forms of working-class humour remained embedded within staff and pupils' identities and was frequently used, often unwittingly, in a relaxed, playful way to:

- manage uniform: "put yha collar down, Elvis is dead!";
- ensure the classroom was tidy at the end of the day: "what I do not want is loads o'[of] paper on 'floor 'cos [because] I do not want 'r [our] cleaner in my ear 'ole at home time";
- ensure pupils moved between activities without wasting time: "can you move a bit quicker today 'cos [because], you know, I am off to my Mum's for Christmas dinner";

- confirm and reinforce the use of particular equipment: "if anyone draws a table without using a ruler, I am sending you to another school";
- manage noise levels and pupil engagement: "yha not in '[the] local [pub] nar lads, callin' [chatting] away wi' [with] each other".
  (Observation Data)

In all cases, pupils engaged with these humorous exchanges and the rules and processes subtly embedded within them. They were also frequently observed initiating the use of humour to negotiate a degree of control over *their* experiences of schooling, especially the structures and relations of the day:

> Pupil tells the Teacher it is break time and the Teachers replies: Who are you '[the] union representative? Staff and pupils laugh. One pupil shouts, "yeah we are, it is brek [break]". The Teacher laughs and responds: You'll be '[the] death o' me you lot, go on get out to play.

(Observation Data)

What can be seen here is a conjuring of industrial relations and performances that continue to underpin systems, structures, and relations of work and leisure. These distinctive forms of humour reflect variants of 'pit humour' that historically characterised coalfield communities like Lillydown. Such humour provided not only a coping strategy for miners engaged in dangerous labour underground but also helped develop affective relations and spaces of sociality and being within the community more broadly (Beynon et al., 2020; Dennis et al., 1956). Social haunting allows us to come to know how industrial humour is reworked into the present to challenge social and 'work-based' relations and structures in the school:

> It's almost like a semi-industrial type of humour, isn't it? It reflects what you would have found in the industry… It's that sort of almost unkind ribbing of each other sort of thing and that is probably the sense o'[of] humour these kids have got from their industrial background and where the' have come from and they have probably kept that haven't the'. That

is probably why the staff in my class have still got it and they get it as well and probably why I have got it. (Joe, Teacher)

Pit humour, especially the 'darker side' of joking (see Collinson, 1988), can be problematic, but such exchanges should not be viewed as negative. As Pitt (1979) reflects on the use of humour between miners, "this incessant exchange of caustic wit and rudeness is symptomatic of the close relations between the men" (p. 38). This is illustrated in exchanges at Lillydown Primary where such forms of working-class humour continue to function as a mechanism to manage the strictures and social relations of schooling. The use of humour at Lillydown Primary was a creative response to manage and diffuse oppositional relations and processes experienced by pupils *and* staff. This contrasts with Bright's (2011a, b) research which describes 'pit humour' as central to young people's resistance towards staff and educational processes, structures, and values more broadly. To some extent, it complicates Willis' (1977) use of the 'laff'. Willis observed the significance of the laff through the Lads' counter-school culture. It was an important mechanism to prepare them for particular rituals and performances of shop-floor culture. At Lillydown Primary though, humour is used by both staff and pupils in an "attempt to win a space" from larger processes of schooling and capitalist society. Humour was used to diffuse hierarchical structures and oppressive processes; and functioned as an apparatus for creating and maintaining relations and conditions of trust and respect. Here we start to be affectively drawn into the essence and being of haunting—the something more, something different from before—as we come to know how traditional rhythms and ways of being mediate, encouragingly, social relations and processes of schooling. We come to see and know how ghosts can carry the goodness of the past.

The Paradox of Social Haunting

Staff generally advocated relational ways of working with pupils, and so often unwittingly harnessed the goodness of the ghost that challenged, at least partly, social relations of schooling for the working class. At times

however, a disjuncture was evident between the expectations and performances some staff claimed to have, and their classroom practice. In these cases, the social relations of schooling were bound by more authoritarian discourses. Although uncommon, when they did occur, such practices were often met with low-level pupil resistance—sighing, slow-timing, and disapproving facial expressions. In a few instances though, pupils enacted more overt forms of resistance. Generally, this was more evident with newer members of staff:

> Pupils are doing a test, sitting in rows and working in silence. The teacher, without warning, asks one pupil to move. The pupil asks why and the teacher replies,
> Teacher: Because you are talking, and I have asked you to move!
> The pupil slouches in their chair, sighs, and again questions the move. The teacher asks them to move again in a sharper, sterner voice. The pupil reluctantly moves. They sit in their new place slumped in the chair, mumbling under their breath, and sighing. After a few minutes, the pupil begins to tap their pencil on the desk. The teacher is watching and after around twenty seconds shouts:
> Teacher: Get on with your work and stop tapping your pencil!
> The pupil immediately shouts back—"I'm thinking!"
> The teacher does not respond. For around five minutes, the pupil sits 'thinking' before putting their head on the desk.
> Teacher: Get your head up! The pupil shouts back immediately that they are 'thinking' and then refuses to continue the test.
> Teacher: Right, I have had enough of your attitude, go put your name on the board
> The pupil huffs as they get up.
> T: If it continues you are going to be moved to another year group.
> The pupil slouches in their seat, reluctantly does a few more questions, and then sits for the last five minutes of the lesson doing nothing.
> (Observation Data)

When met with authoritative discourses and performances, pupils had potential to act within a "socially remembered repertoire of refusal", as their 'resistant histories' waver in the present (Bright, 2011b, p. 502). These more authoritarian practices summoned the ghost of Lillydown's past "dwelling beneath the surface of a troubled history" (Cho, 2008,

p. 124). Being overly authoritarian gives sustenance to ghosts that harbour the social violence and injustice of the past:

> The' hate being humiliated and shown up publicly…if you're overly authoritative with 'em it would just turn 'em totally away from you and the' would hate you. If the' hate you then the' won't work. If you're authoritative and aggressive wi' 'em [with them]…and make 'em try to behave in a way that is just to show you have control, it can lead to a danger that the' are going to hate you and you then lose control…The' don't want to upset you and let you down and if the' do the' are really disappointed in 'emselves…I think the' are quite defiant and I think the' are quite strong willed. I think a lot o' kids in Oakshire probably are like that. (Joe, Teacher)

For many staff, there was a belief that historical social violence, particularly that which took place during the 1984–1985 miners' strike, continues to affect relationships with police and other forms of authority. For post-strike generations, though their history is often unknown, their lived realities continue to be shaped by echoes and murmurs of their industrial past. These generational affects reflect Abraham and Torok's (1994) notion of 'transgenerational haunting', the idea that an event or unspeakable trauma does not end with those who bear witness to and experience it first-hand. Historical conflicts and disputes with authority and the state are "complex, dangerous, and incomplete" social memories (Bright, 2011a, 2011b, p. 69). At Lillydown Primary, pupils' resistant histories are summoned into the present when ghosts are mishandled, or those who they haunt are blind to them. Social haunting is that moment of unsettledness when the present wavers and when feelings and experiences of the 'something-to-be-done' emerge and signal for something other, something different from before, to be done. To be blind to such histories, or to mishandle them, risks rupturing the potentialities of ghosts and re-awakening the 'unhallowed dead' (Gordon, 2008)—the ghosts that carry the loss, injustice, and violence. In these moments, when *some* have been blind to or mishandled ghosts, "abusive systems of power" are exorcised from the past and 'their impacts felt in the present' (Gordon, 2018, p. 209). Much is at risk in coming to know and engaging with the fullness of ghosts. Ghosts in and of their selves do not bring

about change. They have their own agency and unless we show respect to ghosts, talk graciously to them, and learn how they speak, then we risk being haunted by the possibilities of past (Gordon, 2008).

Conclusion: The 'Something-To-Be-Done'

Through the notion of social haunting, a new kind of seeing and knowing becomes visible that moves beyond economic and cultural reproduction theories. It attends to the spectral forces interacting with and demanding the attention of the often unconscious present. By coming to know the fullness of the ghost, we begin to see how the goodness of working-class culture and history haunts in ways that begin to refashion relations of schooling in more encouraging ways. Traditional working-class ways of being and doing, can be used to penetrate and challenge social relations of schooling in more equitable ways, at least to some degree. At Lillydown Primary, mutual and open dialogue, autonomy, and collectivity worked to create a sense of belonging; and the use of traditional working-class humour served as a mechanism to effect educational processes and rules in a more relaxed way. Rather than being a space of alienation, particular relations and practices encouragingly shaped processes and experiences of schooling. Laying bare the fullness of the ghost is characterised by possibility and hope, as well as contradiction in contemporary capitalist society. When social relations of schooling are enacted through more authoritarian means, ghosts can play a role in reproducing class-based structures and dispositions. In these moments, pupils' 'resistant histories' are summoned and ghosts unveil their negative form. Blindness and mishandling ghosts risks opening-up the wounds of history and injuries of class. To harness the potentialities of ghosts, one must make contact with the fullness of ghosts. Only then, can we begin to challenge and refashion education with and for the working class.

Harnessing ghosts, however, is not enough to "overcome the structural and ideological power of global capitalism and neoliberalism" (Linkon, 2018, p. 25). Any serious call to challenge and transform experiences of schooling for the working class needs to be enacted alongside broader

social, economic, and political reform (see Hill, 2017; Simmons & Smyth, 2018, for example). My point lies, rather, on a somewhat smaller yet important step towards transformation—the conscious knowing of all facets of the ghost. Here, there are two important points to make. First, is to reiterate that to truly know the effects of deindustrialisation, we must better understand the fullness of ghosts—especially the goodness that haunts (see Simpson, 2021). The second, is that to harness the transformative potential of ghosts, there must be a consciousness reckoning with echoes and murmurs of the past by *all* who are haunted. Consciously following ghosts is to think beyond a "dull curiosity" or "detached know-it-all criticism" into a knowing of "what is at stake" (Gordon, 2008, p. 203). Ghosts are emergent, complex, and contradictory and there are no guaranteed outcomes of their desires and possibilities. Social hauntings may be partial, varied, and limited. But ghosts are demanding, they incite us to do something different to before. We must become conscious of the ghosts we are haunted by and the ghostly matters of others: "if you think you can fight and eliminate the systems' complicated 'nastiness' without it, you will not get very far because it will return to haunt you" (Gordon, 2008, p. 203).

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Teaching Industrial History After Deindustrialisation: 'Tracks of the Past' in the Scottish Coalfields

Ewan Gibbs and Susan Henderson-Bone

Introduction

On 14 January 1987, Scottish workers in the Lanarkshire village of Tannochside—around ten miles east of Glasgow—made history when they took on an American corporate giant. They began a factory occupation in protest at the announced closure of the area's principal employer—Caterpillar's earthmoving machinery plant. The dispute lasted 103 days but ultimately ended in defeat. During April 1987, the workforce was compelled to settle for improved redundancy terms following the company's obtainment of an interim interdict against the

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occupiers and the withdrawal of union support (Woolfson & Foster, 1988). Recent research on the occupation has placed it within the longer history of deindustrialisation in post-war Scotland (Gibbs & Phillips, 2018). The dispute is best understood in the context of long-term transformations in the coalfields. Caterpillar began building their factory atop a derelict mining village in 1956 with the inducement of UK regional policy. The replacement of employment in textiles, coal, shipbuilding, and steel with mass production industries fulfilled policymakers' hopes for increasing productivity and export income. These efforts were strongly focused on coalfield regions as mining employment contracted, especially during the late 1950s and 1960s (Tomlinson et al., 2019).

The occupation's thirtieth anniversary in 2017 was marked by significant public commemoration led by the Caterpillar Workers' Legacy Group (CWLG) which was largely composed of male former occupiers and their wives. Commemoration activities included: reunion events; putting on a play written about the occupation and its contemporary meaning; collecting material for and hosting museum exhibitions; and making and hosting a documentary film about the occupation (Gibbs, 2021a). Author one met the CWLG through these activities where he assisted by recording oral history interviews at meetings and a reunion event. It subsequently became apparent that developing a school curriculum was a key objective that the Legacy Group had not yet achieved. This would ensure recognition of the occupation's local and national significance as well as ensuring it was held up as an important example for younger generations to learn from. Along with the Legacy Group, and Unite the Union, author one collaborated with author two, an education academic, to develop the 'Tracks of the Past' (TOTP) project. TOTP took a 'place-based' approach to social subjects' education (Mannion, 2020). It centred on engaging students on a subject of local relevance that happened somewhere they were familiar with. Some of the students lived on the former factory site, which now hosts a housing estate and a supermarket, while others came from neighbouring towns and villages. At the same time, the story of divestment by a multinational corporation during a time-period associated with accelerating

economic globalisation, posed important questions about how democracy and social justice can be understood through lessons that probe distinct geographical scales.

TOTP was completed with a first-year secondary school social studies class in the 2018–2019 academic year. Through self-selection, based on obtaining pupil and parental permission, thirteen students were followed across seven lessons, each lasting one hour. The thirteen students worked in six groups. Each group produced a collaborative 'learning journey' montage that combined writing and artwork to convey what they had learned about the occupation. In preparation for completing the learning journey montages, students filled out enquiry grids which asked them to record what they had found out about different aspects of the Caterpillar occupation. Specifically, they were asked to research people (such as workers and their families), places involved (including the factory itself but also local streets and more distant spaces associated with the Occupation), objects (including artefacts such as newspaper articles), and to note what they knew about the items they listed and questions they had about them. The grids assisted students to integrate knowledges gained from an electronic database of archival sources compiled by the research team made available to via Chromebooks and iPads, physical artefacts such as a collected tin and 'I support the Caterpillar Workers' stickers that replicated objects related to the occupation, and interviews with CWLG members in the classroom. In completing learning journey montages in groups of between two and four, the students combined written and artistic representations of the occupation. The only requirement was presentation: each journey was required to demonstrate progress from 'start' to 'end'.

Our approach to teaching TOTP lessons was devised in dialogue with the Scottish curriculum (Scottish Executive, 2004), which emphasises personalised learning and students' roles as responsible local, national, and global citizens. This chapter is based on interviews and focus groups with former Caterpillar workers, teachers and students involved in the project, as well as diaries of the school lessons kept by the project researchers. Aside from the interviews with Caterpillar workers, which were recorded for use in public heritage activities, pseudonyms have

been used to preserve anonymity. The testimonies and diaries are supplemented by a questionnaire completed by six class parents and the students' project work.

Recent literature on education and industrial legacies in the coalfields has demonstrated the mining industry's continued relevance to teachers, support staff, and pupils. Simpson and Simmons' (2021) research in Lillydown, a former coal settlement in the north of England, reveals that school staff and pupils established a reciprocal industrial working-class 'authenticity' based on a 'shared history' of connections to the locale's industrial past. In Lillydown, the retained salience of coalmining culture resurfaced through various different processes and relations of schooling—through reference points to trade unions, for example, that were familiar to pupils as well as staff (Simpson & Simmons, 2021). These more optimistic conclusions are built on the 'social haunting' framework that Geoff Bright (2011) developed in his assessment of young people's engagement with education in ex-mining villages in the English Midlands. Bright (2011) detailed 'resistant' behaviour in opposition to middle-class education professionals that resembled miners' objections to Thatcherite individualism, as well as divisions between neighbourhoods that had origins in coal industry conflicts, with the latter including the use of 'scab' as an insult. The miners' strike of 1984–1985 still held much affective power almost three decades later. These examples demonstrate that in parts of the former coalfields, where large-scale mining employment was present into the 1980s and 1990s, lingering affective influences remain that structure the educational outlook for future generations. Linkon (2018) refers to these processes as deindustrialisation's 'half-life', but it in effect represents the receding 'residual' influence of industrial society. TOTP was founded on similar expectations of the intergenerational transmission of memories of industry and employment related to Caterpillar, which was a comparatively recent industrial heritage located in the proximity of the secondary school where we completed the project. Instead, the occupation was a newly discovered history to almost all students and staff who engaged with the project, and it was at best a distant memory for most parents. Shared investment in place, as opposed to the industrial past, did facilitate the building of

authentic intergenerational learning however, especially through the presence of former occupiers in the classroom. The former occupiers came to embody a historical episode whose human drama and proximity to known sites sustained interest.

These experiences have resonance across much of the British coalfields where mass production industries increasingly complemented coal during the second half of the twentieth century. While coalmining employment was in more or less constant decline from the early 1920s, when it peaked at over a million miners, the sharpest fall in absolute numbers came during the late 1950s and 1960s. There was a parallel experience to Lanarkshire in other contracting coalfields such as South Wales, where employment in mechanical engineering and electronics provided alternative stable and comparatively well-paid unionised industrial jobs (Hall, 2012). In a coalfield context, where heavy industries provide dominant reference points, Caterpillar can be understood as a search beyond 'heartland' heritages. Nettleingham (2019) defines industrial heartlands as the areas most prominently associated with industrial history. Heartlands enjoy their status at the expense of other former industrial areas such as Kent which is less commonly remembered as part of Britain's industrial past, despite its coalmining and shipbuilding heritages. Heartland status can also be understood with reference to economic sectors as well as geographies. Within Lanarkshire, assembly engineering sectors are peripheral within the dominant collective memory of industrial society, which revolves around coal and steel, but they are important to understanding the transition from an industrial to a service economy. The absence of the occupation from historical consciousness among both students and teachers was also a reflection of the long-term effects of deindustrialisation and associated trends towards suburbanisation. Beatty et al. (2019) recent report emphasises that across the UK, 'the former coalfields have become places where people live rather than work' (p. 42). The students engaged in TOTP were often from families that had moved into the area since 1987, which justified the rationale in establishing an ownership of Lanarkshire's industrial past through school lessons.

The next section places Caterpillar within coalfield history, establishing the importance of the mass production employment period as

an interregnum in deindustrialisation between the closure of most of Lanarkshire's coalmines and the transition to a service economy. It also develops the challenge facing Caterpillar's heritage in a context where heavy industries dominate public memory. An assessment of the TOTP project is presented in two sections. The first part focuses on the difficulties and benefits of completing a project on a relatively unknown industrial heritage that did not benefit from the local and family familiarity commonplace in coalfield heritages. Section two reviews the learning journeys produced by the students we followed. It emphasises that interpersonal contact proved the most valuable means of creating a sense of the industrial past among school students and that the occupation also enabled them to develop an understanding of contemporary as well as historical injustices.

A Coalfield Heritage

In 2016, South Lanarkshire Council's (2016) Cultural Coordinator, Claire McGhee, recalled the shock her colleagues felt when a local songwriter working with senior primary school children 'started to talk to the children about coal and they all had very blank faces'. McGhee went on to explain that 'coal is in the blood and bones of the majority of the people who live in South Lanarkshire' and argued this justified future heritage efforts. McGhee's sentiments have been paralleled by others with connections of the coalfields. Margaret Wegg was a miner's daughter and a miner's wife who worked in the canteen at Cardowan colliery in North Lanarkshire. She was made redundant when the colliery closed in contentious circumstances during 1983 (Gibbs, 2021b). Subsequently, Wegg was among the leading activists of the Cardowan Women's Support Group that supported the 1984–1985 strike. In 2009, Wegg told a journalist that she felt that the growing temporal distance from the closure of Lanarkshire's last mines was contributing to increasing unfamiliarity with an industry once central to the county's economy, social life, and geography: 'I doubt whether today's young people know what a piece of coal looks like…At least my two grandchildren know. They have been brought up to appreciate coal' (*Glasgow* Times, 2009). McGhee and

Wegg's shared investment in the intergenerational transmission of coal heritages is typical of the place that Britain's most iconic and formerly largest industry has received in memorialisation that followed the intensification of deindustrialisation during the 1980s and 1990s. In these narratives, 'black gold' (Dicks, 2000), stood at the centre of community, sustaining settlements that owed their existence to mining.

The Summerlee Industrial Museum in Coatbridge, North Lanarkshire, built on the site of a historic ironworks, commemorates this past. Following closure, Cardowan's winding engine was donated to the museum and provides a sense of the scale and noise heavy industry entailed. Visitors view recreated miners' cottages portraying social advancement across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and brave a recreated mine which imitates the dark, cramped nature of underground work (Culture North Lanarkshire, n.d). Another section of the Cardowan mining apparatus, half of the winding wheel, stands in the village of Moodiesburn, North Lanarkshire. It is part of the memorial to forty-seven miners who perished following an underground fire at Auchengeich colliery in September 1959. In 1984, the winding wheel was reprised by local striking miners as a memorial to mark the disaster's twenty-fifth anniversary. During 2019, local primary and secondary students were among the attendees at a ceremony to mark the sixtieth anniversary. This commemoration was also attended by local politicians and religious leaders, as well as former miners and trade unionists from across Scotland, Yorkshire, and Durham (Gibbs & Phillips, 2019). Coal is therefore at the centre of industrial commemoration in Lanarkshire.

The increasingly unfamiliar status of coal that Claire McGhee and Margaret Wegg described so vividly was the outcome of a long process that has evolved over a period of almost a century. It took almost one hundred years of sustained contraction before British deep coalmining ended with the closure of Kellingley colliery in Yorkshire in 2015. Lanarkshire exemplifies those trends. In 1921, 59,925 men were employed in the county's coal industry, approximately one-third of the total male workforce (Census, 1921). Over the following sixty-two years, coal was partially replaced by employment in assembly goods industries directed to Scotland's contracting coalfields at the behest of policymakers. Caterpillar's investment at Tannochside was an archetypal

example with the new plant being built atop a derelict former mining village and providing employment for former miners and their sons. Connections to the mining industry were referred to in interviews collected around the thirtieth anniversary of the occupation in 2017. For instance, John Brannan, who was the factory's Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) convenor and head of the occupation's Joint Occupation Committee (JOC), mentioned that his father was a coalminer whose sense of 'comradeship' and solidarity with his workmates was visible to him growing up. Bill McCabe, who was a shop steward in his twenties during the occupation, recalled that his grandfather had been a mining trade unionist and that he and his father saw themselves as following his example at Caterpillar. Both these interviews were conducted at Tannochside Miners' Welfare, which was not incidental. The Welfare was used because it stood adjacent to the former factory site and had hosted large union meetings across the life of the factory, as well as providing support during the occupation.

Caterpillar should therefore be understood in the context of the long contraction of Lanarkshire coalmining. In the twenty years between 1951 and 1971 alone, coal employment fell from over fifteen percent of male workers to under three percent of employed men, from over twenty thousand workers to under four thousand (Census, 1951; 1971). Coal became an increasingly peripheral—if still visible—part of Lanarkshire's economy over the course of the twentieth century. John Slaven is a former Scottish Trades Union Congress and current GMB union official. John's father and mother relocated from Glasgow to local-authority housing in Birkenshaw, North Lanarkshire, so that his father could take up employment at Caterpillar. John recollected that when growing up in the area during the 1960s and 1970s, the contracting coal economy was still part of community life. A bus drove Birkenshaw men to other pits in central Scotland. Mining dangers were experienced collectively. John shared the distress of his best friend at school, Paul Sweeney, when his father was trapped underground for five days in the 1960s. These developments also framed the significance of Caterpillar, which came to represent modernisation and prosperity in contrast to the declining dangerous collieries:

> You have to understand the physical environment of Caterpillar, it was a big shiny new factory; it looked modern, the front ae [of] it looked modern, it looked American so you know, and they made these brilliant tractors that were sold all over the world, why would they go? You werenae doing an old decrepit pit that's seam was running out, you were in this big modern factory that had computer design pay systems that were making big yella tractors that everybody knew aboot. (John Slaven, interview)

John's comments demonstrate how the 'aura of permanence' created by the scale of industrial production come to shape the dislocation associated with deindustrialisation (Cowie & Heathcott, 2003, p. 6). By the late 2010s, industrial employment was a relatively marginal part of Lanarkshire's economy. During the final decades of the twentieth century, the county had remained dependent on manufacturing. The impact of economic restructuring is demonstrated in Table 1. Deindustrialisation exercised downward pressure on overall employment from the 1970s to the 1990s. Between 1971 and 1991, industrial employment's labour market share fell from 44.3 percent to 21.8 percent, concurrent with a sharp overall reduction in employment of over 40,000 jobs. This was equivalent to nearly a fifth of the numbers employed in Lanarkshire in 1991. Lanarkshire therefore conforms to the picture of 'enforced joblessness' which afflicted deindustrialising areas within the UK and was principally experienced by male manual workers (Beatty & Fothergill, 1996).

Deindustrialisation continued over the following three decades, but in place of labour market withdrawal and shrinkage, a transformation has taken place. Table 1 demonstrates a significant growth in the size of Lanarkshire's workforce. The county is increasingly characterised by suburbanisation and commuting to service jobs beyond its boundaries. During 2015, it was estimated that a total of around 120,000 people left the North and South Lanarkshire local authority areas for work every day, primarily to the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh (Campsie, 2015). That amounted to over one-third of the total workforce, a far higher

Table 1 Employment in Lanarkshire

Year[1]	Employed Residents	Percent in industry[2]
1971	257,558	44.3
1991	216,830	21.8
2011	308,870	9.5
2018	325,400	7.2[3]

Source UK Data Service, UK Census 1971 Tables 10 and 28; UK Census 1991 Table 23; UK Census 2011 Age by Industry; UK Census Data; *NOMIS* Labour Market Profiles, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire

proportion than those employed in the remainder of Lanarkshire's industrial sectors. These changes have shaped the environment in which the students involved in TOTP have grown up in. One major impact is the remaking of Lanarkshire's landscape and economic geography through the repurposing of its physical space and redeployment of its workforce. The context of industry's marginalisation was also a major driver of the CWLG's activities. Billy Stewart (2019), a local folk musician, wrote a song titled 'Ghosts and Memories' for an album about the occupation produced by the Lanarkshire Songwriters collective in collaboration with the CWLG. Its chorus reflects on changes to the former factory site:

> Now there's only ghosts and memories of what there used to be
> Where a factory stood there's houses now

The CWLG's members have also sought to imbue the new built environment with the memory of the occupation. A CWLG report compiled by John Gillen (2018), who served as John Brannan's deputy on the JOC, detailed that the former Caterpillar union steward and current North Lanarkshire Labour Party councillor, Bob Burrows, had worked to have

[1] Figures for 1971 are for the County of Lanarkshire and 2011 and 2018 are combined totals for North and South Lanarkshire council areas. 1991 figures are combined totals from Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, East Kilbride, Clydesdale, Monklands, Motherwell, and Strathkelvin District Councils which were formed out of Lanarkshire County and later amalgamated into either North or South Lanarkshire.

[2] Industry refers to mining and manufacturing sectors, except for 2011 when only manufacturing was available.

[3] Figures for 2018 are a total of industrial jobs in Lanarkshire rather than employment of residents.

four streets named after the factory on a new housing scheme built atop the former factory site. The report was compiled as TOTP was taking shape and the project was listed in a similar vein. TOTP was a means to have the occupation 'included as part of the school curriculum', which would preserve its memory, cementing its status as a bona fide historical evident with local and national significance.

TOTP 1: Background and Lesson Observations

The rationale for TOTP rested on expectations among both the project team and the CWLG that there would be some sense of connection with the Caterpillar factory among the students at the Lanarkshire secondary school where the project took place. However, during the lessons, it became apparent that there was limited pre-existing awareness of the factory. Instead, TOTP generally involved the establishment of new connections based on shared investment in place and a sense of the relevance that the Caterpillar occupation held to contemporary economic experiences in Scotland and internationally. A questionnaire was distributed to parents of the students that completed the project. Six were returned, meaning around one in five parents completed the questionnaire. The results are not therefore conclusive for the whole class. They are, however, more representative of the thirteen children that the project followed working across six groups. Five of the six completed questionnaires were from parents of these students. Only one parent recalled Caterpillar's presence: 'I remember the Caterpillar factory that employed many local people. They always had a summer trip for staff and their families. I also remember the steel factory in the Motherwell area'. A significant level of detail is recalled in this memory, indicating a familiarity with the Caterpillar factory and the company's presence in the area. The invocation of the Ravenscraig steelworks also demonstrates an understanding that the factory was part of a larger local manufacturing infrastructure. However, five other respondents had no direct memories of the Caterpillar factory or the occupation; two did, however, remember the occupation being reported on Scottish television news.

This prevalent sense of removal from Caterpillar was related to the socioeconomic changes discussed in the previous section inasmuch as the occupation predated most of the respondents' connections to Lanarkshire. No questions about residence or place of birth featured in the questionnaire. However, four of the six parents who responded mentioned that they were not originally from Lanarkshire. One explained that they had grown up in Clydebank, to the west of Glasgow, and discussed the town's historic links with the shipbuilding industry. Additionally, two questionnaires referred to coalmining. Coal was an industrial heritage they were aware of and associated Lanarkshire with. Three respondents specified that they had visited the Summerlee Museum. Five of the six parents said that they were supportive of school engagement with industrial heritage. The most developed answer specified the importance of links to the local community in achieving this: 'If the local industrial past can be built into the curriculum, that's good, but in the spirit of "it makes a village". It's important for the local community to explore its own history'.

The questionnaires indicate the accuracy of the assumptions behind TOTP, that industrial heritage is built on localised connections and family links to industry. Yet Lanarkshire's suburbanisation meant those connections were less likely to be present. These developments were accelerated by deindustrialisation, specifically the expansion of housebuilding on the former factory site, which means that people living near where the plant had stood were not always likely to have a direct connection to its relatively recent industrial past. TOTP developed in a quite different environment to research in the English coalfields where familiarity with the recent history of mining was apparent among pupils and teachers (Simpson, 2021). Coal's dominance within industrial heritage demonstrates the challenges of engaging with alternative memories related to other industrial sectors. These difficulties parallel Nettleingham's (2019) observations of the challenges posed by working outside familiar 'heartland' industrial histories. Widespread local recognition granted for Victorian heavy industries matches the pattern of industrial commemorations in Lanarkshire and across the UK as demonstrated by Summerlee. This focus can lead to a concentration on the more distant past, meaning that more recent events that are pivotal

to the making of contemporary Lanarkshire are obscured. Caterpillar's thirty-one-year presence in Lanarkshire between 1956 and 1987 was comparatively short when contrasted with activities that were a major part of the area's industrial landscape for over 150 years. Only one teacher, an older member of staff with a background in the area, had prior knowledge of the dispute. He remembered the occupation and was exceptional among those involved in delivering TOTP from outside the CWLG in having a sense of personal connection to Lanarkshire's industrial era. During a teacher focus group, he explained that 'by educating people, hopefully they'll realise the benefits of being in a trade union'.

Most teachers involved in delivering lessons were not from Lanarkshire and were unfamiliar with the occupation. This was evident when one of the two teachers who taught the social subject class was asked what they knew about the occupation—'I'll be honest, I'm not from this area so, like, nothing'. They saw value in the alternative teaching approach of TOTP, emphasising both the value of a place-responsive method and a group project that was not reliant on meeting predetermined outcomes:

> I honestly think the whole making it a wee bit real to them [the students], making it personal, that'll really help. I think that'll be your hook, because they'll get excited that they're doing something…That's to do with them, that's so local, that possibly had an effect on their family. Or that they're living in a house that's not been built in that area.

The occupation's authenticity and immediacy would be established through shared connections to place held by both the former occupiers and the students, and through the experience of meeting and interacting with CWLG members.

In early lessons, there were some signs that even place-based connections to the plant were limited for some students. During the second lesson, one pupil, Jenni, removed herself from the context of Caterpillar and Tannochside by stating: 'I'm from Bothwell, there's nothing in Bothwell' (Observer notes, 13 September 2018). However, Jenni later took part in a student focus group where she mentioned that her mother had said she was familiar with Caterpillar when she discussed it at home and that her uncle had worked at the plant. For Jenni, then, it could in fact be

that the highly localised distinction between Uddingston and Bothwell assisted her in placing the factory in relation to other local boundaries and landmarks. At the focus group, Jenni displayed knowledge of the length of the occupation and an understanding of the factory's eventual closure. Aria, who also took part in the focus group, explained that 'My mum and my dad knew about it when it was happening. They said they knew quite a lot of people that it happened to'. Aria and Jenni's discovery of previously unknown connections to the occupation demonstrate the benefit of formally recognising local working-class history and the importance of the legitimation that the CWLG sought for the occupation. There was a parallel to the role the thirtieth anniversary of the miners' strike played in the Yorkshire coalfield in discovering these links. As Bright (2016) explains, this provided a context for confronting a previously 'unspoken' affective context. Formally revisiting the occupation at school encouraged discussion at home and granted it the status of a bona fide historical event. TOTP encouraged an intergenerational dialogue about the industrial era and a struggle for workplace justice which assisted in the uncovering of existing community knowledges. Aria's contribution to the focus group underlined the value of conversing with former occupiers who gave TOTP authenticity through its connection with an accessible local past. She discussed the benefits of hearing 'the people's experiences with that. So, like, actually their feelings and thoughts on what's happening'.

The dialogue between students and occupiers was an emotional and physical exertion for some participants. During one lesson, two former union stewards and occupiers, Bob Burrows and Jim McRobbie, were interviewed by students. Bob attended in a suit, which was perhaps a signifier of his standing as a local councillor in the area, and Jim was also smartly dressed. After introducing themselves to the class, both men were directed towards the back of the classroom where they patiently answered questions. A respect for the older men was demonstrated by the students who were careful to make way and who queued to ask their questions. This perhaps accorded to learned habits around older relatives and neighbours. Jim suffers from a degenerative illness, but despite occasionally slurring words, was articulate and made it clear that he was looking forward to meeting the students. The interactions

between students and former occupiers established a common invest-ment in place that helped to break down the distance between Caterpillar and contemporary Lanarkshire:

> Bob is doing most of the talking in answering questions, but Jim also provides comments, including experience of the nightshift. A lot of groups ask questions about poverty and survival. One girl tells me about how 'local shops, the Co-op and a butcher' provided support for the occu-pation. A sense of familiarity is also apparent in the form of the visitors who link the past with the present and common local affiliations. One boy proudly tells me after speaking to Bob that 'he's a Motherwell [Foot-ball Club] fan!' Another links Jim's former occupation as an electrician to his dad who's a gas engineer. But unlike Jim, his father 'hates his job' which takes him 'up north', away from his wife and children. (Observer notes, 18 September 2018)

The conversations between the students and Bob and Jim helped create forms of authenticity predicated on the former occupiers 'speaking the same language' as pupils (Simpson, 2021). Not being school authority figures encouraged this atmosphere, but it also came from other important connections with students. Bob's investment in locality through his support for Motherwell created an affinity with one student, for example, whereas Jim's experience as a tradesman connected with another student's family life. These shared links to place and class furnished moments where connections between past and present could be made. Bob was able to further establish familiarity with references to the survival practices that characterised the occupation. He answered students' questions on how the occupiers lived without wages for three months by telling them about his role as the chair of the occupation's hardship committee which tasked him with awarding scarce money to occupiers most in need. During a conversation with TOTP team members, he noted that: 'all of the students asked similar questions about how we coped with no money or food. They wanted to know how they sustained themselves, how they survived' (Observation notes, 18 September 2018).

A human-interest appeal cemented the familiarity of place. Fascination with how workers' families negotiated the predicament of going without

wages stimulated the students' interest. Conversations between students and occupiers appeared to indicate interest in trade union activism, especially on the last day of visits by the occupiers, when John Gillen was interviewed: 'The questions John are asked seem to be well informed. He discusses the relatively good pay at Caterpillar and the role of shop stewards and the trade union with one group' (Observation notes, 20 September 2018). Mark and David, two students in a different group, demonstrated capacity to link the stories they had been told with the other sources, identifying John Gillen and John Brannan in a picture of a demonstration from 1987.

TOTP 2: Outcomes

Two quite different readings of Caterpillar unfold in the six learning journeys that were followed for TOTP and analysed below. A range of perspectives were produced through engagement with differing sources in distinct ways. They also came out of the formation of contrasting perspectives on the meaning that should be taken from the occupation and the factory's closure. As discussed below, three of the journeys demonstrated a localised or community understanding of Caterpillar in Tannochside. Steph and Andrew's learning journey focused on what they learned from their discussions with the former occupiers: 'By the end…We also found out how hard it was to feed yourself and your family'. Andrew consolidated this understanding during the student focus group when he explained that the main interest he had taken in the occupation was understanding how workers and their families had survived when they 'didnae have any food or nothing'. Jenni and Calum's work was less specifically detailed when it came to the occupation. Instead, they focused on the changes brought about by deindustrialisation, noting that there had previously been a Caterpillar factory in Lanarkshire which 'made diggers and bulldozers' before 'it got shut down'.

Debbie and Thomas constructed a more developed learning journey from a local viewpoint. They integrated a number of sources and considered distinct gendered experiences of the occupation. A paper figure of a

woman was included on the learning journey and a piece of card attached reads, 'Hi I'm Julie and my husband lost his job. I found it hard to stay strong as we were struggling for money, and we had three children'. This representation was an amalgamation of the perspective on the occupation that Cathie Brannan, John's wife, had presented to the class, with Bob Burrows' story. Bob was a father of three and sole earner in the household when Caterpillar closed. Debbie and Thomas' learning journey also presented a developed understanding of why employment at Caterpillar was valued, emphasising both the 'good wages' and 'best facilities of its time' that the American corporation provided. The occupation itself was discussed through both a union demonstration in London—indicating interaction with the archived sources—and the use of collecting tins, which were one of the artefacts used in the classroom. During the student focus group, Debbie commented that: 'I liked the bit where you got to, like, meet people because, like, they were there and it's kind of like a primary source and it was quite cool to see what their experiences were'. Her group's learning journey reflected these encounters. It concludes with an appraisal of the occupation's aftermath: 'The workers tried everything they could, but they sadly lost. The good thing was that Caterpillar helped them find new jobs' (Debbie and Thomas, learning journey). This assessment indicates awareness of retraining offered as part of the deal that ended the occupation.

Two other learning journeys provided a different perspective, focusing on Caterpillar's multinational presence. David and Mark's journey centred on a world map that was pasted on to the journey. They had written 'Location of Caterpillar plants-worldwide' above it, and marked sites in Canada, the United States, as well as Scotland and England. David and Mark's understanding of Caterpillar's multinational activities was confirmed in interactions during the lessons:

> The group discussed with me various countries in which Caterpillar had factories. They told me that Caterpillar had had two factories in the UK, noting there was another in England, so this was a problem for marking the map. I said that Scotland and England were big enough to mark separately, keen that they showed this knowledge. (Observation notes, 27 September 2018)

Rachel, Claire, and Jamie decorated their learning journey with a drawing of a globe that had 'Aroun[d] the world' written above it alongside a representation of a Caterpillar bulldozer coloured in the firm's signature yellow. This journey rationalised closure in terms of global restructuring: 'Why did the factory close? Due to the fact the company needed to close one of their factory [sic] and the Scottish factory seemed like the best idea'. This was the only mention of the Tannochside experience. Rachel's group instead focused on Caterpillar's continued international operations, detailing a recent tax scandal involving the company:

> 'Money: Even though Caterpillar is world famous it does not mean that they can't pay their taxes'
>
> 'The company got into a lot of trouble when people found out the well-known company was not paying taxes due to some complication with Switzerland'

These conclusions were drawn from internet research completed on iPads and Chromebooks which held the electronic databases that the archival research was based on. In January 2018, Caterpillar had become embroiled in a US tax case with the Internal Revenue Service due to the deployment of its Swiss subsidiary for tax-avoidance purposes (Tangle & Rapoport, 2018). The closure at Tannochside was therefore part of a global pattern of economic vandalism.

The remaining learning journey was differentiated from the others through bridging perspectives in both temporal and geographical terms. Aria and Julie combined knowledge developed in dialogue with the occupiers and research that drew on the archival sources and artefacts. Moments from the 103 days of the occupation were referred to including: a fundraising football match; a union demonstration in London that aimed to pressure the UK government; and a letter from John Brannan to Margaret Thatcher. The archival database contained items related to these events which informed Aria and Julie's perspective on the occupation. References were also made to commemorative badges worn by some of the former occupiers and the replicated 'I support the Caterpillar workers' stickers that were among the objects provided.

The learning journey also detailed Caterpillar's continued global business presence. Alone among the learning journeys, this work referred to a portion of the old factory site's present-day use as a supermarket, stating that it was 'In Uddingston, where Scotmid is now'. The learning journeys were far from a total agglomeration of the knowledge created during TOTP, which is evidenced by quotations from the focus group. In fact, they were decisively limiting by design, forcing groups to agree on content and decide priorities. Yet, this was illuminating in obligating the groups to collectively conclude what was most important, whether a local or global lens was the best way to engage with Caterpillar, and how, if at all, the occupation and factory closure related to Lanarkshire in 2018.

Conclusion

The learning journeys demonstrated engagement with a range of textual sources and objects as well as the educational benefits provided by classroom dialogue with former occupiers. Yet, one major omission was trade unionism. Aria and Julie's work mentioned the occupation in some detail, including important instances of collective mobilisation such as the protest in London and local community support at the fundraising football match. However, the central role of union organisation in the Caterpillar factory's culture, and its integral role to the making of the occupation, were marked by their absence. Neither, though, did the delegitimisation of organised labour and industrial protest in Britain characterise any of the learning journeys, several of which used a language of economic and social justice that bore similarities to the moral economy outlook of the occupiers in 1987 (Gibbs & Phillips, 2018). Debbie and Thomas' decision to include Cathie Brannan's story is significant in demonstrating the importance of delivering a gender-conscious approach to industrial heritage education. Aria's comments on Cathie's contribution to a class discussion, which followed her husband's, confirms this: 'his wife came in as well, so you got her perspective of it as well'. During the same focus group, Debbie indicated that she felt there was benefit from speaking to people who were children at the time of the

occupation: 'Maybe some, like, who were children at the time. Maybe not, like, the oldest people but not the youngest either. Like, people who their mums and dads lost their jobs or things like that would be quite interesting to hear [from]'. Given the intergenerational focus of the project, this was a weakness that precluded greater consideration of the closure's long-term impact and overlooked recent research which emphasises the impact that deindustrialisation has upon children and the value of childhood memories to studying economic change (Perchard, 2017).

The experience of industrial heritage in the TOTP project will have increasing generalisability in the 2020s. Growing distance from the final closure of coalmines and other large industrial employers along with the experience of a growing services economy, commuting and suburbanisation are visible in other parts of Britain. TOTP was founded on the expectation that a local industrial heritage project would link with existing knowledges among students, their families, and school staff. These turned out to be minimal. Instead, TOTP largely made students aware of an important relatively recent struggle for economic justice for the first time. However, local connections were important in driving this interest, especially through visits to the classroom by members of the CWLG. Meeting and interviewing the former occupiers brought the history of the occupation to life for students, especially the gravity of going for 103 days without wages and the mobilisation of solidarity in support of the dispute. An authentic connection through shared investment in place, and in some cases working-class family experiences, anchored this interest. These provide a hopeful justification for pursuing industrial heritage education. Shared connections to place can still enthuse students and encourage them to take ownership of local history, even where it is not necessarily related to their families. In other cases, taking the history of the occupation into the classroom rekindled family memories and established previously unregistered connections to the occupation. Furthermore, the example of Caterpillar was well chosen despite its peripherality in dominant memories of industrial Lanarkshire. TOTP brought an important episode of economic change that raised fundamental questions about the role of economic decision-making in a democratic society in a way that could be understood at both local and global levels. It allowed students to determine their vantage by engaging

with people, places, objects, and archival sources. Similar episodes can be found in other parts of the British coalfields, especially if we look beyond dominant heartland heritages.

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'I Was Never Very Clever, but I Always Survived!': Educational Experiences of Women in Britain's Coalfield Communities, 1944–1990

Natalie Thomlinson

Introduction

The educational experiences of working-class women have often been overlooked, not only by policymakers and practitioners, but also in academic circles. Historically, much of the literature has focused on working-class boys (see, for example, Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Willis, 1977), and of socially mobile boys and girls in grammar schools (Hoggart, 1957; Jackson & Marsden, 1962). Whilst there has, of late, been more attention paid to the educational experiences of working-class women (Plummer, 2000; Spencer, 2005; Tisdall, 2019), there remains a lack of research on the experiences of those who went to secondary modern schools—institutions which educated the vast majority of working-class girls between the Butler Act and at least until the 1970s—and the experiences of working-class girls who left grammar

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173

school at the earliest possible moment. Much of the academic literature on the recent history of education in Britain has focused on the link between social mobility and schooling (Mandler, 2020). Whilst this is an important concern, questions such as pupils' everyday experience of school, and how experiences shaped the self, remain under researched, especially in relation to working-class women. This chapter draws on the experiences of nearly 100 women brought up in coalfield communities across Britain in the post-war period to address these questions. It examines their experiences between the 1944 Education Act (which introduced free secondary education for all and enshrined a system of selection at eleven) and 1990, when the youngest interviewee left school.

The women whose testimonies appear in this chapter were interviewed as part of an AHRC-funded project on the experiences of women during the 1984–1985 miners' strike in Britain. This project was undertaken by: myself; the principal investigator for the project, Florence Sutcliffe Braithwaite; and the project's postdoctoral researcher, Victoria Dawson. Interviewees were recruited through a variety of methods; adverts for participants were placed on social media and in local papers; flyers were sent round to community organisations in coalfield areas; and interviewees themselves recommended friends who would be happy to talk. The oral-histories were conducted as full-life history interviews, ranging from between 90 min to 7 h in length. This allowed material about a range of topics pertinent to the lives of working-class women in coalfield communities in post-war Britain, including education, to be gathered. Participants were born between 1934–1974, with the majority being classic 'baby boomers' born between the mid-1940s and late 1950s, and were drawn from coalfields across England, Scotland, and Wales (see Table 1). The sample was too small to be representative: our sample was more socially mobile than average, and drawn disproportionately from active supporters of the strike, despite our attempts to solicit interviewees from across the political spectrum.

The women had a range of educational experiences and attended a mix of single-sex and co-educational schools; attendance at single-sex institutions was more common in older interviewees, and amongst those who

Table 1 Overview of Interviewees Biographical Details

Interviewee	Year of birth	Location	School type
Christina Bell	1949	North East	Secondary Modern
Tracey Bell	1971	Nottinghamshire	Comprehensive
Joyce Boyes	1955	Yorkshire	Secondary Modern/comprehensive
Carol*	1968	South Wales	Comprehensive
Chloe*	1959	Yorkshire	Grammar
Sara C	1971	Yorkshire	Comprehensive
Kay Case	1948	South Wales	Grammar
Maureen Coates	1942	Yorkshire	Grammar
Betty Cook	1938	Yorkshire	Grammar
Kath Court	1943	Yorkshire	Secondary modern
Myra Dakin	1959	Yorkshire	Comprehensive
Elizabeth Ann*	1943	South Wales	Grammar
Liz French	1950	Kent	Secondary modern
Theresa Gratton*	1955	North East	Grammar
Christine Harvey	1950	South Wales	Grammar
Shelan Holden	1970	Yorkshire	Comprehensive
Margaret Holmes	1942	Kent	Secondary modern
Sian James	1959	South Wales	Secondary modern/comprehensive
Anne Kirby	1955	Fife	Comprehensive
Pippa Morgan*	1962	South Wales	Grammar/secondary modern
Poppy*	1968	North East	Comprehensive
Maxine Penkethman	1967	Staffordshire	Comprehensive
Marie Price	1935	Nottinghamshire	Secondary modern
Robyn*	1963	Yorkshire	Comprehensive
Angela Rees	1958	Kent	Secondary modern
Ann Rollett	1943	Yorkshire	Secondary modern
Alice Samuel	1958	Lanarkshire	Grammar
Jean Shadbolt	1948	Nottinghamshire	Grammar
Marjorie Simpson	1938	Yorkshire	Secondary modern
Kerry Smith	1972	Nottinghamshire	Comprehensive

Table 1   (continued)

Interviewee	Year of birth	Location	School type
Rita Wakefield	1943	Nottinghamshire	Secondary modern
Jo-Anne Welsh	1967	Yorkshire	Comprehensive
Josie Warner*	1952	Staffordshire	Grammar
Anne Watts	1949	South Wales	Grammar
Carol Willis	1952	North East	Grammar

*Denotes a pseudonym

had passed their eleven plus.[1] Roughly a quarter attended a grammar school, though some transferred between secondary moderns and grammars and vice versa, and a number were in secondary moderns and grammar schools that became comprehensive during their time at the school. The younger interviewees tended to have gone to comprehensive schools due to the phasing out of the eleven plus in most local authorities from the mid-1960s onwards. The majority attended school in either their local community or the nearest town. Those who attended grammar schools were over-represented in the research; we should recognise here the tendency of volunteers for oral history projects to be drawn from those who feel they have a 'successful' life story to tell. However, given that the focus of the project was the miners' strike, rather than education, failing the eleven plus was not an obvious deterrent to taking part, and we therefore gathered useful accounts of education in secondary modern schools from many women.

Of course, the context in which these oral testimonies were produced needs to be considered. Encounters between university researchers and women who, in some cases, left school without qualifications, can be freighted with class and power imbalances. The fact that I grew up in a coalfield community, whilst sometimes useful in establishing a rapport with interviewees, could only go so far in ameliorating differences in life

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[1] The eleven plus was an examination taken by all pupils across England and Wales until the 1960s (although it still exists in some areas). Pupils sat the eleven plus in the final year of primary school to determine which secondary schools they would attend thereafter (grammar, technical, or second modern). The eleven plus was (and still is) controversial and has been criticised as being biased against working-class children, and also against women, who were, in many cases, required to gain higher marks than boys to obtain a grammar school place.

experience. As such, the interview—as all oral histories are—were deeply shaped by the intersubjectivity of the encounter (Summerfield, 2004). Whilst the interviewees were no doubt faithful to the truth as they understood it, it would nevertheless be naïve to read these testimonies as simple empirical assertions of fact. Nevertheless, these interviews *are* useful for providing insight into how education was subjectively experienced and perceived by the women in our research, and the frameworks they used to make sense of their experiences at school.

It is impossible to give one single narrative of the experiences of almost 100 women. Many loved school, others hated it, and some were indifferent. Often a range of attitudes were present in the same interview. In some cases, happy memories of school jostled with a sense of resentment at the low expectations of working-class girls. For those who remembered more progressively inclined teachers, school was simultaneously the locus of class and gender oppression, and an arena for critique. Mandler (2020) points to the contradictions in a system that championed education as a means of social mobility whilst failing to provide the mass of the population with schooling that could actually make good on this promise; in his reading, Britain's shift to comprehensive education in the post-war period was driven by widespread public discontent with this failure. Importantly though, experiences of school shaped participants' sense of self in other important respects—as 'rebels', as women who 'loved to learn', as 'popular' sociable people—and this chapter also explores how school shaped their subjectivities, and the frameworks they used to interpret their educational experiences.

Class

That education in twentieth-century Britain worked to reproduce class inequalities is well-established in literature (see, Jackson & Marsden, 1962; Plummer, 2000; Reay, 2017; Willis, 1977). Many—though not all—of our interviewees recognised this. This may have been linked to the generally left-wing tendencies of our sample as access to various leftist discourses around education provided many of our interviewees with the intellectual tools through which to interpret their experiences.

It was notable that those who deemed themselves as 'socialist' were most likely to critique the schooling they had received in terms of its failure to promote social mobility. Unsurprisingly, recollections of taking the eleven plus were flash points for memories about social injustice. Margaret Holmes, for example, suspected that her headmaster at primary school in Deal, Kent, may have prevented her from attending grammar school in the 1950s as her mother was a cleaner. It is impossible to know the validity of this claim, but teachers often had significant power in determining the fate of 'borderline' candidates, with predictable class biases (Vernon, 1957). Kath Court passed her eleven plus in Altofts, West Yorkshire, in the early 1950s—one of only two to do so in her class—but was unable to take her place at grammar school. She remembered:

> I knew I was very much working class when it came to the eleven plus, because we had twins that were quite…the family was quite high ranking in the Catholic Church. One of the twins passed the eleven plus and so did I and there were two places but because they were twins, I didn't get the place but the twin that was dim did, and yes, I knew that was class division, yes, from being early and I always resented that.

Kath was then sent to the local secondary modern which did not offer formal qualifications. Unsurprisingly, the injustice of this still burned in Kath's memory. Now in her late seventies, Kath remembered "I was so disgusted, I was angry, because if I'd have gone to Notre Dame, in Leeds, I'd have had a different life altogether" even though as an adult, Kath re-entered education and retrained as a social worker.

The lower status of the secondary modern was felt keenly by some pupils and their parents. Sian James, said of the local secondary modern that she attended in South Wales in the early 1970s that "we knew that we were the lowest of the low". Others seemed to have taken less of a battering to their self-esteem by going to a secondary modern; it may well have been that passing the eleven plus was so rare in some communities that failing it was hardly worth of note (Plummer, 2000). Yet, despite the general keenness amongst some parents for their children to go to grammar school (Mandler, 2020), not all our interviewees wished themselves to go to grammar school. In Kent, in the early 1970s, for example,

Angela Rees remembered refusing to take her eleven plus (which it was expected she would pass) for fear of being seen as 'snobby' by her schoolmates. In one particularly vivid testimony, Christine Worth remembered the struggle she had with her mother over whether to attend the local grammar school in Derbyshire in the early 1960s:

> Oh, it was miserable…when I found out I was the only one [of the girls at the school] I said, 'I'm not going'…my mum was devastated. I'd passed mine and [mum said] we could afford the uniform—'I can afford the uniform you will go'. And after a summer of rows, I went. It was difficult being the only girl in that year. I remember in my early teens getting into fights and I'm not a fighter. But sometimes you've got to hit back, because of course we used to get bullied, we wore uniform, and they called us bucket bangers.

Fear of being the 'odd one out' drove Christine's resistance to attending the grammar school. She was not the only one bullied for going to grammar school. Theresa Gratton* from County Durham remembered of her experiences in the late 1960s that:

> Of course, it had a wonderful uniform, it was a convent, so I was dressed in a diarrhoea brown gabardine coat with a bowler hat, and you had to have a briefcase. You may as well have stuck a Belisha Beacon on my head and said, 'come and get me.' I don't think I ever forgave me mam and dad for letting me go there [laughs].

As these testimonies suggest, attending grammar school could make someone a target. The uniforms themselves, a 'Belisha Beacon', were markers of difference in communities where conforming to certain norms was often valued. For those who passed the eleven plus, grammar school could be a disorienting introduction to a different and more middle-class world with a different set of values and norms. Differences were felt across many arenas: some were everyday embodied modes of 'being', such as clothing, appearance, and accent: other differences centred around modes of cultural consumption in terms of choices made around leisure and entertainment. Again, this is unsurprising; the low-level class-warfare of the grammar school has been a theme of educational

sociology for the last sixty years at least (Jackson & Marsden, 1962; Plummer, 2000). Theresa Gratton remembered of the grammar school she attended in Hartlepool that:

> When I went to grammar school, it was like…'whoa'. When it was Christmas, we had to stay there to go to the Christmas party, we had to be invited to someone's home and they used to insist on somebody from Hartlepool inviting all of the colliery girls to go with them and I remember going to this house and it was a huge, semi-detached townhouse and I thought, 'Jesus, I didn't know people lived like this' and they would say, 'what does your dad do?' and then you'd say, 'miner' and they would look at ya…and then the judgement would be made, so I used to be seethingly resentful of that, massively, but it did sort of make me realise, I think, for the first time that there was this other world out there that was different to the one I inhabited.

Here, we see that class was experienced through the concrete differences in material circumstances of pupils at the school. Theresa was made to realise the existence of 'this other world' for the first time, and of the value judgements made about working-class life. In a middle-class environment, she was made to feel her difference, to bear the 'hidden injuries' of class (Sennett & Cobb, 1972). Perhaps the most extreme example of this can be seen in the experience of Pippa Morgan* who passed her eleven plus in South Wales in the early1970s but was so unhappy at her grammar school that after a few months she refused to go. Her unhappiness was such that she was referred to a child psychologist who recommended that she was transferred to the local secondary modern. In a testimony that once again highlights visible class markers of difference, such as clothing and appearance, she remembered that:

> I was just so unhappy there [starts crying]. I missed my friends. I missed just everything about the other school…That was like a class thing. You know, in the grammar school, like people were so, I don't know, snobby for want of a better word, and…they'd pick on everything you'd done, they'd pick on everything…I had my ears pierced twice and there was big fuss over that in the school 'oh, what do you want that for, what do you want that?'. And even you know different things, down to clothes, colour

of your hair, things like that. And I just hated it…and then when I went to this school [the secondary modern], you know, it was…normal.

Here we can see how Pippa's habitus was different to that of the teachers and fellow pupils at her grammar school, resulting in a sense of deep alienation and unhappiness. Class was experienced here as not simply a lack of belief in the abilities of working-class pupils; it was written on the body of the working-class pupils themselves, designated as 'excessive' and 'vulgar', as 'other' to the norm of the well-regulated middle-class body (Skeggs, 1997). Like Bourdieu's (1990) famous fish that does not know it is swimming in water, as a working-class student, Pippa was only able to experience an instinctive grasp of the culture and social codes governing behaviour at the 'normal' secondary modern school.

Class snobbery was not, of course, limited to grammar schools. Remembering at her school which had recently changed from a grammar school into a comprehensive in the South Yorkshire coalfield in the 1970s, Jo-Anne Welsh said:

[The school] still had affectations to be a grammar school, which was quite interesting. I think there was kind of quite a lot of snobbery in school. So, despite the fact that, y'know, it's sat in the middle of a mining area, and predominantly, y'know, served people who were, kind of, working classes, I think there was quite a bit of snobbery about what people's parents did and then what aspirations might be for those children.

Aggie Currie, in another memory that centred on clothes, remembered of her secondary modern school in Doncaster in the 1960s that:

If your uniform came from Marks and Spencer, you were first choice for the teacher. If you were one of them kids whose uniform came from the market or jumble sale, they didn't want to know. And I was one of them kids.

Different patterns of cultural consumption could also occasion snobbery, and at her secondary modern, Sian James remembered talking

about reading the *Daily Mirror* only to be told it was a 'barmaids' paper' by her teacher. Sian remembered her teachers as 'embittered' and 'second-rate', and as Tisdall (2019) has suggested, it may have been that such teachers reinforced their own precarious sense of middle-class identity by putting down their students. Yet, it must also be said that for some interviewees, class was not a particularly salient point of division in their schooling lives. This was perhaps most typical within the secondary modern, where class was rarely brought up by our interviewees, apart from in the context of failing the eleven plus (Sian and Aggie were exceptions). This was likely because such schools in coalfield communities had an overwhelmingly working-class intake; but this was also the case for some of our grammar school pupils. Whilst nationally grammar schools were dominated by middle-class children, this was not always the case in overwhelmingly working-class areas. Those who went to grammar schools in the local or nearby village or small town where they had grown-up tended to be less likely to remember class antagonisms at school than those who had to travel further to go to school outside coalfield communities. Carol Willis from Ashington in Northumberland remembered that her grammar school wasn't 'posh', with most pupils being the children of miners, and having a broad North-East accent. Maureen Coates remembered the same of her experience at grammar school in the mining village of Adwick-le-Street, near Doncaster, as did Alice Samuel of her grammar school in Lanarkshire. This is not to say that class did not shape the education that they received; but some women did not always see it as a factor in the day-to-day experiences of school. This was less true of gender.

Gender

School has always been an arena for the reproduction of gender norms (Byrne, 1978; Griffin, 1985; Plummer, 2000; Sharpe, 1976). Undoubtedly, the education that boys and girls received in post-war Britain was different, both in terms of formal curriculum differences and the 'hidden curriculum', where wider social expectations of suitable behaviours and aspirations for girls shaped the education they received in the classroom

(Sharpe, 1994). Tisdall (2019) has argued that the allegedly 'progressive' ideologies of the post-war Britain worked to enshrine normative notions of gender, particularly for working-class girls. This was made obvious in the 1963 Newsom Report, and the heavily domestic curriculum it recommended for girls in secondary modern schools. The importance of preparation for life as a housewife was heavily underscored in the report's recommendations, with training in cooking and sewing emphasised. Many interviewees recognised these differences and understood them as a product of different gender norms; some also explicitly framed them as a product of a sexist society. Kath Court remembered that "school in my opinion prepared the girls to be wives and mothers". Similarly, Shelan Holden attending a school in South Elmsall, told us: "The girls were brought up that they were gonna be pit wives. That was the expectation".

Almost all who attended mixed schools remembered the segregation of lessons; this was unsurprising given that Benn and Simon (1970) found in the late 1960s that 50% of the comprehensives they surveyed limited some subjects to boys only, and 49 percent limited some subjects to girls. Such segregation was not limited to girls doing cooking and boys doing woodwork (something all our interviewees including those born in the 1970s, remembered), but also often included a divide between the physical sciences (often restricted to boys), and biology (more commonly offered to girls) (Byrne, 1978). It was not always clear in these interviews whether the segregation was 'official', or the result of pupils being given the 'choice' between studying various subjects which resulted in traditional splits, but the effects were much the same. Physical Education was also segregated for almost all of interviewees, with girls usually forbidden to play 'boys' sports such as football. This was resented by many. Shelan Holden, for example, said, "I used to be the one always arguing that I wanted to go and play football and rugby, and it was like 'you can't, 'cause you're a girl'. I'd be like 'but why?'". Marie Price was also told by a teacher that she would 'never be a lady' because of her love of playing the game. Given that the Football Association banned the women's game until 1971, it is unsurprising that schools were slow to provide opportunities for girls to play football; that this was often commented on perhaps points to the privileged place of football in the cultural life of the nation,

and a sense that being banned from football was emblematic of the wider ways in which some women suffered exclusion.

Yet, it would be incorrect to suggest that all interviewees were nascent schoolgirl feminists, chomping at the bit to critique the gendered nature of their education. Joanne and Christina Bell, for example, remembered warmly the play kitchen in their primary school classrooms. Anne Kirby also remembered cooking as her favourite lesson. The domestic was not necessarily viewed with disdain. Indeed, Giles (2004) has suggested that for many women in the post-war period, to be a 'housewife' was understood as a modern and desirable identity. As Bev Skeggs (1997) has argued, competence within the domestic sphere was one of the few cultural resources that working-class women could draw on for a successful performance of femininity. It is therefore unsurprising that many within our sample of working-class women were not particularly troubled by the gendered nature of the curriculum that they experienced. Their experiences were framed within a culturally hegemonic discourse that saw women's association with the domestic as 'natural' and 'right'. Marjorie Simpson noted with apparent approval, and a laugh, that at the secondary modern school in South Yorkshire in the early 1950s, 'girls were girls and boys were boys', saying (slightly tongue in cheek) "nobody had thought of all this nonsense that there is these days about it all!". As Marjorie's words suggest, women's association with the domestic could simply be thought of as 'the way things were', or even as training for the future; such understandings certainly reflected the traditional gendered divisions of labour that were seen to characterise coalfield communities in the early post-war period (see Dennis et al., 1956). It is important to note that despite the increasing participation of women in paid work in post-war Britain (McCarthy, 2020), only the youngest of our participants expected to have lives characterised by extensive participation in the paid labour force, still less a career. In the event, most of them participated extensively in the paid labour force, but these earlier assumptions inevitably informed their orientation towards school, and what both they and the authorities regarded as a suitable education for girls.

Some participants did, however, have memories of teachers explicitly challenging gender norms. Aberdare Grammar School, which five interviewees attended, invoked consistent memories of an old-fashioned

school that was nevertheless remembered for its ambition for the girls who went there. Elizabeth Ann* (1943), for example, remembered that the teachers at the school did not want them to learn shorthand because they feared their pupils getting 'stuck' in office work. In the 1980s, Shelan Holden was highly critical of the gender politics of her school in West Yorkshire. She remembered these teachers as adults who helped her develop her sense as an individual with valuable things to say and allowed her to challenge gendered norms. It is also worth noting that one interviewee, Myra Dakin, who attended the same school as Shelan but in the early 1970s, remembered that she did woodwork and welding there; yet Shelan described the school as 'totally segregated' in terms of the domestic science/woodwork gender divide. It is difficult to know whether one of the two misremembered here, or whether the school—which had been established as an experimental community college in 1969 by the West Riding when Myra attended—had a greater enthusiasm for such educational experiments in its early days than it did by the time Shelan was there in the 1980s. But it was clear that such experiments *were* happening in schools by the later 1960s. Joyce Boyes recalled an experiment at her secondary modern in Castleford in the late 1960s:

> [There was] a little project where, on a Tuesday afternoon you could all choose to do something else…I remember I went into the woodwork class, and you'd be amazed how many boys went into the cookery class…they'd got an old car and you could go and learn a bit about mechanics and things, so I think they were trying to branch out a little bit, and get away from 'the boy, and the girl', and not overlapping sort of thing.

Joyce remembered this experiment fondly, though her use of the term 'project' served to underline its novelty. Whilst Tisdall (2019) has pointed to the limits of progressivism in post-war Britain, both she and Carter (2016) have argued that secondary moderns could, nevertheless, be at the forefront of experiments in pedagogy that aimed not just to improve academic achievement, but make education 'more natural, practical and enjoyable' (Tisdall, 2019, p. 208). As Carter (2016) has suggested, the vagueness from policymakers about what precisely a secondary modern

education should consist of—as well as the relative absence of qualifications available for pupils to take until the introduction of the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) in the 1960s—left some room for teachers who were inclined to innovate. Many were not so inclined, but the progressive nature of some teaching in secondary moderns is hinted at in Joyce's memories around the experiment in letting students choose their own lessons. Yet, despite some of these experiments, as we shall see, aspirations for working-class girls were rarely high.

Imagined Futures

The sense that little was expected of many of our interviewees pervaded their reminiscences of school, particularly for older participants. Marie Price remembered of her secondary modern schooling in the late 1940s that "it was just get you through school and that was it". Rita Wakefield, eight years younger than Marie and from nearby Bulwell, remembered that "all the jobs were laid out for you" when she left her local secondary modern, the choice being either the Players cigarette factory, the hosiery factory, or—for the boys—the pit. A generation later, Maxine Penkethman, from Stoke-on-Trent, remembered that "even the teachers…they just set you up to fail, they told you, you were going to be—nothing, and, and we weren't". She remembered the school as 'churning out these kids', telling them "you're going to go and work in a factory", and not going to "do anything with your life". Perhaps it is unsurprising given such a context that a number of our interviewees recalled being persistent truants and unofficially leaving school early, particularly given the fact that there was little skilled work available in coalfields for women with qualifications.

But even those who went to grammar school had few memories of being encouraged to stay on beyond the end of compulsory education, reflecting what we know about the greater propensity of working-class girls to be 'early-leavers' at grammar school (Plummer, 2000). In the 1960s, Kay Case said she 'hated' her time at grammar school in Merthyr Tydfil, and that all she could think of was "leaving school, getting a job and saving up to get married". Betty Cook remembered of her time at

Pontefract District Girls' High in the early 1950s that she was "desperate to leave school. I had three very close friends at school who had left when they were fifteen". Betty left at the age of sixteen, at which point—despite the entreaties of her headmistress who wanted her to stay on so at school so she could go to gain teaching qualifications—she began nursing training. Betty did not speak of disliking school per se but talked of the 'tight reign' her 'possessive' father kept on her. Beginning residential nursing training at the age of sixteen was the only way in which Betty could gain what she called 'freedom'. For many working-class girls, leaving education early, either through marriage, work, or in Betty's case, further training, was the only way in which they could leave oppressive home lives—though such moves did not always result in the 'freedom' that were longed for.

This trajectory of early leaving was common for many who went to grammar schools in our sample. They were more likely to attain qualifications than those who went to secondary moderns, but often did not stay on into the sixth form. Grammar school was generally seen to be a route into white-collar employment, rather than as a prelude to university. This is unsurprising, given the extremely low numbers of working-class women attending university during this period (Byrne, 1978). As Jean Shadbolt remembered of her experience in 1960s Nottinghamshire:

> I wanted to do something arty…but…with my parents, neither of them ever said to me, 'Come on! You can do this!', you know. Once I reached fifteen, and could have left school legally, they didn't really mind whether I went to school or not. Even though I was doing my O-Levels, there was never any 'are you to revise? What exam have you got?' They didn't care…As long as I didn't go into a factory…Once I got an office job, in their eyes, I'd arrived.

Joyce Boyes also remembered aiming for clerical work at her secondary modern in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the desirability of which was noted by Byrne (1978) and Griffin (1985), and Sharpe (1976). This changed a little for younger participants, where increasing numbers of women in paid work meant interviewees grew up with a greater expectation that career-oriented qualifications might be useful for their

future working life. Deindustrialisation resulted in changing patterns of employment in coalfield areas (and indeed, across the country), with the economy shifting towards a service sector that was more likely to provide jobs for women than had previously been the case (McCarthy, 2020). The increasing availability of white-collar employment for women and decreasing availability of traditionally 'male' work in heavy industry, presumably also worked to subtly shift girls' thoughts about their possible futures. Sharpe (1994) observed that in the eighteen years between her 1976 and 1994 studies of teenage girls in West London schools, girls had become much more career orientated. Even so, career ambitions—or more accurately, their absence—tended to be shaped by the experience growing up in occupationally homogeneous coalfield communities. Tracey Bell remembered of her school in Nottinghamshire that in the 1980s, "we didn't really have access to people who were inspiring beyond the teachers we had", and that being a teacher was seen as the highest aspiration possible. Similarly, Robyn who attended a comprehensive school in Doncaster remembered that were "no aspirations, nothing…middle-class people were teachers and doctors, and I didn't know any teachers or doctors". On the other hand, Poppy, from the North East, recalled attaining good grades with relative ease at her comprehensive in the 1980s but, to the dismay of the head, was not interested in going to university:

> I was wanting to be out and about…And eventually I dropped out of school and when I did, the headmaster went mad. He wasn't happy, I was…I was doing A-levels 'cos I was one of the few candidates that they thought might make the Oxbridge, kind of, university…they didn't have many kids going to university at that time and I went…I went to Newcastle nursing instead. But he was like, 'You could be a doctor', but I was like, 'I don't want to be a doctor, I want to be nurse, and I've got me place, so there's no point me staying, 'cos I start before me A-levels...', he wasn't happy at all. He actually said to me that…he would bet his…he bet the rent or summat that I would end up on a council estate with, I think it was, three children to four different fathers.

Poppy's tale is interesting for the ambivalence demonstrated by the headmaster in the situation. In Poppy's telling, the head wanted her stay

on, holding aspirations for her as a working-class girl alongside an expression of deep class prejudice about the sort of life Poppy would lead if she did not follow his advice. The irony here is that by deliberately defying the power of the older, middle-class, male, Poppy also 'colluded in her own damnation', as Willis (1977) would have it. We may also want to read this vignette as a way of Poppy illustrating her intelligence to the interviewer, and her triumph against the odds—given the class prejudice she faced—in obtaining a degree later in life and following the career she wanted.

Experiences of School and the Making of the Self

To understand school within a crudely functionalist paradigm as a place where qualifications could be gained and 'converted' to jobs is to miss many other reasons it could be valued. It is true that many interviewees recalled negative experiences of school, but many still found value in their education despite the injustices faced. Whether their time at school was positive, negative, or a mixture, interviewees' experiences did much to shape their sense of self later in life.

Most obviously, amongst those who passed the eleven plus, there were hints of identification with the ethos of the grammar school as Jackson and Marsden (1962) also found in their famous study *Education and the Working Class*. Whilst patterns of working-class achievement as a whole were negatively impacted by selective education, a small number of working-class students were nevertheless able to negotiate the system successfully and to 'achieve' at school (indeed, the success of these pupils was used to confer legitimacy on the tripartite system). Some of our interviewees were part of this small number of academically successful working-class students, "I enjoyed school; I always enjoyed school", said Christine Harvey of her grammar school in Aberdare, remembering with happiness the encouragement given to pupils by their teachers. Christine, unusually for a working-class girl of her generation, went on to attend university in Sheffield to study maths. Anne Watts attended this school at a similar point in time, and equally recalled an atmosphere of

ambition for the girls, noting that she 'thrived' there. A grammar school education could be a source of pride, even a welcome source of difference to the other boys and girls they had gone to junior school with. Perhaps, this is unsurprising given the veneration of academic achievement within the grammar school, and the implicit message given to those who had passed the eleven plus that they were 'better' than their school-friends who failed. Josie Warner, remembered of her time at a Black Country grammar school in the 1960s:

> At school, I was clever…quite bossy, top of the class in most things. I enjoyed school immensely, I liked going to school, oddly, for a child. I particularly liked my secondary school. I did enjoy having a real mix of people to be friends with. I was not friends with people on my estate, I was only friends with people from school, so I guess, as a child, I was probably, fairly aspirational. I was pretty good at most things…I really enjoyed school as both the source of learning, 'cause we had some absolutely brilliant staff there. I mean I can still remember whole lessons from some of the secondary school teachers.

Clearly, being 'top of class in most things' was something that bolstered Josie's self-esteem and shaped her sense of self into adulthood. A number of those interviewed who hadn't attended grammar schools also talked of having loved school. Certain subjects and certain teachers were remembered with fondness, and there was no contradiction between having 'loved' school and not having achieved many academic qualifications. As Anne Kirby remembered, "[I]loved high school. Absolutely loved it…Don't think I was good at anything really, I just enjoyed it". Perhaps more pragmatically, Ann Rollett, said she 'enjoyed' her time at the school she attended in the 1950s, noting with a laugh that "I was never very clever, but I always survived!". And Joyce Boyes remembered the 'lovely little secondary school' she attended in Castleford, praising the 'good education' she received there.

We should also read these oft-repeated assertions about 'loving school' or 'loving-learning' within the context of claim-making about the self. Through making these claims, interviewees were not just simply stating a 'fact' about their younger selves; they were constructing a self for the present that allowed them 'composure'. 'Composure' is, in Summerfield's

(2004) words, the process within an oral history interview where the interviewee 'constructs a narrative about him or herself, in pursuit of psychic comfort and satisfaction, and in the hope of eliciting recognition and affirmation from his or her audience' (p. 69). Interviewees were therefore not just children who had loved learning; they wanted to be seen as people who 'loved learning', implicitly during the present as well as the past. To be someone who 'loved learning' was to be intelligent, thoughtful, and hardworking; to present oneself in this way was to attempt to access the forms of cultural capital associated with education. That these claims were made in the context of interviews with university researchers was perhaps significant and may have also spoken to a desire to be seen in a certain way by the interviewer, or to simply claim some common ground with them.

To be a person who 'loved learning' was not the only way through which we could see how school experiences had positively shaped participants' sense of self, however. Most obviously, school could be valued for the occasions for socialising it provided (see, Richards, 2018), and the sense of belonging and identity that being 'part of the group' could engender. This was commented on widely by our interviewees. In one interview passage, Kerry Smith recalled of the comprehensive she attended in Nottinghamshire in the 1980s that:

> I just didn't particularly enjoy school at all, I wasn't the most academic…I think I got four GCSE passes and then I went on to do a BTEC, I wanted to leave school as soon as possible, so I went to West Notts College and did a BTEC. But this sounds really strange saying it out loud, weirdly I was really popular. I had like loads and loads of friends, and I was the only person in the school who was like house captain, form captain, and prefect, so—there was some elements of it—and that kind of, that social side of it, and I knew everybody, and everybody knew me, and it was all very kind of…But the actual learning…

The hesitations in the testimony serve to underline the ambivalence of this passage, as Kerry tried to formulate what, precisely, she felt about her schooldays. In her juxtaposition of memories of social success alongside a perceived lack of academic achievement, she was not alone. As Sara C. remembered of her education in Barnsley in the 1980s, "I liked

school, I wouldn't say I was a good student, but I did like school. *I had lots of friends"* (italics mine). And Maxine Penkethman decried her 'terrible' teachers, but 'still enjoyed school 'cause we had a right laugh'. Many talked of the number of friends that they had at school, and about 'having a laugh', perhaps a way of constructing themselves as sociable, well-liked people.

A number of our interviewees talked also of their rebelliousness and independence at school, and it was notable that a number of those who became active in left-wing politics both during and after the strike emphasised this aspect of their personality. Aggie Currie, for example, talked of the trouble she regularly got into:

> I could walk in a classroom – 'cause I were a bit of a joker and all – 'You – out! That were my school day. 'You – out!' Every class. And my oldest sister Mary, she were dead quiet and timid, and if anybody picked on her, I used to go ge'rem…that's why my education was so – unbelievable. You know, I've bluffed my way through life a lot, really, you know, with jobs I've had, I got educated during 't miners' strike.

It is significant here that Aggie positioned herself as the protector of her sister in a way that seemed to foreshadow her later politics as a protector of her community, as suggested by the way that Aggie drew the miners' strike (in which she played a leading role in the support movement) into a part of her life story where it did not apparently fit. Similarly, her ability to 'bluff' her way through life is implicitly presented here as a result of her lack of education at school. Likewise, for Maxine Penkethman, there was an implicit connection made between the story she told of herself as a schoolchild, and the person she later became. Maxine was a teenager during the 1984–1985 strike, but later became involved in trade union activity. She recalled teachers being unfair to her due to the bad behaviour of her older brother, and explicitly connected this with her current values when she said, "I'm quite independent, if somebody picks on me, I'll stand up for myself and other people"; values she clearly saw as motivating her involvement in trade unions. Aggie and Maxine were not the only women to present themselves this way in our testimonies. Liz French described herself as a 'ringleader' amongst her

friends at school in Kent; Alice Samuel described herself as a 'wild child'; and Christine Worth described herself as a 'rebel'. All became involved in activist efforts to support the strike, and it was difficult not to feel that these experiences at school had contributed to a sense of their selves—and a story they wanted to tell of themselves—as women not afraid to challenge the establishment.

Conclusion

Class and gender profoundly shaped the educational experiences of interviewees. This was unsurprising and, in many ways, their stories work to richly illustrate, rather than to challenge, decades of sociological research that have established this. Like women from other working-class communities in post-war Britain, girls in coalfield schools often imagined their futures in terms of the norms of the communities around them, and the limited employment opportunities available to women. But the love of school expressed by many (though not all) should caution us against being too reductive about the educational experiences of working-class women in post-war Britain. Certain things could be valued about school even as the social injustices that the education system helped to perpetuate were recognised. The ambivalence of many interviewees towards school can be read in light of contradictions inherent within the school system, with both its emancipatory and oppressive aspects. Furthermore, the process of life-review inherent within the oral history process provides insights into how experiences at school shaped the self in powerful ways. Some women came to construct themselves as people with a 'love of learning'; others as individuals who liked a 'laugh' and could make friends easily; others as 'rebels' (of course, these categories were not mutually exclusive). Reflecting on experiences at school became a keyway through which interviewees understood how their adult selves came to be, and through linking the present self with the past self in a coherent fashion, composure in the interview could be generated. Schools in post-war Britain should be investigated by scholars not just as sites of social

reproduction—although they were undoubtedly that—but also as sites through which meanings about the self were generated, and in which the tools to create such meaning were shaped.

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Are We Expecting Too Much? Aspirations and Expectations of Girls Living in an Ex-Mining Community

Gill Richards

Introduction

Despite decades of equality policies, legislation and strategies, the UK still has one of the widest national attainment gaps, and evidence suggests that progress previously made in closing education gaps has now stalled or even started to widen (The Children's Society, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2021). If this trend continues, the Social Mobility Commission's prediction in 2017 of an 80-year timeframe to close the gaps between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers could significantly increase and risk 'undoing decades of progress in tackling education inequalities' (Hutchinson et al., 2020, p.32). The UK also has one of the greatest 'within school variations', with students from different backgrounds having different experiences of the same school, some of

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which negatively impact young people's educational experience (Jerrim et al., 2018; The Children's Society, 2020).

The research described in this chapter investigated the experiences of girls living in an ex-mining community located in an area of severe disadvantage identified in the Index of Multiple Deprivation as being in the top 10 per cent of most deprived places for education, skills and training. It also has one of the lowest rates for social mobility in England (Carneiro et al., 2020). The study was conducted over eight years. In the first stage, 89 girls were interviewed about their aspirations, hopes and fears for the future. The second stage involved follow-up interviews to discover their experiences as they developed into young adults.

Disadvantage and Underachievement

Successive UK reports have identified that young people from some backgrounds continue to be vulnerable to educational inequality and underachievement, despite initiatives like the 'Young Gifted and Talented Programme', the 'Future Talent Fund' and 'Pupil Premium' funding (Centre of Social Justice, 2014; EEF, 2018). Early developments brought mixed success, leaving a number of communities still feeling that they had been left behind (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). This can be attributed to a range of factors like the application of different definitions of disadvantage and underachievement, and which students meet those criteria. The Social Mobility Commission (2017) criticised, in particular, the use of too many short-term strategies rather than long-term targets with 'anchored policies' that would enable time to embed them, rather than 'drift with each political tide' (p. 6).

While young people's education attainment and achievements cannot be simply characterised by their backgrounds, some, like those who experience economic disadvantage, are persistently vulnerable to underachievement (EEF, 2018; Hutchinson et al., 2020). Where young people live and receive their schooling can also impact achievement; the attainment gap is significantly greater in parts of the country like the East Midlands, the north of England and some rural areas (Andrews et al.,

2017). Differences occur irrespective of school's locality or Ofsted inspection grade: '…the gap is as large in schools rated 'Outstanding' as in these rated 'Inadequate" (EEF, 2018, p. 2). The quality of teaching young people receive also makes a difference, varying not only between schools in the same locality, but also within individual schools (EEF, 2018; Hattie, 2009). These factors, particularly when combined, damage educational progress (Montacute, 2018).

An underpinning driver of government strategies to overcome disadvantage has been to increase 'social mobility'. In 2016, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission identified 'cold spot' areas that failed to create opportunities for young people. Funding for 'Opportunity Areas' and the national plan 'Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential' followed, with an intention to 'level up opportunity' so that 'talent and hard work alone should determine how far people go in life' (DfE, 2017, p. 6). These ambitions generated a range of activities in schools that again had mixed success. Despite an intention to ensure that no community would be left behind and no children across the ability range were underachieving, national attention focused mainly on young people with the highest academic potential (DfE, 2017; Montgomery, 2020). Consequently, successful achievement by those not viewed as 'highly able' has been less celebrated, and some aspirations and talents viewed as more valuable than others.

A popular message about social mobility suggests that it results from raising aspirations and that anyone who wants something enough and works hard enough will be successful. While following this mantra may enable *some* young people to achieve their aspirations, others who are less successful can internalise this as their own failure. Focusing on increasing social mobility, rather than purely aiming to enable individuals to achieve their own potential and enjoy personal success with more choices in life, also suggests that some young people's backgrounds are so negative they need to escape from them. While multiple factors can make life difficult for those vulnerable to underachievement, many still experience positive elements which create pride in their heritage: the importance of these must be understood, accepted and integral to any initiatives. Assuming that people's lives will simply improve if they achieve higher qualifications, become wealthier and 'middle-class' ignores the more complex

issues of family expectations and community ties which affect individual decision-making. Young people can face barriers of isolation and loss of friendships after achieving well academically or have to reconcile new lives while remaining loyal to their 'roots'. Cullen et al. (2018) also found that 'fear' affected decision-making—fear of leaving home and mixing with people unlike themselves, fear of feeling exposed due to unawareness of the wider world and fear of failure exacerbated by a perceived stigma of needing help. Fear also affected students' behaviour in school, with some hiding academic talent for fear of losing friends. The consequences of this can lead to self-doubt with internal voices reminding them to 'know their own place' and live a 'double life' as they straddle two competing worlds (Mattys, 2013; Richards, 2018).

Girls and Vulnerability to Underachievement

Despite progress made to address gender inequality, girls from disadvantaged backgrounds remain especially vulnerable to underachievement. These girls may be overlooked because of other girls' increasing education achievements, especially when their disengagement is hidden behind acceptable behaviour, as they silently 'truant in their heads', not causing trouble but also not contributing—'hiding their dissatisfaction behind a veil of compliance' (Fisher, 2014, p. 151).

Plan UK (2020) found government initiatives to improve equality failed to translate into equity for some girls, leaving them disempowered, unheard and frustrated by what they saw as empty messages and policies that made no real difference to their lives. UNICEF (2020) made similar observations, noting that girls' career expectations still reflected gender stereotyping because education systems 'allowed gender divides to be perpetuated and disproportionally affect the most marginalised girls' (p. 3), impacting their future career opportunities.

Expecting Too Much?

Community Context

The girls lived in an ex-mining community within the UK's Midlands region—a community proud of its heritage but still severely impacted by mine closures which left men struggling to find alternative work. With few local full-time opportunities available, a 'new world' had been created for men and women. Many women were now the main wage earners, taking on (sometimes multiple) low-paid, part-time jobs, replacing the strongly traditional gender-based roles that had been the mainstay of this community. Previously, women typically became home-makers and mothers soon after leaving school, while men supported their families by working in coalmining like their forefathers. Genera-tions had always lived and worked within the community; travel outside the area for work or leisure was unusual and generally viewed with disap-proval. When the mines closed in the late-1990s and early-2000s, bitter divisions were created between families by acrimonious strikes and devas-tating unemployment. All of this continued to affect decision-making, so even with local government regeneration projects available, people in the community struggled to find work.

With opportunity for secure work to be found, in the main, outside of the community, further divisions were created. Those who took advan-tage of external employment were usually successful and many moved into new housing at the edge of the community. Most sent their chil-dren to schools outside the area, with high expectations of the career opportunities these would offer. Families remaining within the commu-nity viewed them as 'those up the hill' who had rejected their roots, a response that still affected relationships and social interactions, even within local schools.

School Context

The first stage of the research involved three primary schools (PS1, PS2, PS3) located within the ex-mining community. Two had been rated

'Inadequate' by Ofsted (PS1, PS2) because of a failure to address girls' low achievement. The third primary school (PS3) was more successful, praised by Ofsted for raising standards and closing educational gaps.

The two secondary schools were ones to which most of the girls traditionally progressed. One was located within the community (SS1), and the other (SS2)—considered an exceptional choice by the community for a few girls—was situated fifteen miles away. Ofsted described SS1 as having an intake with below average standards and noted that employment skills were not developed enough for students to benefit in their working lives. SS2's intake came from a wide, socio-economically advantaged catchment area with high attainment levels on admission. Ofsted praised the school for providing a wide range of extra-curricular activities and career guidance providing an 'excellent' preparation for adult life.

By the second stage of the research, significant changes had taken place within the schools. All three primary schools were rated by Ofsted as 'Good' and praised for raising girls' achievement. SS1 had been inspected four times by Ofsted and each time had been rated 'Inadequate', with inadequate teaching identified as the main cause of disadvantaged learners' poor attainment. In contrast, SS2 received an Ofsted rating of 'Outstanding'.

These school contexts impacted the girls' experiences and opportunities. Most had started in schools where girls were underachieving and then progressed onto a secondary school where attainment was low and employability skills underdeveloped, limiting post-school options. What became obvious during the timespan of the research was that irrespective of how their school was judged externally, individual girls had different experiences of what was provided, and this affected the way they anticipated their future.

Interviews

Eighty-nine girls were interviewed for the first stage of the research— fifty-three Year 6 girls who lived within the ex-mining community (PS1:6, PS2:34, PS3:13) and thirty-six Year 11 girls (SS1:17 who all lived in the ex-mining community; SS2:19 who came from a range of localities

including the ex-mining community). In each school, every girl in Years 6 and 11 was invited to take part and all whose parents gave permission were interviewed. They were given the choice to be interviewed individually, with one friend or a small group, to ensure they felt comfortable. Years 6 and 11 were selected because these were transitional points of the girls' education journeys.

The research was conducted using semi-structured interviews. These started by asking, 'What do you like about school?'. The Year 6 girls were then asked what they wanted to do when they grew up, and the Year 11 girls were asked about their post-school plans and what had influenced these. Follow-up questions focused on what they thought their adult lives would be like and their personal goals. At the end of the interviews, both groups were asked to anonymously complete two cards expressing 'Hopes' and 'Fears' for the future.

The second stage of the research started six years later and took two years to complete. Schools enabled contact to be re-established and set up opportunities for re-interview. Forty-six girls were found, and re-interviewed, and reliable information was collected on another twenty-one. This time, interviews focused on the successes and barriers they experienced moving into young adulthood.

Several interview responses raised issues about attending university like a lack of parental support and being overwhelmed on university 'Open Days' because they misunderstood information and were too scared to ask questions. Some described how they felt unprepared for university life and struggled to 'fit in'. Despite selecting a small, local university because this would be less 'scary', and enabled them to still live at home, they experienced isolation because they missed out on university social life and lost school friends who did not understand their new life. One older girl, who had left SS1 a few years before the others and was now a mature student, volunteered to be interviewed and her experience is included in this chapter.

Aspirations and Expectations: Primary Schoolgirls

Despite the different experiences girls had of primary school education, they all had similar views of school and what their adult lives would look like. They enjoyed school, mostly because they were spending time with friends rather than anything they were learning and were all looking forward to new challenges at secondary school. They also had similar aspirations. Some wanted to become teachers, nurses, vets, paramedics, accountants and lawyers. Others, influenced by family and the media, wanted to become beauticians, hairdressers and singers who were 'discovered' on TV talent shows. Several were clear that they wanted different adult lives to those of their parents:

> I'll be saving lives [as a paramedic] and I'll have a handsome husband with a 'fifteen pack' and blond babies.
> I'll not do too much drinking. Don't want to ruin my body.
> I want to be an accountant, [but] you get attracted and then you end up with a boyfriend and a family.
> I want to live locally, not somewhere rough where the police are about and [there are] people with knives.

When asked about 'hopes' and 'fears' for the future, most wanted to be working in their dream jobs and have a happy home life, living with children in a 'big' house. Their fears were detailed, with some possibly reflecting on family experiences:

> I fear getting into debt and not being able to pay the mortgage.
> When I move out from Mum and Dad, I hope I *never* get broken into or robbed.
> I meet the 'wrong person' and lose my friends and family.
> I will get a divorce or have a husband that hits me.
> My greatest fear is not to find a nice man and he beats me up.

When individuals' 'hopes' and 'fears' were compared, direct links between these were found: fears that a wonderful family life could end with domestic violence or divorce, or a successful career might end in a

lost job, debt and homelessness—important contextual issues for schools to consider when seeking to raise girls' aspirations and build resilience.

Aspirations and Expectations: Secondary Schoolgirls

The secondary schoolgirls also enjoyed school because it provided the opportunity to socialise with friends. Differences between the two schools became clear as they discussed their experiences and aspirations. In SS1, six of the girls thought that being with friends was the only good thing about school. Others identified subjects they enjoyed and teachers they liked because they were 'helpful and always around, not like home' and gave them 'different points of view from home'. Few had told their teachers or career advisors about their aspirations, and most were unsure of what they would do when they left school in the summer. There was a consensus that teachers were more important than subjects; most girls had selected exam subjects based on liking the teacher (and who they thought liked them), irrespective of enjoying the subject, having any talent in it or offering a route towards a chosen career.

Five of the SS1 girls were expected to achieve excellent GCSE results and four of these wanted to go to university, although they hadn't decided on a career or what to study. The other girl did not know what she wanted to do. She had always wanted to be a hairdresser like others in her family but changed her mind after trying it during work experience and this was causing conflict at home. Six other girls wanted to go to university and become lawyers or vets, but only one was expected to get good GCSE grades and she knew that SS1 did not offer an A-level subject required to access her university course—she was too scared to study at another school, so her dreams had been shattered. The other girls wanted to leave school in the summer, with most having vague ideas about working in hairdressing, social care or early years' settings, but all were unaware of the qualifications and experiences needed to achieve these.

When the SS1 girls described their 'dreams' for the future, most focused on family life:

I want a big home, lots of garden, twin girls and a boy with blond hair and blue eyes, 2 Husky dogs and a Yorkshire Terrier. I don't mind [having] a husband if he's the right person. I want a secluded country house, not where I am now, I want fresh air.

I want to have kids and be a WAG. Mum thinks I'll be a good WAG. I want a 'fairy tale wedding' with feathers, all pink and white. Everyone would dress up dead pretty and Dad will walk me down the aisle. I want to be a children's rep abroad. I'll find a hot Spanish man and retire when I have kids.

I have lots of dreams, I'd like to be famous. I want a boyfriend who is absolutely gorgeous and my kids to be popular at school…I want my husband to have a good job, good money. I'll look after my kids at home and get a part-time job when they go to nursery. I'd really like to be a model.

I want a big house, nice car. I want to be married with children – no more than two, I'm one of four. I want to go to a university near home, come home at night. It's tradition we go to university and stay at home.

The fragility of such dreams became apparent when one group, who had started a lively discussion about their futures, suddenly stopped and asked the interviewer: 'Are we stupid to want this? Are we expecting too much?'.

The girls' fears for the future centred around what they saw as 'failure', for example:

My worst fear is to be worrying about money all the time and not to get far in life.

I fear that I won't be able to do what I want with my life.

To have an unsuccessful marriage, especially if it was to happen multiple times. To become a dull workaholic and stuck up.

I hope that I don't end up living in a council house, no money, no kids, and [my] parents aren't pleased with what I have become.

In contrast, all nineteen SS2 girls were enthusiastic about the subjects they were studying and knew how these provided a route towards their selected careers. They were well-informed about university courses, and several had studied additional vocational courses or taken on voluntary extra-curricular activities to enhance their CVs. Most saw university as

an opportunity to move away from home to meet new people and start living independent lives. Some were undecided having 'realised [they were] not clever enough for university' so intended looking for local work and have a life of 'partying and fun'.

The SS2 girls also dreamed of happy adult lives, but these were linked to having a successful career and financial independence:

> I want to be successful and rich. I want two children...I want a job I enjoy and a nice car and a nice boyfriend. I want my own business.
>
> I want my own place, settle down with my own money and car. Have a decent job, get more money, get a bigger place, get a nice boyfriend.
>
> I want to go away…see the world, take every chance. Don't mind the idea of living alone, you can learn a lot about yourself. Why wouldn't you take the opportunity to be so much more?
>
> I want to be happy, financially and emotionally, waking up each morning and loving my life.

Their fears were similar to those of the SS1 girls, with some concerned about losing control of life choices:

> My greatest fear is ending up at home still when I am in my late twenties without a job. I'll be lonely and single – no money and drinking every night.
>
> I fear being unsuccessful, having no friends, earning no money and being in lots of debt. Some-one else controlling my life.
>
> I fear being out of control, not being able to decide what to do, being in debt or depressed.
>
> I fear being unsuccessful because I would live life always regretting, I could have done more.

Superficially, both sets of secondary schoolgirls had similar aspirations and fears for the future, but there were key differences. The girls from SS1 had post-school plans that generally kept with the familiar, even if this limited their options. They had not shared their aspirations with teachers or careers officers, preferring to discuss these with friends and families, who were usually supportive but unable to help them. The SS2 girls were far more confident in their choices and prepared to take risks;

they had taken full advantage of school and family support to prepare them for the next stage in their lives. In spite of such confidence, some of this group felt under constant pressure from teachers and family, while others felt devalued by teachers because they were less academically successful. They were placed in lower sets and described how some teachers ignored them and this had 'taken away hope'.

Achieving Aspirations?

The second stage of the research focused on the girls' experiences after leaving school and if there was anything they wished that they, or their school, had done differently. The primary schoolgirls had completed secondary schooling and either moved on to further studies, work or in some cases, settled into family life as a mother. The secondary schoolgirls had left school and were either completing further studies or settled into working lives. A few were unemployed and four had become mothers.

The Primary Schoolgirls Who Progressed to SS1

Thirty-two of the primary schoolgirls had progressed to SS1. After completing GCSEs, twenty-five of these had left school. Eight were now studying vocational qualifications in childcare, hairdressing, health and social care, or catering at the local college. They all intended to work locally in careers they envisaged during their original interviews. Two others had decided to study A-levels at a college further away and then apply to university, because as one explained: 'I wanted to meet new people I have more in common with. They [SS1 peers] didn't want the same things I did – I wanted to work hard, they just wanted to have a good time'.

Two girls had followed their dreams. One emailed this update:

Well, my life has changed completely, and it couldn't be more different to what I envisaged in Year 6! I wanted to be a vet…however, this was my head speaking, not my heart! I was always a dancer – this was my true

passion, but my parents encouraged me to keep my dance separate from schoolwork – which I always did.

Basically, I have followed my heart. I am now a professional dancer. I started in Sixth Form but quit after a few months – I was very unhappy. I moved away from home, and I did a year of Performing Arts at College…I now teach dance in schools and have my own Dance Crew…I am making a career and good living from what I love – dance! I am studying to be a qualified Ballet Teacher with the IDTA and a Gymnast Coach with the British Gymnastics Association. My life is non-stop dancing, choreography, training and teaching. I love it and have never been happier. My aim is to open my own dance school – but first I want to experience as much of the dance world as possible!

The other girl had resolutely focused on achieving her dream of working with horses and avoiding 'trouble':

I didn't spend time with the other kids. People round here are not who I want to spend time with, they're into drinking and drugs, so I avoid them.

I want to be in the Olympics and the Worlds within 10 years. I now work for a top Olympic showjumper, and he lets me ride his horses. I've got two of my own now that I keep with his horses. It's one of the best places in the UK…I work hard, starting at five-thirty in the morning and finishing about eight at night, riding all the horses.

You need millions to get to the top in show jumping, so I'm going to have to work my way up…and get sponsors. Those who aren't so good, but mega-rich, make it earlier and younger. My family used to fund me when I was just competing with ponies, but now at this level it can cost £25,000 to get into a show. I'm off to Germany for a top international competition soon and just the ferry is £300. My family pays unless I am riding one of the horses owned by [Olympic showjumper] and then he pays.

One girl, who had wanted to become a beautician, became pregnant soon after leaving school. Her second interview provided insight into some of the difficulties encountered at school:

I'm a single mum. I really love it. I didn't plan to have a baby and her dad doesn't see her, but I live with my mum and I'm really happy. Mum's been brilliant. She stopped doing all that stuff she did before, and we get on really well now. I only see Dad occasionally.

I didn't work at all after I left school, I just sat around. I didn't know what to do. I had no qualifications. I messed up so much at school. I thought about joining the Army but then I stopped going to school and got involved with people who didn't go to school. Dad didn't help. If I'm really honest, I think my problems at home were probably too much for me to work at school. I think I was really lucky they didn't kick me out. A couple of teachers tried really hard to help, but they didn't even know what was going on at home.

I don't see many people from school now. The girls I knocked around with in Year 9 all got into drugs. I wish I'd gone more [to school] and stayed out of trouble. I'd probably have done OK if it weren't for the people I was with and the stuff that was happening at home. I think I knew that by Year 11, but it was too late then to change things, so I just truanted more. When [daughter] goes to school, I'd like to go to college and do childcare.

Seven girls had stayed on at school to take A-levels, with six intending to apply to university. They had all changed their minds about the careers discussed in their first interviews, mostly as a result of school-organised work experience. The other girl was the main carer for her disabled father and this experience had fostered an interest in a new career and she was now supporting disabled students in a local college.

The other girls were working locally in hairdressing, cafes and administration. Two could not be found to re-interview, but their school and peers knew their situations. One had wanted to become a solicitor, but after struggling in school was excluded in her final year. Her family were involved in a serious crime that had negatively impacted her relationships with the community. The other girl, who had planned to go to university, started drinking heavily and became a drug addict after leaving school. She had now turned her life around and was a happily married devout Muslim who avoided previous friends.

The Primary Schoolgirls Who Progressed to SS2

Four girls progressed to SS2, all from PS1. One completed her GCSEs and now attended the local college. The other three were studying A-levels at SS2, two of whom no longer intended to go to university and become vets. They were now considering vocational courses at the local college, having decided that going to university would be 'worrying' and 'scary'. The other girl, who had dreamed of being a famous singer, now wanted to study aerospace engineering at university. She was inspired by her brother who was an aerospace engineer. He had organised work experience for her, which she had loved. Her teacher was encouraging her to apply to Cambridge University and she had dreams of working in Formula 1.

The Primary Schoolgirls Who Progressed to SS3 and SS4

Six girls from PS2 had selected another school (SS3), one of whom had transferred there after attending SS1 for six months, because 'it was a terrible school' and she realised that she was a 'smart kid and wanted more'. Three of these left school after their GCSEs. The other three stayed on to take A-levels. In primary school, they had wanted to become a bank accountant, an interior designer and an actor. Now, two planned to go to university, one to study pharmacy and the other to study health care (like others in her family). The third girl still wanted to become an actor, but her father would not support her going to university: 'Dad just wants me to get off my arse and get a job'.

Two girls from PS1 had chosen to attend a fourth school (SS4). In primary school, one had wanted to be a nurse and to travel. After initially staying on to study A-levels, she left to work in a local pub, where she became a manager. The other girl had been a county athlete and wanted to work in ICT, like her father. She still lived locally but had lost contact with her peers, who described her as 'turning a bit weird…drinking in school and self-harming': the reasons for this were unknown.

The Secondary Schoolgirls: SS1

Despite eleven girls originally intending to go to university, only five were known to have done this. One had wanted to attend a university close to home and then join the police force. Her plans had changed after receiving low exam results. She accepted a 'clearing' place at a university sixty miles away and enjoyed the experience:

> I've just got a 2:1 in Criminology, Criminal Justice and Law. Going away was exciting, meeting new people. I made the choice late – a last minute decision. In the first year I came back every weekend, but I got used to it, made more friends and stayed there more…I'm looking now at other jobs in criminal justice to use my degree until I get into the police…I've got friends from all over now – UK and abroad.

Another girl had also wanted to join the police force after her A-levels but because there were no local places available, found work in a nearby retail store. She went back to her teachers in SS1 to seek advice and with their support was sponsored by a multinational company to study for a business degree at a local university. She was excited about her future:

> It's an amazing experience. I want to set up a property business. I'm definitely more confident now, I speak up more. Before…I went to school, got taught, went home. I was bullied but didn't say anything. I'm looking to buy a house with my boyfriend and then a big holiday after I finish my degree.

One girl had found the whole university experience to be less positive and now had different plans:

> After college I applied to do law at university, I wanted to be a lawyer. School put me down, said I'd never get to university, but I did. I stayed a year and a half, then I left. The teachers put me down and I didn't like the people. I didn't know what I wanted. I got a job at the chippy, then an admin job. I'm doing an advanced NVQ now in customer service. I did it all myself – no-one helps you if you aren't clever. My family tried

to help me through uni and were disappointed when I left. I'm going to work hard and get promoted and get rich.

The other girls went straight into work after completing GCSEs. Some had low exam results that prevented them from studying A-levels, whereas others with excellent results encountered challenges that had reshaped their plans. One girl explained that 'my family put me down, said I wasn't good enough to be a vet', so she studied animal management at the local college. When she was unable to find a job in animal care, her father found her work in a local pub, which she enjoyed because it 'brought me out of my shell, gave me confidence'. Another, who was now a single mother, described how she had become pregnant at sixteen, four months into an engineering course. She intended to work as soon as her son was in school: 'I want to be financially stable. When my son is in full-time education, I'll do anything…I don't care what I do, but I want to work'.

Generally, the girls had lost contact with their school friends, having found new ones after leaving school. Some saw their futures as offering exciting new opportunities, but others were scared as much seemed uncertain, with one girl describing the future as 'more frightening than anything else in my life'.

The Secondary Schoolgirls: SS2

Six of the girls from SS2 achieved their plans to go to university, none of whom came from the ex-mining community. Three girls from the ex-mining community were doing something different to their early aspirations. One left the school's sixth form after a year and moved to Cornwall for work with a fashion company. After promotion to Events Manager, she returned home to set up her own company:

> I put together a business plan and got support from the bank and my parents. I now own a shop and sell an organic range of clothing that's ethically sourced and sustainable. I've just moved to a better location and have pop-up shops in different locations. I set up a traders' association and got all the local shops together to promote our town with Christmas

events as a 'destination' town. Now I've expanded into clothing from Italy and India. I'm trying to support the textile industry in other countries as well as the UK. Mum works with me two days a week and Dad is a financial advisor, so that helps – it's a real family business.

Another girl was diagnosed with epilepsy just after her first interview which prevented her joining the Navy. She had trained as a primary school teacher instead and was excited to have just accepted a teaching post in the local area. The third girl had dreamed of owning her own spa. She explained how bullying had affected her education:

> I left school after Year 11 'cos I failed my GCSEs except Science. It had been a hard year…racial bullying out of school, but it came into school. I stopped going to school and they sent work home. The school had a reputation as a good school but…!
>
> I went to college and did Health and Social Care, then changed to Forensics, but it didn't suit me. Then I got pregnant. He's two now. I want to concentrate on being with him and go back to college next year and start again. I don't know what I'll do. I'm not going to let it get to me. I left my previous school because of problems. If I hadn't done that, I'd have paid more attention when I transferred to [SS2]. I could have been a new person there, but I concentrated on making friends, not working. If I hadn't done that, I'd have had a whole new life. I'm hopeful for the future. I want to be successful for my little one…I won't be a 'benefit hugger', I want my son to see me working, not just a stay-at-home mum.

The three girls knew of one other girl who had been part of their original group. She had been very quiet in her first interview, only stating that she wanted to have a good job and a happy family life. They knew that she had suddenly changed, and after becoming 'wild' at the end of Year 11, was now a single mother who lived locally but avoided old school friends.

What Can Schools Do?

The girls' accounts provide insight into factors influencing their decision-making as they negotiated the pathways they saw available to them as young adults. Three themes were identified: confidence and trust; achievement and resilience; understanding successful learning behaviour.

Confidence and Trust

Most of the girls either remained in, or returned to, the ex-mining community, irrespective of the school they attended or what they did after leaving school. Many started with high aspirations, but these had been tempered by family expectations, unexpectedly low exam results, and a fear of the unknown.

Family and friends had a significant impact on the girls' decision-making, especially as they got closer to leaving school: most discussed their aspirations with them but had chosen not to share these with teachers. Some of the girls experienced bullying in school or difficulties at home which they had kept secret, even when it affected their learning. Others reported having been treated negatively by some teachers and peers, leaving them feeling there was no point in trying. In their second interviews, several girls explained the difficulties they had experienced:

> I needed more time with teachers who understood what I was feeling about what was happening at home.
>
> I wished that I'd asked for more help with Maths, then I could have done pharmacy. School should have noticed I was struggling, but they didn't know what I wanted to do.
>
> I wished I'd told the teachers I was struggling. I didn't have the confidence and didn't like to admit I couldn't do something.
>
> They pushed the elite students, but if you're not one of those, it's not the same. We had to push ourselves. It was hard.
>
> Teachers need to really know you, know when something is wrong. Teachers didn't know who we were.
>
> I wish that school would sit people down and talk to them about what they want to do. This is really important because so many still don't know

what they want to do. So many on my hairdressing course don't want to be hairdressers.

Overcoming such reticence requires schools to consider how much they really know about their students' lives and how they can establish relationships that inspire confidence and trust. They must accept that some young people, like these girls, are often skilful in keeping important parts of their lives private, especially if they feel vulnerable. Students often perceive teachers to live very different [privileged] lives to themselves and assume that they cannot understand their problems—a view reinforced when teachers suggest 'opportunities' or 'solutions' which are unachievable because the unique community context has not been taken into account. When students then fail to respond, teachers may become discouraged as their efforts to address 'disadvantage' appear to fail. The schools in this study had staff roles and procedures to provide support, but the girls did not utilise them. This shows that more needs to be done to discover individual barriers young people experience and respond to these specifically so that students can have trust and confidence in staff and school systems.

Achievement and Resilience

Most of the girls attributed their success to personal motivation and family support. Some only achieved their aspirations after first complying with family and community expectations or separating themselves from these—an experience the university student explained:

Mum only started her career when I was sixteen and my brother and sister left school at sixteen. I went to uni at eighteen, but I think I was too young – I wasn't ready. I got into a financial mess and Mum bailed me out. I decided to get out and went home. I worked for two years and then suddenly thought I was under-fulfilling myself. I felt I wasn't doing myself justice and felt ashamed for failing at uni – Mum always wanted me to go to uni. I realised I had to go to uni to be where I wanted to be.

I consider myself as 'moving up' – a prestigious thing that I deserved. Financially it was hard, but I wanted to become a teacher, so I did the

access course. The [University] Open Day was welcoming, but daunting and scary. It was all so big – my previous experience was of small rooms and people I knew.

Mum was really pleased – she wanted for me what she didn't have. My Nan is proud, deep down – but she said 'What do you want to do that for? Isn't [the village] good enough for you?' My brother always looked up to me and he is at uni now. I feel they have put me on a pedestal. I think it's down to parenting and what they want for you. My friends' parents expected them to stay in the family community.

I lost touch with old friends; none went to university – it wasn't considered the norm. They could have done it too but didn't see it like that. I was the special one that got away. Being part of the girls' cliques we were in, uni wasn't considered. All the clever ones did A-levels but didn't consider university. A lot of the others, well…it was cool to not be clever, cooler to be involved with things like beauty therapy and making yourself beautiful. Now they say 'Oh, she's changed. She looks different and talks differently now'. I have changed massively. I think my mind has been opened and I feel passionate. It is small-minded in the village, I realised that I was small-minded.

I feel distanced from the village, the community is very small, and friends and family are a strong part of your everyday life. You have to accept that to go to uni, you'll have to be someone different, give up everything in a way.

Her account reflects many of the challenges experienced by the younger girls. She knew her family were proud of her but realised that achieving her dreams meant becoming 'someone different' and giving up everything familiar. Resilience and family support were key to her success. Several of the other girls had found resilience to cope with similar changes in their lives but others struggled. Some had showed early resilience that had broken down as pressures increased: the different ways in which parents provided support significantly impacted outcomes. Where parents had the social capital to support their daughters, this scaffolded the girls' resilience. In other situations, some dealt with arising problems by offering a route that reverted back to the familiar. A few parents made it clear that they would not support aspirations that differed from community norms, giving their daughters a stark choice between following family expectations or risking censure and isolation

by acting independently. It is these situations that schools need to work with families to resolve by building deeper relationships that are based on equal partnerships which accept parents' individual starting points—respecting where they 'are' in terms of understanding opportunities available, implications of choices and community pressures. This must start early to keep young people's aspirations on track and prevent a growing fear of the unknown influencing their final career decisions.

Several of the girls wanted more school support in understanding the 'new worlds' they were entering after school:

I wish we had done work experience in pairs. I was scared.

I wish school had prepared us more for the 'outside world'. They only taught us subjects.

Most at this school don't know what they are going to do. We don't know about many jobs.

I wish school had organised more visits to University Open Days and went with us.

They just focused on A-Levels, not preparing us for uni.

> It's really hard when you leave school. You're on your own, not prepared for when you leave. School got people to talk to us before we left, but I needed that after I left – I felt stranded.

If requests like these were accommodated within schools' careers curriculum, increased self-confidence could enable unfamiliar situations to be met with resilience. Some needed staff assistance outside of school time—attending 'overwhelming' University Open Days with them or offering advice to unemployed ex-students who felt 'stranded' and spent their days waiting around outside the school gates—highlighting the importance of providing support that extended past the end of a school day.

Understanding Successful Learning Behaviour

Many of the girls did not understand what was required to be successful learners. On reflection most realised that they should have been more conscientious:

I wish I'd worked harder, then I wouldn't be in the situation I'm in now. I didn't believe it when I was told we needed to do more work. I wish I'd kept my head down. A year-13 student came and told us we had to work hard and what it was really like. Still, some of us didn't believe it.

I wish I'd listened to my parents more. My Dad didn't do well at school and had to do 'night school'. He wants me to do well. I wish I hadn't lied to them about doing my revision.

I didn't make enough of the opportunities given, like when I had careers advice, I didn't take it seriously, I didn't listen.

These comments demonstrate the problem for schools, especially as *all* the girls said that they only realised they should have worked harder when they received their exam results. Despite teachers having emphasised the importance of working hard, this had little impact on the girls' behaviour, resulting in post-school opportunities limited by wrongly selected subjects and low exam grades. Enabling young people to understand successful learning behaviour requires them to trust their teachers and believe the advice they give them. Critical reflection on the school–parent–student partnership is needed to identify how expectations and responsibilities are shared and clarified so that everyone understands the reality of this—for example, how *hard* is hard work and what does *good* revision look like to parents supervising the young people doing it?

Conclusion

Many of these findings reflect those from other studies. Plummer's earlier research (2000) on working-class girls' aspirations also found that educational success was often achieved at high personal cost as girls struggled to balance achievement with community expectations. Reay (2018) identified similar personal conflicts arising from social mobility, describing how the 'injustice at its heart' (p. 37) made individuals responsible for their own success and finding acceptance 'in middle-class contexts' (p. 40). Cullen et al. (2018) and Allen et al. (2021) also found the negative impact of fear on decision-making and the importance of

'belonging'. These reoccurring themes all suggest that our education system needs to do more and do it better.

Keeping aspirations on track is much harder than just inspiring young people. It is also not enough to just get students past the 'starting line' onto their chosen course or selected career, they want to feel they belong and enjoy success. Long-term support is needed to achieve this, supported by detailed monitoring across the whole of young people's education journey and beyond—monitoring that focuses on aspirations, belonging, attainment and progression. Sharing detailed information from these data across education settings would enable them to jointly better support young people's aspirations, working in partnership with families and taking account of contextual issues that affect their decision-making and, ultimately, their adult lives.

Relationships were key to the girls' decision-making. Where these provided positive support, they generally had confidence and resilience to deal with 'scary' new situations. Without this, most made choices that kept them within their comfort zone irrespective of previous aspirations. Developing deeper, individualised relationships with students and their families can enable 'insider' information that increases understanding of some of the complex contextual challenges young people face, especially where seemingly similar problems arise from different personal situations. This would avoid generalizations about disadvantage that result in many initiatives not impacting all those for whom they are intended. Getting these right matters, all young people should be able to face the future feeling 'happy and alive', 'passionate' about what they do and have the opportunity to achieve their aspirations.

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Practices and Negotiations of Belonging in the Deindustrialising Coalfields: Navigating School, Education and Memory Through a Time of Transformation

Jay Emery, James Pattison, Kat Simpson, Natalie Thomlinson, and Lucy Jackson

Introduction

In December 2020, the authors convened online to collaboratively remember experiences of schooling. Although not the same ages, from the same places, or working in the same disciplines, the guiding logic was

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223

that we all grew up and went to schools in the UK coalfields at the time of deindustrialisation and have, subsequently, progressed through higher education to pursue academic careers, with some researching on or in the former coalfields. Such experiences seemed an interesting basis for experimental memory-work, exploring deindustrialisation, class and place through the lens of school and education. Though not intentional, much of the discussion that took place over the five months of research centred on notions of belonging and 'non-belonging' (Lahdesmäki et al., 2016, p. 238), of feeling 'out of place' (Creswell, 1996). Perhaps to be expected from social scientists, dialogue strived to contextualise our experiences in conceptual frameworks of class, place and gender, and make connections across aligned social processes. This chapter examines dynamics of belonging at the intersection of schooling, deindustrialisation and memory.

In the following sections, we examine some of our youth experiences of (non-) belonging and attempts to either 'fit in' or 'get by' within normative formations of identification. Productions of belonging are heavily shaped and mediated by the historical and geographical conditions in which individuals find themselves (Yuval-Davis, 2011). For the authors, localised and intergenerational formations of class and gender were often at odds with transforming coalfield landscapes. The authors' school years corresponded with a period of flux where residual structures of feeling and routes to belonging were in tension with new classed and gendered expectations in the coalfields.

Coalfield conditions in which belonging was produced, or not, are discussed in a subsequent section with reference to place, school and education. This is followed by analyses of our collaborative remembering and discussions around belonging. Emerging from discussions, we conceptualise belonging as an unfinished process of everyday practices. For us, the production of belonging was negotiatory, with practices intended to navigate, balance or subvert competing classed and gendered expectations from parents, teachers, peers, place and ourselves. Producing belonging was an individualised, as much as a collectivised, practice contingent on the familial and personal circumstances of each author. The school, as the primary site for social interaction and performance, was principally where belonging and identity was produced, denied

and/or negotiated. Belonging was often sought or secured in resistance to authorised forms of behaviour, educational performance and attainment. Unsettling homogenising conceptions of coalfield communities, we demonstrate that our experiences were varied and have resulted in diverse affective memories across the group. The chapter contributes to literature on (youth) belonging in deindustrialising spaces.

Negotiatory processes of belonging during our schooling were also revealed to us through the collaborative remembering process, having been lingering facets of our ongoing psychosocial selves and identity formation. The chapter, then, makes a secondary contribution to literature on the role of memory in productions of belonging. As the research process was somewhat novel, the next section details the collaborative remembering methodologies and the originality this adds to existing understandings of belonging, lived experience and memory in the context of deindustrialisation.

Remembering Collaboratively

Growing interest in the effects of deindustrialisation on formations of belonging and identity focuses on how industrial legacies remain embodied in the deindustrialising present (Emery, 2020; Linkon, 2018; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012). Research centres on memories of former industrial workers and how they have processed loss through cultural practices of remembering (Emery, 2019; High, 2018). Additionally, research exploring how industrial communities navigate transforming, deindustrialising economies emphasise residual formations of belonging and sociality, conceptualised as 'social hauntings' (Simpson, 2021) and 'intergenerational transmissions' (Walkerdine, 2015), which continue to order the lived experiences of subsequent generations. Research has used these intergenerational conceptualisations to explore the relationship between deindustrialisation and education, noting the persistence of past valuations of behaviour and performance (Bright, 2011; Simpson, 2021; Ward, 2015). While insightful of youth experiences at the local level, there is little understanding of how experiences of school during deindustrialisation impacted belonging more broadly, how those experiences

have shaped life course transitions, or how childhoods in deindustrialising spaces are remembered. We posit that practices of collaborative remembering are effective in revealing the nuances of individuals' lived experiences and memories which, in turn, draw out differences and commonalities along class, gender and geographical lines.

The authors are from either the Nottinghamshire or Yorkshire coalfields. Born in 1979, James has lived in the mining town of Mansfield, in Nottinghamshire, and surrounding pit villages all his life. Jay was born in 1986 in Warsop, 'a pretty archetypal pit village or pit town' also near Mansfield, living there until the age of 24. Born in 1984, Lucy was raised in Bilsthorpe, a small Nottinghamshire mining community, until she left for university at 18. Natalie was born in 1986 and grew up in Scawsby, a suburb of Doncaster, a mining town in South Yorkshire. Kat was born in 1992 and lives in the former mining village of South Kirkby, West Yorkshire. Lucy attended Rufford Comprehensive in the nearby mining village of Edwinstowe and reflected that, "it was just kind of like middling really". Natalie attended her local primary school and then her local secondary school, Ridgewood, which she described as "an alright school by Doncaster standards" but "not what you would call a 'middle-class' comp". James attended the local primary and comprehensive, Garibaldi. While not a notably low-performing school when James was there, the school had a poor reputation. There was a local idiom: 'red sky at night, Garibaldi's alight'. Kat attended the local primary and then the local secondary school—Minsthorpe Community College—which she described as "terrible in terms of results, terrible in terms of teaching, pedagogy, all that". Jay shared a similar view of the secondary school that he attended from 1997 to 2004.

These details were the foundation for four online data collection sessions held between December 2020 and March 2021, each lasting 1.5 to 2.5 hours. The first three sessions mainly involved sharing memories and experiences and remembering together, with the fourth session used to critically reflect on the research process. Sessions were semi-structured and sequenced around shared life course. Session one covered parental experiences of education and expectations of us, what our respective schools and localities were like in broad terms, and our general educational performance. Session two covered specific memories of school as

well as the emotional valences evinced by those memories. Session three explored how memories and formative experiences of place, school and education have shaped our post-school lives, transitions into adulthood, careers and sociality. At the beginning of each session, we discussed topics from the previous session that seemed unresolved or that one or more of us had considered further in the interim. Thus, the joint discussions lingered in our personal thoughts and were reflected on and returned to with the group.

As is common in practices of remembering, memories were often compared, contrasted and (re)evaluated against present-day conditions. Contemporary comparison was used to illustrate certain arguments and, perhaps, overstated differences between our past experiences and contemporary ones. For instance, we spoke of the recent trend in state schools to use words such as 'inspire', 'ambition' or 'achieve' to manufacture a sense of institutional identity and belonging. We compared this with our experiences, remembering that little was done to inculcate any collective, shared identity. However, on reflection, and discussed below, we often dismissed or actively resisted any such initiatives by our schools as senses of belonging were, in part, constituted by practices acting against the school, teachers and education system. This signals the importance of follow-up sessions to further qualify, reassess and analyse, and we met a further two occasions in May and June 2021 to do this.

Psychologists engaged in collaborative remembering research suggest that sharing memories can aid memory retrieval among others in a group setting. This was evident in our sessions whereby memories conjured reflection in those of us that did not think about school as much. Natalie, for example, thought about school 'an awful lot', evoking diverse emotions. Conversely, James rarely thought about his school years and was largely indifferent about his memory. However, the discussions increasingly evoked dormant memories in James, who would often reflect between sessions and realise the significance of his formative years. The shared space to remember and reflect impelled us all to interpret, assess and evaluate who we were and what we did during critical and formative life stages. In this sense, the sessions can be seen as a mutualistic cultural practice of interpretation and evaluation among those with shared pasts (Pohn-Lauggas, 2020). However,

sometimes recalling memories of our past selves and actions was an uncomfortable process. Each of us admitted to curating some experiences and stories to the group in attempts to mediate how others saw us. Collaborative remembering in this context necessitated curatorship of our stories. This presentation of the self and emotional management of memory was particularly evident around sense of belonging.

Belonging and the Coalfields

What it means to belong, to have a sense of belonging, is 'often considered self-explanatory' (Wright, 2015, p. 391). However, as Antonsich (2010) argues, social scientists "know very little about what belonging stands for and how it is claimed" (p. 644). Belonging is often described as feelings of being 'at home' within a place and is aligned to concepts of identity, citizenship and community (May, 2017). The opposite, to not belong, gives rise to feelings of "uprootedness, disconnection, disenfranchisement or marginalization" (Wright, 2015, pp. 395–396). Space and spatial language, then, are often invoked in expressions of what someone belongs to or in (Trudeau, 2006). We are said to belong to and within particular places: a locality, house, workplace, university, school, for example. Some choose to specify this as 'place-belonging' or 'place-attachment', however, space regularly "functions as a concrete frame connecting various other dimensions, aspects, and relationalities of belonging" (Lahdesmäki et al., 2016, p. 236).

Considering how belonging and space interact, Bennett (2014a) suggests that "when imbued with significant social encounters and absorbed into the rhythm of life, places become part of a dense web of relationships which, in turn, become inalienable from the place itself" (p. 660). While this practice-based approach is useful for conceptualising belonging, it is important to recognise the politics of belonging which denies or circumscribes capacities to claim belonging through practices in certain spaces based on subjectivities of class, race, gender and so forth (Schein, 2009; Trudeau, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2011). For those that do not belong, are not permitted or choose to dis-belong by rejecting belonging practices, spaces may be imbued with negative associations of

non-belonging or outsiderness. As our experience attests, belonging is an unfinished, relational process negotiated and produced through everyday practices rather than a fixed state.

Industrial communities, organised around common, shared forms of work, have been imagined as instilling rhythms of encounters and activity that produces and maintains stable forms of belonging over generations (Dennis et al., 1956; Emery, 2019). In much early research, mining communities were seen as the apex of such solidaristic relations owing to their seemingly bounded and homogenous nature and shared enterprise (Emery, 2019; Strangleman, 2017). Tightknit relations supposedly produced collectively experienced senses of belonging. The coalfields were, however, more heterogeneous than early studies suggested, and subsequent work explored "the empirical reality of huge differences within and between coalfields" (Strangleman, 2017, p. 6). As Jay has written:

> Important to the shaping of identities and belonging in coalfield communities were different settlement types, divergent traditions in industrial relations, competing formations of local and regional identification and patterns of women's employment and participation in social and political life. (Emery, 2019, p. 25)

We recalled in our discussions the legacies of migration from within the UK, former Commonwealth countries and Eastern Europe, either through our own family members or through school friends whose relatives had migrated to the coalfields. Heterogeneities of place, class and mobility, reflected in our own families and circumstances, shaped our capacities and opportunities to belong and experiences of (dis-)identification. Further, state schools, as institutional spaces, are irreducible from the places and localities in which they operate and the intergenerational webs that constituted formations of belonging within their wider geographies.

There is, as Jay reflected, a need to get beyond the idea that "you have to be born with…coal dust behind your fingernails to be rooted in these kind of places", and though we all had male relatives who had worked in the coal industry, only Lucy had a father who worked in mining (as an

electrician). A focus on male mining identities can also marginalise the experiences of women. Moreover, as discussed in subsequent sections, the dominance of the coal industry had begun to decline in the Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire coalfields by the time we were born and grew up. The widespread colliery closures of the 1980s and 1990s "represents the most dramatic contemporary example of social transformation in Britain since the Second World War" (Bennett et al., 2000, p. 1) and, from the mid-1980s, the industrial ruination in both coalfields was acute and enduring (Waddington et al., 2001). Thus, specific conditions intersected by class, gender and space in each of the places the authors are from troubled understandings of belonging within coalmining localities rooted in a supposed homogeneity.

Belonging, Place and Class

Important in our divergent experiences are complexities surrounding the urban/rural spaces of coalfields (Arnold, 2020). Gilbert (1995) describes a distinction between 'mining towns', suggestive of larger places characterised by more occupational heterogeneity, and 'miners' towns', with coalmining playing a more decisive—but never total—role in determining economic, social and cultural life. Using this distinction, Jay, Kat and Lucy considered themselves to be from 'miners' towns'. Jay described how most people would be connected to mining through family networks and Kat emphasised the economic homogeneity and isolation of these places:

> Everywhere was largely pits…whether it were the bigger towns like Doncaster and Barnsley. But you had these villages on the outskirts of these big towns that had their own pits…they were built for and depended on 'em. (Kat)

For Lucy, the bounded 'close-knit' nature of 'miner's towns' could be quite prohibitive and claustrophobic: "everyone knew I was Brian Jackson's daughter…this kind of feeling, like, being watched everywhere". Occupational diversity and social diversity were much more

pronounced in 'mining towns', where both James and Natalie lived. A reflection from James illustrated that 'mining towns' and 'miner's towns' were not static urban/rural dichotomisations; rather, they were subject to transformation:

> I grew up in Forest Town…a pit village on the edge of Mansfield, but…Forest Town has been kind of absorbed into the town [Mansfield]…it seems, a bit strange to think of it as a pit village. (James)

Similarly, Natalie recalled the occupational mix in the suburb of Doncaster she grew up as:

> …a real mixture of like policemen, secretaries, that sort of thing, but also ex-miners and people who worked at the [railway] plant…occupational heterogeneity…There was a sense of it being a mining town, but I think it was maybe more, slightly, a generic working-class feeling. (Natalie)

Levels of heterogeneity or homogeneity were, however, not necessarily consequent of more inclusive places, and symbolic borders of insiderness/outsiderness were drawn based on established understandings of geography, class and gender.

All the authors had at least one parent who had moved to their hometown, yet migratory histories had varying effects on senses of belonging and feelings of insiderness and outsiderness were contingent of the class and gender subjectivities constituting mobility (Taylor, 2016). Lucy suggested that her mother, from Calverton only eight miles from Bilsthorpe, was marked as an outsider when she moved to Bilsthorpe:

> …it was seen as quite strange for my dad to be courting someone that wasn't from Bilsthorpe…my mum had a bit of mystery…because they didn't know everything about her and they weren't like, 'oh she's so and so's kid', and 'so and so's sister'. (Lucy)

The feeling of having a parent who was an 'outsider' was particularly marked for Natalie, whose father was from Weston-Super-Mare. Although he was not from a particularly privileged background, the fact that he had a southern accent meant that he "may as well have been

the Earl of Grantham!" (Natalie) in terms of how he was perceived by others locally. The combination of his West Country origins and his profession as a maths lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University produced a sense of 'outsiderness' that was "quite apparent at quite a young age" (Natalie). James also had a complex sense of place-belonging due to a migrant father. James stated that he lacked any "strong familial or historical attachment to Mansfield", identifying more with a 'Geordie' identity, as his father was from Northumberland.

Both instances of migration were marked by economic factors rather than being purely elective (Savage, 2010). James' father moved with his family as a teenager when his father transferred from Lynemouth Colliery in Northumberland to Thoresby in Nottinghamshire, while Natalie's father initially moved for a job at Doncaster College. Neither James' father nor Natalie's expressed an uncomplicated enthusiasm for the places they ended up living. Furthermore, though both their mothers were from nearby, neither were from the towns in which James and Natalie had grown up. This made it difficult for them to claim deep family roots in the area they grew up, though James and Natalie knew no other home.

By contrast, for Kat and Jay, having family from outside the area did not always have a marked effect on senses of belonging or identification. The fact that Kat's mother was from Macclesfield and had "always seen herself as an outsider to the village" had no discernible impact on Kat's own sense of belonging to South Kirkby. Similarly, Jay's maternal family migrated from coalfields in Scotland, impelled by economic factors. Like James' and Natalie's fathers, Jay's uncles and grandparents did not gain any new sense of belonging from the places to which they relocated in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. However, Jay's mother, who was nine when she moved, did not overtly identify with her Scottish roots. Coincidently, growing up Jay did not feel any meaningful transnational sense of belonging; Jay felt rooted in his local community describing Warsop as his 'whole existence'. This was aided by his greater identification with his father's side of the family who had lived in Warsop for three generations.

All the authors conceived their localities as having predominantly 'working-class' cultures, though significations of this culture were nebulous and intersected by geography, gender and race. It is perhaps unsurprising that class identification was often liminal within all the localities

and not regularly to the fore while growing up. Class is, however, critically reflected on by the authors in the present. James felt that his parents were "probably comfortable in terms of economic capital but lacking social and cultural capital and symbolic capital that…middle-class families sort of have". With a father who was a lecturer, Natalie felt that to identify as anything other than middle class would be disingenuous, despite the working-class roots of her mother's side of the family. This further served to make her feel removed from the community she grew up in. Though unsure of whether they would describe themselves as working class now, Jay, Lucy and Kat all felt more comfortable describing themselves as having working-class backgrounds.

The production of belonging within the deindustrialising coalfields was, then, contingent on many factors, and not simply something 'gifted' down generations based on a homogenising criterion of being from/of a specific bounded place. We have suggested that this is, in part, because the coalfields were much more diverse than is often recognised. Localised diversities played into the politics of belonging and frameworks of who did and did not belong. A temporal or class rootedness in place foregrounded or eased routes to belonging and shaped early claims to place and (dis-)belonging. For all the authors, belonging was still something that had to be practised and might be incompletely experienced, contingent on a willingness or capacity to engage in everyday practices (Bennett, 2014b). As discussed in the next section, producing forms of belonging was regularly about what you did, your cultural and social practices, and how you performed everyday interactions. Both Kat and Jay, with more uncontested working-class backgrounds, were adept at negotiating everyday practices of belonging through social relationships and ways of being within the community more broadly. For James and Natalie, with more complex class backgrounds, belonging was perhaps experienced as more transient, but not necessarily unavailable. Conceptualisation of belonging/non-belonging was a continual process of production and negotiation, and the intensities of feeling belonging were often in flux. This was most apparent within educational settings.

School and Education: Senses and Practices of Belonging

As intimated, school is an institutional space functioning as a site of social reproduction and transformation whereby students are, to varying degrees, prepared both educationally and socially for citizenship and labour market participation. Expectations and purposes, therefore, are taken into the school that are feasibly tangential to the formation of belonging. For the authors, negotiating belonging within school spaces was not always consistent with educational success, familial expectation and individual dispositions.

Negotiating belonging was often at the detriment to educational effort and performance. Although she had many positive memories and made lasting friendships, Natalie had 'some really awful experiences' at school. These often related to being bullied because she was regarded as 'clever'. A self-described 'boffin,' Lucy stated: "I was that, like, weird geek, yeah…I liked school". Lucy 'quietly got her head down' and 'got on with stuff' in secondary school. While James was regarded as clever, placed in 'high ability' groups and was not disruptive, he put in the minimum amount of effort to get by and avoided being seen as a 'swot'. James recalled that the 'hard' reputation of Garibaldi, his secondary school, was a valued source of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), particularly for male pupils. Similarly for Jay, being cast as 'a square'—meaning to try hard educationally—was 'social death'. He saw being the 'hardest' or the 'funniest' as the two most valourised (male) identities. Realising he could not 'be the hardest', Jay instead tried to be the 'funny one', the "one that always pushes the boundaries" (Jay) of school rules, in order to produce belonging. Both Kat and Jay noted that humour was largely used as a mechanism to create a sense of belonging and solidarity at school— a place that could 'be quite alienating' (Kat). Like the 'Lads' in Willis' (1977) study, also illustrated by Frances (1994), 'having a laff' was a way of fostering social bonds for both Kat and Jay. Though enactment of, and engagement with, 'having a laff' undoubtedly provided a mechanism for belonging and identity for Kat and Jay, *some* of their behaviours and actions had deleterious effects on others, such as those Natalie experienced in a different locality. There was a sense with all authors that

you could either 'belong', or you could try hard with schoolwork. It was continually difficult to negotiate these two often irreconcilable poles.

Low standards, the uninspiring nature of education and the aspirations of family and local networks also shaped negotiations of belonging with regard to whether practices of belonging were pursued or side-lined in preference for a delayed sense of belonging post-school. All authors recalled the limited expectations and aspirations of both students and teachers:

> No one was ever really pushed…I don't think they ever thought they were going to produce rocket scientists out of Rufford…if someone was clever, they weren't ever going to throw stuff at them to really excel. (Lucy)

Though Natalie was labelled as 'a clever kid', space to be 'other'—to be 'a bookish person' interested in 'politics and art'—was difficult to access and shaped by traditional gendered divisions of education and employment where activities were discouraged depending on gender. Early adolescent choices over which direction to take impacted capacities to change direction later. The authors recalled how, throughout secondary school, stratified forms of education and training were offered as more 'accessible' educational pathways, based on valuations of engagement and behaviour as much as ability:

> You had: those kids who did well; those who just got expelled; those that went on early college transfer – doing trades like electricians, plastering, plumbing – and then, you had those, like me, that had good grades but were naughty, so they didn't exclude 'em because they needed their results – we were in like behaviour groups. (Kat)

Jay, like Kat, was 'too much of a disruptive influence' for the 'highest ability' set but was never permanently excluded because "they couldn't afford to lose [his] marks" (Jay).

Despite the limitations of the education received, imagined futures for the authors were frequently seen to lay beyond the coalfields. Personal senses of belonging and local provisions of education and employment shaped decisions on whether to leave, and the desirability to do so.

Lucy did not see her future in Bilsthorpe while she was at school, so did A-levels in Mansfield, the nearest large town, before progressing to Aberystwyth University, "about as far as you can get from Bilsthorpe, and I thought I am not going back" (Lucy). Similarly, Natalie thought she would 'always leave'. This was partly because her older brothers left Doncaster to go to university and partly because her father had migrated to the area and so Natalie felt "just not quite part of a community in the same way". James also remembers wanting to get away from Mansfield. James thought that because many of his family were from outside Mansfield, this enabled him to see his future elsewhere, though ironically, he still lives in the town. Natalie and James also interpreted their relatively privileged class positions as underpinning an increased awareness of opportunities beyond the coalfields. Though all participants came from areas with historically low participation in post-compulsory education, shaped partly by the (former) abundance of industrial work, intergenerational legacies around education and employment were complex and shaped by class and gender. For some, attending university was taken-for-granted owing to familial expectations. For others, university was seen as means of escape from the restrictions of class and gender. Also, university was not seen as a viable or attractive option.

Natalie, Kat and James had at least one parent who had experienced tertiary education, though not necessarily university. The influence of this varied. Natalie felt that her father's position as a university lecturer gave her significant cultural capital in terms of 'knowing how that whole system works'. Natalie felt that she was 'always expected' to go to university, which informed her orientation to school. She felt it significant that her mother, whose father was a miner and then a factory worker, had always resented the fact that her teachers at the grammar school she attended had told her that 'she wasn't university material'. Giving birth to her elder sister at 18, Natalie felt that her mother consciously encouraged her and her twin sister to pursue opportunities denied to their mother. James recalled how his miner grandfather felt his prospects were curtailed by the economic necessity of working in the pit from 14. He was therefore keen for James' father to continue his education which he did by studying at Derby College as part of his training for work at Rolls Royce.

By contrast, James felt that little was expected of his mother, who grew up in Warsop, saying that she experienced the:

> [S]tandard education or expectations of a working-class woman that was born in the 50s, you know, that she would go to school as long as she had to and then she would work in a shop or something like that...and that's pretty much what she did. (James)

In terms of parental expectations to go to university, James said that: 'It wasn't taken for granted that I would go'. Though he thought about university, James did not know "how you actually go about those kinds of things" and suggested that his family lacked the cultural capital to navigate this.

Kat and Jay, who had more uncomplicated working-class backgrounds, economically and culturally, saw their futures within their localities. For Kat, knowledge of opportunities available to her was constrained within South Kirkby for most of her early experiences of schooling. It was only later when Kat 'stayed on' at school that she became aware of 'other' educational and occupational opportunities:

> I didn't see the relevancy of education...When I got to the end of college, it was then that I started to realise 'oh, actually there's university, we can do things, there's various different occupations that I can go into...there's a life outside. (Kat)

Kat's mother grew up in Macclesfield where she passed the eleven-plus exam to attend the local grammar school, later moving to South Yorkshire to train as a physical education teacher before retraining as a nurse some years later. Kat felt her mother's background meant that her mum was able to support her with whatever she wanted to do, with familial expectations "high if I wanted to go on to college or university". Kat nevertheless chose a BTEC qualification largely because "friends had done a BTEC so it seemed like a safe option". Jay remembered how it was important to 'get along' in Warsop: "if I'm popular at school, if I can get along here, then I'm sound because I've never really experienced anything, like, outside it". Jay's parents left school at 15 and 16. His

mother attended the same school as Jay; she was also a dinner-lady at the school when Jay was a pupil. There was no experience of higher education in the immediate family and Jay, despite being seen as academically capable by teachers, did not consider university while at school. However, drawing attention to the deindustrialisation taking place, Jay recalled the diminishing opportunities available to him in Warsop, observing that "those trajectories of my family, like going down the pit and getting the family going and going to, like, the [Miners'] Welfare every Saturday' were eroding".

The sense and recognition among the authors that they would, at some point, look beyond their communities, in terms of education and employment, are, in some ways, indicative of the disembedding of life from traditional relations of class, gender and community characteristic of late modernity (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992) but also, more importantly here, their individual backgrounds and histories. Transformations of the local labour market led to anxieties, as Jay recalled:

> I remember [my brother] saying vividly, 'it was so much better when everyone just did the same job'…He'd get really frustrated that people just couldn't go down the pit anymore…I can kind of see the comfort in him wanting that…everyone leaves school and does the same job – there's that security and kind of similarity. There's none of this anxiety about what you're going to do, it's just kind of like laid out for you. (Jay)

By contrast, Lucy felt this meant that her parents were 'really supportive, really encouraging', wanting what they considered to be a better life for their children than they had. Lucy's parents had not experienced higher education, although her father had undertaken an apprenticeship as an electrician, and her mother had trained as a nurse, before nursing education took place in university settings. She said that her parents:

> [C]ome from backgrounds where you know, it was like that really working-class sort of tradition and they both made real efforts to kind of like get educated or sort of like push things a bit more. But not kind of beyond what they felt was…reachable. (Lucy)

While legacies of a localised mining culture were something that all participants felt was in effect during their schooling, it has been shown that the nature of this culture exerted itself in diffuse ways and to varying extents. This reflects the heterogeneous nature of the coalfields the authors grew up in. Senses of belonging were produced within a space of diverse expectations that were classed, gendered and shaped by the valuations of teachers, schools and fellow students. Often negotiating belonging was not compatible with expectations placed on individuals or those that individuals placed on themselves. These problematic negotiations often resulted in conflictual affective memories of school and shaped subsequent post-school negotiations of belonging.

Legacies and Reflection

It is evident that memories of school and place are complex and ambiguous. Memory work is always mediated and curated by contexts of remembering, which in turn effect the emotions evoked by the process. We felt that having some shared life history led to remembering being quite open and fluid. Remembering together instilled a sense of solidarity within the group during the research process, inflected with notions of pride in where we come from. This is despite divergent experiences, and may have been born of this, as a process of recognition that divergences were also bound up with experiences of similitude. A sense of solidarity was also fostered by remembering shared post-school experiences in higher education and academia. These experiences, though outside the coalfields, were shaped by childhoods and schooling in them, and these were additional threads entwining the life courses of the authors.

All participants felt alienated to some extent by the middle-class culture of university life, both as students and latterly as employees. This is negotiated in different ways. Jay and Kat feel obliged to say that they are from the coalfields at academic conferences to validate their research. Kat feels that "you do have to fight a bit more or prove yourself coming from a working-class mining community", not necessarily in terms of research but in academia more broadly. Natalie experienced more prejudices around place during undergraduate study at Oxford

University than she has latterly as an academic, which came from tutors as well as students. 'It was really quite odd' for Natalie to go from being 'the posh one' at school to being 'the northerner' at university, yet this made Natalie 'more proud to be northern'. Natalie found that the valorisation of a 'Yorkshire identity' she experienced while growing up, though parochial, afforded a degree of 'protection' in the wider world. Kat concurred, though she qualified this by saying that she is 'not sure' whether she fits in with academia outside Huddersfield University, where Kat feels a sense of belonging. James thought being a mature student and not being particularly engaged with social elements of undergraduate life, limited exposure to class prejudice. Jay has increasingly questioned whether there is an undercurrent of class and place prejudice within academia that he was not previously aware of. At one academic conference, a senior academic openly criticised where Jay grew up as being backward and impoverished without any sense of how stigmatising this would be. Though none of us feel completely comfortable with claiming a class-based sense of belonging now, the authors noted that academics from working-class places seem gravitate to each other, perhaps because of a nascent feeling of alienation within the academy.

It was our sense of shared history and place that brought the authors together in the first instance. Telling stories about our pasts helps create a cohesive and understandable autobiographical sense of ourselves and our place in the world (Brown & Reavey, 2017). Collaborative remembering can foster sociality and group formation, with "the very act of sharing our past with others in conversation" contributing "to enduring social and emotional bonds" (Fivush et al., 2018, p. 39). However, while the authors would concur, a group sense of solidarity may have been contingent on not actually experiencing school together directly.

The collaborative remembering of shared experiences could have potentially conflictual outcomes. Jay noted, "it is weird as I start to get further away [in time] how people have completely different evaluations of our school…It makes you question your own memories". Though such practices of 'having a laff' conjured fond and humorous memories, positive affectivities were tempered by feelings of shame and remorse:

I'm not proud of it. I'm laughing, but I'm not proud of it now. I do think, if anything, I am a bit ashamed of, like, the way I treated certain teachers who were there to, like, really, help kids like me in the sense of being working class and growing up in the coalfields. (Jay)

Kat adds,

Looking back, I probably do feel a bit ashamed about some of my behaviours in certain classes and how I treated some teachers. But then I think, sometimes I did just find some [teachers] quite disrespectful…I didn't get that sense of belonging or trust from them and then I'd be like, 'I ain't fucking doing this' and I'd mess about. (Kat)

While deviant behaviours that sometimes evoke shame in their remembering need to be contextualised by the standard of education within the coalfields during this period, it must also be recognised that cultural practices of belonging such as 'having a laff' were often harsh (Simpson & Simmons, 2021) and productions of belonging often depend on exclusionary practices directed at ostracising others (Young, 1986). Collaborative remembering methods, though carrying potential for a participant action-based research that both fosters belonging and reveals hidden affective memories, also have the capacity to reinvoke problematic memories that compromise senses of belonging.

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Conclusion: The Ghost of Coal

Robin Simmons and Kat Simpson

This book brings together ten chapters which critically examine education, work and social change in Britain's former coalfields. The authors draw on a range of disciplines and methodologies, and each chapter provides valuable insights into the past, present and perhaps the future of ex-coalmining communities—in terms, for example, of changing patterns of employment; community relations; experiences of school and post-compulsory education; and shifts in the gendered nature of work and social relations more broadly. What each chapter has in common though is a perspective or stance which recognises the social, economic and cultural importance of coal, but avoids either romanticising or demonising coalmining communities. We know that coal began

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245

to decline in importance, particularly as a form of employment, by the early-twentieth century and that colliery closures accelerated from the 1950s onwards. We also recognise that the Great Strike of 1984–1985 was a momentous turning point which effectively signalled the beginning of the end of the coal industry. But it is also important to remember that some fifty coalmines survived into the 1990s, and Britain's last deep mine, Kellingley, did not close until late-2015.

One of the book's most significant lessons is that Britain's former mining communities are marked by diversity and difference as much as similarity or unity. Different coalfields were marked by more or less radical politics, and different mining communities were more or less dependent on coal in terms of both economics and identity (Gilbert, 1991). But even the act of extracting coal differed substantially according to geology, technology and different working practices which, in turn, affected earnings, workplace relations and community life across different coalfields (Beynon & Hudson, 2021). Different communities therefore have different histories; memories of the industry are more or less recent or distant; and it is fair to say that some places have managed to ameliorate the effects of the demise of coal better than others. This is partly because of the different histories and cultures which characterise different coalfield communities, but also because of differences in geography and transport, and the various 'regeneration' initiatives which have attempted to offset the impact of pit closures (see Beatty et al., 2019). It is nevertheless possible to make certain generalisations about Britain's former coalmining communities. It would, for example, be reasonable to say that they have been less successful in reinventing themselves than some of Britain's major conurbations which, at least in popular discourse, have been transformed from declining urban wastelands into trendy, cosmopolitan twenty-first-century cities (it is, of course, also important to look past such rhetoric and recognise that significant pockets of poverty exist alongside affluence in Britain's cities). Either way, former coalfield communities remain unfashionable places, rarely worthy of attention—other than as objects of curiosity, pity or derision: bleak and old fashioned, full of resentful people with questionable attitudes and opinions. But, whilst such stereotypes are unfair,

it is perhaps unsurprising to find a certain bitterness can sometimes be observed in the former coalfields.

Neoliberalism, Dispossession and the Ghost of Coal

Much has been written about how neoliberalism has dispossessed working-class communities over the last forty years or more, not only economically but also socially, culturally and politically. This can be seen, for example, in high levels of unemployment and underemployment; in job insecurity; low pay; deteriorating conditions of employment; and increasing managerial control and surveillance. But the impact of neoliberalism reaches far beyond employment and the labour process. It has, for example, also affected access to, and the operation of, housing, health, social care and other public services, all of which now function as quasi-businesses operating in competitive markets created and maintained by the state—often to the detriment of staff and service users. Education from early-years settings through to further and higher education is now the subject to diktat and discipline, managerialism and performativity. Whilst dominant discourses present educational competition and choice as improving standards, empowering the individual student-consumer and of course driving social mobility, it actually exacerbates existing patterns of inequality, especially in terms of social class (see, for example, Ball, 2005; Reay, 2017; Thompson, 2019). Meanwhile, trade unions, local authorities and grass-roots organisations which traditionally represented the working classes have been disempowered by successive waves of neoliberal policy. It is more than this though. Neoliberalism has arguably reshaped virtually all aspects of social life according to the strictures of the market—from health, welfare, travel and communications through to sport, leisure and even daily inter-personal relationships (see, for example, Davidson, 2013; Harvey, 2007). Such processes have affected all working-class communities but have been felt particularly sharply in the former coalfields, especially in some of the more isolated and deprived locales, like those Nicky Stubbs and Richard Gater write about in this book.

Chomsky (1996) describes neoliberalism as essentially a form of *Class Warfare* and, whilst such language may sound extreme, it is quite possible to interpret the way coalmining communities were treated in the 1980s and 1990s in such a way. The tale of the decimation of the coal industry has been rehearsed extensively elsewhere and, whilst there are different versions of this story, it is safe to say that confrontation between the miners and the Conservative governments of that time was no accident (see, for example, Beynon, 1985; Milne, 2004; Phillips, 2014). The Tories, of course, had history with the NUM, which effectively brought down Edward Heath's government in 1974. During their years in opposition, Keith Joseph and others on the Right of the Conservative Party, including new leader, Margaret Thatcher, demanded a break with the so-called consensus politics which dominated post-war Britain. Over time, a new doctrine based on previously unfashionable ideas about individual liberty, free markets and the inherent inefficiency of the state effectively colonised the Conservative Party (see, for example, Hayek, 1944, 1960). Mrs Thatcher then swept to power at the end of the 1970s following the so-called Winter of Discontent—a series of high-profile public sector strikes presented as symbolic of Britain in abject crisis. Overly powerful trade unions were, the Conservatives argued in the run-up to the 1979 General Election, troublesome, backward-looking organisations interfering with the natural order of the economy, sapping the profitability of business and the morale of the country (see Sandbrook, 2012).

Whilst in opposition, the Tories made detailed plans to tackle strike action in key nationalised industries, including coal. The 1977 Ridley Plan recommended building up coal reserves at power stations; importing coal from overseas; recruiting non-unionised lorry drivers to haul coal; and converting power stations to burn oil and gas. It also suggested cutting off welfare benefits to striking workers and creating a mobile squad of specially trained police to be deployed against pickets. The tactics of successive Thatcher governments reflect all this. In 1981, the prime minister was forced to back down to the threat of NUM strike action in response to the plan to close twenty-three 'uneconomic' collieries, largely because sufficient coal stocks were not in place. Three

years later, however, preparations had been made and a bitter year-long strike was triggered by the announcement of another round of pit closures.

Different commentators have different perspectives on the 1984–1985 strike and its key protagonists—prime minister, Margaret Thatcher; the President of NUM, Arthur Scargill; and the Chairman of the NCB, Ian MacGregor—as well as the respective role played by police, the courts and the miners themselves. What is clear, however, is that the full resources of the state were mobilised to beat the strike, and eventually, Britain's strongest trade union, the NUM, was roundly defeated. Miners and police fought pitch battles on picket lines, union assets were seized, soup kitchens fed striking miners and their families, and 26 million working days were lost before the NUM admitted defeat (Paxman, 2021). The physical and psychic violence inflicted on mining communities should not be underestimated, and its aftereffects live on in the former coalfields (Simpson, 2021; Simpson & Simmons, 2021). Either way, the coal industry entered swift decline in the years after the Great Strike and just fifty collieries remained by the early-1990s. Over thirty of these were shut in 1992, and the rest were sold on to the private company RJB Mining (later known as UK Coal) which continued to close pits until the industry effectively ceased to exist when Britain's final deep mines shut in 2015 (Paxman, 2021).

Life After Coal

The way Nicky Stubbs mobilises the Gramscian notion of interregnum in this book offers a powerful way of understanding the plight of many former mining communities following the closure of the industry—although the extent to which the interregnum has passed is debatable. The likes of Bright (2011), Simpson (2021) and Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012) help us to understand how the former coalfields continue to be haunted in ways which go beyond numerical data. In other words, being from the former coalfields continues to affect both individuals and communities in multiple ways—as is evident from many chapters in this book. There is, we suggest, still something *different* about ex-coalmining

communities and about being from a former coalmining community. For us as individuals, the legacy of coal continues to affect us in multiple ways. It is present, for example, in our sceptical dispositions; in our suspicion of authority; and in the coarse 'pit humour' that characterises the way we goad each other about work and life broadly. In the past, this harsh, sarcastic humour acted as a survival mechanism for miners and their families living and working in conditions of adversity (Dennis et al., 1956). It lives on in the bleak banter which those from elsewhere seldom 'get'.

There has, of late, been something of a resurgence of interest in the social and economic history of coal (see, for example, Beynon & Hudson, 2021; Gibbs, 2021; Paxman, 2021). There are, however, still significant gaps in our knowledge and understanding of former coalmining communities, although it might be more accurate to say that much has been disregarded or forgotten. Some of this relates to the role of women. Dennis et al. (1956) wrote about women's unpaid labour—cooking, cleaning, fetching and carrying, rearing children and so on—without which the male workforce (and by extension the coal industry) would have struggled to function. The role of women in the Great Strike has also received significant attention (see, for example, Loach, 1985). There is moreover some research on 'women's work' within the coal industry in terms, for example, of clerical and administrative roles, and in catering, cleaning and ancillary work (University of Wolverhampton, 1982). There is, however, little understanding of the importance of women's labour in the coal production process itself. Whilst the 1842 Coal Mines Act banned all females (and boys under ten-years-old) from working underground, women continued to be employed in 'pit-brow' work—unloading, sorting and shifting coal—for over a century thereafter. The last pit-brow girls were not made redundant until 1972, one hundred and thirty years after women were forbidden from working underground yet their story remains largely untold (although see John, 1982).

Some chapters in this book focus on girls and women, mainly in terms of their experiences of school. Martyn Walker's chapter focuses on post-compulsory education and training for (male) mineworkers, but there is a paucity of equivalent research on the experiences of women who were

employed by the NCB. Thousands of women were employed to process, administer and manage miners' pay and pensions; handle finance and purchasing; deal with health and safety records; and work in support functions including personnel, occupational health, sales, export and marketing. Many of these women undertook significant programmes of education and training, often attending colleges and polytechnics on 'day release' from their place of work. Yet there is virtually no research on their experiences of education and employment.

The nature and purpose of education in capitalist societies have always been complex and multi-faceted, although it has often been associated with failure and humiliation for working-class pupils (Reay, 2017). This continues to be the case, despite claims that more education will somehow provide the antidote to a range of social and economic ills (see Smyth & Simmons, 2018). Whilst such notions are at best wishful thinking, it is worth thinking a little more about the notion that education can drive social mobility, especially in relation to coalmining communities. Martyn Walker's chapter explains how the NCB provided many coalminers with access to vocational education and training which opened up significant opportunities for career progression—both in mining and sometimes in other industries after redundancy and pit closure. Martyn's work illustrates how these processes were linked to social mobility *within* the local community, whereas nowadays social mobility—especially in terms of access to secure professional work—is far more likely if young people leave the former coalfields (Beatty et al., 2019).

It is, however, necessary to critique dominant discourses of social mobility more generally. On the one hand, notions of social mobility have become something of a mantra in UK policy circles. There are various reasons for this, not least that promoting social mobility as a goal deflects attention away from thorny questions about the redistribution of wealth, fairness and equality. Effectively, social progress becomes a competition whereby (working-class) individuals fight to try and escape their origins. There are numerous problems with this, not least the patronising notion that working-class youth somehow need to become better, more civilised and productive individuals. But the possibility of downward mobility is generally overlooked (Ainley, 2016). Employment in the

former coalfields is now largely characterised by insecure, low-pay work in warehouses, call centres, retail, distribution and social care (Beatty et al., 2019). Upward social mobility, at least as it is currently supposed to function, effectively becomes a mechanism whereby sections of talented working-class youth are 'creamed off' into the ranks of the middle and upper classes. There are, however, also more 'technical' problems about dominant discourses of social mobility, especially the assertion that education should be the primary way through which it can be achieved.

Let us be clear, participation in education and training has, over time, undoubtedly improved the life chances of many, but the relationship between education and social mobility is not straightforward or unproblematic. No amount of education can facilitate significant social mobility without concomitant labour market opportunities (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). During the 1950s and 1960s, the 'golden age of social mobility' was driven largely by the expansion of professional and managerial jobs associated with the nationalisation of key industries and the creation of the welfare state. But, whilst there has continued to be some growth in high-skill work, this has not kept pace with rising educational attainment (Ainley, 2016). Traditionally, gaining degree-level qualifications secured entry to professional employment, but the great expansion of higher education which has taken place, especially since the 1990s, means this is no longer the case. There is now a general over-supply of graduates which means that many employers can be highly selective, often preferring to recruit graduates from the top-end of the Russell Group (the wealthy research-intensive universities), rather than less-prestigious institutions. 'Top employers' moreover now frequently demand a CV embellished with a range of other achievements and experiences in terms, for example, of sporting excellence, travel, music or voluntary work—all of which advantages students from more privileged backgrounds viz-a-viz those with less social, economic and cultural capital (Brown et al., 2010). Working-class young people therefore remain systematically disadvantaged despite increased participation in further and higher education (Thompson & Simmons, 2013).

It is also important to consider other changes in the UK labour market. Whilst many manufacturing jobs are now gone, this does

not mean that Britain has somehow been transformed into a 'knowledge economy' based on skills, creativity and cutting-edge technology (Elliott & Atkinson, 2007). There has in fact been a great expansion of low-pay, low-skill employment across the British economy, especially in retail, hospitality, catering, care and other forms of service sector work—particularly in the former coalfields. There has also been something of a 'hollowing out' of intermediate-level employment, especially in craft, technical and supervisory roles (Ainley, 2016). The gap between high-skill and low-skill employment has therefore widened, and the 'rungs' on the ladder of social mobility are now fewer and more broadly spaced. Whilst never commonplace, progress from the shop floor into professional or managerial roles becomes increasingly difficult.

Dominant mantra about the importance of skills, creativity and innovation rings hollow when so many jobs basically entail routine, fragmented low-skill tasks with little worker discretion or autonomy. The recent expose of conditions at the Sports Direct warehouse at Shirebrook near Mansfield illustrates some of the harsh realities of working life in the former coalfields (The Guardian, 2020). The implications for education and training associated with such a labour market are profound, and it is difficult to avoid turning to classic Marxist analyses about the role of education in society (see, for example, Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The role of vocational learning is particularly problematic. Traditionally, the coal industry created significant demand for post-compulsory education and training—in terms not only of craft and technical skills, but also in subject disciplines ranging from engineering and surveying to management, accountancy and other branches of business studies. Importantly, most of these qualifications were delivered in partnership with local institutions of further and higher education which also drew a considerable number of staff from the coal industry. All this was lost with the demise of coal, and there is, among many employers, little demand for high-level qualifications and skills. This, in turn, has significant implications for colleges other providers of education and training. Ainley (2016) points on the one hand to the virtual collapse of a coherent youth labour market with young people required to invest more and more time, energy and money in various forms of learning for diminishing returns. Young

people are, Ainley argues, effectively left trying to 'run up a downwards escalator'.

Revisiting the Ghost of Coal

We recognise this all paints an irksome picture, but the future need not be bleak for Britain's former coalfield communities. Paxman (2021) argues that coal in many ways 'made Britain' and there is no doubt it played a key role in fuelling industrialisation and urbanisation, and the growth of empire which made Britain a world power, militarily and in terms of commerce and trade. The UK is now a largely post-industrial economy, the empire is long gone, and the coal industry no longer exists. Whilst Britain continues to import significant quantities of coal, fossil fuels are now deeply unfashionable with the stated intention of moving to green and renewable energy in vogue across most advanced economies. This shift could—perhaps even should—provide new opportunities for the former coalfields. Reducing carbon emissions will not happen by accident. Significant investment and leadership from the state will be required if we are serious about building a 'green economy' (see Beatty & Fothergill, 2021). New forms of manufacturing, transport, construction and recycling, and a workforce able to provide new goods and services will be required. In other words, investing time, energy and, of course, money in coalfields communities would allow them to make a substantial contribution to the national economy once again. There are some signs that this is beginning to happen. A new Britishvolt 'gigaplant' to produce batteries for electric vehicles—providing around 3,000 direct jobs and another 5,000 jobs in the supply chain—is currently under construction in the former coalmining town of Blyth in Northumberland (DBEIS, 2022). Significant further developments of this kind will be required to move the former coalfields forwards.

Finally, we return to the role of education, which can be both a conservative and a progressive force in society (sometimes simultaneously). But schooling has, we know, often disparaged, belittled or demeaned working-class cultures and histories. The challenge, if we are serious about engaging working-class pupils in education, is to provide a learning

environment and culture relevant to their lives and aligned with working-class values and principles. This is difficult especially under neoliberal regimes, but there are various strategies which can be used. This relates to promoting learning which young working-class people can relate to; education which develops respectful relationships with communities; and forms of learning which recognise the richness of working-class lives as a basis for investigation. This might include a focus on place, relationships and involving the local community to celebrate particular ideas, events or cultures (Smyth & McInerney, 2007; Smyth & Simmons, 2018). In other words, methods such as those Ewan Gibbs and Susan Henderson-Bone write about in this book. Whilst such an approach is relevant to all working-class communities, it is needed in the former coalfields perhaps more than anywhere—where we should recognise not only the loss and pain of the past, but also the 'goodness' of the ghosts which remain to haunt them (Simpson & Simmons, 2021).

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Epilogue

Huw Beynon

In 1920, there were 1.19 million workers employed in the British coal industry. My two grandfathers were included in that number. After a hundred years, and cascading through the generations, the scale and impact of mining heritage become clear. In no other capitalist economy was coal mining so dominant or so vital to all aspects of economic and social life (Britain was virtually a single fuel economy until the middle of the 1950s), and nowhere were miners so strongly organised. At that time, the Miners Federation of Great Britain was also by far the largest association of miners in the world.

The large number of miners, the nature of their working conditions and the essential nature of their work created a powerful moral element within British socialist thought which was perhaps best expressed by George Orwell. In 1937, he visited a coalmine in Lancashire and,

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exhausted by the walk to the coalface, he marvelled at the endurance of the miners. Orwell wrote about how the miners' "lamp lit world down there is as necessary to the daylight world above as the root is to the flower" (Orwell, 1986, p. 30). It was an urge to expose the details of this "lamp lit world" to the general public that led B.L. (Bert) Coombes, a miner in South Wales, to write his famous autobiography *These Poor Hands* two years later. This was followed, in 1945, by *Miner's Day,* one of the first Penguin specials. Recently republished, Coombes (2021), combined with paintings of the Rhondda by Isobel Alexander, vividly portrays the impact of coalmining upon the valleys and its people, all wracked in the "everlasting war against industrial disease and accident" (p. 156). If support was needed for Diane Reay's description of mining as "a dirty, dangerous and dehumanising job" involving "one long struggle against injustice", it can be found on these pages.

The filth was everywhere—in the air, in the river, lying on the ground and in the waste tips. For Coombes, these tips stood as "monuments to ugliness and slovenliness" (p. 114). They take on a surreal presence in Alexandra's paintings as they did for Lowry when he visited South Wales twenty years later. These tips live on into the present day, threaten villages in time of heavy rain, still surviving the tragedy that hit Aberfan[1] in 1966. The dust, of course, was also found in the lungs of the miners. Between 1931 and 1948, 22,000 miners contracted pneumoconiosis in UK mines, 85 per cent of them in South Wales. It was a plague, and with limited compensation for the afflicted, pneumoconiosis and other lung diseases continued to be the main cause of premature death for miners well into the twenty-first century (McIvor & Johnson, 2016).

Given this, and the impact we now know that coal has had upon the planet, it might seem perverse to offer a defence for the industry or to mourn its passing. But there is more to be said reflected in the deeply mixed feelings of Coombes and other miners who, while hating the thought of going to work, would, once underground, vigorously

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[1] The Aberfan disaster was the catastrophic collapse of a colliery spoil tip created on a mountain slope above the village of Aberfan, near Merthyr Tydfil. A period of heavy rain led to a build-up of water within the tip which caused it to suddenly slide downhill as a slurry, killing 116 children and 28 adults as it engulfed Pantglas Junior School and nearby row of houses. A subsequent enquiry placed the blame for the disaster on the NCB.

engage with the "battle against the mountain"! This is what gave mining engineering such a fascination and "the charisma" that Martyn Walker identifies in the post-war period. It was established in career ladders within the mines and in the courses taught in local technical colleges and mining institutes. Nationally, it was found in the NCB's Scientific Research Establishments at Stoke Orchard and Bretby with their persistent concern for developing new engineering methods and clean coal technologies. These teaching and research establishments were run down and eventually closed along with the mines in the late eighties and nineties when the newly privatised UK Coal Corporation turned itself into a property developer, and Bretby was converted into a hotel and conference centre.

In the old *coal and steel towns*, in places like Motherwell, Consett and Ebbw Vale, coking coal mines were grouped around huge inland steel complexes creating a remarkable concentration of unionised manual work which combined internal job ladders with low-level educational entry requirements. Here, miners and steel workers lived close together and shared facilities. In Ebbw Vale, the Workman's Hall was controlled by the Waenlwyd lodge, but (in a similar way to Tannochside Miners' Welfare) it was used by the steel workers and the Labour Party for large meetings. The students at the Grammar School also used it for their annual Eisteddfod walking across the railway line that traversed the main street in order to deliver limestone to the blast furnaces. These were large industrial towns which in the fifties and sixties provided relatively high wages and a stability for large and overwhelmingly working-class communities.

All this employment of course was for men. For generations, the young women of the coalfields were often forced to leave home to work as domestic servants in aristocratic country houses and in the homes of the urban middle classes, normally returning home to marry. Marriage therefore was a fundamental feature of these communities and indispensable to the employment system of mining. While the principle of pit head baths was established by act of parliament in 1920, at the time of nationalisation in 1947, many of the smaller collieries remained without washing facilities which were then often installed a few years before closure. Overalls were not provided by the NCB until 1979, relieving

the household belatedly from the task of washing dirty pit clothes. By this time, many of the changes which accompanied the dramatic closure of mines in the sixties had accelerated. Employment opportunities for women in health care and office work had emerged through the expansion of the welfare state with others found in the new light engineering and garment factories relocated on the old coalfields. This uncoupling of the link between mining and domestic labour created opportunities that were accelerated by feminist ideas, broad changes of attitude and popular culture. When Eric Burdon and the Animals sang "we got to get out of this place… girl there's a better life for me and you", they were speaking for a generation. Expectations changed and classrooms changed too, as Natalie Thomlinson explains, with young people experiencing the emancipatory as well as the oppressive aspects of organised education. In spite of the hidden and not-so hidden injuries of class, some succeeded, went away to university or teacher-training college, few to return.

This was a time of significant working-class gains culminating in the much-maligned seventies and the "profit squeeze" (Glyn & Sutcliffe, 1972). It was followed by Mrs Thatcher as capital struck back in a raft of industrial closures and deep changes to the welfare state. This process was fuelled by policies of marketisation, the destructive and ongoing process of commodification that Karl Polanyi (1944) had identified in the English enclosure movement.

At that time within sociology, the dominant discourse was not of this kind, referring instead to the coming of a post-industrial society (Bell, 1973) linked to ideas of post-Fordism and post-modernism. It took a considerable struggle to establish deindustrialisation as a legitimate *conceptual* framework with its emphasis on power and struggle rather than an inevitable, teleological, process of change. Tim Strangleman and Nicky Stubbs explain how this can be understood as a long process of destruction, renewal and destruction again with complex identities formed along the way, drawing on the past, the present and some imagined futures. These emotions were in play in 1963 when Rootes opened its factory in Renfrewshire to make a new car there—the Hillman Imp—that would, supposedly, challenge the Mini and compete in international rallies. The factory closed in 1971. Similarly, at Uddingston with the Caterpillar factory where its high-tech glossily finished machines

had created an "aura of permanence". In 1987, it was described by the company as "a plant with a future" but within weeks its closure was announced precipitating the workers' occupation used skilfully by Gibbs and Henderson-Bone in their "Tracks of the Past" project. But as the authors remind us, coal was "at the centre of industrial commemoration in Lanarkshire" as it was in most of the other coalfields, and where the past has been drawn on in similar ways in the local classrooms (Mates & Grimshaw, 2021, 2022).

The miners' strike of 1984–85 was a significant milestone here involving untold hardship, bravery and resilience, often bringing out the best and the worst in people and illustrating well Gordon's (2008) view that "life is complex" (p. 4) stretching established understandings of community and solidarity. The strike and its aftermath have been presented in film with the magisterial anger of *Brassed Off* contrasting with the deep sentimentally of *Billy Elliot* and the elegiac *Pride*. As time passed, views of the strike changed, and revisionist accounts have come to explain how it could have been settled earlier, or not happened at all yielding the benefit of a much slower run down of the industry. In reaction to these ideas, one ex-miner in Durham explained to me that:

> I often think how poorer our lives would be without that year. If we had faded away without a fight, I am sure that there would now be no gala to boost our sense of wellbeing each year. But more importantly it became a symbol of resistance.

There was a similar view in Maerdy in South Wales where the mine had been identified during the strike as "the last pit in the Rhondda". As a consequence, one old resident recalled that:

> [P]ress from all over the world had focused on us. And shortly after that the pit shut. It was still fresh in people's memories, right, this one colliery that had stuck it out to the bitter end and reopened was now shutting. If there hadn't been a miners' strike, and Maerdy had shut, OK, it would have been the last pit in the valley, but there wouldn't have been the interest that there was.

Here, we can see the building blocks of memory, the elements that stick together giving a strength to the humour, pride and sensitivity that Kat Simpson identifies as haunting the classroom "in ways that begin to refashion relations of schooling in more encouraging ways". This is the hope. It is a hope that is challenged by the processes of marketisation that are wrecking the infrastructure and the lives of many on the old coalfields where more schools are desperately needed along with better sick pay and welfare provision. In the thirties, during the previous phase of extreme marketisation, Gramsci (1971) identified an interregnum when "the old is dying and the new cannot be born" and when a "great variety of morbid symptoms appear". This was "resolved" through fascism and a world war. We must find a better way.

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Index