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Collective Memory in the Mining Communities of South Wales.

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PhD History.

University of Sussex.

May 2017.

Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

Thesis Summary.

Coal mining communities across Britain have often been argued to have possessed powerful collective memories of past struggles, though such memories have, as yet, been little studied. This thesis is a study of the collective memory of the interwar years within the mining communities of south Wales, and explores the ways in which the great strikes and lockouts, underground accidents, the interwar depression, and clashes with police and strike-breakers were remembered by the men and women of the coalfield.

Using nearly 200 oral history interviews that were recorded in the 1970s, alongside newspapers, political and trade union records, novels and other sources, this study examines collective remembering as a reciprocal interaction between the public representations of the past, and the memories and attitudes of individuals. It argues, firstly, that individual memory did not just reflect or rework discourses about past events, but was itself an important agent in shaping and creating collective understandings of that history. Those individual memories remained integral to those collective memories, rather than being subsumed within or subjugated by them. It also suggests that the relationship between individual and collective memory should not be seen as necessarily oppositional, nor as between two distinct and separate types of memory, but rather as a spectrum.

Secondly, it argues that the experiences of the inter-war years were understood and remembered within a number of distinct temporalities. Strikes and protests were often recalled within a linear framework, accidents underground were understood as a cyclical experience, whilst the depression was seen as a discontinuous rupture. It thus argues that conceptions of historical time were not singular, but plural and overlapping, and were themselves shaped and transformed by historical events. It thus traces understandings of time and how these changed at a popular level, rather than an intellectual or cultural one, through examining the memories, thoughts and attitudes of the men and women of the south Wales coalfield.

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Abbreviations.

AL – *Aberdare Leader*.

CHP – Coalfield History Project.

CLC – Central Labour College.

CWM – *Colliery Workers' Magazine*.

DMA – Durham Miners' Association.

GFP&RL – *Glamorgan Free Press and Rhondda Leader*.

ILP – Independent Labour Party.

MFGB – Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

MO – Mass Observation.

MOA – Mass Observation Archive.

NCLC – National Council of Labour Colleges.

NUM – National Union of Mineworkers.

RL – *Rhondda Leader*.

SWA – *South Wales Argus*.

SWE – *South Wales Echo*.

SWCC – South Wales Coalfield Collection.

SWM – *South Wales Miner*.

SWMF – South Wales Miners' Federation.

SWMIU – South Wales Miners' Industrial Union.

SWML – South Wales Miners' Library.

SWV – *South Wales Voice*.

TUC – Trades Union Congress.

UoS – University of Sussex.

WM – *Western Mail*.

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Map of the South Wales Coalfield.



Introduction.

In the South Wales coalfield now, there was, twenty or thirty years ago...a certain consciousness that had crystallised into definite clear ideas. That is more or less completely lost today, and I don't know, I'm wondering...in any crisis situation...whether that has been lost completely, or is it merely buried for a small time and will be re-asserting itself.¹

In the winter of 1972, and then again in the summer of the following year, Hywel Francis – a historian working with the Coalfield History Project (CHP) – interviewed the former miners' leader Dai Dan Evans at his home in Cardiff. Evans had been born in Abercraf in 1898 – the year that the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) was founded – and had left school to work in the Gwaunclawdd colliery at the age of fourteen. The choice to go underground, he remembered, had been an obvious one – 'all the young lads...in the village were steeped in mining...mining yarns, stories that were taking place at the pit that day' – though it was also a decision that he said he regretted almost immediately.² A Communist Party activist, who later became the General Secretary of the South Wales Area of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), he went on to describe his experiences of working underground, the death of his brother in a pit accident, the years that he had spent in Canada after 1921, the epic lockout of 1926, the depression, and the dramatic campaigns against the rival, coalowner backed, South Wales Miners' Industrial Union (SWMIU) in the 1930s. Towards the end of the second interview, reflecting on his experiences in the industry, he spoke of a particular consciousness that had once existed on the coalfield, and which had sustained the mining communities through those struggles. That consciousness, he thought, had now been lost, and he wondered whether it had gone forever, or whether it was 'merely buried for a small time and will be re-asserting itself.'³

The consciousness to which Dai Dan Evans was referring was the radicalism and militancy for which the miners in general – and those of south Wales in particular – were so widely renowned. In their landmark studies of the coalfield Hywel Francis and David Smith argued that 'an alternative culture with its own moral code and political tradition' had existed within the mining communities of south Wales – a culture that 'had no comparable equivalent in the

¹ South Wales Miners' Library (SWML), AUD/264, Interview with Dai Dan Evans, 7 August, 1973.

² SWML, AUD/263, Interview with Dai Dan Evans, 5 December, 1972.

³ SWML, AUD/264, Interview with Dai Dan Evans, 7 August, 1973.

other British coalfields' and was significantly 'outside the mainstream of the British Labour Movement.'⁴ They located the emergence of this 'exceptionalism' in the Rhondda with the Cambrian Combine Strike of 1910-11 and the publication of the famous syndicalist pamphlet, *The Miners' Next Step*, the following year. During 1926, they claimed it appeared 'on a universal basis throughout the coalfield,' and in both their co-written history, *The Fed*, and their own, individual works, they traced its continued expression through unemployed demonstrations, stay-down strikes, hunger marches and the involvement of many south Wales miners in the Spanish Civil War.⁵ Yet it was not just Dai Dan Evans who was concerned that something was being lost. Fears that this unique and distinctive consciousness – this 'alternative culture' – was ebbing away in the post-war world, were pervasive throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Editorials in the official journal of the miners' union bemoaned the 'apathy [that had] blanketed the trade union movement,' and the 'lack of enthusiasm' of many of its members.⁶ Similar complaints appeared frequently in the local press, lamenting that 'the fire of class struggle had been doused by indifference,' and wondering if perhaps something had been lost when 'the bitter struggle for human decencies was won.'⁷ A letter from one miner, written in the midst of a strike by the National Union of Seamen in 1966, began by quoting Idris Davies's poem 'we shall remember 1926 until our blood is dry,' attacked at length the failure of the miners to give adequate support to their striking comrades, and concluded by asking 'do we remember 1926? Sometimes I wonder if we do.'⁸

It was in the context of such fears that the Coalfield History Project (CHP) was launched in 1971. Concerns that the mining communities' radicalism and distinctive culture was being eroded, combined with the mass pit closures of the 1960s, together appeared to pose an existential threat to the future of the coalfield itself. It was a time when 'the economic foundation and social fabric of every mining village between the Llwyd River in the east and the Gwendraeth Valley in the west seemed to be under threat.'⁹ In response, a group of researchers based at Swansea University launched a major effort, funded by the Social

⁴ Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed – A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), 66, 55; Hywel Francis, *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), 29.

⁵ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 66. See also Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, and Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993).

⁶ *The Miner*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Mar/Apr. 1957, 15; *The Miner*, 8:3, May/Jun. 1960, 1.

⁷ *Western Mail (WM)*, 25 Sep. 1963. See also *Rhondda Leader (RL)*, 12 Feb. 1955; *South Wales Voice (SWV)*, 13 May 1965 and *WM*, 11 Jan. 1972.

⁸ South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC):MNB/PP/63/13 – Papers of Howell Davy Williams – Draft letter to *The Miner*, re. General Strike and Seamen's strike, 1966.

⁹ SWCC, David Bevan, *Guide to the South Wales Coalfield archive* (1980), 1.

Sciences Research Council, to preserve manuscript records and the miners' libraries, whilst also conducting a large oral history project interviewing the men and women of the mining villages. The CHP was begun 'in an atmosphere of considerable urgency,' and whilst the researchers said that south Wales had been somewhat 'overburdened by "prophets of doom"', there could, nonetheless, be 'no doubt' about the 'severe blows' that had been inflicted.¹⁰ The aim of the project was to preserve as much as possible of the history of the coalfield, and to record the distinctive culture of the south Wales miners before it disappeared. Yet the recovery of this history was not solely for the sake of posterity, but was also meant to serve a more immediate, political purpose. Through the preservation of its history, the project also hoped to sustain the 'alternative culture' of the coalfield – its militancy and radicalism – for the struggles of the future. This aim was particularly explicit in *The Fed*, the most significant work to come out of the research of the CHP. It opened with a joint foreword from the leadership of the South Wales Area NUM, who hoped that the book would foster a better understanding of the past amongst its members, which would in turn lead them to 'strive more vigorously for the socialist society our forebears struggled valiantly to attain.'¹¹ Then, in the introduction, Francis and Smith themselves claimed that the revival of any militancy would depend on the 'retained memories of coalfield society,' and that their book explicitly sought to 'sustain that collective memory.'¹²

A collective memory of protest and struggle was one of the most significant features of the 'alternative culture' that was argued to have existed in south Wales. *The Fed* itself was liberally scattered with references made by political and union figures throughout the 1920s and 1930s to the world of the Scotch cattle and the Chartists, and it argued that 'the importance of oral tradition and the "received memory" cannot be over-emphasised.'¹³ These arguments have subsequently been echoed in works by historians like Neil Evans and Diane Preece, who have both claimed that memories of the past played an important role in the unemployed demonstrations in the 1930s.¹⁴ A collective memory of past struggles was so central to this alternative culture, that the idea that culture was being lost was often rooted in a sense that

¹⁰ SWML, *Final Report of the Coalfield History Project* (1974), 2, 7.

¹¹ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, xiii.

¹² *Ibid.*, 42.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 62-3 (Scotch Cattle), 260, 265 (Merthyr), 192-8, 250 (Chartism), 99 (citation).

¹⁴ Neil Evans, "'South Wales has been roused as never before": marching against the means test, 1934-1936,' in *Crime, Protest and Police in Modern British History: Essays in Memory of David J.V. Jones*, ed. David Howell and Kenneth O. Morgan, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 194, and Diane Preece, "'Defend the Rights of the Roads Your Fathers Fought For": The Blaina Riot of 1935', in *Llafur*, 10, no. 2, (2009), 100.

people no longer remembered the past. Elved Evans for example, interviewed in 1978, expressed similar concerns to Dai Dan Evans about some sort of consciousness having been lost, but focused on the apparent erosion of any historical understanding:

It's a pity really that it [the coalfield's history] hasn't been compiled over the years...so that the young people today realise what went on in the area. Because they think now that the good times came...automatically, like the leaves falling off the trees in autumn don't they?¹⁵

The concerns that appeared in the pages of *The Miner* and the local press were also often centred on the historical awareness of the mining communities, with complaints about an ignorance of or an indifference to the past, and hopes that the younger generation could be roused to a greater 'awareness of their heritage,' and with it, 'more of a sense of responsibility for the future.'¹⁶

This is a study of the collective memory of the inter-war years within the mining communities of south Wales. Focusing on strikes, lockouts and other protests; accidents underground; the depression; and the clashes with police and blacklegs, it uses the oral history interviews recorded by the CHP, alongside the records of the miners' union, material from political parties, novels, and local and national newspapers to explore the extent to which there was a collective memory of such events amongst the men and women of the coalfield. Though it primarily looks at how these experiences were remembered in the 1970s, it also attempts to trace the way that such memories might have changed over time since the inter-war years. Powerful collective memories were, as noted, central to the idea that the miners of south Wales possessed an alternative culture – one that was now being lost in the post-war world. This study thus explores the question of whether there was a distinctive political and industrial consciousness in the south Wales coalfield, and whether the researchers of the CHP were able to find what they were looking for. It argues that powerful collective memories – of strikes, the dangers of the pit, the depression, and the actions of police and blacklegs – were still present in the 1970s, and that these had emerged through a reciprocal interaction between individual recollections of those events, and representations of the past by the union, political parties and the press. This meant that individual memories played an important and independent role in shaping and creating shared understandings of the past, and it is argued here that individual and collective memory were not fundamentally different or separate ways of remembering. Instead, the relationship between them is perhaps better understood as a fluid and continuous

¹⁵ SWML, AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978.

¹⁶ WM, 11 Jan. 1972.

spectrum. This study also explores the temporalities of memory. As will become apparent, different historical experiences were often remembered within different conceptions of time – with strikes and protests, for example, often being recalled within a linear narrative, the dangers of the pit understood as a cyclical experience, and the depression seen as a discontinuous rupture. It argues that conceptions of time within the mining communities were plural and overlapping, and were themselves affected by the dramatic events of the 1920s and 1930s.

I

The idea that mining communities possessed powerful collective memories of past struggles is a common trope within studies of coalfield societies across Britain, referenced repeatedly by historians, sociologists and even miners themselves. Dave Douglass, a former miner and activist, has written of how as a child in the north eastern coalfields, ‘you don’t get Goldilocks and the Three Bears or Little Red Riding Hood as a bedtime story – you get Churchill and the ‘26 strike,’ and has also claimed that ‘a passion for history...at once forces itself upon those who would study the miners.’¹⁷ In a 1948 study meanwhile, the sociologist Ferdynand de Zweig claimed that ‘the past weighs heavily on the miners’ minds,’ and that one was ‘continually struck’ by how deeply engrained this sense of history was whenever talking to them.¹⁸ A large number of studies have since concurred with Zweig’s observations, with Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter’s *Coal is Our Life* and Tony Hall’s *King Coal* both remarking on the miners’ ‘tremendous grasp of their own history.’¹⁹ The historical consciousness of the mining communities has also been a common point of reference for historians, with Barry Supple, for example, claiming that no one who had had any ‘serious dealings with miners at any time in the twentieth century could fail to recognise the potent role in their lives and politics of individual and collective memory.’²⁰ Two collections of essays – one on miners, unions and politics and one on the 1926 lockout – have both opened with

¹⁷ Dave Douglass, ‘“Worms of the Earth”: The Miners’ Own Story’, in *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel, (London: Routledge, 1981) 61.

¹⁸ Ferdynand Zweig, *Men in the Pits*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948), 10-11.

¹⁹ See Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, *Coal is Our Life*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1956), 56. Citation from Tony Hall, *King Coal, Miners, Coal and Britain’s Industrial Future* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 9.

²⁰ Barry Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry, Vol. 4, 1914-1946: The Political Economy of Decline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 682-3.

similar claims, and the importance of collective memory to understanding mining communities has also been noted by Peter Ackers and Jonathan Payne.²¹

Yet whilst the miners' sense of history may have frequently occasioned – or even demanded – such references, there have been very few works on collective memory within mining communities in Britain. Despite the repeated claims of historians and sociologists about the importance of collective memory to coalfield societies, their studies typically make only a brief allusion to its significance and do not examine how it emerged, its nature, or how it shaped life and attitudes within the pit villages. Those that do venture opinions on the subject tend to draw heavily on the characterisation of coalfield societies as isolated communities with an overwhelming occupational homogeneity, stressing the hereditary employment patterns of the industry. Marianne Debouzy, for example, has written of how the 'long' memory of the miners was 'typical of cohesive groups,' and claimed that 'the transmission of the miner's history is part of the upbringing of children.'²² James Fentress and Chris Wickham have similarly argued that the 'coherence' of coalfield societies makes them 'among the best places to look' for collective memory, with 'the transmission of memory...made possible by family continuity and a continuity of employment.'²³ These claims are echoed by former miner Dave Douglass, who has said that 'a kind of collective memory...is passed on through generations.'²⁴

Despite the undoubted importance of occupational continuity and family links, however, it should be pointed out that, within mining historiography more broadly, explanations that rely solely on structural factors such as these have been largely discarded or discredited as being too deterministic. Furthermore, explanations of collective memory that rely solely on stories passed down at the knee to miners' sons and daughters still leave many questions unanswered. How would such memories all echo common themes rather than being a disparate collection of stories about things that were felt to be personally relevant to the individuals who told them? How would the memories come to represent the community's

²¹ Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman & David Howell eds., *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1910-47*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 1; John McIlroy, Alan Campbell & Keith Gildart eds., *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lockout: The Struggle for Dignity*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 1-3; Peter Ackers and Jonathan Payne, 'Before the Storm: The Experience of Nationalization and the Prospects for Industrial Relations Partnership in the British Coal Industry, 1947-1972: Rethinking the Militant Narrative', in *Social History*, 27, no. 2 (2002), 184, 189.

²² Marianne Debouzy, 'In search of working-class memory: Some questions and a tentative assessment', in *History and Anthropology*, 2, (1986), 269, 274.

²³ James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 115-116.

²⁴ Douglass, 'Worms of the Earth', 65.

experience of the past, rather than that of just specific families or individuals? And how would such memories relate to each other to form a collective memory, rather than remaining simply an aggregation of similar but otherwise unrelated family stories? It seems reasonable, therefore, to question whether any collective memory within such communities can be explained solely by their occupational homogeneity and continuity, and the close family links many men and women had to the industry. This is especially so given that such assertions are, in the case of Debouzy and Fentress and Wickham at least, made without any supporting evidence.

One of the most significant works written about miners and collective memory is Hester Barron's study of the 1926 lockout in the Durham coalfield. She demonstrates how memories of past struggles bolstered the 'determination of the miners to fight' in 1926, and how the events of that year themselves joined 'other strikes, lockouts and pit disasters in the creation of a heroic national and regional chronicle of coal and its people' after the miners returned to work.²⁵ Nonetheless, despite this overarching narrative of suffering and resistance, she also emphasises that memories within the mining communities were often 'fractured and diverse...differentiated by...age, gender and personal circumstances.'²⁶ Keith Gildart's study on memory in the north Wales coalfield – which utilises a number of unpublished autobiographies – makes a similar point. He notes how, in the writings of the miners themselves, political and trade union issues were often less important than culture, sport, domestic life, sexuality, and occupational camaraderie and humour. The 'complex picture' that emerges from their memories challenges the claims of 'union-centred narratives as being representative of general working-class experiences.'²⁷ Beyond these two works, however, very little has been written about miners and collective memory, despite the claims of historians and sociologists that it is crucial to understanding coalmining communities. In south Wales meanwhile, where a strong collective memory is argued to have been an integral element of the 'alternative culture' of the coalfield, there have been no in depth studies of collective memory at all.

²⁵ Hester Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout, Meanings of Community in the Durham Coalfield*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 244, 226.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁷ Keith Gildart, 'Mining memories: reading coalfield autobiographies,' in *Labor History*, 50, no. 2, (2009), 155.

II

Aside from its importance to understanding coal-mining communities, collective memory still remains relatively abstract and heavily contested. It was the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs who first coined the term itself and developed it as a concept. He argued that all memories were understood within the wider collective framework – such as family or workplace – in which the events remembered had occurred, and that all recollections were thus structured by the identities of those groups. For Halbwachs, ‘no memory [was] possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their collections,’ and that all memories were, therefore, ‘essentially group memories.’²⁸ Both historians and sociologists have since built extensively on his work. Fentress and Wickham, for instance, agreed that ‘social groups construct their own images of the world by establishing an agreed version of the past,’ but also criticised his neglect of individual memory and his characterisation of individuals as passive or mindless automatons.²⁹ As Hester Barron has noted, these criticisms are not entirely fair, for Halbwachs also argued that ‘the individual participates in two types of memory,’ placing their ‘own remembrances within the framework of [their] personality,’ whilst those held in common with others were placed within the framework of that group.³⁰ These two memories, ‘were often intermingled,’ and as Barron notes, an exploration of collective memory within mining communities must be ‘similarly layered’ – focusing on both individual and collective forms of remembering.³¹ A separation between two types of memory is thus envisaged by many historians, including Pierre Nora, who argued for an individual memory that was ‘psychological, individual and subjective,’ and a collective memory that was ‘willful and deliberate...social, collective and all-embracing.’³²

Many studies of collective memory have embraced this distinction between two different types, or forms, of remembering and have focused on the way that representations of history in politics, popular culture and the press have shaped popular understandings of the past. In this respect, studies of collective memory have followed broader shifts within history and

²⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis Coser, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43; Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, ix.

²⁹ Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, x, ix

³⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, (New York, 1980) cited in Barron, *The 1926 Miners’ Lockout*, 250.

³¹ Barron, *The 1926 Miners’ Lockout*, 250.

³² Pierre Nora ed., *The Realms of Memory, The Construction of the French Past, Vol. 1: Conflicts and divisions*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 8.

other disciplines towards the 'linguistic turn' – emphasising the role of discourses in constructing people's experiences of reality. Yet, whilst few would deny the importance of discourses and representations to understanding historical experiences, such a focus must also be balanced by a simultaneous appreciation of how such discourses were *received* by their intended audiences. This point was made by Jon Lawrence in his criticisms of the similar direction taken by political history. A 'language based analysis of politics,' he pointed out, needed also to recognise the importance of reception, emphasising that to succeed, political discourses 'must engage with, and in part echo, pre-existing popular beliefs and aspirations.'³³ He called, therefore, for 'a greater critical attention on the relationship between political activists...and those they seek to represent...because this relationship is one of representation it must constantly be negotiated and renegotiated.'³⁴

If political attitudes can only be understood by looking at the representations of political parties and activists alongside popular attitudes, the same is true for collective memory – which must also balance an exploration of how the past was represented with how these were received by individual men and women. Wulf Kansteiner has made this exact point in his wide ranging survey of the state of memory studies – in particular criticising the way in which studies of collective memory have 'not yet paid enough attention to the problem of reception.'³⁵ Popular understandings of the past – or collective memory – cannot be reconstructed solely from the discourses that might have shaped it, for neither the characteristics of those discourses, 'nor the authors' objectives are good indicators for subsequent reception.'³⁶ He argues, therefore, that:

We should conceptualise collective memory as the result of the interaction among three types of historical factors: the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore or transform such artefacts according to their own interests.³⁷

³³ Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 52.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁵ Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding meaning in memory: A methodological critique of collective memory studies', in *History and Theory*, 41 (2002), 180.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

Such an approach has already been implicitly used by historians such as Penny Summerfield and Alistair Thomson. Summerfield's *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* explored the way in which particular female identities had been constructed in government policies, the press, popular culture and girls' magazines, whilst using oral history interviews to examine the extent to which these were reflected in the attitudes and memories of women who had lived through the war.³⁸ Meanwhile, Alastair Thomson's *Anzac Memories* explored the powerful narratives about the Anzac legend that featured in historical representations of the First World War in Australia, and how rank-and-file Australian soldiers had engaged in such narratives. Crucially, he emphasised how most of the men he interviewed 'referred to themselves as "Diggers" and not "Anzacs",' primarily engaging in a separate 'rank-and-file' identity which, whilst closely related to national narratives, 'did not necessarily carry the patriotic meanings that informed the language of Anzac.'³⁹ Significantly, therefore, this was an understanding of the past created by a more reciprocal relationship: 'the Australian soldiers did not just have a legend created by others about their experiences; they were actively involved in fashioning and promoting their own collective identity.'⁴⁰

The efforts to explore how public representations of the past were received has in some respects led to individual memory being brought back into the study of collective memory, as historians use individual recollections (most frequently in oral history interviews) to try to examine the effects such representations had on popular understandings of the past. This has, in turn, attracted criticisms over how such studies have approached and characterised individual memory. One problem with this approach is the way in which the thoughts of individual men and women about the past only appear when they are receiving or reworking wider narratives. In this sense, they only appear to exist in the specific context of their response to public representations, and are at other times rendered silent or invisible. Yet individual men and women clearly think about the past – particularly their own experiences of it – at other times as well, and the focus on individual recollections solely for what they say about reception thus ignores large aspects of wider public understandings of history.

Anna Green in particular has criticised the 'reductionist' nature of such approaches, and has also attacked the way in which the individual is denied any capacity to think independently or

³⁸ Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

³⁹ Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories, Living with the Legend*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 44.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

critically about the past. In response, she champions the independence of individual memory from wider collective narratives, writing that ‘memory is indisputably a faculty of the individual brain,’ and describing how ‘few would argue that there is any linear or aggregative relationship between individual memory and collective memory.’⁴¹ She concludes that, ‘individual memory and collective memories are often in tension,’ with individual recollections ‘frequently challenging the construction’ of collective accounts.⁴² In response, Graham Smith has argued that there are more options for oral historians than to focus on either the effects of cultural discourses or to romanticise the agency of individual memory.⁴³ In an article about the experiences of women who had worked in Dundee’s jute textile industry, he uses group discussion interviews to explore the relationship between individual and collective forms of remembering. He argues for the existence of another form of remembering ‘operating at the intersection between individual and group memory,’ which he called transactive memory.⁴⁴ This form of remembering was a process whereby small groups created their own collective memories of past experiences, and provided a forum in which people could ‘articulate and make meaning of memories of past individual experiences without grand narratives.’⁴⁵

This study examines collective memory as an interaction between public representations of the past and the memories and attitudes of individual men and women, mediated by wider intellectual and cultural traditions, as was advocated by Wulf Kansteiner. Yet the challenge is to do so in a manner that does not ignore or dismiss the agency and independence of individual memory in the construction of shared understandings of the past. This study, therefore, also attempts to look at individual recollections in their own right – not just for what they can reveal about the popular reception of wider narratives. In doing so, the influence of individual memory on those narratives, and its role in creating new collective memories becomes clearly and consistently apparent – a point that is emphasised throughout this work. This approach, therefore, seeks to answer the problem for collective memory studies that was raised by Fentress and Wickham, of ‘How to elaborate a conception of memory which, while doing full justice to the collective side of one’s conscious life, does not render the individual a sort of automaton, passively obeying the interiorised collective will.’⁴⁶ For them, the

⁴¹ Anna Green, ‘Individual Remembering and “Collective Memory”: Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates,’ in *Oral History*, 32, no. 2, (2004), 37.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 41-43.

⁴³ Graham Smith, ‘Beyond Individual/ Collective Memory: Women’s Transactive Memories of Food, Family and Conflict,’ in *Oral History*, 35, no. 2, (2007), 78, 88.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁶ Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, ix.

relationship between different types of memory is more fluid, and the ‘categories in which we discuss memory should be indefinite enough to avoid any sense of rigid boundaries separating one “type” of memory from another.’⁴⁷

The relationship between individual and collective remembering is thus one of the central questions of this study – as indeed it has been to many of the debates about collective memory. It is argued that individual and collective memory might better be understood as existing on the same spectrum, rather than as two distinctly different and separate types of remembering. This also means rejecting the idea that individual memory becomes either subsumed by, or else stands in defiance of, wider collective narratives. Instead, it is argued that individual memory is not necessarily oppositional towards collective memory, and nor are the two mutually exclusive. Rather, individual memories – though they could stand independent of wider collective frameworks – were integral to the collective memories that existed on the south Wales coalfield.

III

Beyond these continuing debates, collective memory studies have also paid an increasing amount of attention to the temporalities of memory. Bill Schwarz, for instance, has noted how temporality has been foregrounded in many studies, whilst Susannah Radstone has argued that the ‘non-linearity, circularity or timelessness of memory,’ poses challenges to the ‘linearity and the cause-and-effect structure’ of history and historical narratives.⁴⁸ Such debates have a direct relevance to collective memory within south Wales – where different experiences from the 1920s and 1930s were often recalled within very different conceptualisations of time. Temporality is thus the second central question of this study, alongside the nature of the relationship between individual and collective remembering.

One of the most influential historians to have written on temporalities is Reinhart Koselleck. In *Futures Past*, he examined time and history through what he termed a ‘conceptual pair’ – past

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁸ Bill Schwarz, ‘Not Even Past Yet,’ in *History Workshop Journal*, no. 57 (2004), 103; Susannah Radstone, ‘Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory,’ in *History Workshop Journal*, no. 59 (2005), 138.

experience and the 'horizon of expectation.'⁴⁹ He argued that, up until the late eighteenth century, 'the course and calculation of historical events was underwritten by...natural categories of time,' and that most people had lived primarily 'within the cycle of nature.'⁵⁰ In such societies, people's expectations 'subsisted entirely on the experiences of their predecessors...which in turn became those of their successors.'⁵¹ The closeness of this relationship between past experiences and future expectations was ruptured, however, by the French Revolution – a period of such dramatic and rapid societal change that time itself seemed to accelerate, and past experience ceased to serve as a guide to future expectations. The growing distance or 'asymmetry' between experience and expectation led to the disappearance of cyclical or 'naturalistic' understandings of time, and to the emergence of a more linear conception in which time was seen primarily as progress. He argued that rather than culminating in the Last Judgement, as had previously been assumed, time now reached into an 'open future,' with history seen 'as a long-term process of growing fulfilment which...was ultimately planned and carried out by men themselves.'⁵²

Far from being the most intrinsic or natural way of viewing the past, it was suggested that a linear conception of time – of history as a progression – was a relatively recent development in western society. Indeed, the historical contingency of modern understandings of time has been a recurring theme in much of the writing on temporalities. In an essay in 1967, for example, E.P. Thompson traced the emergence of much of our contemporary practical relationship with time – from the way it governs work and life, to even the language and phrases we use to talk about it – to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵³ During this period, a working-day based on strict adherence to clocks and fixed schedules was imposed due to the demands of industrial capitalism, and as a result, seasonal and cyclical patterns of life and work gave way to more formal and measured understandings of the passage of time.

Stephen Kern, meanwhile, has claimed that the growing pre-eminence of these formal and linear temporalities led to a significant reaction against them in the decades before the First World War. Sociologists and anthropologists highlighted the 'social relativity of time' and

⁴⁹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 33, 276.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 37, 278.

⁵³ E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism,' in *Past and Present*, no. 38, (1967), 73.

‘challenged the temporal ethnocentrism of Western Europe,’ whilst a ‘series of sweeping changes in technology and culture’ also led to ‘distinctive new modes of thinking about time and space.’⁵⁴ The turn of the century thus saw a number of writers, artists and other thinkers arguing for ‘a plurality of private times’ in the face of the seemingly remorseless advance of a standardised and universal public time.⁵⁵ Yet just as the dominance of linear time over public conceptions of the past was being challenged, it began to exert an increasing influence over more personal ways of thinking. Rhodri Hayward has shown that, although the ability to recount our past experiences is now ‘widely seen as the bedrock of our sense of self,’ there is ‘nothing straightforward about our ready equation of identity with history.’⁵⁶ Instead, the close association of our sense of self with a chronological personal history was a specific development of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that had been driven by ‘new forms of religious narratives and theological arguments,’ and he pointed out that ‘other societies and cultures maintain quite different conceptions of selfhood.’⁵⁷

More recently, work by Emily Robinson and Jeremy Nuttall has explored the ways in which political parties have conceptualised time when talking about both the past and the future. Robinson has argued that both left and right-wing uses of history – though different in many respects – have historically been underpinned by the same assumptions about the basic linearity of time. Since the late 1970s, however, both Labour and Conservative attitudes towards history have converged into a ‘presentist’ way of thinking, in which history no longer imposed any duties or responsibilities on those invoking it (either of maintaining traditions or of continuing a legacy of past struggles), but served only the needs of the immediate present. The past was no longer connected with the present and the future, but had become detached, leaving politicians ‘unable to speak of radically different futures.’⁵⁸ Nuttall, meanwhile, has examined how the Labour Party imagined such futures in the middle part of the twentieth century. Throughout this period, he claimed, ‘Labour saw socialism as something both fast and slow,’ with the party’s ideas of progress split between short-term aims that were ‘relatively immediately achievable,’ and longer-term ‘cultural, ethical and educational change.’⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 19, 34-35, 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁶ Rhodri Hayward, *Resisting History, Religious Transcendence and the Invention of the Unconscious*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6, 1.

⁵⁸ Emily Robinson, *History, Heritage and Tradition in Contemporary British Politics, Past Politics and Present Histories*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 2.

⁵⁹ Jeremy Nuttall, ‘Pluralism, the People, and Time in Labour Party History, 1931-1964,’ in *The Historical Journal*, no. 3, (2013), 731, 729.

Although this ‘pluralism of time-frames’ primarily reflected a difference between the party’s left and right, the two perspectives were ‘not always conflicting,’ and indeed, both could sometimes be seen even within the thinking of specific individuals.⁶⁰

The plurality of time was one of the other major themes in Koselleck’s writings. Though he argued that the French Revolution had precipitated a general shift towards a linear, historical perspective, he acknowledged that this transformation had been neither total nor universal. The political, intellectual and technological worlds, for example, had already been long affected by ‘a consciousness of difference between traditional experience and coming expectation’ and he argued that there were multiple layers of history, each moving according to different temporalities.⁶¹ Some events could even straddle the boundaries between these temporal layers. Koselleck gave a hypothetical example of a legal dispute over labour rights, which could be seen as a dramatic historical event in itself, as part of long-term social, economic and legal trends, or as both simultaneously. The same court-case could thus be ‘differentially classified with respect to temporality’ depending on the particular history that was being written.⁶² He argued, therefore, that there was no such thing as a singular historical time, but rather ‘many forms of time superimposed on one another.’⁶³ History was thus conceived in a plurality of varied and overlapping temporalities – historical time itself a contingent ‘entity which alters along with history.’⁶⁴

Koselleck’s conception of historical time as plural is important to understanding the collective memories of the mining communities of south Wales. Indeed, such a conception is, to a large extent, demanded by the CHP interviews and the particular temporal challenges that they pose when using them to explore how the experiences of the inter-war years were remembered. The first of these challenges relates to the recollections of underground accidents, which – though exceptionally common in the CHP interviews – rarely, if ever, have a date or even a period of time attached to them. It is thus extremely difficult to look only at memories of accidents from the 1920s and 1930s, and even were this possible, imposing such a cut-off point would be highly artificial, given that the experiences of such dangers remained very similar after the outbreak of war and even after nationalisation. The second relates to the memories of hardship and unemployment, which can be examined through both the oral

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 731, 755.

⁶¹ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 277.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 109-110.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, xxii.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

history interviews from the 1970s, and sociological surveys and reports from the time. In many parts of south Wales the depression began with the defeat of the miners' lockout in 1921, and lasted until the early years of the Second World War. Looking at the collective memories *of* this experience *from* the inter-war years onwards, means that, at times, this study is exploring the memories *of* an event *during* that event itself – i.e. how something was being remembered whilst it was still actually happening.

These problems of time and chronology are largely a consequence of attempting to write a linear history of events that were experienced and remembered within very different temporalities. Linear historical time does not help to understand how the depression was remembered during the 1920s and 1930s at a time when it was still ongoing, nor does it help to understand memories of deaths and injuries that were less a historical event than they were a constant presence. This study thus focuses on the various conceptions of time in which the experiences of the inter-war years were remembered. Memories of strikes and lockouts, alongside those of the police and strike-breakers, were often remembered within a heroic linear narrative of progress through struggle – as part of an unfolding sequence of events in a story of the coalfield's history. The dangers of working underground, however, appear instead to have been understood within a cyclical conception of time – as an eternally recurring and unchanging feature of life within the pit villages, rather than as specific historical events. The depression, meanwhile was too big and significant an event to be understood within either of these temporalities. Instead, it appeared to be understood within what might be termed a 'discontinuous' conception of time. It stood out as an exceptional period, as a major disjuncture or rupture within the coalfield's history that shattered and remade conceptions of both time and society.

This study therefore, like much of the work on temporalities discussed above, argues that linear understandings of time were relatively modern and historically contingent. Historical time was plural, complex and overlapping, and the various temporalities that are inherent within the collective memories of the inter-war years emphasise the need to be aware of the many different ways of thinking about the past, present and future and the relationship between them. Most importantly, however, this study looks at popular understandings of time. Research about temporalities has been primarily at an abstract or conceptual level, or, where it is anchored in historical examples, has looked at understandings of time as a cultural or intellectual phenomenon. But there is also a need to examine how these cultural and intellectual concepts and developments were reflected, reworked or rejected by the wider

population. This study thus looks at the popular consciousness of time amongst the men and women of the mining communities of south Wales, at how such understandings shaped their world-views, and at how they were, in turn, shaped by the experiences of the those communities between the wars.

IV

Beyond the wider historiography on collective memory and temporalities, there has also been a considerable amount of historical research on the south Wales coalfield itself, particularly since the publication of *The Fed*. The arguments of Francis and Smith – about the distinctive culture of the south Wales miners, their commitment to radical, extra-parliamentary politics, and the centrality of the miners’ union to coalfield society – have since been echoed by a number of historians. Stefan Berger has supported many of their arguments in a comparative article on south Wales and the Ruhr coalfield, whilst Sue Bruley’s study of the 1926 lockout, though differing substantially from Francis and Smith in foregrounding the experience of women and gender relations, also ‘takes the view that in some respects coalfield society at this time did possess significant “alternative” features and that these were further developed during the temporary period of the lockout.’⁶⁵ Most recently of all, Ben Curtis’s work on the south Wales miners extends many of the same conclusions reached by *The Fed* about the inter-war years to the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁶

Many other historians, however, have challenged the arguments about the radical coalfield and its alternative culture. Kenneth O. Morgan, for instance, has argued that Wales was ‘not a revolutionary country,’ stressing the repeated electoral domination of Labour on coalfield politics, and dismissing the instances of ‘radical’ political culture, such as strikes, hunger marches and the publication of *The Miners’ Next Step* as ‘diversions from the main theme’ whose significance had been ‘greatly exaggerated.’⁶⁷ Ina-Maria Zweiniger-Bargielowska’s study of nationalisation and industrial relationships has similarly concluded that the militancy and

⁶⁵ Stefan Berger, ‘Working-Class Culture in the Ruhr and South Wales: a Comparison’, in *Llafur*, 8, no. 2, (2001); Sue Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926, The General Strike and Miners’ Lockout in South Wales*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), 13.

⁶⁶ Ben Curtis, *The South Wales Miners 1964-1985*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

⁶⁷ Kenneth O. Morgan, ‘The Welsh in English Politics, 1868-1982’, in *Welsh Society and Nationhood: Historical Essays Presented to Glanmor Williams*, ed. R. R. Davies, Ralph A. Griffiths, Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and Kenneth O. Morgan (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1984), 249, 250.

radicalism of the south Wales miners has been overstated, and that the Labour Party's dominance indicated rather an 'acceptance of the established order.'⁶⁸ Mike Lieven, meanwhile, has pointed out in two separate articles how the work of Francis and Smith (and those who have followed them), with its focus on political and industrial militancy has marginalised or even silenced significant sections of the mining communities. Miners who were not active in the lodge, for example, were largely absent, whilst those who were not members of the Federation, or had broken strikes were usually demonised. He also argued that the electoral dominance of Labour disguised the fact that significant proportions of the coalfield's population did not share those same political sympathies. Even in Mardy, 'Little Moscow' itself, a substantial and active Conservative Club provided local opposition to the dominance of the Communist Party.⁶⁹ The most striking exclusion of all from the historiography of the coalfield, however, were women, who were rendered 'largely invisible' by the exclusive focus on the activities of the union.⁷⁰ Lieven thus did not deny the existence of the alternative culture described by Francis and Smith – indeed, he went out of his way to acknowledge its presence in the 'Mardy, Tonypandy and Tredegar which they represent so brilliantly.'⁷¹ What he argued instead was that this was just one aspect of the history of the coalfield; that this alternative cultural pattern was not representative of all mining communities nor everyone within them; and that we would 'not even begin to understand' coalfield society by 'privileging...about thirty men in the lodge against the rest of the community.'⁷²

Lieven had himself written a very different sort of history to those union centric narratives in his study of the village of Senghennydd. The experiences of the community beyond its political attitudes and industrial struggles was central to this work, as the routines of everyday life, the importance of religion, the roles played by shopkeepers and other members of the community and, in particular, the experiences of women, were explored. What resulted was an invaluable insight into other experiences of life within the pit villages, which stands in stark contrast to the picture presented by works like *The Fed*. To take one example, Lieven showed how, for women, the early coalfield was a society that 'teetered on the brink of bestial violence,' with

⁶⁸ Ina-Maria Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Industrial Relationships and Nationalization in the South Wales Coalmining Industry,' (PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1989), 103-111.

⁶⁹ Mike Lieven, 'A New History of the South Wales Coalfield?', in *Llafur*, 8, No. 3, (2002), 96-97.

⁷⁰ Mike Lieven, 'A Fractured Working-Class Consciousness? The Case of the Lady Windsor Colliery Lodge, 1921', in *Welsh History Review*, 21, No. 4, (2003), 749-50.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 754-755.

⁷² Lieven, 'A New History,' 101.

local newspaper and court records revealing the appallingly frequent instances of domestic and sexual violence, whilst also demonstrating the fundamental role that women played in holding their families and communities together.⁷³ According to Lieven, ‘Senghennydd and villages like it form a contrast to some of the more radicalised communities of the Rhondda,’ that had been identified by Francis and Smith.⁷⁴

It is important to emphasise, however, that Francis and Smith were fully aware that the works they were writing were not entirely representative of the experiences of the whole of the mining communities. *The Fed* was never intended to be a wholly balanced and impartial history, but was, as alluded to before, an explicitly political work, intended to inspire and provide a resource for future struggle, written at a time which, as they correctly realised, would be crucial in determining the future of their communities. In his reflections on the interviews that he had carried out for CHP, for example, Hywel Francis acknowledged the influence of the very same Conservative Club in Mardy that Lieven had mentioned. ‘There was indeed,’ he wrote, ‘a well-developed tradition of working-class Toryism in the heart of Bolshevik territory,’ one which ‘provided a homogeneous fairly well organised political opposition’ and which qualified ‘very much the picture of the all-powerful Communist Party.’⁷⁵ Francis and Smith’s condescending dismissal of the ‘Con Club’ in *The Fed* – of which Lieven had complained – was by no means a misguided historical judgement, but rather a very deliberate occlusion made for political reasons.

It should also be noted that Lieven’s book presents just as distorted a view of the mining communities as do the works he criticised – perhaps deliberately so. In his account, the SWMF is not just relegated to the background, but almost invisible, whilst the epic lockouts of 1921 and 1926 are also largely disregarded. Chris Williams has properly emphasised the importance of both aspects of the coalfield’s history, and that to divide them ‘is to write a history unrecognisable to those who lived through it.’⁷⁶ The radicalism and militancy of a significant section of the miners and their families was an important feature of south Wales and should not be ignored or downplayed, but nor should it be cast as the only story or historical experience of the coalfield. Rather than being seen as in opposition, *The Fed* and *Senghennydd*

⁷³ Michael Lieven, *Senghennydd, The Universal Pit Village 1890-1930*, (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1994), 141.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁷⁵ SWML, *Final Report of the Coalfield History Project*, 140-41.

⁷⁶ Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society, 1885-1951*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 6.

should be read together, as both providing invaluable (if partial) accounts of the mining valleys of south Wales in the early twentieth century.

In this respect, the debate over whether emphasis should be placed on the conventional aspects of coalfield society, or whether it should be characterised as a radical storm-centre of extra parliamentary struggle, is not a major theme or question of this study. Instead, both are explored together, as both being important to understanding the historical experiences of the mining communities. However, one aspect of this debate that is directly relevant is the nature of the relationship between the Labour and Communist parties. In examining representations of the past within the coalfield, this study uses the records of both parties, as well as individual Labour and Communist figures. This, of course, makes any differences in the way that the two political cultures represented the past an important factor in understanding collective memory. Yet despite the way in which the two parties are often cast as distinct, rival traditions, in practice, their representations of the mining communities' history are often strikingly similar. This may have been because oppositional political affiliations could sometimes be overridden by a common occupational loyalty. In the Durham coalfield, for example, Hester Barron has argued that different gender, regional, or political identities were instead structured around a primary occupational identity, and therefore did not weaken, but rather 'tended to complement a dominant occupational culture.'⁷⁷ This overriding loyalty to the union was therefore 'able to shroud even the most unlikely political differences and allow apparently contradictory ideological positions to exist.'⁷⁸

The pre-eminence of occupational loyalties over political ones might also be argued to have existed in south Wales. Max Goldberg, for example, recalled his days as a Communist activist and remembered how he would 'never accept' party instructions 'which conflicted with my responsibilities in the union,' adding that he still stood 'by that view.'⁷⁹ Another activist, Phil Abrahams, had actually left the Communist Party after it decided 'to go into socialism through the House of Commons,' as he saw no need for two parliamentary parties and would support the one 'that had its base in the trade unions.'⁸⁰ Meanwhile, Mavis Llewellyn explained the popularity of her district's first Communist councillor by explaining that he 'had identified

⁷⁷ Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*, 257-58.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁷⁹ SWML, AUD/347, Interview with Max Goldberg, 6 September, 1972.

⁸⁰ SWML, AUD/329, Interview with Phil Abrahams, 14 January, 1974.

himself with all the miners' struggles, so that in a mining community he was very popular.'⁸¹ Several other examples from the CHP interviews could also be quoted, and they suggest that when it came to the mining communities, political differences were often subsumed by this common occupational loyalty. Will Paynter, who succeeded Arthur Horner as the General Secretary of the NUM, claimed that the loyalty to the union was so strong that it was 'regarded as a substitute for political organisation.'⁸² This is not to suggest that there were no differences – and indeed, where such differences are apparent, they are discussed – but otherwise, the similarities in the way that the miners' past was represented by both parties means that the relationship between the Labour and the Communist Party is not a major theme.

V

The principal sources used to look at individual and collective memories within the south Wales coalfield are the oral history interviews that were conducted by the CHP in the 1970s. Between 1972 and 1974, against the backdrop of the miners' industrial victories, the four researchers – Hywel Francis, David Egan, Alun Morgan and Merfyn Jones – recorded the memories of 176 men and women. Over the course of the decade, these interviews were supplemented by a large number of smaller studies and projects which brought the total number of recordings to well over 600, and this study is based on a selection of 198 of these. Some of these people were interviewed multiple times, but as other interviews were with multiple people, the total number of individuals spoken to was slightly higher at 203. The majority of these interviews were taken from the first project that was carried out between 1972 and 1974, with most of the remainder drawn from two studies carried out by Philippa Dolan and Alun Burge in 1975 and 1978 respectively.⁸³ Unsurprisingly, given that the purpose of the first Coalfield History Project was to record and preserve the 'alternative culture' of the coalfield, the interviews focused largely on what were seen to be the manifestations of that culture – strikes and lockouts, protests and demonstrations, clashes with the police, and the campaigns against the SWMIU. Despite this primary focus however, the interviews covered a wide range of different themes and subjects – including the inter-war depression, migration and the dangers of the pit – and remain an invaluable resource for looking at most aspects of

⁸¹ SWML, AUD/98, Interview with Mavis Llewellyn, 20 May, 1974.

⁸² Will Paynter, *My Generation* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), 111.

⁸³ For more information about the various studies and projects – and for an explanation of how these 198 interviews were selected – see Appendix I.

life within mining communities. Individual recollections could often be considerably varied and diverse, and, as Merfyn Jones noted, 'the informants showed scant respect for...attempts to card-index their lives.'⁸⁴

Aside from the four researchers, the first project also employed two transcribers – Mrs C.M. Jones and Mrs M.M. Robinson – who together transcribed a substantial number of the interviews that had been carried out between 1972 and 1974. Not all of these transcripts have been used here, as many of the interviews transcribed were of local leaders or NUM officials and it was decided to focus primarily on the interviews with women and more rank-and-file miners. However, of the 198 interviews used in this study, there were transcripts available for 92 – for the other 106 (including all of those carried out by Philippa Dolan and Alun Burge) there remain only audio recordings. The majority of the interviews used in this study were therefore listened to directly, and even of those that were transcribed, just over half were listened to alongside the transcriptions.⁸⁵

As has become evident from having listened to the recordings alongside them, the transcripts are exceptionally accurate, and are more or less word-perfect renderings of the interviews into text. This is not to say that they are by themselves a complete substitute for the recordings. As Alessandro Portelli has noted, 'in oral history much of the meaning is couched in how things are told as much as in what is told,' and being able to listen to the recordings provides invaluable insights into how things were said, and how the person felt about what they were remembering, which cannot be derived from the text alone.⁸⁶ Although these problems can be avoided by listening to the tapes (as has been done for more than three-quarters of the interviews), they can resurface again in any attempt to quote or analyse them in writing. Portelli has described the difficulties involved in writing about oral sources, and of how any attempt to capture people's words in written form risks 'turning eloquent oral performances into unreadable texts.'⁸⁷ At occasional points in this study there is indeed a dissonance between what appears to be the meaning of the words on the page, and the actual meaning of the person who spoke them that is clearly evident when listening to their voice and their tone

⁸⁴ SWML, *Final Report of the Coalfield History Project*, 216.

⁸⁵ Due to constraints on the amount of time I was able to spend in the archives, around 40 of the transcripts were photocopied or photographed and were analysed away from the SWML on the basis of the transcribed text alone.

⁸⁶ Alessandro Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

on the recording itself. It should thus be emphasised that throughout this study, wherever a claim is made about how someone who was interviewed felt, or about what they meant by what they said, these are based exclusively on interviews which have also been listened to.

As mentioned above, this study primarily looks at memories of the inter-war years, and although a number of sociological surveys, together with a few other records, do provide some insight into individual memory from the 1930s onwards, it is only the large number of interviews carried out by CHP in the 1970s that provide a substantial enough source base for any detailed analysis of individual memories. Yet, whilst these interviews provide an invaluable insight into recollections of the inter-war years during the 1970s, they are not a reliable indication of how the events of that time would have been remembered in the decades before. Indeed, in the intervening years between the events themselves and the time people were interviewed, memories may have changed substantially. In particular, subsequent events such as the Second World War, the nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947, the mass pit closures of the 1960s and the victorious strikes of 1972 and 1974 are likely to have significantly influenced how the inter-war period was remembered. Whilst it is still interesting to discuss how people's memories might have been affected by such events, attempting to trace how specific individuals' memories might have changed is an exceptionally difficult task – even perhaps for the individuals concerned. Therefore, whilst this study looks at representations of the inter-war years from the 1920s and 1930s onwards and attempts to suggest how collective memory might have changed over time, it is principally a study of the collective memory of the inter-war years as it existed during the 1970s.

There are also some other problems in using the CHP interviews. The recordings are not (and were never intended to be) a balanced cross-section of coalfield society, and are therefore not fully representative of gender or geographical divisions, nor of differences between 'activists' and the 'rank-and-file.' Because of the community study approach that was adopted by the first CHP (and later by Alun Burge and Philippa Dolan), the interviews are heavily concentrated in just a few small villages or areas of the coalfield – namely the upper Swansea Valley, Mardy and the Rhondda, Bedlinog, and the villages around the colliery at Nine Mile Point. Though this approach provides detailed and invaluable insights into the experiences of specific communities, it means that there are very few interviews from the larger towns within the coalfield (such as Pontypool, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Aberdare, Pontypridd or Neath) where many miners and their families lived. Thus the interviews primarily provide an insight into memories and attitudes within a particular type of mining community, rather than all mining

communities. This study in particular is also distorted by not including any interviews that were carried out in the Welsh language. Though twenty-four such interviews were recorded by the CHP, I do not speak Welsh well enough to use them. The majority of the coalfield was English-speaking by the end of the First World War, but the absence of any in Welsh again means that this study is not fully representative of the whole coalfield, particularly of the western edges in Carmarthenshire where it was most widely spoken.

The substantial amount of movement and migration within the coalfield further complicates any attempts at a regional comparison of memory. As the CHP researchers themselves noted, 'coalfield society was far more fluid, mobile and less self-contained...than was first anticipated.'⁸⁸ Of the 203 people interviewed, 46 had moved within south Wales from one village or valley to another, whilst a further seventeen had left it altogether at some point during their lives. Yet it should be emphasised that the mobility of the men and women of the mining communities is in no sense a weakness of the interviews, nor a methodological problem or challenge to be overcome. It was, rather, a significant feature of the coalfield that is integral to any attempt to understand the mining communities of south Wales. Amongst other things, it challenges the stereotypical ideas that such communities were isolated, static and unchanging, and also undermines the attempts to explain their powerful collective memories as being a consequence of their supposed continuity and stability. This migration and movement, and in particular its effect on collective memory, is also a recurring theme within this study.

The interviews are also skewed by gender. Of the 203 people in the interviews chosen, there were 129 men compared to just 74 women, with those 74 representing nearly all the interviews carried out with women amongst the 600 recordings. The researchers themselves lamented the failure to interview more women – Alun Morgan, for example, made 'repeated efforts...to interview a woman on her own' for his community study of Bedlinog, but unfortunately the most he could achieve was to interview a few women alongside their husbands.⁸⁹ Furthermore, a systematic comparison of gender differences even amongst these interviews is also very difficult. Over half of the women interviewed were from Philippa Dolan's study in the Swansea Valley, and it is thus hard to ascribe the differences that can be seen in the recordings to either gender or geographical location. To give one example, bitter

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

memories of strike-breaking appear to be more common amongst men than amongst women (29 of 129 compared to 11 out of 74). However, not one of the women interviewed by Dolan recalled any such incidents, and if her interviews are taken out of the statistics, then the number of women who had hostile recollections of strike-breakers jumps to one-third, compared to less than a quarter of men. It is impossible, however, to say with any certainty that the lack of hostility displayed by the women of Ystradgynlais and Ystalyfera was related to where they lived, and therefore safely exclude them from an analysis of gender differences. Gender identities were obviously an important influence on what was remembered and the way in which such experiences were recalled, and this study does try to highlight such differences where they are apparent. Where such differences are less clear, or where there appears to be little distinction between how men and women remembered, it tries to accord a greater relative prominence to the recollections of women in an attempt to better reflect the experiences of the whole of the mining communities.

Part of the reason for the imbalance between the numbers of men and women interviewed, was that the principal interests of the CHP were strikes and trade union militancy. Hywel Francis himself thought that there had been an 'excessive emphasis on the history of organised labour at the expense of other...areas' in the oral history project, though as he also pointed out, it had been impossible to attempt everything.⁹⁰ This does mean, however, that activists and officials from the miners' union and the Labour and Communist parties are also overrepresented in the recordings. Of the 203 interviews, 65 were with individuals who were either a member of a political party or had held some official position within the SWMF or NUM. This imbalance is a particular problem in relation to memories of strikes and protests, as powerful memories of past struggles were a central element of the alternative culture that was supposed to have existed, and one would naturally expect to find more evidence of such memories amongst those who were politically or industrially active. There is an obvious danger, therefore, of presenting the memories of a relatively small and especially politicised section of the coalfield's population as representative of the whole. As a consequence, this study attempts to offset the imbalances in the interviews by drawing more heavily on the interviews with the 'rank-and-file', whilst political affiliations or union positions are acknowledged whenever such individuals are quoted.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

Yet, though it is important to be aware of the fact that the CHP interviews represent a particularly politicised cross-section of the mining communities, care must be taken not to overemphasise the distinction between ‘activists’ and the rank-and-file.’ As Chris Williams notes, such people often ‘shared homes, pubs, clubs, chapels, relatives, perhaps even lovers.’⁹¹ It is even more important to avoid characterising people who were active in political or trade union matters as in any way separate or external to the communities they led and represented. The overwhelming majority of the leaders and officials within the SWMF – including the most prominent – had emerged from within the pit villages themselves. Figures like Aneurin Bevan, Federation president Arthur Horner and the Communist Party activist and novelist Lewis Jones had all worked underground, and had directly experienced the strikes, dangers of the pit, poverty and unemployment and clashes with police and strikebreakers that they talked and wrote about. Such figures were intrinsically linked with their wider communities, and closely resemble the ‘organic intellectuals’ that Antonio Gramsci argued were indispensable to any genuine working-class movement.⁹²

One final absence in the CHP interviews were the scarce references to the First World War. This was, in large part, because it simply wasn’t asked about. The researchers were mostly interested in the experiences of the 1920s and 1930s rather than those of the war years, and even when the conflict was brought up by those being interviewed, they did not push them far for their thoughts or recollections. Of those who did mention the conflict, only six were women, whilst over half were political or SWMF activists who primarily recalled pacifism, conscientious objection and their experiences with the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Though an interesting and important aspect of the coalfield’s experience of the First World War, it was not representative of a south Wales in which, as Kenneth O. Morgan has claimed, ‘the overwhelming mass’ of people ‘threw themselves into the war with gusto.’⁹³ As is noted later, both the union and their opponents were subsequently to make use of war-rhetoric, particularly in relation to strikes, during the early 1920s. It remains impossible, however, to say whether such attempts were engaged with by the wider population of the coalfield, or to examine collective memories of the First World War more broadly.

⁹¹ Chris Williams, *Capitalism, Community and Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield, 1898-1947*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 47-8.

⁹² Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, ed., and trans., Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 5-14.

⁹³ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, Wales 1880-1980*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 159.

VI

Despite these challenges, the CHP interviews remain an incredibly important source for understanding the mining communities of south Wales, and provide an invaluable insight into individual memory and broader popular consciousness. It is therefore surprising that the CHP's interviews have been so little used by historians. The only substantial use made of the recordings was in *The Fed*, and in Hywel Francis' *Miners Against Fascism* – and in both cases, they are used in an illustrative manner, or to provide an insight into a specific historical experience (such as those of the miners who fought in the International Brigades). Subsequent historians have used individual interviews or small selections of them in their own works about the coalfield, but there has been no attempt to use them on a systematic basis to explore the attitudes and experiences of the men and women of the pit villages.

This is what this study attempts to do. It explores how the events of the 1920s and 1930s were remembered by the people who had lived through them, and at how the interaction of those recollections with coalfield representations of that past led to the emergence of collective memories within the mining communities. Focusing firstly upon the memories of strikes, lockouts and other protests, Chapter I examines the attempts by the union and others to construct a heroic, linear narrative of progress through struggle, and the extent to which such narratives were engaged with by the miners and their families. It also looks at other memories of strikes that existed on the coalfield, including a collective memory in which they were recalled as instances of solidarity rather than confrontation. It is argued that this memory emerged out of the experiences of individual men and women, independent of the representations of the union or the press, thus demonstrating the influence of individual recollections in shaping and creating shared understandings of the past.

Chapter II then moves on to discuss memories of accidents underground. It examines the narratives about the 'Price of Coal' that were created through a reciprocal interaction between personal recollections of deaths and injuries in the pit, and representations of those dangers by the union. Its primary focus however, unlike the exploration of memories of strikes, is not the relationship between individual and collective remembering but the temporalities of those memories. It is argued that the dangers of the pit were understood within a conception of time that was cyclical, rather than linear, and which was rooted in the recurring, cyclical nature of

danger, work and life within the pit villages. The third chapter explores memories of poverty and unemployment during the 1920s and 1930s, and explains how a collective memory of 'hard times' emerged across the coalfield despite considerable variations in experience. It focuses on both the relationship between individual and collective memory and on conceptions of time, arguing firstly that individual memories of hardship were integral to the wider collective memory that emerged, and secondly that mass unemployment and migration were experienced as a fundamental rupture to the nature of coalfield society. The economic collapse was thus remembered in a third, discontinuous conception of time. The fourth and final chapter examines how confrontations with the police and with strike-breakers were recalled. There were strong and bitter memories of both police and blacklegs within the pit villages – as might be expected – but such memories were also very complex and nuanced, with exceptions often made for particular individuals. Those individuals were able to make such exceptions because, as individuals, they were never subsumed by collective memory, but were an integral part of it – remaining fully in control of the wider narratives that belonged to them, and which they had created.

I

‘Do you remember 1926?’ – Collective Memories of Protests, Strikes and Lockouts.

Do you remember 1926? That summer of soups and speeches,
The sunlight on the idle wheels and the deserted crossings,
And the laughter and the cursing in the moonlit streets?

Do you remember 1926? The slogans and the penny concerts,
The jazz bands and the moorland picnics,
And the slanderous tongues of famous cities?

Do you remember 1926? The great dream and the swift disaster,
The fanatic and the traitor, and more than all,
The bravery of the simple, faithful folk?

‘Ay, Ay, we remember 1926,’ said Dai and Shinkin,
As they stood on the kerb in Charing Cross Road,
‘And we shall remember 1926 until our blood is dry.’¹

In ‘Gwalia Deserta,’ his dramatic poem about inter-war south Wales, Idris Davies encapsulated the conventional ideas about the collective memory of mining communities more succinctly and evocatively than perhaps anyone has managed since. Three times the poem asked, ‘do you remember 1926,’ on each occasion describing the memorable events of that year, before eventually Dai and Shinkin, two Welsh miners now exiled to the streets of London, replied that they would, indeed, ‘remember 1926 until our blood is dry.’² The impression evoked by his lines, of the great lockout seared into the memories of the miners, is one that is familiar to much of the historiography of mining communities – and that of south Wales in particular. A history of heroic past struggles, a reminder of past triumphs and injustices handed down within the pit villages as an inspiration for future struggles, is the sort of collective memory with which such communities are most closely associated. References by historians and

¹ Idris Davies, ‘Gwalia Deserta VIII’ (1938), in *The Collected Poems of Idris Davies*, ed. Islwyn Jenkins, (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2011), 30.

² *Ibid.*, 30.

sociologists to coalfield collective memories almost always refer to the memory of strikes and protests – such as 1926 – rather than to accidents underground, pit disasters or the inter-war depression. Similarly, the strong collective memory that was argued to be a central feature of the ‘alternative culture’ of the south Wales coalfield was also primarily one of past struggles. This chapter focuses on the collective memories of strikes and protests that emerged across the coalfield, exploring how such events were remembered by the men and women of the pit villages, and the extent to which those memories did indeed represent the distinctive political and industrial consciousness that many feared was ebbing away, and which the CHP had sought to record and preserve.

As noted above, many historians of south Wales – from Hywel Francis and David Smith, to Neil Evans and Diane Preece – have referred to the importance of a collective memory of past struggles. Such studies, however, have not explored such memories in any depth. Neil Evans has noted how the memory of the Tonypandy riots in particular was politically contested, with the Communist Party acclaiming the miners’ resistance, whilst others used the example of the riots as a ‘warning against this kind of action.’³ Yet beyond this, the role played by collective memory is typically just alluded to without being fully examined. The only substantial study is Hester Barron’s work on the Durham coalfield, which detailed the attempts of the Durham Miners’ Association (DMA) to create ‘a heroic national and regional chronicle of coal and its people,’ in which 1926 sat alongside 1893, 1912 and 1921, and was later joined by the strikes of the 1970s and 1980s.⁴ Crucially, this narrative was one of progress as well as grievance, one in which the DMA had played a key role in achieving gains for the miners. Yet Barron looked beyond the efforts of the DMA to construct a heroic narrative of progress through struggle, to the memories of the miners and their families who had lived through the lockout. Through the use of oral history interviews, she showed that, alongside this heroic narrative, memories of 1926 were also ‘fractured and diverse, differentiated by an individuals’ age, gender and personal circumstances.’⁵ As will be seen below, memories of strikes, lockouts and protests in south Wales were similarly complex.

Narratives of progress through struggle were also important to political parties on the left and other progressive movements across Britain, not just to miners’ trade unions. In two articles on Popular Front pageants in the 1930s, Mick Wallis described how a progressive history of the

³ Evans, ‘South Wales has been roused as never before’, 194.

⁴ Barron, *The 1926 Miners’ Lockout*, 226.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

past struggles of the working-class was evoked in mass, dramatic displays to provide support and inspiration for contemporary struggles. He argued that these performances were 'part of a felt tradition of protest and celebration,' and were an important element in 'the struggle for the right to public space' – both physical and discursive.⁶ Such a history had also been invoked by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in 1934, as they staged celebrations to mark the centenary of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. As Clare Griffiths has noted, the commemorations were intended to rally existing members and consolidate support in the wake of the industrial defeats of the 1920s and the political disaster of 1931. The events were intended to 'provide more enduring resources of influence and inspiration,' and the 'accent in the commemorations was on progress.'⁷ Mythologised accounts of the past were also hugely important to the Labour Party, as demonstrated by Jon Lawrence. Using political autobiographies and popular histories written by Labour activists, he explored the various, mythologised narrative frameworks in which the history of the party and its prominent individuals had been written. Amongst these myths was the 'forward march of Labour,' a narrative in which Labour was assumed to be 'marching towards the promised land,' with its ultimate victory inevitable.⁸ The 'forward march' had been a significant element in representations of Labour's past even in the aftermath of the 1931 election, and these assumed a 'generally triumphalist tone,' following the landslide victory in 1945.⁹ Emily Robinson has also shown the importance of the past to parties across the political spectrum. For socialists, she argues, 'history carries a double obligation: to recover and remember past struggles and oppressions and to carry forward the outrage necessary to reshape the future.'¹⁰ Implicit to this view of history (as it was also to the 'forward march') was a teleological utopianism in which the past was moving progressively towards an eventual victory.

The efforts of the SWMF to construct a similar narrative could draw on a long history of political and industrial struggles. In 1831, miners and ironworkers at Merthyr Tydfil raised the red flag, seized control of the town and defeated several regiments of soldiers before order was finally restored. Eight years later, it was miners and ironworkers from the eastern valleys

⁶ Mick Wallis, 'Pageantry and the Popular Front: Ideological Production in the 'Thirties', in *New Theatre Quarterly*, 10, no. 38, (1994), 134; Mick Wallis, 'The Popular Front Pageant: Its Emergence and Decline,' in *New Theatre Quarterly*, 11, no. 41, (1994), 22.

⁷ Clare Griffiths, 'Remembering Tolpuddle: Rural History and Commemoration in the Inter-War Labour Movement', in *History Workshop Journal*, no. 44 (1997), 151, 160.

⁸ Jon Lawrence, 'Labour – the myths it has lived by,' in *Labour's First Century*, ed. Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 349, 360.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 360.

¹⁰ Robinson, *History, Heritage and Tradition*, 22.

who rose in arms, descending upon Newport to demand the implementation of the People's Charter, only to be met by soldiers and shot down outside the Westgate hotel. Of a less spectacular (though terrifyingly effective) nature, was the violence and intimidation enacted by the Scotch Cattle, a secretive organisation of colliers who enforced strikes through ritualised attacks on blacklegs, managers and coalowners from the 1820s through to the 1840s. Yet despite this early political and industrial turbulence, trade unionism was slow to develop amongst the south Wales miners (particularly in comparison with the north-east of England), with the SWMF only founded in 1898 following a six-month strike across the coalfield. There was then an upsurge in militancy before the First World War, with the Cambrian Combine Strike seeing the deployment of police and troops to the mid-Rhondda, whose infamous confrontations with the strikers led to the Tonypany riots in November 1910. Though forced back to work the subsequent year, the demands of the Cambrian miners for a minimum wage were eventually won by the first national coal strike in 1912. Following the Armistice, the coalfields were plunged into acute economic depression, and after a three-month lockout in 1921, were forced back to work on greatly reduced wages. The miners' resistance to further attempts to cut wages (and increase hours) in 1926 precipitated the nine-day General Strike, with the miners remaining out for seven months before their catastrophic defeat. One consequence of the coalowners' victory was the emergence of the South Wales Miners' Industrial Union (SWMIU), an allegedly 'non-political' company union, backed by the owners and with a prohibition of strike action written into its constitution. Its emergence at a handful of pits across the coalfield proved the spark for a revival of militancy, with a series of spectacular 'stay-down strikes' or occupations in attempts to remove it. These strikes were paralleled by a growing spirit of defiance amongst the unemployed, with many unemployed miners involved in the Hunger Marches of 1934 and 1936, and an estimated 750,000 people taking to the streets in demonstrations against the Means Test in 1935. Following the outbreak of war in Spain in 1936, many activists in the coalfield threw themselves wholly into efforts to support the Spanish Republic, with 122 miners amongst the 178 Welshmen who served in the International Brigades.

This chapter looks at how these struggles were remembered within the mining communities of south Wales. Although it primarily focuses on the strikes and protests of the inter-war years, those events were placed within a longer narrative of historic struggle, stretching back before the First World War and well into the nineteenth century. This chapter, therefore, also looks at the representations of political and industrial struggles from before the First World War, as they were an essential part of the wider narrative the union was trying to construct, and are

thus important in trying to understand how events like 1921 and 1926 were depicted. It begins by examining the efforts of the SWMF, the Labour and Communist parties, and other groups within the south Wales coalfield to construct a narrative of progress through struggle. It then explores the way in which the struggles of the inter-war years were recalled by individual men and women – and traces how the interaction between these individual memories and the coalfield representations of strikes and protests led to the emergence of collective memories of strikes and protests across the coalfield. Whilst there is considerable evidence in the CHP interviews of a heroic memory of past struggles, this memory did not exist unchallenged, and there were also other memories that depicted industrial action as disastrous, and advocated arbitration and conciliation. In particular, there was a powerful collective memory of strikes which centred on co-operation rather than confrontation. This memory emerged independently from within the pit villages and was shaped by individual experiences rather than by representations of the past. It is thus argued that individual memory, far from simply reflecting or refracting such representations, itself played an important and influential role in the creation of collective memory.

I

The SWMF and other groups within the coalfield made concerted efforts to construct a heroic narrative of progress through struggle following the miners' defeat in 1921. There were two principal reasons for constructing such a history. The first, was its potential use as a direct inspiration for contemporary struggles. The second, was to rehabilitate the idea that strikes and protests were actions that were capable of achieving positive change. In the face of the miners' defeats in 1921 and 1926, this linear narrative of progress through struggle emphasised successes that had been achieved by such actions in the past, whilst framing failures as temporary setbacks in an inexorable onward march of progress. Similar motivations had also driven attempts to construct such a narrative at a national level. As Clare Griffiths has noted, the organisers of the Tolpuddle commemorations in 1934 had sought to use history to 'shake the movement out of its apathy,' and to 'awaken some response' from the members by showing them 'what had been fought for in the past.'¹¹ Such efforts, however, had begun over a decade earlier in south Wales.

¹¹ Griffiths, 'Remembering Tolpuddle,' 158.

In 1923, for example, A.J. Cook had lamented that ‘we do not know enough of the early struggles of the South Wales coalfield,’ and expressed a hope that some such histories would soon be written.¹² The following year, the union’s official journal, *The Colliery Workers’ Magazine (CWM)*, similarly urged ‘the present generation of workers...to become acquainted with the conditions under which their forefathers lived and laboured.’¹³ The journal itself tried to provide just such an education to the mining community, as part of a wider attempt to dispel any despondency that had settled on the coalfield following their defeat in 1921. In one article, it detailed a list of the achievements that the union had won through its industrial strength. The ‘Mines Acts...Minimum Wage Act, and the findings of the Sankey Commission’ were all ‘milestones of progress,’ and although the Federation’s ship had ‘struck an iceberg’ in 1921, past lessons would only serve ‘to guide us in the future.’¹⁴ Another article reflected on the past heroes who had won the ‘freedom of the coal slaves,’ and declared that their memorial ‘must consist of a living, growing army of men and women determined to further social justice...John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in his grave, but his soul goes marching on.’¹⁵ The final line, from the famous American Civil War song, underscored the necessity of continuing the struggle towards an eventual victory despite their recent defeat.

Others within the coalfield made similar efforts to construct such a history. One miner wrote to the *CWM* to criticise those who claimed that strikes were of no use, arguing that ‘if we were to analyse the “footprints of time” on the “road to progress,” we should see [the] indelible mark’ of strike action ‘across every step we made.’¹⁶ The idea that the forces of labour were engaged in an ‘onward march’ was explicitly referenced in a poem sent in by another miner, and also by a district report from the Anthracite coalfield.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Elizabeth Andrews, the Labour Party’s Women’s Organiser for south Wales, quoted the Chartist Ernest Jones as she exhorted the women of the coalfield to ‘rise again’ following the setbacks they had suffered.¹⁸ A more detailed attempt to chart a history of struggle appeared in the pages of the *Aberdare Leader*, in which a regular column claiming to report conversations between an ‘Old Miner’ called Dai, and a journalist named ‘Pen Dar’ appeared from 1925.¹⁹ The conversations ranged

¹² *Colliery Workers’ Magazine (CWM)*, Vol. 1, No. 5, May 1923, 114.

¹³ *CWM*, 2:12, Dec. 1924, 313.

¹⁴ *CWM*, 1:5, May 1923, 115.

¹⁵ *CWM*, 2:7, Jul. 1924, 181.

¹⁶ *CWM*, 1:9, Sep. 1923, 227.

¹⁷ For the poem see *CWM*, 2:2, Feb. 1924, 41, for the Anthracite district report *CWM*, 2:3, Mar. 1924, 66.

¹⁸ *CWM*, 2:12, Dec. 1924, 317.

¹⁹ See *Aberdare Leader (AL)*, 31 Oct. 1925 for the first example. The column subsequently appeared most weeks from then on until the end of 1926.

widely over the history of the local area since the arrival of the pits and ironworks, describing the 'stirring times' of the Merthyr Rising and a great strike in the winter of 1857-58.²⁰ Of the latter incident, the old miner reportedly spoke with 'a tightened lip smile and closing fists as if ready to avenge an old insult.'²¹

Following the miners' defeat in 1926, this heroic history of progress through struggle became a narrative that was mostly invoked by the more militant elements within the SWMF, as well as some left-wing Labour figures and the Communist Party. In 1928, the Communist paper, the *Sunday Worker*, published a series of articles on the 'revolutionary traditions' of the British workers, focusing particularly on the Newport Chartist rising and the General Strike.²² These, the paper claimed, were 'critical episodes in the class struggle,' whose legacy should be resurrected by the present generation of workers.²³ In the 1930s, this narrative found expression through the pages of the *South Wales Miner*, a radical paper founded by a group of militant miners in 1933, who were closely associated with the Communist Party. The lockout in 1926 was a frequent point of reference, whilst a 1934 article advocating strike action referenced the 'hauliers' strike of 1893' when 'soldiers and police were brought in against the strikers,' described how this was followed by the 'South Wales strike of 1898, the Cambrian Combine strike of 1910, and the National Strike of 1912,' and claimed better conditions could be won 'only by determined struggle.'²⁴ When it came to campaigning against the SWMIU, inspiration was drawn from early trade union pioneers. One article in September 1934 called on the SWMF to 'organise the Taff-Merthyr miners' and to act with 'the courage and determination of the Tolpuddle martyrs,' to 'remove this cancer which threatens the very existence of trade unionism.'²⁵ Political figures also drew on examples from the past. Standing for the Communist Party in a by-election in 1933, Arthur Horner talked about the lockout in 1926, whilst Aneurin Bevan, Labour MP for Ebbw Vale, gave a speech before the Second World War in which he dismissed the idea that 'our liberties' had been won in battle – 'those liberties were won by the Chartists, not in Khaki, but in Fustian; by the action of the Rhondda miners, Lancashire weavers, Tolpuddle martyrs.'²⁶

²⁰ *AL*, 5 Dec. 1925

²¹ *AL*, 26 Dec. 1925

²² *Sunday Worker*, 19 Aug., 26 Aug., 2 Sep. & 9 Sep. 1928.

²³ *Sunday Worker*, 2 Sep. 1928.

²⁴ *South Wales Miner (SWM)*, No. 14, 9 Jan. 1934. For references to 1926 see *SWM*, 15, 23 Jan. 1934 and *SWM*, 28, 11 Sep. 1934.

²⁵ *SWM*, 29, 26 Sep. 1934.

²⁶ SWCC:MNA/NUM/PP/46/21 – Papers of Arthur Horner – Election Address, Rhondda East Parliamentary Bye-Election, March 28, 1933. The speech by Aneurin Bevan was quoted in Smith, *Aneurin Bevan*, 237.

References to a heroic past were, indeed, a feature of coalfield society throughout the inter-war years, appearing frequently in speeches, trade union material and newspapers – whilst there were also more formal attempts to construct such a history. Ness Edwards, a Central Labour College (CLC) student who became a Miners' Agent and eventually the Labour MP for Caerphilly, wrote a number of histories of south Wales in which he charted the course of the workers' struggles. In 1926, his *History of the South Wales Miners* was published, which detailed the Merthyr Rising, where the 'gathering clouds of class hatred' had burst so fatefully in 1831, the exploits of the Scotch Cattle, and the strike of 1898.²⁷ These movements, he claimed, had 'paved the way for the formation of a permanent miners' organisation.'²⁸ This was followed, twelve years later, by his *History of the South Wales Miners' Federation*, which continued the story into the first part of the twentieth century.²⁹ The CLC, meanwhile, propagated a similar history through its lectures and other educational material. D.J. Williams, for example, delivered a talk on the lessons of the General Strike, in which he urged that it be used 'as a starting point for next time' – the lessons had to be driven home to the workers as the 'surest way to prepare for victory.'³⁰

Besides these more formal histories, there were also other attempts to articulate such a narrative that might have reached a wider audience. Lewis Jones, a prominent and extremely popular Communist activist in the Rhondda, wrote two epic novels, *Cwmardy* and *We Live*, which followed a young miner named Len as he grew up in a fictional mining village located somewhere in a thinly disguised Rhondda valley. Through Len and his friends, the novels traced the emergence of the exact sort of political and industrial consciousness that the CHP later set out to preserve. Formative experiences included the first day in the pit, an accident underground, fictionalised accounts of the Senghennydd explosion and Cambrian Combine Strike, the strikes and unemployed demonstrations of the 1920s and 1930s, and finally, Len's service and death with the International Brigades in Spain. The novels thus represented a history of the mining communities' struggles, and the hard-won progress achieved in the face of bitter and violent opposition from the coalowners and the state. A planned third volume –

²⁷ Ness Edwards, *The History of the South Wales Miners*, (London: The Labour Publishing Company, 1926), 15-16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14, 36.

²⁹ Ness Edwards, *History of the South Wales Miners' Federation: Vol. 1*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938), 49.

³⁰ SWCC:MNA/PP/127/14 – Papers of DJ Williams – Notes for a lecture on 'The Lessons of the General Strike'.

intended to chronicle the community's eventual victory – never materialised due to Lewis Jones' untimely death in 1939. *We Live* ended, nonetheless, with the village marching out on another political demonstration to the strains of 'The Red Flag,' closing on the lines 'Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer, We'll keep the Red Flag flying here.'³¹ The idea of this history of struggle being carried on into the future was thus, once again, underscored.

The SWMF attempted a more spectacular evocation of the coalfield's history with a historical pageant on May Day in 1939.³² It claimed to trace the 'progressive feet of history in its march forward,' as it staged a series of dramatic episodes from the coalfield's history, beginning with the Chartist Rising of 1839 and the trial of its leader, John Frost, and moving through the beginnings of trade unionism, the Tonypany riots in 1910-11 and the General Strike of 1926, before concluding with the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War.³³ The Chartists, the narrator described, were 'the beginning of the modern fight for freedom...part of your ever renewed fight for a better life.'³⁴ As the audience watched the miners being defeated in their earliest strikes, they were assured that whilst 'individuals and masses have been flung to the ground to be defeated time and time again,' they would nevertheless 'rise again in ever increasing strength and numbers.'³⁵ At its dramatic climax, International Brigade veterans, recently returned from Spain, urged the audience to join them in swearing an oath, 'in the name of Wales and its people, in the name of our high wrought past, in the name of our traditions, in the name of our battles in the fight for freedom,' not to relax until freedom and prosperity was brought back 'to our land.'³⁶ In case anyone missed the point that progress was achieved only by struggle, it was also emphasised that, 'during a hundred years of history, strike and struggle alone have ameliorated the miners' lot.'³⁷ The pageant was perhaps the most coherent and explicit effort to chart this history of progress through struggle, but it was

³¹ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We Live*, (Cardigan: Parthian, 2006), (1st ed., 1939), 881.

³² The decision to launch such a spectacular celebration of May Day in 1939 seems to have been made following rank-and-file pressure from across the coalfield (see SWCC: MNA/NUM/3/3/59 – Correspondence re. May Day Demonstrations, 1934-38). The Pageant was staged simultaneously in three locations, at Abertillery, Pontypool and Ystradgynlais, and was acted out by 2,260 people at *each* location – close to 7,000 in total. Although audiences were affected by heavy rainfall on May 1st itself, it was estimated that at least 5,000 people had turned out at both Abertillery and Ystradgynlais, with possibly a similar number at Pontypool (See SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939, and *South Wales Argus* (SWA), 2 May 1939).

³³ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Pontypool prompt script.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Draft scenario for the South Wales Pageant May 1st 1939.

just one example of a far more widespread effort during the inter-war years to invoke such a past within the coalfield.

The appearance of the International Brigade veterans at the end of the pageant brought the history of struggle right up to the present, with the Spanish Civil War being directly subsumed within this narrative almost immediately. This had happened to most of the political and industrial struggles of the past two decades. Throughout 1926, the SWMF had continually described the strike as 'historic,' and even as the miners' resistance crumbled in the winter of 1926, it was still claiming that the year would be etched in to the history of the labour movement.³⁸ The Hunger Marches in the 1930s were similarly historicised. The marchers' own paper provided a running commentary on their progress, noting as they passed Windsor Castle, that 'the march on this day was undoubtedly historic...for the first time in history an army of the working-class, behind the Red Flag, marched past Eton College, Windsor Castle...and ultimately through Runnymede where King John signed the Magna Carta.'³⁹ For those who produced the paper, the unemployed were marching into history before they had even finished marching through Slough.

As noted above, the invocation of such a history had two intentions: the first was to rehabilitate the idea of political or industrial action as a force capable of achieving positive change; the second to inspire such struggle in the future. The use of the past as a direct inspiration for contemporary struggles seems to have been especially true of the Chartist Rising, which was repeatedly invoked in support of unemployed demonstrations during the 1930s. In 1935, the *South Wales Argus* reported how a local activist had launched one march with the words, 'the Chartists commenced their fight in Blaina...and the date is on this chapel...we are going to fight today.'⁴⁰ Then, when the National Hunger March set off the following year, one marcher named Eddie Jones recorded in his diary how they had been sent on their way by a Labour Party agent who had 'referred to the Chartist movement very aptly and ably.'⁴¹ Crucial to both of these intentions, however, was that the narrative that the union constructed be heroically victorious rather than tragically heroic, as Hester Barron has noted of

³⁸ See *CWM*, 4:7, Jul. 1926, 167; *CWM*, 4:9, Sep. 1926, 189 and *CWM*, 4:12, Dec. 1926, 249.

³⁹ SWCC:MNA/PP/77/1 – Papers of Charles Mendus Jones – South Wales Marchers Bulletin.

⁴⁰ *SWA*, 6 Jul., 1935.

⁴¹ SWCC: MNA/PP/67/11 - Papers of Eddie Jones – Diary of Hunger March (1936), entry for Sunday 25 Oct. 1936. The Chartists were also referenced by Will Mainwaring, Labour MP for Rhondda East, and by Aneurin Bevan in support of his plans to establish workers' defence organisations across the coalfield, see Williams, *Democratic Rhondda*, 110 and *WM*, 22 May, 1933.

the efforts of the DMA in Durham.⁴² To this end, emphasis was primarily placed on successful actions, like the strikes over the minimum wage from 1910 to 1912, or the demonstrations against the Means Test in 1935 – but even catastrophic defeats could also be cast in a more positive light. The Chartist Rising, for example, was depicted as an eventual victory despite its actual failure, on the grounds that all but one of the Chartists' demands had subsequently been met. The defeat in 1926, meanwhile, was also represented in a similar manner. The May Day Pageant in 1939, for example, focused on the General Strike rather than the lockout, which afforded the opportunity to stress how the 'whole working-class of the British Isles' had come forward to support the miners.⁴³ In this respect, 1926 represented a victory in the form of the unprecedented display of working-class unity, rather than just failure and defeat. Arthur Horner, in particular, was prominent in promoting the idea of the lockout as a victory. Asked once on BBC radio whether 1926 had been 'a disaster,' he replied that he thought it 'was the greatest success the miners ever achieved,' explaining that the 'venomous' behavior of the coalowners towards a 'defeated, exhausted and starving people' had led to the support the miners had received across the country for nationalisation in 1947.⁴⁴

The nationalisation of the coal industry provided a perfect opportunity to further advance a narrative of progress through struggle. Speaking just after the election in 1945, when public ownership appeared imminent, Arthur Horner declared that 'the organised mineworkers and their families have played a great part in bringing about this mighty victory,' through 'generations of...struggle...against private ownership of the mines,' and paid tribute to the strikes in 1911 and 1912.⁴⁵ The ceremonies that marked nationalisation at most – perhaps all – pits across the coalfield, also propagated this particular narrative. At the Glanamman colliery in the Amman Valley, the colliery manager hailed vesting day as 'a great occasion in the history of coalmining,' and the 'culmination of claims made for forty years.'⁴⁶ At the other end of the coalfield, at Nine Mile Point, miners had 'stood in the bitter cold to listen to speeches...which recalled the struggles of the past.'⁴⁷ The ceremonies, the *South Wales Argus* reported, had been 'greeted by cheers...as dawn broke over the bleak hills.'⁴⁸ The narrative of the mining

⁴² Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*, 246.

⁴³ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Pontypool prompt script.

⁴⁴ SWCC:MNA/PP/46/48 – Papers of Arthur Horner – Typescript of an interview for BBC programme 'I remember', c. 1965.

⁴⁵ SWCC:MNA/PP/46/45 – Papers of Arthur Horner – Typescript of BBC talk on the Mining Situation, Sep. 1945.

⁴⁶ SWV, 4 Jan. 1947.

⁴⁷ SWA, 1 Jan. 1947.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

community's past that was promoted here and elsewhere, was not a tragic one in which the miners were passive victims, but one in which progress had been won in the face of adversity by the strength and heroism of those communities.

Following the Second World War, past strikes and protests remained a constant point of reference. Both the Pontypridd and Aberdare Labour parties produced jubilee pamphlets to commemorate their fiftieth anniversaries, which detailed the roles of their areas in the coalfield's struggles. The Pontypridd pamphlet, published in 1948, highlighted 1926 in particular, as a year 'written in letters of fire,' in which the working-class displayed the fighting spirit of the 'Chartist days.'⁴⁹ In 1953, Bedwellty Urban District produced a pageant of history for their area that mentioned the Scotch Cattle and the Merthyr Rising, and in which the Chartists were a central episode.⁵⁰ Although the Chartists were shot down at Newport, 'We,' the narrator declared, could 'look back with pride to our forebears who fought so hard for the privileges we now enjoy – who dares say they lost the struggle...they sowed the seed...we are now reaping the fruits of their endeavours.'⁵¹ As the coalfield moved into the 1960s, this heroic past continued to be referenced by politicians and the local press. The MP for Rhondda East, Mr Elfed Davies spoke of anger against the government's pit closures, and warned that 'not since 1926...has there been such resentment,' whilst an article in the *South Wales Voice* described how life in the inter-war years 'was a series of guerrilla battles against the bosses,' referencing the lockout in 1921 and the Anthracite strike in 1925.⁵²

Past struggles were also referenced frequently by the successor of the SWMF – the South Wales Area of the National Union of Mineworkers – particularly through the pages of its official journal *The Miner*. Advocating support for Seamen imprisoned for industrial action in 1960, the journal urged, 'let us never betray the Tolpuddle Martyrs,' whilst campaigns for a seven hour day noted how it had been 'filched from us by the old coalowners in 1926.'⁵³ The release of *The Angry Silence*, a film perceived to be anti-trade union, also elicited an angry response, with an editorial reminding its readers of how the minimum wage had been won 'after many of our men had had cracked skulls from the batons of police and soldiers in

⁴⁹ SWCC:MNA/PP/21/6 – Papers of D. Evans – Pontypridd Trades Council and Labour Party pamphlet, 1948, *Action, Struggle, Achievement, Jubilee (1898-1948)*, 26.

⁵⁰ SWCC:MNB/PP/22/4 – Papers of Harold Finch – Script of the Pageant of Bedwellty.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Quoted in the *RL*, 7 Dec. 1967; *SWV*, 26 Dec. 1963.

⁵³ *The Miner*, 8:6, Nov/Dec. 1960, 9; *The Miner*, 4:4, Jul/Aug. 1956, 7.

Tonypandy.⁵⁴ Contemporary issues frequently prompted the journal into historical references – at times it seemed almost an automatic reflex to reach for inspiration or legitimation from the past – and the rhetoric of such references was often strident and confrontational. To give one example, opposition to plans to decentralise the National Coal Board drew heavily on the memories of the inter-war years. ‘The miners...have very good memories,’ the journal warned, and would not be deceived by the Conservative government: ‘It is our intention to resist the decentralisation of this industry with all the forces at our command. *And they are formidable.*’⁵⁵

There appears, however, to have been several changes in the way in which the history of past strikes and protests were represented in the 1950s and 1960s. Firstly, whilst the past remained a constant point of reference in the post-war period, there were fewer attempts to work this historical consciousness into a coherent history. The union and political parties frequently drew on historical examples, but did so on an informal and reactive basis, rather than proactively constructing a narrative of the coalfield’s past. Secondly, the examples drawn upon were not just of strikes and protests, but also of unemployment and hardship, with many representations of the inter-war years eliding the great lockouts of the 1920s with the depression that followed. To take one typical example, an article in *The Miner* referenced the ‘disastrous wage reductions’ in 1921 and 1926, which were ‘followed by the years of depression, victimisation and mass unemployment.’⁵⁶ These two shifts – with representations of strikes merged with depictions of the wider suffering of the inter-war years; and the decline in concerted efforts to depict the mining community’s history as a clear and detailed march of progress – led to a change in the way that the past was referenced, with it increasingly taking on the character of a heroic tragedy. 1926 was openly referenced as a ‘disaster’ by the South Wales Area NUM, whilst Aneurin Bevan spoke at one gala of the ‘victories won by the ex-coalowners in 1921 and 1926,’ who had driven the miners ‘back to work utterly defeated.’⁵⁷

Such changes were perhaps partly a result of the political and industrial victories of the 1940s. Jeremy Nuttall’s article on the Labour Party’s conceptions of time and progress has noted how those conceptions ‘could never be quite the same’ following the election in 1945, as socialism was no longer solely ‘of the future,’ but now also part of the present and the past.⁵⁸ The

⁵⁴ *The Miner*, 8:3, May/Jun. 1960, 3.

⁵⁵ *The Miner*, 8:5, Sep/Oct. 1960, 5 (original emphasis).

⁵⁶ *The Miner*, 10:4, Jul/Aug. 1962, 17.

⁵⁷ *The Miner*, 9:6, Nov/Dec. 1961, 10; *The Miner*, 3:4, Jul/Aug. 1955, 9.

⁵⁸ Nuttall, ‘Pluralism, the People, and Time,’ 744.

election, and in particular nationalisation in 1947, might have had a similar effect on the miners' union's narratives of progress through struggle. A majority Labour Government and common ownership of the mines had been amongst the fundamental aims of the SWMF (and the other mining federations) for decades, and once these had been achieved (even if only temporarily in the first case), there was no longer such an obvious endpoint to their progressive march. The history that the union invoked remained essentially linear – in that past struggles provided inspiration for contemporary struggles that would make the future better – but that history was less coherently and less confidently marked out. The fact that there was less certainty as to where exactly progress was marching was probably an important factor in these changes, but it should also be noted that a clear destination seemed so much less urgent in the 1950s and 1960s than it had done during the desperate times of the inter-war years. The linear history of progress through struggle thus became an informal resource, of which elements could be used as and when they were necessary, rather than a central part of the union's rhetoric.

The shift from narratives of the miners' heroic victories, to tragic narratives focusing more on their suffering and a sense of injustice at past defeats, was perhaps best embodied by Alexander Cordell's famous novel, *Rape of the Fair Country*, published in 1959. The book focused on Iestyn Mortymer and his family (ironworkers and colliers around Blaenavon and Nantyglo in the early nineteenth century), the hardship of their life during the industrial revolution, the growth of Chartism and trade unionism, and their struggles against the ironmasters and coalowners. Though laced with heroism and courage, it was very much a tragic story of the oppression and suffering endured by the people of the valleys. Iestyn's father and youngest brother were both killed in accidents at work, the whole community were starved into submission following a bitter strike through a harsh winter, and the novel culminated in the Chartists' march on Newport and their fateful confrontation with soldiers in 1839:

It was the end...caught in the open by trained men under cover, the Chartists were breaking...behind us they were dead or wounded, before us they lay under the scorching fire of the Redcoats. Only one fired back now, a man with one leg, the last broken hero of the Chartist cause.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Alexander Cordell, *Rape of the Fair Country*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1959), 310-11.

As the remaining Chartists were rounded up at bayonet point to be carted off to prison, Iestyn could only watch helplessly as his best friend, Mo, lying in a pool of his own blood, died alone on the cobbled streets outside the Westgate.

Though it focused heavily on the community's struggles and the heroism of the Chartists, it was, at root, fundamentally a novel about the suffering and indignity that the coalfield had endured in the past. In this respect, it fitted a pattern in which references to the past increasingly focused on the sorrows and tragedies of the miners' struggles rather than their strength and their victories. This seems to have been particularly apparent during the strike in 1972, which was often seen more as a retribution for past defeats than as a further step forwards in a march of progress. Letters written to the *Western Mail* declared that the miners had been 'brought to their knees too often in the past – it is their turn now,' or of how no strikes in the past had benefitted them, and that 'surely their time has come.'⁶⁰ Similar examples can be found scattered throughout the reporting on the strike, and this attitude of retribution was also remarked upon in *The Fed* – though it should be pointed out that at least one person placed the strike in the context of the earlier successful strikes for the minimum wage, and hoped that the same spirit would carry the miners to victory in this fight as well.⁶¹

After the miners' stunning victory in 1972, one lodge official declared that they had 'just written some glorious pages in the history of the miners,' which surpassed 'anything that has happened in the last 50 years.'⁶² For some, their victory that year, and then again in 1974, demonstrated that industrial action could indeed achieve positive change. One group of miners from Mardy, reflecting on their experiences in 1972, agreed that the strike, 'had shown that the union leadership had been wrong...to come out against strike action,' whilst the industry was being run-down during the 1960s.⁶³ For others amongst the union's leadership, victory served to dispel assumptions derived from the miners' defeats in the 1920s, as they 'came to realise that a clash with the government did not lead inevitably to defeat.'⁶⁴ The strikes of 1972 and 1974 may thus have led to a further shift in attitudes towards strikes and industrial action – recast once more as heroic expressions of the mining community's strength

⁶⁰ Both from *WM*, 17 Feb. 1972. See also *WM*, 18 Jan. 1972, 21 Jan. 1972, and 16 Feb. 1972.

⁶¹ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 477; *RL*, 28 Jan. 1972.

⁶² Cliff True, Fernhill Lodge, ASC (NUM (South Wales Area) Special Conference Minutes), 21 February 1972, cited in Curtis, *The South Wales Miners*, 108.

⁶³ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/11/25 – Material relating to 1972 Strike – Rhondda Strike Committee interview notes.

⁶⁴ Curtis, *The South Wales Miners*, 108.

through which progress was achieved. None of this, however, appears to have affected the way that historic strikes were represented, with 1921 and 1926 both still placed within a narrative framework of tragedy and defeat.

Beyond these shifts, there was one other major change to the way in which past struggles were represented in the 1950s and 1960s, which was that women's involvement in those struggles seems to have been gradually omitted from representations of the past. Women had been relatively prominent in such representations during the 1920s and 1930s – the *CWM*, for example, tended to refer to the struggles of the miners and their families, with strikes very much represented as a shared experience. Women also featured heavily in the SWMF's May Day Pageant, with closing speeches from a miner's wife and a miner's daughter, alongside a miner's son and an unemployed miner himself. In Lewis Jones's novels, women were often depicted as the driving force behind the various strikes and protests. Before the onset of one stoppage, a woman in the street was heard to remark that 'It be 'bout time our men did something,' whilst during the dispute itself, when the will of the strike's leaders was wavering, Len dispelled any doubts by declaring, 'not one of us dare tell our women "the strike is over" ...if we did such a thing they would turn us from the door in scorn.'⁶⁵

Yet, after the war, women tended to feature less and less in representations of the coalfield's past. This was, in part perhaps, a consequence of the way in which references to history increasingly came in the form of articles on retiring union officials and political activists. Jack Jones for instance, retired in 1963, and *The Miner* described how he had 'witnessed the brutal police attacks on the workers during the 1910-11 Cambrian Combine strike and...became aware of the need for class struggle.'⁶⁶ In another example, George Edwards of Abertillery wrote of effusively of the past generation who 'the younger miners have to thank for their improved conditions that they enjoy today.'⁶⁷ Many more examples could be quoted from both union publications and local papers, and as more references to the past occurred in such a form, that past became increasingly linked with men. Whilst older men were feted as torchbearers keeping alive the memory of those decades, women were gradually dropped from the narrative, which became far less about the community's resistance, and far more about the miner himself. One notable illustration of this might be seen in *The Miner's* launch of a 'Women's Page' in the spring of 1963. This had been a regular feature of the *CWM*, but its

⁶⁵ Jones, *Cwmardy*, 93, 268.

⁶⁶ *The Miner*, 11:3, May/Jun. 1963, 32.

⁶⁷ *The Miner*, 8:3, May/Jun. 1960, 15.

1960s incarnation bore little resemblance to its inter-war forerunner. Whereas in the 1920s Elizabeth Andrews could be found exhorting women to 'take a keener interest in...industrial matters and politics,' the 1960s 'editress' was more concerned in urging them to rid themselves 'of those spare inches of plumpness that have settled during the winter months.'⁶⁸ Campaigns on nationalisation, votes for women and a blistering attack on indirect taxation gave way to fashion, hair styles and 'recipes to tempt a hungry man.'⁶⁹ Indeed, the only indication that this was a feature in a miners' paper appears to have been the modelling of the hair styles on 'our socialist sisters' in East Germany, rather than the capitalist west.⁷⁰

The mining communities' history, therefore, increasingly became less about the community as a whole and more about a specific group of men who were passing away. During the inter-war years, that history of past struggles had been placed within a heroic, narrative of progress through struggle, as part of an attempt to lift the mining communities out of their despondency following their defeats in 1921 and 1926, and to inspire them to continued struggle. Since the Second World War, however, that past had gradually changed from a heroic march towards some eventual political or industrial victory, and become a heroic tragedy. Though still drawn on to legitimate and inspire contemporary struggles, it was a history intended to provide a sense of grievance rather than a sense of hope, and was drawn on as and when needed, rather than being actively constructed. This appears to have changed again, however, following the strikes of the early 1970s, both of which were seen as marking new victories in the miners' onward march of progress.

II

These narratives, and these views about past struggles, were not just constructed by the union however, but were also shared by many of those who lived within the mining communities, at least by the 1970s. The interviews carried out by the CHP suggest that there were many miners who engaged with these heroic representations of strikes and other protests, and who placed their own recollections of such actions within this wider narrative framework. The interaction

⁶⁸ CWM, 1:1, Jan. 1923, 18-19; *The Miner*, 11:2, Mar/Apr. 1963, 33.

⁶⁹ See CWM, 4:5, May 1926, 116 (nationalisation), 4:11 (Nov. 1926), 248 (votes) and 1:5 May 1923, 125 (indirect taxes); compared to *The Miner*, 11:4, Jul/Aug. 1963, 14, and *The Miner*, 13:6, Nov/Dec. 1965, 20.

⁷⁰ *The Miner*, 11:4, Jul/Aug. 1963, 14.

between these individual memories and the wider, coalfield representations led, it might be argued, to the emergence of a collective memory of strikes and protests across south Wales, in which progress had been won by determined and often heroic struggle.

There is, unfortunately, very little evidence from before the 1960s for how individual men and women remembered strikes, making it difficult to reconstruct any collective memory that might have existed during the inter-war years. In the 1960s, Robin Page Arnot, who was then conducting his own research into the history of the south Wales miners, interviewed a number of former miners, and the notes from these provide, perhaps, the first evidence for how strikes were remembered by the men and women who had lived through them. One former miner described how 'it was terrible in the old days before the union,' but that 'things had become better' after the emergence of leaders like Arthur Horner and Aneurin Bevan and the corresponding increase in militancy.⁷¹ Another former miner, by that point a councillor in Trelew, reflected on the strikes at Taff-Merthyr against the SWMIU in the 1930s, and of how he knew 'of no other struggle for trade unionism to equal it, except perhaps the Tolpuddle Martyrs,' claiming that even after thirty years, people in the community 'still talk of it.'⁷²

Within the CHP interviews, strikes and other protests were often recalled as courageous attempts to win better conditions in the face of violent repression and were frequently linked together in a narrative of historic struggle. Many for example talked about the Minimum Wage being won by a strike – although many referenced the Cambrian Combine strike of 1910-11 rather than the National Strike of 1912. Some recalled that it was only through such struggles that any advances had been made. 'Ever since I can remember,' remarked Bob Boole the miners had:

Had to struggle and fight for all they've got...they've never had nothing given to them, it have all come out of the struggle. I mean, the minimum wage and eight-hour day, as a boy, I can remember the miners from the Rhondda, coming round singing you know, 'We're miners from the Rhondda, fighting for a living wage' that's the song they used to sing.⁷³

Such attitudes were not restricted to political and trade union activists. Boole does not appear to have even been a member of any political party, nor held any trade union position, and

⁷¹ SWCC:MNB/PP/2/16 – Papers of R.P. Arnot – Personal Statements collected in South Wales – Interview with Mr Fisher, 23 Sep. 1958.

⁷² SWCC:MNB/PP/2/14 – Papers of R.P. Arnot – Material re. research visits to South Wales – Letter from Councillor W. Jones, 21 Jan. 1964.

⁷³ SWML, AUD/575, Interview with Mrs Brown, Mrs Miller and Bob Boole, c. 1975.

there were many such 'rank-and-file' miners who also embraced this heroic narrative. Jesse Clark, for instance, never joined any party either, and confessed to being bored by the lodge meetings that he rarely attended – 'It killed the spirit by having too much meetings.'⁷⁴ Yet towards the end of the interview, reflecting on his life and his experiences in the coal industry, he similarly concluded that, 'it is said you see, that countries that do have no wars got no history...and it's progress by struggle, progress by struggle.'⁷⁵

Other memories mirrored the basic framework of this heroic narrative, placing events like 1926 within a history of strikes and protests. This is particularly the case when it comes to the lockouts of 1921 and 1926, with a powerful associative link between the disputes in many of the interviews. On forty-nine occasions, a question about one elicited a memory of both, the two seen as part of the same story or narrative. To give one example, Miss Jones was asked whether she remembered the General Strike, and replied:

[Miss Jones] 'Ooh dear yes... and the 1921 strike too – that lasted three months. And then another one in five years...but, you see, the men had to fight for their rights...I remember the strike for the 8-hours, 8 hours a day.'

[Interviewer] 'When was that?'

[MJ] '1912? I think? Not sure. I remember it.'

[Int.] 'Did they win?'

[MJ] 'They did! How did we used to sing, "eight hours work, eight hours play, eight hours sleep, and eight hour day!"⁷⁶

Another striking example of disputes being linked together came in an interview with W.T. Curnick, who was asked about his memories of the 1921 lockout:

I go far back to say when I was a boy, before I was ten, the Hauliers' strike...they were marching over the mountain to another colliery and fetching them out...I remember the strike in the Rhondda Valley...that big strike, remember Winston Churchill had the fault of sending soldiers to the Rhondda...and shortly after we came out on strike for the Minimum Wage. We were out on strike in 1912, 1911-12, another strike. Oh I've been in several strikes, but the worst of all was the 1921 and the 1926.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ SWML, AUD/325, Interview with Jesse Clark, c. 1972-1974.

⁷⁵ SWML, AUD/326, Interview with Jesse Clark, 1969.

⁷⁶ SWML, AUD/457, Interview with Miss Jones, 18 March, 1975.

⁷⁷ SWML, AUD/305, Interview with W.T. Curnick, 17 July, 1973.

Some of those interviewed were even more explicit in placing their own experiences of strikes within a narrative of progress through struggle. Ivor Huggins, a Communist Party activist, was asked about the General Strike, and remembered how they had 'carried on, and tried to struggle along, because of the history of the mining community.'⁷⁸ That history, he claimed, demonstrated how 'it's been years of struggle...as it do prove now...with the last one.'⁷⁹ His recollection of a 'history of struggle,' and his assumption that this march of progress would be continued by further struggle, echoed the rhetoric of May Day 1939, and the pageant that the SWMF had staged. Alongside the recollections of past victories that strikes had won, and the way that such strikes were often linked within individual memory, they, together, suggest a substantial level of engagement with these heroic narratives within the mining communities.

That a number of those interviewed by the CHP had similar recollections of strikes and protests suggests that such memories may have been relatively widespread across the coalfield. Furthermore, the fact that many miners appear to have placed their own recollections within a common narrative of progress through struggle, indicates that there was also a wider, shared perspective on past strikes and protests. However, collective memory is more than simply an aggregation of similar individual memories, or even a series of individuals engaging with wider narratives. It is also collectively shared and discussed within communities, and imagined as the experience of the community, rather than just of an individual. As discussed before, historians such as Hester Barron and Marianne Debouzy, and former miner Dave Douglass, have all highlighted the importance of family links, and the handing down of stories as being integral to the emergence of a collective memory. There is plenty of evidence for such stories within the CHP. To take one example, Ivor Huggins spoke of how his family had been forced to leave Blaina because of 'victimisation' following the strike of 1898, and claimed that his father 'had memories of when the Union was formed first of all, and he wrote verses on it.'⁸⁰ Huggins had only been born six years after that strike, but said that he had 'used to hear my brothers talking about all that you know, and my father...and you did feel buoyant, like you were in the struggle, even though you were young like.'⁸¹ Elizabeth Roberts, meanwhile, had heard stories from even further back about the Chartist rising – 'I remember my father talking about that, they marched to Newport didn't they?' – recalling how it was one of the many tales that he had used to tell them 'about the times he was a boy.'⁸² Even one of

⁷⁸ SWML, AUD/627, Interview with Mr and Mrs Ivor Huggins, 1 February, 1978.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² SWML, AUD/613, Interview with Elizabeth Roberts, 12 January, 1978.

the interviewers, Alun Morgan, talked about having heard stories as a child of historic strikes. Asking Ernest Lewis about the 'Billy Fairplay' strike of 1900 in the eastern valleys, he explained that he had 'heard my grandfather and my father on about it.'⁸³ Perhaps even more significant though, is the fact that before this explanation, Ernest Lewis had first chided him that it was 'a wonder you didn't know that,' indicating, perhaps, that an awareness of the community's history was assumed to be common knowledge.⁸⁴

Some of the most striking examples of memories being passed down arose in interviews where other members of the family also contributed. P.J. Matthews' son, for instance, reminded his father to tell the CHP researcher of how he had taken 'a choir down west' to raise money for the strike in 1921, and then interrupted his father's account of 1926 to confirm that 'we children had to go to the soup kitchens in school with our little basins... there was no money then was there dad?'⁸⁵ Nancy Davies meanwhile interjected during her mother's recollection of 1926 (when she herself was five) to affirm that 'they was going in for two days and coming out for three days wasn't they?' – to which her mother replied 'It was, they were lucky to have three days a week for a long time.'⁸⁶ Later in the interview, having recalled that she received free shoes and having been asked who they were from, she was silent for a while before eliciting the support of her mother who muttered 'I expect your father can tell you that.'⁸⁷ The exchanges between Nancy and her mother suggest that stories about 1926 were an existing subject of conversation within the house, in which the hardship the community had suffered, and their resistance had often been told before. Many more examples of such stories could be provided – indeed, they appear in no fewer than fifty of the 203 interviews, despite the fact that the CHP researchers never directly asked any of those interviewed about what people talked about at home.

For some families, it was not just stories about historic strikes, but also a tradition of protest and struggle that was handed down. In some of the interviews – particularly those carried out with political or trade union activists – past and present generations were consciously linked not just by blood, but also by a particular political and industrial consciousness. Bob Boole talked about the struggles of his older brothers, and of how he had gone through all of the same struggles in his turn – 'so I mean, I was more or less steeped in it like, and you can't

⁸³ SWML, AUD/312, Interview with Ernest Lewis, 2 October, 1972.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ SWML, AUD/300, Interview with P.J. Matthews, July, 1973.

⁸⁶ SWML, AUD/342, Interview with Nancy Davies, 6 May, 1974.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

forget those things...it's more or less in your blood.'⁸⁸ Perhaps the most explicit example, though, of this idea – that a tradition of protest and struggle were directly inherited from ancestors – can be seen in the interview with Phil Abrahams:

Talking about tradition, my grandfather was born in 1825...and he was in the Chartist Uprising...he had a blue scar, down here...I said – 'Grandfer, what happened to your head, what give you that?'
 'The Bloody militia...they came at us from all sides...and when they shot twelve...at Newport...we run over the mountains.' Now it's interesting you say about our people being left-wing or revolutionary. Of course, it goes back to the Chartist movement...we were the first to suffer the ignominy of the Industrial Revolution.⁸⁹

The history of the mining community's struggle was thus also seen within generational terms, with the legacy of past strikes and the responsibility for future struggle passing from one generation to another. Generations, as well as strikes and protests, were consciously linked together within a narrative of progress through struggle.

Yet whilst occupational continuity – generations of the same family working down the pits – was important to the emergence of collective memory, its influence should not be overstated. Over half of those interviewed had some family links to the mining industry, but a quarter also had parents who had moved to the coalfield from other parts of Wales or from the west of England, or had undertaken that journey themselves. Nearly a quarter had also moved around within the coalfield from one valley to another, and a further seventeen had left at some point during the 1920s and 1930s. As noted above, therefore, the mining communities of south Wales did not conform entirely to the conventional stereotypes of stable, enduring communities of men and women whose ancestors had been miners for time immemorial. Indeed, during the first part of the twentieth century, the coalfield appears to have been characterised by movement and migration. From the 1890s, Wales was the only country outside the USA to record positive net migration figures, and in the decade that began in 1900, South Wales saw a net inwards migration of 130,000.⁹⁰ Movement continued during the 1920s and 1930s, though this time in a different direction. 'Officially 430,000 people left...overwhelmingly from south Wales,' as the depression hit, a figure representing nearly a fifth of the entire population of Wales.⁹¹

⁸⁸ SWML, AUD/575, Interview with Mrs Brown, Mrs Miller and Bob Boole, c. 1975.

⁸⁹ SWML, AUD/330, Interview with Phil Abrahams and George Brown, May, 1972.

⁹⁰ Gwyn Alf Williams, *When Was Wales?*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 178-9.

⁹¹ Williams, *When Was Wales?*, 253.

Given this, the fact that an imagined continuity between past and present generations of miners remained a strong feature of the mining community's self-image is interesting, even if such an image was perhaps constructed as much as it reflected reality. It also complicates conventional explanations of how collective memory emerged – which have often been based on assumptions about such occupational continuity. It might be argued, however, that the transience of such communities may have helped, rather than hindered, the emergence of a collective conception of the past. The movement of people across and into the south Wales coalfield might have led to the sharing of stories about the past with newcomers to the pit villages, helping both to integrate new arrivals, and facilitating the emergence of a common narrative of the community's history and its meanings out of otherwise potentially disparate and contingent individual and family memories. Indeed, stories about past strikes and protests were not just handed down within families, but also appear to have been discussed more widely within the mining communities. J.L. Williams (who was later to become a Labour MP), had been born in west Wales, to a non-mining family, and had moved, via the Rhondda, to the pit village of Bedlinog in 1906. Yet despite lacking any mining ancestors, he too had been told stories about the heroic struggles of the past. One elderly neighbour had told him of how she had known 'John Frost very well,' and as Frost's niece, had asked the great man – 'if you had your time over again, would you do the things you did?'⁹² The Chartist leader's response had been simple – 'Yes. Exactly the same.'⁹³ Ben Davies also heard local stories of past strikes after moving from the Rhondda to the Dulais valley further west. He remembered reading in the papers about an incident at the Rock Colliery in Glynneath during the 1925 Ammanford strike where picketing miners had been charged by police. Upon arriving in the anthracite, he 'enquired and I had the whole story of how it happened...I was to go and work in the very mountain in which the battle took place.'⁹⁴

In some cases, such stories seem to have become common historical reference points within particular villages, stories that belonged to the community as a whole. One such example might be seen in the village of Bedlinog, regarding the strikes at Taff-Merthyr in 1934. A Communist Party activist named Edgar Evans, although not a miner himself, was closely involved in the actions directed against the SWMIU, which led eventually to the recognition of the SWMF. One particular incident stood out in his memory, which he recounted as follows:

⁹² SWML, AUD/396, Interview with J.L. Williams, 24 April, 1973.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ SWML, AUD/168, Interview with Ben Davies, 11 June, 1973.

There was a crowd of thugs...they had cauliflower ears – been brought up from Cardiff – and they were out for business that very night see. And they were coming gradually coming up closer and closer...and as things were getting more and more intense, we heard the strains of ‘The Red Flag’ coming up from the canteen and from the baths...and Duw, Duw! Everybody started to feel he was almost on wings you know. And with that...the whole night shift marched up like an army from the canteen and from the baths, up to the shed to join the Federation. That’s the last we saw of these thugs.⁹⁵

It is interesting to compare Evans’ vivid recollections of this incident with those of Ned Gittins in 1961. Gittins’ memories were recorded in writing by Robin Page Arnot – who was then conducting his own research on the history of the South Wales miners – and he was quoted as saying:

There were a bunch of thugs from Cardiff, people with cauliflower ears, who had been brought up by the enemy...suddenly, we heard a voice down below speaking at the pit-head baths...it was Charlie Yeoman speaking, and suddenly we heard cheers. I tell you, my hair stood on end. These men...were deciding to go back home. They were on strike. Then suddenly they were singing the Red Flag. What has happened to the thugs we asked? Well they had gone like rats.⁹⁶

Apart from how little the passage of more than ten years (which included mass pit closures and the successful strike in 1972) seems to have altered the basic narrative, the similarities also, again perhaps, suggest a collective memory of the incident. That the details remain identical, from the presence of the crowd from Cardiff, to the sudden strike of the afternoon shift and the thugs scattering, to the singing of ‘The Red Flag’, and even in places the phrases used, such as ‘cauliflower ears,’ may indicate that the people concerned did not simply remember these events in isolation as individuals, but talked to others about their experiences, retelling them within their communities. Gradually, through this retelling, and the sharing of common personal experience, a common narrative with consistent themes and details emerged. These stories, although still told by and retained in the memories of individual people, were in some respects shared property, a collectivised story of a particular experience that could be understood or retold by anyone who was, or considered themselves a part, of the mining community.

⁹⁵ SWML, AUD/212, Interview with Edgar Evans, 9 July, 1975. He had also recounted the same story in another interview two years earlier, see AUD/210, Interview with Edgar Evans, 14 July, 1973.

⁹⁶ SWCC:MNB/PP/2/15 – Papers of R.P. Arnot – Notes on interview conducted with Ned Gittins, 19 Oct. 1961. Ned Gittins also told the same story to a CHP interviewer twelve years later, see SWML, AUD/231, Interview with Ned Gittins, August, 1973.

Perhaps one of the most notable features of the stories about Taff-Merthyr was the singing of 'The Red Flag.' It was also mentioned by Benny Cooke, one of the miners who had been underground at the time, but who had walked out that day to join the strike. He told the CHP interviewer that he had never experienced 'singing such like it in all my life – you had that tempo you know...you'd become part of a man when you went out.'⁹⁷ Memories of singing during strikes or other protests appear frequently within the CHP interviews, and they were also a hugely important feature of the May Day Pageant in 1939. Early preparations for the event had stressed that, 'as far as possible the scenes should be active and not passive,' using 'mass declamation...or singing,' and the *South Wales Argus* reported that 'four massed bands and 28 massed choirs,' had taken part at 'Abertillery and Pontypool.'⁹⁸ Songs such as the 'Red Flag,' 'John Brown's Body' and 'Cwm Rhondda' were sung during 1926, by unemployed demonstrations throughout the 1930s, on the Hunger Marches in 1934 and 1936, and at the nationalisation ceremonies in 1947, providing almost a continuous accompaniment to the strikes, protests, and eventual victories of the south Wales miners and their families.⁹⁹ These songs carried a particular message of progress through struggle and were also inherently communal – being sung by and belonging to everyone involved. In this sense, they may have helped to foster, as well as reflect a shared outlook on the community's past, in which such actions were seen as the experience of the whole community, and were linked together, through the repeated use of the same songs, within a chain of protest and struggle.

Perhaps even more interesting, however, were the more specific songs recalled by individuals. Both Bob Boole and Miss Jones' recollections of particular songs were quoted above, whilst Ernest Lewis, discussing the 'Billy Fairplay' strike in 1900, recounted two versions of a song that had been popular at that time, one of which went:

Billy Fairplay is on top so they say; taking his allowance of the poor collier's pay; far better for all, to gob all their small; than give it to Billy for nothing at all.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ SWML, AUD/226, Interview with Benny Cooke, April, 1974.

⁹⁸ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – May Day Celebrations 1939 (Review draft of programme) and Draft scenario for South Wales Pageant May 1st 1939. See SWA, 1 May 1939.

⁹⁹ For 1926, see WM, 3 May 1926, *The Labour Voice*, *Llais Llafur*, 22 May 1926, SWA 1 May 1926, SWA, 7 May 1926. For the unemployed protests, see SWA, 22 Mar. 1935, SWA 26 Mar. 1935. For the Hunger Marches see SWCC:MNA/PP/108/14 – Papers of Claude Stanfield – Postcards detailing 1936 Hunger March. For nationalisation see *South Wales Echo* (SWE), 1 Jan. 1947, SWE, 4 Jan. 1947, SWA, 3 Jan. 1947.

¹⁰⁰ See SWML, AUD/313, Interview with Ernest Lewis, October, 1972. 'Billy Fairplay' was a nickname given to Sir William T. Lewis, the man who presided over the sliding-scale committee from 1880-1899, which regulated the wages of the miners according to the selling price of coal. The 1900 Billy Fairplay strike had arisen over a dispute in which the committee had ruled that the miners would not be paid for

Though in each case these songs were recalled by individuals, it might reasonably be assumed that they were known or sang by many others within those specific communities, and represent a collective expression of a shared experience, as well as a shared outlook on the past. Again, although contained within the memories of individuals, such songs reflected and embodied a common, or collective understanding or memory of the past.

In many respects therefore, it can be argued that a collective memory of strikes and protests did exist within the mining communities. Such actions featured prominently in the memories of many of those interviewed by the CHP, and these individual recollections were often understood within a common narrative framework. That heroic narrative, of progress through struggle, had emerged from the interaction between representations of the past within the coalfield, and the efforts of ordinary miners to make sense of their experiences, and led to stories about past struggles being handed down within families, and amongst mining communities more broadly. It is interesting to note that many of these memories, such as those regarding the strikes at Taff-Merthyr, were quite local in nature, being specific to particular communities or pit villages. The songs regarding the 'Billy Fairplay' strike in Blaenavon are another example, whilst references to the Chartists, whether by union or political figures, or in the CHP interviews were also rooted in a particular area of the coalfield.¹⁰¹ Yet whilst different villages or even areas of the coalfield had their own particular struggles and heroes on which collective memory could focus, these were, nonetheless, still placed and understood within a wider, collective framework of progress through struggle that was present across south Wales. Therefore, rather than weakening any wider collective memory, this mosaic of local memories was instead a strength, ensuring that these wider narratives were rooted in more specific and relatable local experiences.

Even more striking than the local dimension to this collective memory, however, is its gendered nature. Only a small number of the women who were interviewed by the CHP – such as Miss Jones, Elizabeth Roberts and Nancy Davies – appear to have placed their own memories within this collective framework, and the heroic narrative of progress through struggle seems to have been primarily engaged with by men. This is all the more interesting given that other collective memories within the coalfield, of the depression, of accidents

'small coal', despite the fact that the colliery companies could (and did) still sell such coal for a profit. The song exhorts the miners to use the small coal to fill the gaps left behind (the 'gob'), rather than sending it to the top for the owners to profit at their expense.

¹⁰¹ The Monmouthshire valleys to be specific.

underground, of police and blacklegs – even other collective memories of strikes – seem to have been participated in more or less equally by both men and women. It is also despite the fact that women within mining communities were often heavily involved in both strikes and protests – especially their more confrontational aspects.¹⁰² This may, in part, have been related to the way that women's involvement appears to have slowly dropped out of representations of such actions after the Second World War.

The heroic narratives of progress through struggle were very much reflected therefore in the individual memories that were recorded by the CHP. Indeed, such interviews also suggest that the personal recollections of strikes and protests, together with these wider narratives, led to the emergence of a collective memory of progress through struggle across the coalfield. Whilst there remains, unfortunately, little indication of how individuals within the mining communities understood or remembered the past until the 1960s, it is arguably possible to identify such a collective memory as existing by the early 1970s. In this respect, it might be said that the CHP did indeed find and record the memory and the consciousness that they were looking for.

III

However, this heroic account of progress through struggle was not the only narrative of the mining communities' past that was present in the coalfield during the inter-war years. A, initially hegemonic Liberal narrative, in which strikes were depicted as the destructive work of extremists that had harmed 'the community' and left ordinary miners worse off, was also propagated by the coalowners, the SWMIU and elements within the press. Meanwhile, another parallel narrative mirrored its basic framework of progress through struggle, but focused instead on the struggle for women's rights.

As discussed above, women's involvement in the industrial and political struggles of the labour movement was gradually omitted from historical narratives of strikes and protests. Yet there were some attempts to construct another narrative of progress through struggle based on the progress achieved by the women's movement. This other history of protest was propagated in

¹⁰² This was particularly true of confrontations with the police, and the intimidation of 'blacklegs' or strike-breakers. See Chapter IV.

particular by Elizabeth Andrews. Her 1957 autobiography, *A Woman's Work is Never Done*, charted a history of the struggle for women's rights that began with Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792 – 'the torch she lit was never extinguished and adult suffrage was achieved in 1928' – and detailed other struggles and groups who had been involved in this 'march of progress.'¹⁰³ She had made similar efforts in her column in the *CWM*, when urging continued agitation for full adult suffrage. One article in 1926, for instance, warned the women of today that the 'bridge to political freedom' was still incomplete, and would have to 'span an age long oppression of womanhood and motherhood' before 'their younger sisters may pass on to political freedom.'¹⁰⁴ Andrews wove this narrative of women's rights into the class focused narratives of struggle and progress that were more widespread across the coalfield – yet struggles against gender based oppression were explicitly marginalised by the SWMF in their own iterations of these narratives. To take one example, the final episode in the SWMF's May Day Pageant in 1939 had speeches by a miners' wife, son, daughter and an unemployed miner, with the wife informing the crowd that it was 'only by standing shoulder to shoulder in equality with our men-folk that we can expect our emancipation as women.'¹⁰⁵

It is unfortunately, very difficult to say how Andrews' efforts to create a narrative of women's struggles were received by women (or men for that matter) within the mining communities, in large part because the focus of the CHP interviews was on other issues, and such questions were rarely, if ever asked. Miss Jones, whose memories of strikes and the songs associated with them were quoted above, also recalled the struggles of the suffragettes, and how she 'knew all about Mrs Pankhurst and her daughters and all of them...used to read everything about them...quite a suffragette I was.'¹⁰⁶ Mavis Llewellyn meanwhile, recalled 'big women's rallies' taking place on International Women's Day, when there 'was always something spectacular planned in the valleys,' though there do not appear to have been any other examples amongst the women interviewed by the CHP.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Mrs Davies and her husband went so far as to say that when it came to attitudes towards women's rights and struggles, Wales was 'very slow...as backward...in behaviour patterns as any kind of society you can think of.'¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Andrews, *A Woman's Work is Never Done*, (Dinas Powys: Honno Press, 2006), (1st ed., 1957), 17.

¹⁰⁴ *CWM*, 4:11, Nov. 1926, 248.

¹⁰⁵ See SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Dulais Valley script.

¹⁰⁶ SWML, AUD/457, Interview with Miss Jones, 18 March, 1975.

¹⁰⁷ SWML, AUD/98, Interview with Mavis Llewellyn, 20 May, 1974. Unfortunately I haven't been able to find any reports of such rallies in the local press.

¹⁰⁸ SWML, AUD/394, Interview with Mrs D.J. Davies, 14 October, 1974.

The narrative of the struggle for women's rights was broadly complimentary to the heroic narratives advanced by the union and Labour and Communist parties (even if women's issues were explicitly marginalised within them). Yet other representations of past industrial and political struggles that were present on the coalfield were, as mentioned above, directly antagonistic towards the idea of progress through struggle. This antagonistic narrative was also an expression of a broader political and industrial culture – one that was in direct competition with the 'alternative culture' described by Francis and Smith. It was this contest that formed the core of *The Fed*, whose central narrative arc charted the attempts to rebuild the SWMF following the defeat in 1926 – dividing the history of the coalfield from 1926 into three distinct phases – 'decline, revival and consolidation.'¹⁰⁹ The Federation, Francis and Smith declared, had 'entered that fight as an army and ended it as a rabble,' their defeat, coupled with the depression that followed, 'tempered the political ideology of militant miners,' and left its exponents feeling 'relatively isolated and persecuted,' with the emergence of the SWMIU constituting a direct challenge.¹¹⁰ The remainder of the book largely charted the eventually successful attempts to rekindle this political and industrial militancy, and to 'rebuild the Federation from its base.'¹¹¹ A memory of strikes in which 1926 was seen as a disaster, and which contained a degree of nostalgia for the supposedly less confrontational and more peaceful times of arbitration and conciliation before the First World War, was a key part of this hegemonic narrative, and the attempts to construct a heroic narrative of progress through struggle were, in large part, aimed at confronting this view of history. Collective memory was, thus, a key battleground in this wider struggle – the particular heroic memory of strikes embodied in the 'alternative culture' of the coalfield stood in direct opposition to a rival conception of the past.

In this respect, the efforts of the SWMF, political parties and others to create this heroic narrative might be seen as part of an attempt to challenge hegemonic ideas about industrial action and what it had historically achieved, and to construct counter-narratives that enabled support for such action in the present. Challenging what were perceived to be dominant modes of thinking about political and industrial issues were of course the very *raison d'être* of organisations like the CLC, and were a major motivation for Lewis Jones in writing his novels. There were many within the union as well, who were publically explicit about the need to not

¹⁰⁹ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 369.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75-76, 363, 106.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, *The Fed*, 81.

only challenge the system itself, but also the ideas which underpinned it. At the height of the 1926 lockout, an article in the *CWM* claimed that ‘the workers are not...held down by sheer force – driven to work at the point of bayonets,’ but were restrained instead by ‘persuasive power’ and the domination of ‘ideas favourable to the maintenance of things as they are.’¹¹² Working-class education, through the Pleb’s League and National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), and more importantly, the working-class press were seen as essential in challenging the power of the coalowners and the state, and the *CWM* consistently urged its readers to take an interest in adult education and the *Daily Herald*.¹¹³ As the journal warned, ‘so long as these ideas are swallowed by the worker, he is shackled to capitalism by chains stronger than those which of old bound the galley-slaves of Rome.’¹¹⁴ This collective memory of progress through struggle was thus a conscious attempt to challenge the wider cultural and intellectual foundations of class domination, or ‘hegemony’ – at the same time as Gramsci himself was formulating these ideas in a prison in Turin.

Elements within the local press made concerted efforts during 1921 and 1926 to depict strikes as disastrous and senseless. Headlines in both lockouts variously decried the actions as a ‘Ruinous strike caused by extremists [sic] folly’ or the ‘Cruellest blow at the vitals of the community.’¹¹⁵ The idea that the miners were fighting a futile battle against immutable economic laws, that they were being led astray by extremist leaders, that ordinary miners were opposed to the stoppage but were intimidated by union ‘thugs’ and denied their say in a ballot were consistent themes in the reporting of many local papers. A particular favourite though, was the idea that strikes were a direct attack on the community. In 1921, for example, the *Western Mail* accused the miners of passing a ‘sentence of helpless poverty and famine upon the whole community,’ whilst the *South Wales Argus* registered its alarm at the miners’ talk of fighting to the finish, which it warned ‘would be literally a fight to the finish of the community.’¹¹⁶ Such papers also drew on examples from the past to promote an alternative approach to industrial relations. The *Aberdare Leader* compared the 1921 lockout to the strike of 1898, which it claimed had been a similarly foolish action, and praised the old miners’ leader, the legendary Mabon, who embodied a style of industrial relations based on arbitration

¹¹² *CWM*, 4:9, Sep. 1926, 200. Similar arguments were made in 1921, and before a demonstration in 1925. See *AL*, 21 May 1921 and *The Labour Voice*, *Llais Llafur*, 20 Jun. 1925.

¹¹³ Articles encouraging readers to take *The Daily Herald* appear in almost every single issue of the *CWM* that I have looked at, whilst articles about the NCLC and Pleb’s League also occur frequently.

¹¹⁴ *CWM*, 4:9, Sep. 1926, 200.

¹¹⁵ *WM*, 28 Jun. 1921, 5 May 1926.

¹¹⁶ *WM*, 8 Apr. 1921; *SWA*, 4 Apr. 1921.

and conciliation. The piece went on to describe how he too had been attacked extremists before 'saner counsels eventually prevailed.'¹¹⁷ The *Argus*, meanwhile, recalled his famous aphorism of 'half a loaf is better than no bread,' and urged the miners to recognise the wisdom of this old proverb, in 'these days of extreme views.'¹¹⁸

Such references attempted to evoke a vision of the past in which there had been a supposedly golden age of prosperity before the First World War that had been achieved by harmony and collaboration between master and men and had been shattered by militant trade unionism. Yet the war itself was also an important historical reference point in such narratives. Appeals against strike action often looked back to the days 'when master and man manned the trenches together,' and wondered if that spirit had 'altogether vanished from among us.'¹¹⁹ Others accused the miners of betraying the legacy of those who had died. C.B. Stanton – a militant labour leader prior to 1914 and a jingoistic recruitment agent and staunch champion of the Empire after the onset of war – urged miners as early as 1919 not to strike, but to 'play the game to the men who had sacrificed so much for them.'¹²⁰ A reporter from the *Aberdare Leader*, travelling through Mountain Ash during the 1921 lockout, came across men working to lay the foundations of a war memorial, mused on what those who had 'made the supreme sacrifice...would think today of the men for whom they fought, and who now place their own selfish enjoyment before the interests of the community.'¹²¹ The use of First World War rhetoric to attack strikes and appeal against industrial action has been noted by Angela Gaffney, and such musings on the meanings of the First World War appeared constantly in the early 1920s, especially around Armistice Day and during the stoppages themselves.¹²²

Following 1926, the First World War was replaced by the lockout as the principal historical reference point of these hegemonic, Liberal narratives. Throughout the 1930s the SWMIU and the coalowners continually portrayed that year as a disaster, in an attempt to shape a collective memory of the lockout which discredited rather than inspired further industrial resistance. Handbills issued by the Industrial Union talked of how the 'disastrous strike of

¹¹⁷ *AL*, 23 Apr. 1921.

¹¹⁸ *SWA*, 29 Apr. 1921.

¹¹⁹ *SWA*, 20 Jun. 1921.

¹²⁰ *AL*, 22 Mar. 1919. How this appeal might have gone down in a village like Senghennydd, where 439 men had been killed in a pit explosion a year before the outbreak of War one can only imagine.

¹²¹ *AL*, 28 May 1921.

¹²² Angela Gaffney, *Aftermath: Remembering the Great War in Wales*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998). See, for example *SWE*, 12 Nov. 1926; *WM*, 8 Nov. 1926; *WM*, 11 Nov. 1926 and *SWA*, 11 Nov. 1926.

1926' demonstrated the need to broaden 'the basis of co-operation' between masters and men.¹²³ Other leaflets countered SWMF propaganda more directly, dismissing the Fed's insults with the line, '*can you call a man a shirker that has remained loyal for seven months and then left destitute to make his own terms?*'¹²⁴ Then, in response to the Federation's call for loyalty, the 'non-political' union retorted, 'they say now be true to yourselves and your children; they did not say that during the strike.'¹²⁵ Indeed, it was not just 1926, but the whole 'old system of...STRIKES, STRIKES, STRIKES,' that was to blame, under which the only sufferers had been 'the workers.'¹²⁶ Most dramatic of all, was the warning issued by the Ocean and United National Collieries that the 1926 strike 'very nearly ruined South Wales,' and that 'a strike now would complete the catastrophe.'¹²⁷

Such representations sought to play on the despondency of the miners, and their disillusion with the union, its leadership and with industrial action that seems to have been present across the coalfield during the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1928, two years after the miners had returned to work, the *South Wales Argus* reported that the workmen of Tredegar had recognised 'the folly of a strike policy,' and that 'those responsible for the disastrous strike and its terrible consequences have lost their power, and their influence is now negligible.'¹²⁸ Local papers that had been virulently hostile to the strike evidently do not provide the most reliable of insights into attitudes within the pit villages, but many of the union's activists also remembered a similar atmosphere when being interviewed decades later. Oliver Powell, a close friend of Aneurin Bevan, recalled how he had 'never found so much hatred and bitterness amongst the workmen [as] when we returned after 1926...they directed their venom directly at the strikers, most unpleasant.'¹²⁹ Vivien Morgan, meanwhile, told Robin Page Arnot that morale in Cymmer was 'at a low ebb...as a result of the thrashing we got in 1926,' and that the lodge lay in 'bloody ribbons.'¹³⁰ It was not until 1935, he claimed, that 'the fear of

¹²³ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/12/2 – SWMIU Handbills, c. 1934.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, (original emphasis).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Handbill from John Griffiths and Levi Phillips (General Managers of the Ocean and United National Collieries), printed in *SWM*, 30, 9 Oct. 1934.

¹²⁸ *SWA*, 12 Nov. 1928.

¹²⁹ *SWML*, AUD/316, Interview with Oliver Powell, 29 November, 1973.

¹³⁰ SWCC:MNB/PP/2/16 – Papers of R.P. Arnot – Personal Statements collected in South Wales – Interview with Mr Vivien Morgan, 3 Sep. 1962.

1926 coming again had died down and there was the possibility of active, energetic trade union activity.’¹³¹

The idea that strikes would lead only to disaster rather than any positive change, or that the miners would never support another one following 1926, appears to have been embraced by many senior figures within the SWMF, and some figures on the right of the Labour Party during the 1930s. Francis and Smith have described how a ‘defensive militancy...permeated the coalfield’ following 1926, and that the union was unable to ‘realistically contemplate a millennium or even a social revolution within the immediate future.’¹³² The moderate policies of the Federation, they conceded, commanded a widespread support in the early 1930s, as indicated by the standing ovation received by the president, James Griffiths, at the SWMF’s annual conference in 1934.¹³³ During one call for strike action in 1934, it was reported that Griffiths sympathised with the call for action, but doubted the readiness of the men to fight – ‘the miners,’ he argued, ‘could not risk another 1926...if the strike was defeated it would mean the end of the Federation.’¹³⁴ Arthur Jenkins, miners’ agent and right-leaning MP for Pontypool, went even further, appearing to fully endorse the idea that strikes were disastrous, and progress achieved only through conciliation, claiming that ‘strikes have never brought good results for the miners,’ and that through such action they ‘had lost more wages...than they had through arbitration.’¹³⁵

This hegemonic, Liberal narrative of strikes had two elements, a belief that strikes were disastrous, rooted firmly in the experience of 1926, and a nostalgia for the ‘progressive consensus’ of prosperity and conciliatory industrial relations that had supposedly existed before the First World War. The CHP interviews also contained traces of such attitudes, in addition to the collective memory of past struggles. Haydn Thomas for example, fondly recalled the old miners’ agent for the Merthyr district; ‘they used to call him John Go-to-work, because he always used to tell you, “go to work boys, go to work” ...and by jingo, you had happier times too, I can tell you.’¹³⁶ Thomas had himself been a member of the SWMIU at Taff-Merthyr, and had worked through a strike at the pit in the 1930s. Such views then might have

¹³¹ SWCC:MNB/PP/2/16 – Papers of R.P. Arnot – Personal Statements collected in South Wales – Interview with Mr Vivien Morgan, 5 Oct. 1962.

¹³² Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 363.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹³⁴ *SWM*, 19, 3 Apr. 1934.

¹³⁵ *SWM*, 30, 9 Oct. 1934.

¹³⁶ SWML, AUD/224, Interview with Haydn Thomas, April, 1974.

been expected, but even staunch Federation men like Thomas Thomas, adopted a position on political and industrial issues that were more closely aligned with the owners. Asked about his politics, he replied, 'my view is a Liberal...view,' and explained that 'I'd rather the Conservatives than Labour, you see.'¹³⁷ To the audible incredulity of the interviewer (Hywel Francis), he went on to claim that 'we get more from the Conservatives than from...Labour...we've had a rise now, two rises with the Conservatives...we don't get bugger all with...Labour except bloody guss.'¹³⁸ The rises, which had, in fact, been won by the NUM against the Tory Government through strikes in 1972 and 1974, were, to Thomas, examples of Conservative generosity rather than the power of industrial action. Indeed, his memories of strikes were very negative; 'I never seen them winning a strike yet...I've seen a good many of them, non-union strikes and everything.'¹³⁹

Whilst individuals like Haydn and Thomas Thomas were wholly opposed to the 'alternative culture' of political radicalism and industrial militancy, many of the people who expressed aspects of the rival, anti-strike consciousness had mixed recollections, containing elements of both narratives. In particular, a nostalgia for the years prior to 1921 – for the so-called 'Progressive Consensus' supposedly shattered by the Cambrian Combine Strike, for the first (and only) Welsh Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and for the legendary miners' leader William Abraham (Mabon) – can be seen in many of the oral history interviews. Some explicitly referenced Lloyd George as a hero, or 'a great man in the interest of the workers,' or boasted of how they were 'one of the few people alive today who could say he had a case of his dealt with by Mabon.'¹⁴⁰ Thomas Jones described Mabon three times as a 'wonderful man' and remembered how he had said 'half a loaf is better than nothing...but he kept us going with a loaf still, although he said half a loaf was better than nothing, yes.'¹⁴¹ Mabon was also recalled in a 1965 BBC documentary on the Tonypandy riots. A group of miners interviewed for the programme agreed that the 'Rhondda today has little time for history...the past is behind us, let it stay that way,' but still remembered the old leader as 'one of the best gentleman no doubt we've ever had in the Rhondda,' and enthused about 'Mabon's Day.'¹⁴²

¹³⁷ SWML, AUD/83, Interview with Thomas Thomas, 3 August, 1973.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ SWML, AUD/658, Interview with Harry Davies, 19 January, 1977; AUD/396, Interview with J.L. Williams, 24 April, 1973.

¹⁴¹ SWML, AUD/179, Interview with Thomas Jones, c. 1972-1974.

¹⁴² *The Long Street – Road to Pandy Square*, (dir. Gethyn Stoodley Thomas, 1965).

Indeed, positive recollections of figures such as Mabon, were not always accompanied by negative memories of strikes and protests. For some, he was simply another labour leader in a pantheon of past heroes. William Smith, for instance, placed Mabon alongside 'Keir Hardie, Dr Marion Phillips and all the stars of the Labour Party.'¹⁴³ A similar phenomenon can be seen with memories of David Lloyd George. Elizabeth Roberts described how her politics had come from her father – 'we would have to be Labour...I had to vote Labour...even my husband, he was told, you vote Labour – my father was a big man for Lloyd George see.'¹⁴⁴ Jesse Clark also described his affection for the former Liberal premier, prompting the following exchange:

[Jesse Clark] 'Lloyd George was my hero.'

[Interviewer] 'Liberal you were, was it?'

[JC] 'Yes he was a Liberal.'

[Int.] 'You were a Liberal as well were you?'

[JC] 'No, I had a tendency towards Socialism.'¹⁴⁵

The two examples show that the interaction between these two, competing narratives, could sometimes be quite complex. Both Roberts and Clark maintained a reverence for Liberal political heroes, despite a subsequent change in political loyalties – with these earlier figures simply being absorbed into a Labour tradition. Positive memories of figures like Mabon and Lloyd George (who embodied a more consensual and less class-conscious form of politics and industrial relations) and engagement with heroic narratives of progress through struggle were not necessarily mutually exclusive.

In many senses therefore, viewing these two narratives as being in direct competition is too simplistic when it comes to looking at how they were engaged with by men and women within the mining communities. It was not always simply case of men or women engaging with one narrative at the other's expense – such engagement could often be far more messy and complex. Nonetheless, the endurance of such attitudes toward strike action into the 1970s is interesting, especially given the fact that, following the Second World War, there were few attempts at propagating this particular historical narrative of strikes and protests.¹⁴⁶ Despite their persistence, however, it should be emphasised that nostalgia for the years before 1921,

¹⁴³ SWML, AUD/315, Interview with William Smith, May, 1974.

¹⁴⁴ SWML, AUD/613, Interview with Elizabeth Roberts, 12 January, 1978.

¹⁴⁵ SWML, AUD/325, Interview with Jesse Clark, c. 1972-1974.

¹⁴⁶ Nationalisation in 1947 had, of course, largely put an end to private ownership of the mines, whilst the focus of the local press understandably shifted to more contemporary concerns, and seldom made references to the miners' history. The two main sources of these representations were thus either vanquished or otherwise preoccupied.

or recollections of the 1920s and 1930s in which strikes were recalled as disastrous or senseless are relatively rare in the CHP interviews. Memories in which strikes were placed within a heroic narrative of progress through struggle were far more common (perhaps, to some extent, reflecting the miners' victories in 1972 and 1974), whilst memories that engaged with the initially hegemonic narrative were scattered and isolated in comparison. There is little evidence that these individual recollections constituted any form of collective memory, as opposed to a disparate collection of personal remembrances. The linear narrative of progress had not been the only memory of strikes that had existed on the coalfield – indeed, it had been constructed to challenge an alternative history of strike action. Yet by the 1970s, these alternative memories appear to have been only marginal, individual recollections, at least in the interviews recorded by the CHP.

IV

Assessing how competing narratives of the coalfield's history were received and reworked is crucially important in attempting to reconstruct collective memory – especially so given their wider historical and historiographical significance. Yet, there is a danger that focusing exclusively on reception might lead to other collective memories being overlooked. Roy Church and Quentin Outram have noted that mining strikes 'have almost always been treated as conflicts between workers and managements,' and only 'rarely as occasions of co-operation between workers.'¹⁴⁷ Any industrial action is, of course, an example of both, and whilst the CHP recorded substantial evidence of people engaging with historical narratives that focused on confrontation, there were also powerful collective memories of solidarity, co-operation and the community pulling together, which appear to have emerged out of the experiences of individual men and women.

Recollections of soup kitchens and communal feeding were by far the most common memories of strikes, mentioned by 88 of the 203 people interviewed. They featured prominently regardless of the specific dispute recalled, occurring in recollections of 1898, 1910-11, 1921 and 1926, as well as several smaller, local actions. There is a very strong association in memory between strikes and soup kitchens, often being the first thing

¹⁴⁷ Roy Church and Quentin Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity, Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889-1996*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15.

mentioned in response to questions about them, or even to a reference to the dates. To give one example, Bessie Webb was asked 'can you remember the General Strike?' and responded 'oh yes, in uh, 1926? There was soup kitchens here in the tinworks...we used to go down every day to have a meal.'¹⁴⁸ Abel Morgan meanwhile, recalled of the 1898 stoppage how 'we immediately formed a soup kitchen...and any strike we had after that, the soup kitchen went into action straight away.'¹⁴⁹ The way in which the communal feeding instantly springs to mind suggests that the soup kitchens serve almost as a mnemonic shorthand for the idea of strikes – both indelibly associated with each other in the collective memory. In perhaps one of the most striking examples of this, Glyn Williams placed his experiences of strikes throughout his life within the context of the canteens:

Now I was in three soup kitchens. The first soup kitchen I remember was as a little tot going with my elder brother Morris...taking me to the 1912 minimum wage strike...then in 1921, we had three meals a day in the '21 strike...we had good food in '21...In 1926 it was one meal a day, and that was the mid-day meal...one good meal a day. That was in '26.¹⁵⁰

Such was the strength of the association between soup kitchens and strikes that they even featured in the memories of those who had not experienced them. Sal Jones recalled how her daughter was born in the 1921 lockout, and that 'there was soup kitchens then, well I couldn't go down because I was going to have my baby.'¹⁵¹ Similarly, Mrs Roderick remembered how 'they had the soup kitchens during the strike,' even though she couldn't 'remember ever going,' whilst Elizabeth Morgan told of how 'the children had soup kitchens, I remember soup kitchens, none of us ever went to soup kitchens.'¹⁵² Furthermore, whilst the more confrontational narratives of past strikes were primarily engaged in by men, both men and women appeared to remember the communal feeding more or less equally – 28 of 74 women and 60 of 129 men. This is despite the fact that, as Sue Bruley has noted, 'adult communal eating in 1926 was [largely] a male experience,' and that only the women who were school-aged at the time of that lockout would have been involved.¹⁵³ They also featured in the memories of those who otherwise had very little recollection of industrial disputes – if someone were to remember only one thing about 1898, 1921 or 1926, it was typically the

¹⁴⁸ SWML, AUD/481, Interview with Bessie Webb and Hannah Evans, 24 April, 1975.

¹⁴⁹ SWML, AUD/311, Interview with Abel Morgan, 9 October, 1972.

¹⁵⁰ SWML, AUD/257, Interview with Glyn Williams, 21 May, 1974.

¹⁵¹ SWML, AUD/181, Interview with Mrs William Rosser Jones, 4 July, 1973.

¹⁵² SWML, AUD/460, Interview with Mrs Roderick, 30 May, 1975; AUD/486, Interview with Elizabeth Morgan, 11 June, 1975.

¹⁵³ Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926*, 46.

communal feeding. Perhaps the best example of this can be seen in the following exchange in the CHP's interview with George Hughes:

Interviewer: 'What do you remember of the several very long and bitter strikes, you know, that took place?'

George Hughes: 'The what?'

Int.: 'What do you remember of the several very long and bitter strikes that took place while you were working?'

GH: 'Spike?'

Int.: 'Strikes!'

GH: 'Strike!? Oh, 1926 I think...I remember they had soup kitchens here for us to feed all the men because there was nothing coming in, see.'¹⁵⁴

The fact that they were so prominent in individual memories of strike action does not, of course, necessarily indicate that there was a collective memory of soup kitchens. It might be argued for example, that they were so widely remembered because they were such a widespread experience, and that, representing a major disruption to one of the most routine aspects of everyday life (i.e. eating), they left a strong imprint on memory. Yet such an argument would not account for the number of people who remembered the soup kitchens despite not experiencing them, as mentioned above. Indeed, it seems that irrespective of whether people had a personal experience of the soup kitchens, their imagery was such an indelible symbol of miners' strikes that they would feature in individual memory regardless. This symbolism was rooted in a wider, common understanding of strikes, and the meaning of such actions. In *Social Memory*, Fentress and Wickham referenced a thought experiment conducted by the psychologist Frederick Bartlett, in which a random and meaningless sequence of events is told as 'a story' to a number of subjects.¹⁵⁵ When they were later asked to repeat the story however, all had changed the details to give it some rational meaning or moral. Fentress and Wickham used this example to argue that our memories hold 'concepts rather than data,' and to suggest that we do not simply remember events because we experienced them, but do so because meaning is attached to them within our memories, and it is the symbol rather than the detail which matters.¹⁵⁶ This would suggest that the reason the soup kitchens retained such a hold on so many people's memories was not simply because

¹⁵⁴ SWML, AUD/254, Interview with George Hughes, August, 1973.

¹⁵⁵ Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 35.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

they were a common experience, but also because they had a wider, shared meaning – remembered so widely because they symbolised something, not just because they happened.

As with more confrontational recollections of strikes, there are also plenty of examples of memories of the soup kitchens being shared, talked about or passed down within families or the wider community. The interview with P.J. Matthews, in which his son interjected to affirm that they had had to go to the kitchens was quoted earlier, whilst Mrs Moon said that she knew of the soup kitchens because her husband had told her of how he had used to go.¹⁵⁷ Henry John, meanwhile, had actually been involved in organising the soup kitchens around Abercraf during 1926. He remembered how:

We were together in the soup kitchens in the school, feeding the kids. And it's a funny thing now, some of the boys, they are men now, fathers, they come on to me now and they always say... 'Oh, the soup we had with you I'll never forget it.'¹⁵⁸

Such examples suggest that the recollections of communal feeding were not just a series of disparate, and otherwise unrelated individual memories, but together formed a collective memory of past strikes that centred on ideas of the community pulling together, of co-operation, solidarity and mutual support.

It was these memories of co-operation, rather than confrontation, which predominate in the interviews recorded by the CHP. Merfyn Payne described how just thinking back to 1926 'lights me up even at ninety-two, when I'm by myself and reminiscing – the joy we got out of helping one another then... there was a sort of village community feeling here.'¹⁵⁹ Ray Williams had similar nostalgia for the time of the lockout, breaking off from describing the soup kitchens in Cwmfelinfach to say how 'people were closer then, kindlier then than they'd ever been.'¹⁶⁰

Another dimension to the collective memory of the community pulling together during strikes, were the positive memories of the shopkeepers, and of how they had supported the miners through their struggles. Seventeen people expressed gratitude or affection for the role that they had played during strikes (none were critical), with Mrs Moon recalling that they were 'very good... all of them...they understood, I mean they lived here with us and they understood us.'¹⁶¹ Elved Evans went so far as to say that they 'would never have won our battles, if it

¹⁵⁷ SWML, AUD/625, Interview with Mrs Moon, 24 January, 1978.

¹⁵⁸ SWML, AUD/220, Interview with Henry John, 1 December, 1972.

¹⁵⁹ SWML, AUD/395, Interview with Merfyn Payne, 18 June, 1975.

¹⁶⁰ SWML, AUD/623, Interview with Ray Williams, 24 January, 1978.

¹⁶¹ SWML, AUD/625, Interview with Mrs Moon, 24 January, 1978.

hadn't been for the tradesmen of this locality...we would have been starved out!'¹⁶² These memories were mirrored in the few interviews that the CHP recorded with the shopkeepers and other tradespeople themselves. Tom Jenkins, for instance, had left the pits after the 1921 lockout to run his own grocery business, and he remembered of the lockout five years later how 'the atmosphere was all of wanting to do for one another what was possible to help them survive.'¹⁶³ Mrs Prosser's father had also been a grocer during the 1920s, and she remembered how he had supplied his 'customers with food throughout the strike, there was no dole or anything for them you see.'¹⁶⁴ This sympathy was again extended by many shopkeepers in 1972, some of whom drew explicitly on the memories of their support for the mining community in 1926. One grocer from Troedyrhiw, remembered how 'the traders of South Wales have helped the miners before, even to the extent of going broke in 1926,' and claimed that those feelings were 'much the same now.'¹⁶⁵

There are two things to emphasise about a collective memory of strikes based on cooperation, solidarity and the community pulling together. The first, is that although strikes appear to have been primarily remembered as acts of cooperation, rather than confrontation, this cooperative dimension was rarely, if ever referenced by the union and political parties, in popular culture and the press, or by the coalowners and the SWMIU. Their representations of historic strikes and protest mentioned neither soup kitchens nor the support of shopkeepers and other tradespeople – focusing instead on industrial actions as instances of confrontation between miner and mine-owner. Indeed, shopkeepers were far more likely to be cast as opponents of the miners within such narratives (or as victims by elements of the press), than to be recalled positively. In 1924, Frances Handy from Abertillery described the 'average grocer' as a 'little capitalist on his own who becomes so blinded in his strenuous endeavour to make profits for himself that he overreaches himself.'¹⁶⁶ In the coming struggle, she warned, they must choose their side, for 'he that is not for us is against us.'¹⁶⁷ Idris Davies painted a similar picture of the shop owners in his epic poem on the 1926 lockout, 'The Angry Summer,' in which a miner's wife was patronisingly lectured by one shopkeeper – 'how will you pay for it now, little woman

¹⁶² SWML, AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978. It is also interesting to point out here how Evans remembered the lockouts as victories when, of course, being 'starved out' was probably closer to the reality. His recollection here might be seen as an example of him engaging with collective memories of strikes as both the community pulling together and as a progressive march.

¹⁶³ SWML, AUD/241, Interview with Tom Jenkins, 28 June, 1973.

¹⁶⁴ SWML, AUD/471, Interview with Mrs Prosser, 18 March, 1975.

¹⁶⁵ *WM*, 12 Jan. 1972.

¹⁶⁶ *CWM*, 2:4 Apr. 1924, 104.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 104, 105.

with your husband out on strike, and full of the fiery language,’ with ‘me, little Dan the grocer depending so much on private enterprise.’¹⁶⁸ This formed a stark contrast with the recollections of friendship and sympathy on both sides that were recorded by the CHP, as discussed above. Edgar Evans, for instance was asked specifically about whether there had been and profiteering by shopkeepers during 1926, and insisted that there hadn’t, that ‘there was an excellent feeling,’ and that the butcher had ‘supplied meat for the...food kitchen at cost price.’¹⁶⁹

The hegemonic, Liberal narratives of strike action also depicted the relationship between miners and shopkeepers as adversarial. One reporter from the *Western Mail* in 1926 described how, in the idle pit villages, ‘the shops...are not doing a quarter of their old trade – the undertakers are bitterly complaining of poor trade,’ and expressed the hope that the miners would ‘bear these lessons in mind’ when they returned to work.¹⁷⁰ Given the way in which relationships between the mining community and shopkeepers during strikes were represented, and given the fact that soup kitchens were almost completely absent from these narratives, it is evident that a collective memory of cooperation and solidarity was not created by coalfield representations being received and refracted by the rank-and-file. Rather, it was a collective memory that had emerged directly out of the individual memories and experiences of the men and women of the mining communities – with these individual memories becoming understood within a common narrative framework that emphasised communal solidarity and cooperation.

The second thing to emphasise is that whilst it would be easy to dismiss this collective memory as simple nostalgia, it was, nevertheless, one that directly challenged contemporary representations of the strike that had appeared in local and national papers. As discussed above, elements of the press depicted the miners’ actions in 1921 and 1926 as direct attacks upon the community. Yet to the men and women of the pit villages, such actions were primarily understood as instances in which the community had pulled together and supported itself. Thus, although these memories may not appear as radical as the more confrontational and militant narratives (and collective memory) of progress through struggle, they also still challenged ideas about industrial action that had been prevalent within the press, and offered an alternative framework for remembering and understanding such incidents. Another key

¹⁶⁸ Idris Davies, ‘The Angry Summer,’ in *The Collected Poems*, ed. Islwyn Jenkins, (2011), 88.

¹⁶⁹ SWML, AUD/212, Interview with Edgar Evans, 9 July, 1975.

¹⁷⁰ WM, 1 Oct. 1926.

element of the hegemonic, Liberal narratives, and one that had been emphasised by the coalowners and the SWMIU in particular, as well as the press, was the claim that strikes (especially 1926) were disastrous, and had brought nothing but misery and suffering upon the miners and their families. Whilst this was more explicitly opposed by the narrative in which strikes and protests were depicted as part of a march of progress, it was also directly challenged by the far more positive memories of solidarity and mutual support during disputes like 1921 and 1926 that were recorded by the CHP. In defiance of narratives that framed the lockouts in the language of catastrophe, disaster and defeat, people within the mining communities collectively recalled the experience as a positive and happy one.

Indeed, positive memories extended well beyond the soup kitchens, or the support of neighbours and local tradespeople. In her book on the 1926 lockout in the Durham coalfield, Hester Barron noted how the glorious summer was ‘one of the most consistent images of 1926’ in both oral history interviews and written memoirs.¹⁷¹ This was also true of 1926 in south Wales, as well as 1898, 1910-1911, 1921 and 1925. Twenty-seven people remembered the ‘marvellous summer’ and ‘tremendous weather’ in which such disputes had taken place, or of how ‘we didn’t have a day’s rain, absolutely glorious.’¹⁷² This is not entirely surprising, as Barron notes, for men who normally spent their lives underground, a whole summer spent out of work on the surface is likely to stick in the memory (it might be noted that of the twenty-seven people to recall the good weather, there was only one woman). But, as Barron also notes, the ‘blue skies and blazing sun’ of 1926 remain central to collective memory because they add to the symbolism of the dispute – ‘an ordinary summer would lack the same romantic currency.’¹⁷³ In her recent work on the Winter of Discontent, Tara Martin Lopez also talks about the role played by weather within memory – in this case the bitter winter of 1978-79. She argues that in popular memory, the severe weather served as a ‘memory aid,’ around which memories of the event are organised.¹⁷⁴ Memories of the series of strikes are given both added meaning (of a sense of crisis) and a narrative framework by the meteorological context. She quotes the work of David Arnold, who has argued that extreme weather can often act ‘as a pole around which all other experiences and impressions are organised and collected...providing a link between the world of personal memory and the broader domain of

¹⁷¹ Barron, *The 1926 Miners’ Lockout*, 231.

¹⁷² SWML, AUD/627, Interview with Mr and Mrs Ivor Huggins, 1 February, 1978; AUD/222, Interview with Dick Cook, 24 January, 1974; AUD/214, Interview with Penry Davies, 20 October, 1973.

¹⁷³ Barron, *The 1926 Miners’ Lockout*, 232.

¹⁷⁴ Tara Martin Lopez, *The Winter of Discontent: Myth, Memory and History*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 87.

collective consciousness.¹⁷⁵ It might be argued that something so communally experienced as the weather facilitates the development of a collective memory, being far easier to remember as a shared experience than other personal incidents, which, by their very nature are more fractured and diverse. The weather during 1898, 1921 or 1926 may also have offered a similar point around which a collective memory could form, with the positive connotations of a 'marvellous summer' helping the emergence of a positive collective memory based on cooperation and community support. A similar role might also have been played by the communal feeding in the soup kitchens, which provide an almost universal common experience of strikes upon which a collective memory might be based.

Many of those interviewed by the CHP also remembered taking advantage of the good weather. Henry John remembered how he had 'camped with the other boys right through the '21 strike on the Gellioni mountain – and we had a terrific time you know.'¹⁷⁶ At the opposite end of the coalfield, John Holland had similar memories of the beautiful weather and the camping during 1921:

It was a glorious summer that, and the best summer as ever I can remember, it was sunshine all the way. Nobody didn't want to go back to work. And then they'd come down in the evening, from the mountain, and they'd sit in the streets on the corners, and they'd all congregate together and then they'd start to sing. They'd be there 'til about one or two o'clock in the morning and then those that was camping out would trot back off up to the tents.¹⁷⁷

In total, forty of those interviewed by the CHP remembered having a good time swimming, playing sports, camping, attending or participating in jazz bands and carnivals or just enjoying the good weather. Anne Thomas, who had just returned from college, described 1926 as one of the best times of her life – 'oh terrific, I came back right in the middle of the 1926 strike you know and it was wonderful, I went to every meeting that was ever held, every concert that was ever held.'¹⁷⁸ For some, the benefits of those summers and the time away from the pits, whether in 1898, 1921 or 1926, endured well beyond the miners' defeat and return to work. Hywel Jefferies was asked what conditions had been like in 1926, and said that it had been 'a good time' for him:

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁷⁶ SWML, AUD/220, Interview with Henry John, 1 December, 1972.

¹⁷⁷ SWML, AUD/614, Interview with John Holland, 13 January, 1978.

¹⁷⁸ SWML, AUD/285, Interview with Anne Thomas, 28 November, 1973.

I think I'd be dead...but for the strikes, 1925 and 1926, I spent my time on the farm, and it was heart-breaking to go back to the collieries I can tell you that.¹⁷⁹

It should also be noted, however, that there were exceptions to this collective memory. Whilst memories of 1921 and 1926 were happy ones for some, there were also many for whom the strikes had been times of intense poverty and hardship. Fully fifty of those interviewed talked about the hunger and suffering caused by the long disputes, and such memories were usually elided with the broader memories of the inter-war depression in the interviews recorded by the CHP, which are fully discussed in Chapter III. Positive memories of strikes and lockouts mostly occur in the recollections of those who were young at the time, whereas those who were older were more likely to remember them as difficult or unhappy experiences. Phil Abrahams, a Communist Party activist from Nantyglo, explained this generational difference in the following terms:

It is the experience of life that determines your political consciousness, and you haven't had that experience before twenty...until twenty...you were more or less cared for by your father and mother, it is after that, that you have to fend for yourself, and then you start to realise when you couldn't meet the rent, and...you had the butchers bill and you couldn't pay it, in the last analysis it is economic isn't it?¹⁸⁰

There were, therefore, some generational differences in how strikes and lockouts were remembered. This is not entirely surprising – those who were young typically had few responsibilities, and thus felt able to enjoy the long break from work, whilst men and women who were older often had children or dependent older relatives to look after, and may have been troubled by the missed rent payments and growing debts with the local shopkeepers. These differences are themselves complex, however. Some of the very oldest people interviewed had very positive memories of strikes based on their experiences of 1898, or the disputes between 1910 and 1912. Industrial action served as a frequent punctuation to the coalfield's history, and could be experienced at several different ages by the same individual. Thus, whilst it was generally the case that attitudes towards strikes were often determined by age at which they were experienced, there is no clear dividing line between different generations within the CHP interviews.

¹⁷⁹ SWML, AUD/76, Interview with Hywel Jeffries, 15 November, 1982.

¹⁸⁰ SWML, AUD/329, Interview with Phil Abrahams, 14 January, 1974.

It should also be noted that some who remembered the soup kitchens did not recall them with any sense of nostalgia, but instead as something shameful, to have been avoided if possible. Miss Morgan, for example, recalled that 'there was kitchens here, but not one of our boys went near that,' and vehemently added 'never near the kitchen!'¹⁸¹ When asked why not, she explained that 'nobody could throw them their food in the kitchen...a disgrace then.'¹⁸² Lee Hutchinson, meanwhile, had enjoyed the strikes and the kitchens himself, but recalled that 'many didn't go there because they were too proud...because they didn't think it right.'¹⁸³ It was, in fact, in recollections of the soup kitchens where perhaps the clearest generational divide could be seen. Those who were children during the lockouts recalled the canteens particularly fondly. Myrddin Hywel Powell for instance remembered sneaking out of the house 'with a big basin under my jersey' to get to the soup kitchens, 'because everybody else was going to the soup kitchens, and I wanted to.'¹⁸⁴ Many women also had remarkably similar memories with Diana Davies, for example, recalling how 'as children we were dying to go to the soup kitchens.'¹⁸⁵ Such recollections indicate that amongst those who were children, the canteens came to be seen as a positive experience of childhood that should not be missed out on.

But whilst it is important to stress these generational differences – and the fact that not everyone fondly remembered the lockouts – such memories were still placed within this framework of cooperation and solidarity, as instances of the community pulling together in the face of adversity. The predominant collective memory of strikes in south Wales was, therefore, one of co-operation, and solidarity. The communal feeding at the soup kitchens were the most enduring memories that were recorded by the CHP, and such recollections, together with the memories of the shopkeepers, the weather, and the good times during the lockouts formed a positive collective memory of the community pulling together during industrial disputes. As such, it directly challenged the depiction of strikes as disastrous – as attacks on the community – that had been propagated by the coalowners and elements within the press. Furthermore, this collective memory of cooperation and solidarity was one that had emerged independently

¹⁸¹ SWML, AUD/463, Interview with Miss Morgan, 6 May, 1975.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ SWML, AUD/170, Interview with Lee Hutchinson, 13 May, 1974. See also AUD/237, Interview with Bob Morris, 9 November, 1973 and AUD/473, Interview with Mrs Taylor, 21 March, 1975 for further examples.

¹⁸⁴ SWML, AUD/295, Interview with Myrddin Hywel Powell, 19 September, 1975.

¹⁸⁵ SWML, AUD/491, Interview with Diana Davies, 25 June, 1975; See also AUD/458, Interview with Edith Jones, 8 April, 1975; AUD/459, Interview with Mrs Richards, 15 April, 1975; AUD/484, Interview with Mrs Thomas, 10 June, 1975; AUD/492, Interview with Edith Edwards, 26 June, 1975.

of the more confrontational narratives of strikes that the union and others had tried to construct. It was one that had been created by the men and women of the mining communities in south Wales, rather than one that had been shaped by representations of the past.

V

In the wider historiography an awareness of, or even an obsession with, the struggles of the past is argued to have been a hallmark of mining communities, and was seen as an integral element in the distinctive political and industrial culture of the south Wales miners and their families. References to past strikes and protests, by the union, by political parties, and within novels and the press were indeed a notable feature of coalfield society from the 1920s onwards. Such references had initially been woven into a heroic narrative of progress through struggle, which had been created partly as a response to the defeats of 1921 and 1926, as an attempt to inspire the miners and their families, and raise them from any despondency. Into the 1950s and 1960s, however, the tone of this narrative had shifted, becoming one of injustice and heroic tragedy, rather than victorious struggle and protest.

As can be seen from the interviews recorded by the CHP, this narrative had helped to shape a strong, militant collective memory of strikes by the 1970s. Furthermore, these memories were actively talked about, discussed, and handed down within families and the wider community, leading to a shared, common understanding of past struggles – though one, it should be emphasised, that was primarily engaged with by men. Such an understanding was able to emerge even though the lives of those interviewed appear to have been characterised as much by movement and migration, as they were by generational continuity and family links to the mining industry. Indeed, this movement may even have even facilitated the development of this memory across the coalfield. Many of the recollections of past strikes were specific to events at particular villages and pits, with a strong local dimension to many memories. Yet these were, nonetheless, often still understood within a broader collective framework, one which may have been shared and spread by the movement of so many miners and their families within and across the coalfield.

In this respect, therefore, the CHP found the consciousness that they were looking for, and which many feared was being lost. However, it had had to challenge an initially hegemonic, Liberal narrative which depicted strikes as disastrous, but of which there remained only a few, scattered and disparate traces by the time the CHP began its work. These two narratives, and the extent to which they were received and engaged with by the men and women of the pit villages, are hugely important, not least because of their wider historiographical significance. The struggle between them over the memory of past strikes was part of the wider struggles to rebuild the Federation, and to shape the attitudes of the coalfield on political and industrial issues. That struggle was detailed thoroughly in *The Fed*, and is a major historiographical issue in the history of the south Wales coalfield. What is particularly striking, is the influence that the legacy of 1926 (and the strikes) exerted in this contest. The interpretation of past strikes was not just one aspect of this struggle, but one of the key battlegrounds. Memories of industrial action were not incidental to, but the very basis of respective positions.

Yet, whilst looking at these historical narratives and how they were received is important, focusing solely on representations of the past and how they were received risks occluding other collective memories. Ultimately, the predominant collective memory of strikes was one of solidarity, cooperation, and the community pulling together. This collective memory was formed independently, and even in defiance of any representations of the past, and had emerged from the individual experiences of men and women within the mining communities. This suggests that the creation of collective memory was more of a reciprocal process – the result of a continual negotiation between public representations and individual memory – and was shaped as much from below as above. This is different to the way in which collective memory is conceptualised by Wulf Kansteiner discussed before, in which such memories were created by memory makers, and then adapted by memory consumers. Rather than such individuals being just consumers, they could, in some cases, also be ‘memory makers’ as well. This once again emphasises the importance of looking at how individuals remembered and engaged with the past, when trying to reconstruct collective memory. Simply inferring a collective memory or popular consciousness from public representations has long been seen as insufficient. But so too, arguably, is an approach which still places all the agency in the hands of representations, and dismisses individuals as simply absorbing, adapting or rejecting such ideas. Ordinary people were themselves agents in the creation of popular consciousness, and could exert a striking degree of independence in constructing the frameworks within which they saw and understood the world in which they lived.

II

Death Underground – Collective Memories of Mining Accidents.

The mining community of South Wales has once again been dealt a harrowing blow. In the early hours of Tuesday morning, a terrible explosion, accompanied by a heavy death toll, occurred at the Ebbw Vale Co.'s No. 1 Colliery, Cwm, near Ebbw Vale.¹

The miners at Cwm made an angry demonstration against Mr and Mrs Baldwin when they visited the pit at noon, on Wednesday, booing the Prime Minister and shouting at him, 'Why don't you go down the mine yourself?'...The crowd numbered about 400, and included a large number of women, who set up a continuous hissing and booing, and shouted 'eight hours,' and 'shove him down the pit,' until the car was out of hearing.²

Referring to the Baldwin incident, Mr [AJ] Cook said: 'A lot has been said about the reception you gave to Baldwin...I say here...without any apology, I think it was really audacious of him to dare to come here (hear, hear). The Prime Minister's action last year, in offering longer hours and taking a side, you have not forgotten...we have got to use these disasters to bring home to the public the tragedy and misery of the miners' existence'...He said one of the greatest safety acts would be the fixing of a proper minimum wage for the miner...another thing...was the Eight Hours Act...and he would not rest day or night until it had been struck off.³

On 1st March, 1927, an explosion at the Marine Colliery in Cwm claimed the lives of 52 miners. Over the next few days, local and national newspapers published vivid accounts of the desperate attempts to rescue the men still trapped deep beneath the surface of the earth. Writing of the 'Chamber of Horrors' that lurked below ground, they described how 'at every step the men were threatened by deadly gas and falls of coal,' that they had had to 'force their way through the fallen timber and heaps of rubbish brought down by the explosion,' and of gas so bad that the canaries they had brought with them were 'killed almost as soon as [they] descended the pit.'⁴ The rescue workers' themselves told of how 'everything seemed blown to pieces and the place was in the utmost confusion,' and reflected that had they, 'saved even

¹ *Glamorgan Free Press & Rhondda Leader (GFP & RL)*, 5 Mar. 1927.

² *SWA*, 2 Mar. 1927.

³ *WM*, 5 Mar. 1927.

⁴ *Daily Mirror*, 4 Mar. 1927; *SWA* 1 Mar. 1927.

one life...we should be happier men, but after all our efforts we found only dead.⁵ The disaster at the Marine Colliery struck only a few months after the miners had returned to work following the great lockout of 1926, at a time when emotions were still raw following their catastrophic defeat. The understandable bitterness and resentment of the miners and their families was made unmistakably apparent when Stanley Baldwin – the Conservative Prime Minister who was widely seen as having sided with the coalowners in breaking the strike – visited the colliery to pay his respects. As he posed at the pithead ‘for a score of photographers,’ trademark pipe in mouth, he was met with a substantial amount of anger and hostility from the rescue workers, anxious families and other onlookers assembled on the surface.⁶ For the tired and grieving men and women who had waited by the pit that Wednesday afternoon, and for their leader, A.J. Cook and the SWMF, there was an indelible link between the heroic struggle of 1926, and the dangers of working underground that were made so clearly evident a few months later.

Given their close proximity, chronologically speaking, the lockout of 1926 was an obvious point of reference for the mining communities and their trade union following the explosion at Cwm. Yet, the links made between the miners’ political and industrial struggles and the dangers that they faced underground were not a one-off, but part of a general and consistent pattern. The deaths and injuries sustained by the miners were an integral feature of the political and industrial rhetoric of the trade union and political parties, and were a key element in their representations of strikes and protests. These were often framed as being attempts to improve conditions underground in order to lessen the risks the miners faced, whilst those risks were in turn used to legitimate the various demands that the mining communities made during such actions. Arthur Cook, for instance, quoted above, stressed that the miners had to ‘use’ such incidents, ‘bring home to the public the tragedy and misery of the miners’ existence,’ whilst simultaneously drawing a direct causal link between the wages and hours the miners had lost in the lockout, and a deterioration in safety standards.⁷ Thus, the strike had been fought, in part, to stop the pits becoming more dangerous, whilst that danger was also a key weapon in the battle for public sympathy and support.

This close relationship between strikes and protests, and the dangers of working underground, was constantly evident when the miners’ union or political parties on the coalfield talked

⁵ SWA 1 Mar. 1927; *Daily Mirror*, 4 Mar. 1927.

⁶ SWE, 2 Mar. 1927.

⁷ WM, 5 Mar. 1927.

about either, from the First World War up until the strikes of the 1970s. Yet, whilst events like the Tonypandy riots, the great lockouts of the 1920s, the Hunger Marches and so forth were placed in a heroic, linear narrative of progress through struggle, the deaths and injuries that occurred in pits across the coalfield were not placed within this same temporal framework, but were understood within a different conception of time. The previous chapter, whilst discussing the linear conception of time within which memories of strikes were placed, primarily focused on the relationships between representations of the past and individual recollections – and at how these led to a collective memory. This chapter continues to discuss those relationships, and the role played by individuals in the shaping and forming of collective memory, but it primarily focuses instead on understandings of time. It argues that the collective and individual memories of deaths and injuries underground, despite being so closely linked to the representation and recollections of strikes and protests, were understood within a cyclical conception of time that had emerged out of the experiences of life, work and danger within the mining communities.

Big pit disasters, such as the explosion at the Marine Colliery in 1927, were amongst the most momentous and striking events within the mining communities' history – and would have formed natural and obvious landmarks within any linear narrative of the dangers the miners had faced underground. Even in the absence of such a framework, pit disasters were still major historical incidents which might reasonably be expected to have featured prominently within both individual and collective recollections of the past. Yet one of the most striking aspects of the memories of the dangers of working underground, was that big pit explosions were actually largely *absent* from the collective memories of the mining communities of south Wales. Whilst there is some evidence of them being remembered locally – within the specific villages affected – they were almost never mentioned by the SWMF or its successor, the South Wales Area of the NUM, and were rarely present in the memories of individual men and women that were recorded by the CHP in the 1970s. This strange, and perhaps surprising, absence was, as will be argued, a consequence of the cyclical conception of time in which the dangers of working underground were understood. Furthermore, the absence of such significant, landmark events from the wider memory of the coalfield made it difficult to construct a linear narrative of historic accidents. Given this, the reasons why pit disasters were largely absent from collective memory is one of the major questions of this chapter, as this absence is integral to understanding why the dangers of working underground were conceptualised differently.

That big pit disasters largely did not feature within the mining communities' own collective memories contrasts sharply with their prevalence within the popular image of such communities. Large underground explosions were amongst the most enduring symbols of mining communities within the public imagination. In Britain, they drew to the coalfields a level of press attention matched by only the greatest of national strikes, and they dominated representations of miners and their communities in popular culture. They were a recurring theme in novels – from Emile Zola's *Germinal* to A.J. Cronin's *The Stars Look Down* and Lewis Jones' *Cwmardy* – whilst perhaps the most famous of mining songs was the hymn 'Gresford', composed after the deaths of 266 men at a colliery in north Wales in 1934. Films also focused on the drama and tragedy of such accidents, with one recent article declaring that 'a mining film without a disaster is like a Western without a shoot-out.'⁸ Their absence is even more surprising given the fact that the south Wales coalfield was particularly associated with these tragedies – having been wracked by disasters throughout its history. There had been eight explosions each killing over a hundred men in the four decades leading up to 1913, including 268 killed at the Prince of Wales colliery in Abercarn in 1878, 290 at Cilfynydd's Albion colliery in 1894, and 439 at Senghennydd in 1913 – the worst mining disaster in British history. Helen and Baron Duckham have written of how, by 1913, the public had become 'accustomed to reading newspaper accounts of calamitous Welsh mining accidents over their breakfast tables', and tragedies continued to strike in the years after, most notably at the Marine Colliery in Cwm – mentioned above – at Six Bells in 1960 (forty-five killed), and the Cambrian Colliery in the Rhondda in 1965 (thirty-one).⁹

Aside from the numerous disasters that formed a tragic punctuation to the coalfield's history, thousands of miners were also killed in smaller, every-day incidents – such as roof-falls and haulage accidents – which claimed lives in ones and twos, rather than scores or hundreds at a time. Coal mining was 'the most dangerous of all the major industries,' according to a Royal Commission Report in 1939, and the risk of death or injury was ever-present.¹⁰ Miners also faced the additional threat of industrial diseases like nystagmus – over which there were particularly strong concerns in the 1920s – and pneumoconiosis, or 'miner's lung', which

⁸ Bert Hogenkamp, 'A mining film without a disaster is like a Western without a shoot-out: Representations of coal mining communities in feature films', in *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies*, ed. Stefan Berger, Andy Croll and Norman LaPorte, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 90.

⁹ Helen and Baron Duckham, *Great Pit Disasters: Great Britain, 1700 to the Present Day* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973), 160.

¹⁰ *Report of the Royal Commission on Safety in Mines, 1938-39*, 5, cited in Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry*, 427.

appears to have replaced nystagmus as the major preoccupation of the union from the 1930s onwards. Overall, whether from disaster, disease or other accidents, south Wales accounted 'for between 20 and 30 per cent of total British colliery deaths from the 1870s through until the 1930s,' whilst representing only 19 per cent of its output and workforce even at its peak.¹¹ It was, 'consistently the most dangerous coalfield in Britain in which to work' – a fact that was widely acknowledged.¹² The appalling frequency with which men were killed or maimed underground is fundamental to any understanding of miners and the communities in which they lived, and was an integral element of their occupational culture, and the idea of belonging to a mining community.

Yet, despite the centrality of danger to the experiences of mining communities, very little work has been written on the dangers of working underground. Much of the historiography of mining communities has tended – generally speaking – to focus more on the growth of the trade unions, on strikes and on industrial relations, rather than the dangers faced by the miners on a daily basis. One notable exception to this is an article written by Roger Laidlaw on the popular memory of the Gresford disaster in north Wales, which, at times, provides a useful point of comparison.¹³ More recently, a major research project on 'Disability and Industrial Society' has led to a series of significant and important articles on disabled miners across Britain. Ben Curtis and Steven Thompson's work on south Wales in particular has highlighted the importance of workplace health and safety to the miners and their union.¹⁴ The most substantial work on the dangers of the pit, however, is Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston's book *Miners' Lung*, which examines pneumoconiosis and other mine-related respiratory diseases across south Wales, the north-east of England and Scotland.¹⁵ Their discussions of miners' attitudes to risk and danger and how these related to constructions of masculinity are drawn on later.

¹¹ Ben Curtis, 'The South Wales Miners' Federation and the Perception and Representation of Risk and Danger in the Coal Industry, 1898–1947', in *Morgannwg: Journal of Glamorgan History*, 58, (2014), 71.

¹² *Ibid.*, 71. The dangers in south Wales relative to other coalfields was raised by miners' MP William Brace in a debate in 1914 – see Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 58, 12 Feb. 1914, 431–432. See also Ben Curtis and Steven Thompson, "'A plentiful crop of cripples made by all this progress': Disability, artificial limbs and working-class mutualism in the south Wales coalfield, 1890–1948', *Social History of Medicine*, 27 (2014), 711, and Duckham, *Great Pit Disasters*, 160.

¹³ Roger Laidlaw, 'The Gresford disaster in popular memory', *Llafur*, 6 (1995).

¹⁴ See Curtis and Thompson, 'A plentiful crop of cripples,'; Ben Curtis and Steven Thompson, "'This is the country of premature old men" – Ageing and Aged Miners in the South Wales Coalfield, c.1880–1947,' in *Cultural and Social History*, 12, No. 4, (2015); and Curtis, 'The SWMF and the Perception and Representation of Risk.'

¹⁵ Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston, *Miners' Lung: A History of Dust Disease in British Coal Mining* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

This chapter looks at how the dangers of working underground were remembered within the south Wales coalfield. It focuses firstly on how accidents, explosions and industrial diseases were recalled by individual men and women, before then exploring how those dangers were represented by the union, political parties and the press. The deaths and injuries that had occurred underground were often placed within a particular narrative that might be called ‘the Price of Coal,’ and it is argued that this was created through a reciprocal interaction between individual recollections and coalfield representations. This interaction thus led to the emergence of a collective memory of deaths underground across the coalfield; and provides further insights into the relationship between individual memories and collective understandings of the past that were discussed in the previous chapter. Finally, this chapter looks at the differing conceptions of time within which the dangers of working underground appear to have been understood. It argues that the deaths and injuries that had occurred in the pit were understood within a cyclical conception of time. This conception was deeply rooted in the experiences of men and women within the mining communities – not just of danger, but of work and life generally – and stood in contrast to the linear understandings advanced by the union and other groups following the defeats of 1921 and 1926. This particular way of understanding time, along with the individual recollections of accidents and the representations of such dangers both nationally and within the coalfield, each provide an explanation for why tragedies such as Senghennydd, Cwm and Six Bells did not feature within the mining communities’ own collective memories.

I

There was a strong and pervasive awareness of the dangers of working underground amongst the men and women within the mining communities. One of the most striking features of the interviews recorded by the CHP, is the sheer number of deaths and injuries that are recalled. Smaller accidents, dust diseases like pneumoconiosis and references to the general dangers of the pit are amongst the most common recollections, occurring in 98 of the 203 interviews. This is despite the fact that such dangers were not the primary focus of any of the interviews and were rarely asked about directly. Whilst over half of the men interviewed (74 from 129) recalled injuries or fatalities that had struck either themselves, workmates or family members, a third of the women interviewed (25 from 74) also recalled such incidents, indicating that the

awareness of the dangers of the pit pervaded the entire community, not just those who directly risked their lives beneath the earth. Furthermore, whilst there were some regional variations in terms of the dangers that were remembered – pneumoconiosis and silicosis featured much more prominently in the interviews with people from the western valleys, for example – recollections of people being killed or injured in the pits are prevalent right across the coalfield. One of the miners interviewed by the CHP remembered that ‘never a day pass and you wouldn’t see an accident,’ whilst another, Jim Minton, claimed that the pit he had worked in ‘started in ’93, and finished in 1921, in all that time there was forty-two men had been killed there.’¹⁶ The constant presence of death and injury within the CHP, was also mirrored in the oral history project carried out by Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston for their work on pneumoconiosis. There, they note that accidents were ‘seared into the consciousness’ of many miners, and were ‘recurring motifs’ in many of the interviews that they conducted.¹⁷

The dangers of working underground were not only widely remembered by individual men and women, but were also actively talked about, shared and passed down within families and the wider community. Norman Evans recalled being often told of an accident that his father had suffered, where the winding rope had snapped, dropping the cage over 300 metres into the pit – ‘he was the only one left alive you see...imagine that as a memory...everyone killed in the cage, [and] somehow or other he escaped.’¹⁸ He went on to say how his father had never gotten over the traumatic incident, that he had used to ‘sweat at the very thought,’ and how ‘he couldn’t forget it.’¹⁹ Rosa Dowling’s grandfather had been killed underground at Treorchy when her mother was only a child:

You know we’ve heard her talking like...he [her grandfather] was sitting down with a pick in his hand, and the chap come along, the overman, and he said ‘hey, come on,’...and when he lifted his head there was a hole right through here, the clod, the coal had caught him in the back of the head look and the pick went right through there²⁰

Many other examples could also be quoted, and together they suggest that past accidents were actively talked about within pit villages, and that there was a shared awareness of the dangers of working underground.²¹

¹⁶ SWML, AUD/635, Interview with Geordie Hardesty, 16 January, 1978; AUD/301, Interview with Jim Minton, August, 1973.

¹⁷ McIvor and Johnston, *Miners’ Lung*, 49.

¹⁸ SWML, AUD/622, Interview with Norman Evans, 28 January, 1978.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ SWML, AUD/637, Interview with Rosa Dowling, 7 April, 1978.

²¹ For other examples see SWML, AUD/98, Interview of Mavis Llewellyn, 20 May, 1974; AUD/180, Interview with Mr William Rosser Jones, 4 July, 1973; AUD/184, Interview with Reg Fine, 2 July, 1973;

Furthermore, the deaths and injuries that occurred underground often appear to have been understood or conceptualised as collective experiences, not just individual ones. Mrs Taylor, for instance, began talking about how her brother had been killed underground, and immediately linked his death with others in the village – ‘there’s one boy living in the pre-fab up here now, and they had one, killed in the colliery, like my brother was killed in the colliery.’²² Her placement of her brother’s death within the context of another, more contemporary pit accident, indicates that she saw it as not only a personal tragedy, but also as part of a common (and still ongoing) experience of life within mining communities. Mavis Llewellyn’s grandfather had also died in the pit, an experience which she brought up very early when interviewed by the CHP. Later on in that same interview, she talked of a documentary about the miners that had aired recently during the strike of 1972, recalling in particular an old woman who had appeared on the programme:

Just sitting in her kitchen with a picture of her three boys. One had been killed when they lived in the little street down here, the second one had died as a result of a colliery accident...and we said that night ‘well gosh,’ there were only twelve houses in that street, and there were two Mrs Davies’s there and one of them had a son killed and the other died as a result of an accident, and the other Mrs Davies living four doors down had a son killed and her second son is hobbling around here now, he’s lost his leg, hobbling around on crutches.²³

What is perhaps most striking, is the way in which the very public representation of the dangers of the pit (the documentary had been broadcast on BBC2), were immediately linked with her own family’s experiences of death underground, and those of the wider community in which she lived. The experience of her childhood self, the two Mrs Davies’s on that street, and the woman on the television all seem to be imagined as the experience of the whole mining community. Her memory here was no longer simply a recollection of personal experience, but was instead a memory of what had happened to the community as a whole.

The recollections of individual men and women were, thus, often talked about and discussed, whilst also being framed as a part of the community’s experience as a whole. The manner in

AUD/201, Interview with Henry Lewis, 4 December, 1972; AUD/215, Interview with Walter Powell, 14 January, 1974; AUD/223, Interview with James Vale, 10 May, 1974; AUD/237, Interview with Bob Morris, 19 November, 1973; AUD/311, Interview with Abel Morgan, 9 October, 1972; AUD/460, Interview with Mrs Roderick, 30 May, 1975; AUD/491, Interview with Diana Davies, 25 June, 1975.

²² SWML, AUD/473, Interview with Mrs Taylor, 21 March, 1975.

²³ SWML, AUD/98, Interview of Mavis Llewellyn, 20 May, 1974.

which accidents underground were recalled was also often strikingly similar, with the same themes continually recurring. Many of the men who had worked underground, for instance, expressed fearlessness in the face of the considerable dangers of the pit. W.C. Davies was asked about his feelings upon starting work, and whether he had had any fears of going underground, and replied simply 'none at all.'²⁴ In another interview, with a group of miners from Mardy Colliery, one of the men mentioned a particularly bad fall that he had witnessed at the pit, and was asked whether it had scared him:

[Miner] 'No I been in the faces eighteen years now. It was the worst I've ever seen of course...but, a fall is a fall, you learn how to work 'em like...'

[Interviewer] 'How did you feel about the danger?'

[M] 'Doesn't bother me at all. It could fall all on me wouldn't worry me. That's it, we've always had bad faces, bad stents –'

[Int.] ' – why doesn't it worry you?'

[M] 'Because it doesn't! It frightens me, when you all of a sudden hear a big bang like that and you turn around like that, but it's gone all of a sudden then, see.'²⁵

This rejection of fear can perhaps also be seen in the stoicism with which many incidents were recounted. Memories of accidents themselves were often characterised by a matter-of-factness that belied the horrific events that were recalled. Arthur Morgan for example remembered an incident where the winding-engineer lowered a pit cage with three miners in too far, so that it ended up submerged in the water at the bottom of the shaft: 'when he stopped his engine the cage and the men were already in the sump and the three men unfortunately were drowned.'²⁶ George Hughes, meanwhile, saw two men killed when the top collapsed, and in a separate incident, nearly lost a leg when the chain broke on the machine he was operating: 'down came the girder...across that leg there...I was under there about fifteen minutes, twelve men tries to lift me up see, and they couldn't it was too heavy, see, dropped it back on me, and I was in a pool of blood, like a duck in water, splashing the blood all over my face.'²⁷ Many similar examples might also be quoted, and the manner in which these memories were related suggests that the prospect of serious injury, or even death, was to a large extent accepted as a part of life underground.²⁸

²⁴ SWML, AUD/188, Interview with W.C. Davies, August, 1973.

²⁵ SWML, AUD/17, Maerdy Discussion Group Interview, March, 1980.

²⁶ SWML, AUD/182, Interview with Arthur Morgan, 4 July, 1973.

²⁷ SWML, AUD/254, Interview with George Hughes, August, 1973.

²⁸ See for example SWML, AUD/165, Interview with Trevor Davies, 3 July, 1973; AUD/196, Interview with Will 'Box' Thomas, 30 May, 1973; AUD/215, Interview with Walter Powell, 14 January, 1974; AUD/311, Interview with Abel Morgan, 9 October, 1972; AUD/323, Interview with W.H. Taylor, August, 1973.

McIvor and Johnston have argued that 'working in the pits...incubated...a "hard man" hegemonic mode of masculinity' where 'fear had to be concealed because it was associated with effeminate behaviour,' and the above examples (and others) might also perhaps be explained within such a framework.²⁹ Part of being a miner, and working underground, was to overcome any sense of fear or apprehension toward the risk of death and injury. Indeed, conquering such fear, for some miners, seems to have been almost a rite of passage from boy to man. Albert Morgan had moved from Montgomeryshire to Aberdare as a young boy to work in the mines, but he remembered that when he arrived, he 'couldn't summon up enough courage to go down the pit and I worked outside for a twelve month.'³⁰ Eventually, he remembered how he had thought to himself, 'come now, I must go down, I'll have to pluck up enough courage,' and had started work at the Aberpergwm colliery in Glynneath.³¹ Meanwhile, Arthur Morgan, who recounted the drowning men with such equanimity, confessed that on his first day of work 'entering the cage I was a bit apprehensive...but of course our fears we got over in time.'³²

The overcoming of these fears, the fact that miners still went down the pit in spite of the dangers it held, was an important element in their self-image and occupational identities. Another one of the men who spoke in the CHP's group interview of miners from Mardy Colliery gave a moving description of the psychological pressures of having to go underground to face the dangers of the pit day after day:

It's mentally bloody hard to go there sometimes. Really hard. You can wake up in the morning, you know you've got a bad stent...It's gone rough for a fortnight, you wake up...when that alarm clock goes, and as my friend over here have said on many occasions, you sat on the end of the bed and thought, 'Ah fucking hell no not again, am I gonna go or aren't I?'³³

It was in the overcoming of this psychological barrier, however, that his sense of occupational pride was rooted, as he went on to explain:

I think every miner...would say 'I am the top of the bloody heap' – even though I work down in the most appalling bloody conditions, that the vast majority of men wouldn't endure...he

²⁹ McIvor and Johnston, *Miners' Lung*, 39-40.

³⁰ SWML, AUD/255, Interview with Albert Morgan, August, 1973.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² SWML, AUD/182, Interview with Arthur Morgan, 4 July, 1973.

³³ SWML, AUD/17, Maerdy Discussion Group Interview, March, 1980.

thinks to himself, I've done it, I'm going down there every day, I'm overcoming the elements, I working in one of the most dangerous bloody industries under the sun, I am the top of the bloody heap, and bollocks to all and sundry however educated they are, however posh they think they are, they can never talk down to a miner...because he *knows* he is superior.³⁴

The other men in the group moved swiftly to express their agreement, and his words here, perhaps give an indication of the extent to which the dangers of the pit – and in particular, the miners' defiance of them – was central to a sense of pride in their occupation, and to the idea of being a miner.

If the attitudes of men toward the dangers of the pit were often characterised by the overcoming of fear, women's memories often conformed to the stereotype of the worried mother, wife or daughter. Elizabeth Roberts, a daughter, wife and mother of coalminers, said that being a woman was 'an awful life,' wondering each morning as her husband went to work whether she would ever see him again, and still – at the age of ninety – afraid of a knock at the door.³⁵ Sociological studies carried out in the 1970s also indicated the presence of such attitudes within the pit villages. John Sewel carried out a study of the social change brought about by pit closures in 1975, in which he observed that:

While a man is underground, his wife is always apprehensive. Some made a point of leaving the home as little as possible while their husbands were underground so that they could be within reach in the event of an accident.³⁶

Interestingly, however, it was mostly in interviews with men in which such attitudes amongst women were recalled. Jake Brookes for example, was asked what time of the year most accidents occurred (which was Christmas), and when asked whether this caused any trepidation replied, 'oh yes, yes, in point of fact it used to play the women folk up and they wouldn't want their men to work on given days, before Christmas and holidays and things like that you know.'³⁷ Evan John, meanwhile, recalled superstitions about sleeping in and being late for work, which was believed by many to be extremely bad luck – 'If people slept late they'd be afraid to go to work, because the women...would say "No, don't rush today, in case anything happens." I remember that kind of talk.'³⁸

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ SWML, AUD/613, Interview with Elizabeth Roberts, 12 January, 1978.

³⁶ John Sewel, *Colliery Closure and Social Change: A Study of a South Wales Mining Valley*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), 54-55.

³⁷ SWML, AUD/308, Interview with Jake Brookes, 13 September, 1973.

³⁸ SWML, AUD/447, Interview with Evan John, 2 December, 1975.

The role of the worried wife or mother was one that seems to have been expected of women within mining communities – a stereotype to which women were expected and imagined to conform. The SWMF's pageant of history in 1939, for example, closed with a miner's wife, miner's son, miner's daughter and unemployed miner telling the audience of their experiences over the last twenty years. The only one to mention the dangers of the pit was the miner's wife – something mirrored in the pageant of history performed at Bedwellty in 1954.³⁹ These provide some indication of the way that the union saw the role of women within mining communities, and suggests at the expectations placed on women to conform to these stereotypes. The way that these expectations, of concern or of grief, could be passed on to younger women can be seen in an interview carried out with Diana Davies by Philippa Dolan. Davies remembered how her mother had always seen her father off to work, 'because she thought that perhaps she'd never see him alive again you see...and she always told us the same, that we should always get up with our men.'⁴⁰ Her memory provides a perfect example of both these gendered expectations, and an awareness of the dangers of the pit being passed on within families and collectively discussed. Though it should be emphasised that, despite these pressures and expectations, not all women conformed to these stereotypes. Diana Davies for example, went on to say that she hadn't followed her mother's instructions, laughing as she said that – 'of course, we didn't do when we got married.'⁴¹

The dangers of the pit thus featured prominently within the memories of both men and women within the pit villages – and were also shared and discussed amongst families and within the wider community. Strikingly, however, big pit disasters featured very rarely in the interviews recorded by the CHP. Despite their historical significance, only thirteen of the 203 people interviewed mentioned an explosion, and in nine of these cases the accident they referred to was directly experienced by either the individual or an immediate family member. There are just four interviews in which a disaster is recalled as an event within the history of the mining community, rather than as a personal or family experience.⁴² This is not to suggest that pit disasters were forgotten. They obviously and understandably featured conspicuously in the memories of those individuals who had personally experienced one – and it is likely that

³⁹ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Pontypool prompt script; SWCC:MNB/PP/22/4 – Papers of Harold Finch – Script for the Pageant of Bedwellty (1954).

⁴⁰ SWML, AUD/491, Interview with Diana Davies, 25 June, 1975.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² SWML, AUD/196, Interview with Will 'Box' Thomas, 30 May, 1973; AUD/233, Interview with Mr and Mrs I Rosser and MM Morgan, 27 March, 1974; AUD/300, Interview with PJ Matthews, July, 1973 and AUD/638, Interview with Harold Jones, 5 April, 1978.

if the CHP had interviewed many people from Senghennydd (or other similarly affected communities) then there would have been many more references to them.⁴³ Besides these individual recollections, there is also some evidence of them being remembered more widely at a local level, within the specific villages and communities that they had affected. Mrs Roderick, for example, told of how her father had worked underground, and had told her that his father before him had been in the Senghennydd explosion.⁴⁴ Albert Davies, meanwhile, when asked directly about an explosion at the Milfraen colliery near Blaenavon, replied that 'you will meet people years after...go to town and talk to people and these things come up.'⁴⁵ Such examples suggest that memories of pit disasters were talked about and passed down within the villages and families that had been directly affected, even if they were not a part of any wider collective memory.

There is also some scattered evidence of local commemorations. Two-hundred people, for instance, attended a service in Senghennydd to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the explosion in 1963, whilst Llethrrddu cemetery, at Treallaw in the Rhondda – where those killed in the Llwynypia and Cambrian explosions were buried – may also have served as a site of local remembrance.⁴⁶ Mrs Coldrick, who wrote for the *CWM*, reported how at Abersychan in the Eastern Valley, a diagram of the old workings at the Llanerch colliery – in which an explosion in 1890 had killed 176 men – was 'hanging in a place of honour' in the Miners' Hall.⁴⁷ 'What memories it recalls to some of those men' she wrote, who 'never tire of telling how, by some trivial incident, they were prevented from going to work on that fateful morning.'⁴⁸ What these examples have in common, however, is that the focus of remembrance is local – specific to particular location rather than the miners as a whole. In each case, people were remembering an event because of its significance to the particular village or community, rather than its significance to the history of the miners or the coalfield more broadly. The existence of these local memories underlying the broader collective memory of the coalfield, were an important

⁴³ Many of the interviews, for instance, were carried out with people who had worked at the Cambrian Colliery and so it is unsurprising that the 1905 Cambrian explosion is the disaster most often referenced. Although these might be contrasted with the 26 interviews carried out by Alun Burge in Cwmfelinfach. Though less than four miles from either Risca or Abercarn, where five explosions had killed 589 men, only one of those interviewed (Harold Jones – who had worked in the Black Vein Colliery which had blown up three times) recalled any of the disasters.

⁴⁴ SWML, AUD/460, Interview with Mrs Roderick, 30 May, 1975.

⁴⁵ SWML, AUD/239, Interview with Albert Davies, 8 November, 1973.

⁴⁶ See *WM*, 14 Oct. 1963, and *SWA*, 14 Oct. 1963. For Llethrrddu see *GFP & RL*, 6 Feb. 1932, *WM*, 20 May. 1965.

⁴⁷ *CWM*, 3:4, Apr. 1925, 92.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

element of the mining communities' understanding of the past, as discussed before.

Nonetheless, it also remains the case that memories of big pit disasters, where they did exist, remained either individual or tied to the experience of a particular community – they did not come to symbolise the experience of the coalfield, nor come to stand as mnemonic reference points for the dangers of working underground.

To give one contrasting example, the Tonypandy riots – a series of violent disturbances that occurred during a strike in the mid-Rhondda over the winter of 1910 to 1911 – were talked about by over a dozen people in the CHP interviews who were neither involved, nor from the Rhondda. In this case, the riots had become a part of the coalfield's collective memory, as a symbolic event that represented the militancy of the south Wales miners and the brutality of the police. For example, when Oliver Powell (from Tredegar) was interviewed by the CHP, he recalled being told before a demonstration to keep in order by a policeman, otherwise, 'Tonypandy will be a bloody cake-walk compared to what I will do to you.'⁴⁹ Regardless of whether he recalled the policeman's words accurately, the fact that, in Powell's mind, Tonypandy was a synonym for police brutality, indicates the status that the riots had attained within the consciousness of some miners. In contrast, tragedies like Senghennydd seem only to have been remembered by the individuals or communities they directly affected, rather than recalled or understood as part of a shared, collective experience.

Overwhelmingly, it was the smaller accidents that killed in ones and twos that were remembered, far more so than the big explosions. Three-quarters of those who mentioned the dangers of the pit remembered haulage accidents and roof-falls and collapses. Of course, the fact that, within individual memory, these smaller accidents are far more common than big disasters may indicate little more than that they were more common. As Roger Laidlaw has noted, 'in no single year in the grim annals of British mining history has the death toll from a single disaster ever exceeded the total number of casualties from minor incidents,' whilst work by Trevor Boyns has shown that the ratio of deaths from accidents to deaths from explosions aggregated out at about four-to-one between 1870 and 1914.⁵⁰ This was well known by the miners themselves. Mr Rosser was one of the four people to recall a large explosion, yet he was still keen to stress that 'most of the accidents were caused by roof-falls.'⁵¹ Similarly, the

⁴⁹ SWML, AUD/316, Interview with Oliver Powell, 29 November, 1973.

⁵⁰ Laidlaw, 'Gresford', 128; see also Trevor Boyns, 'Work and death in the south Wales coalfield, 1874-1914', *Welsh History Review*, 12 (1985), 515. After 1914 deaths in explosions steadily declined so this ratio would likely have been even more pronounced between 1913 and 1974.

⁵¹ SWML, AUD/233, Interview with Mr and Mrs I Rosser and MM Morgan, 27 March, 1974.

SWMF President, William Brace, warned even in the discussions after the Senghennydd disaster that ‘more men were killed by falls of the roofs and sides,’ and that this ‘even greater problem’ should not be forgotten.⁵² In this respect, it is hardly surprising that big disasters feature so little within the CHP interviews compared to the ever-present threat of collapses or diseases like pneumoconiosis.

II

The dangers of working underground also featured heavily in the campaigns and publications of the miners’ union – just as they had done in the interviews recorded by the CHP. The official (and unofficial) journals produced by the union and its activists talked constantly about the deaths and injuries that occurred in the pit – whether from roof-falls and haulage accidents, or industrial diseases such as pneumoconiosis and nystagmus. They were also central element in many of its campaigns – such as that against the SWMIU in the 1930s – and figured prominently in the May Day Pageant in 1939. Both the Labour and Communist parties also made frequent references to them, whilst the depictions of mining communities in the press and popular culture were also often dominated by the dangers of the pit, as mentioned above. As Curtis and Thompson have noted, references to people who had died or been injured underground were usually aimed at bringing pressure on the coalowners and the government for ‘improvements to working conditions or additions to welfare provision.’⁵³ This section discusses these representations of deaths and injuries underground, and the ways in which they interacted with the individual memories of accidents. This interaction led to the creation of a particular narrative – ‘the Price of Coal’ – within which the dangers of the pit were understood. That narrative, and in particular, its contrast with national depictions of the dangers underground, offer a further possible explanation for the strange absence of pit disasters from the wider collective memory.

The ‘Price of Coal’ was the blood price exacted from the mining community for the nation’s supply of fuel and included every victim of the pits, whether from accidents, explosions, or industrial diseases. It had three main elements; the first was that all deaths could be laid at the door of the coalowners, whose greed and callous indifference to health and safety lay behind

⁵² *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 58, 12 February, 1914, 434.

⁵³ Curtis and Thompson, ‘This is the country of premature old men’, 588.

most accidents. The second was the way that it contrasted the monetary cost of coal to the public with the human cost to the mining communities. This was explicit in the phrase 'the Price of Coal' and was deeply rooted in a sense that the miners were misunderstood and under-appreciated. Finally, there was the argument that the deaths and injuries sustained legitimated wage demands and strikes. All three elements can usually be seen wherever miners or their union talked about accidents. In the inter-war years, few references to the dangers of working underground passed without making reference to the coalowners. In the SWMF's May Day Pageant in 1939, the ghosts of four miners took to the stage to speak of how they had died. The first was killed in a roof-fall; 'there wasn't enough timber, there wasn't enough time,' the second in an explosion, which the men had known was coming, but 'were sacked for complaining.'⁵⁴ One had not died in the pits at all, but had been claimed by the dust; 'my lungs are like cement now...I can't be a stone man and a live one too.'⁵⁵ Despite the various causes of death, all, as the narrator declared, were 'victims of a...system which thinks nothing of sacrificing men's lives for profits.'⁵⁶

Whilst the anger at the old coalowners remained well into the 1970s, the union understandably made fewer references to them after nationalisation in 1947. The use of the deaths and injuries that occurred underground to legitimate wage demands during strikes remained constant, however. As discussed before, there was a very close association between strikes and the dangers of the pit in the union's representations. In 1926, one of the principal arguments behind the refusal to accept an extra hour on the working day had been based on the increased danger this would pose. At the outset of the lockout, one union leader observed that there were an average of 1,100 deaths per year in the mining industry, and declared that 'if the country wanted coal they ought to pay for it...if the men were prepared to take such great risks for the country's sake...they ought to have the right to live.'⁵⁷ Eight years later, following the explosion at Gresford in 1934, Arthur Horner argued that the union 'was in a stronger position now to organise strike action than at any time in the past year,' partly because of how 'the Gresford tragedy had created public sympathy for the miners throughout the country.'⁵⁸ This continued through the Second World War and into the 1950s and 1960s, and was also a part of the miners' case during the strikes of the early 1970s. In support of the 1972 strike for example, the South Wales Area NUM issued leaflets pointing out that the

⁵⁴ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Dulais Valley script.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ SWA, 1 May, 1926

⁵⁸ SWM, 30, 9 Oct. 1934

miners were 'entitled to a fair wage which pays proper regard to the dangers and hardships of the miner's daily life.'⁵⁹ The *Rhondda Leader*, meanwhile published an editorial in support of the strike, which remarked that it was 'a good time now to remember the men who have died...horrible deaths in the dark hundreds of feet below,' and that coal miners should be 'the highest paid in industry.'⁶⁰

It is important to emphasise that the 'Price of Coal' was not just something that was talked about by the union, but that many miners also placed their own recollections of underground accidents within this framework. The anger towards the coalowners, for instance, was often passed down within families. Henry Lewis for example was told by his father that the coalowners were 'in the collieries by here see, killing men and all that, only making profit.'⁶¹ Meanwhile, Bob Morris' recalled his grandfather, and being told as a child of 'the suffering...[he] had without any compensation from the coalowners...he was left on the scrap-heap.'⁶² These attitudes were also present in the immediate aftermath of tragedies. In a letter just after the Senghennydd explosion, one of the rescue workers, Will Fisher, wrote a letter to his cousin where he set out at length the preventative measures that could have been taken; 'Why the hell are these things neglected? Because of the expense!...the average colliery company turns over its investment capital every eight years; and still the capitalist's blood-stained claw reaches for more.'⁶³ Perhaps the best example of all comes from the testimony of W.P. Bowen, one of only a handful of the CHP interviews to recall a large explosion. He brought up the disaster at the Cambrian colliery in 1905, prompting the following exchange:

W.P. Bowen: 'There's a lot of lies have been said in the Cambrian about the accident...'

Interviewer: '...About what?'

WPB: 'About the explosion.'

Int.: 'The cause of it?'

WPB: 'Yes.'

Int.: 'Do you know anything about -'

WPB: '- I know what the cause of it...a man who was there, he was in that explosion, and he told us what had happened. But Leonard Llewellyn come down, manager you see, the next

⁵⁹ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/11/22 – Leaflets re. 1972 Strike – Leaflet by the South Wales Area NUM titled 'The Miners' Strike', 1972.

⁶⁰ *RL*, 28 Jan. 1972.

⁶¹ SWML, AUD/201, Interview with Henry Lewis, 4 December, 1972.

⁶² SWML, AUD/237, Interview with Bob Morris, 19 November, 1973.

⁶³ Letter from Will Fisher to Charlie Mason, 11/11/1913. Cited in Jen Llywelyn ed., *Remember Senghennydd: The Colliery Disaster of 1913*, (Llanrwst, Gwasg Carreg Gwalch; 2013), 58.

day, and he never said that again, and he was never on the inquest. They put the blame on a man, on in the face, shot-firing. *Nothing of the kind.*⁶⁴

He would not expand on the real causes, but his anger towards the coalowners, nearly seventy years after the event, and over a quarter of a century after nationalisation is particularly affecting.

There was, evidently, therefore, a close relationship between the union's narratives of the 'Price of Coal,' and the ways in which accidents underground were remembered within the mining communities – with individual men and women often placing their own memories within this same narrative framework. Indeed, such was the closeness of this relationship, that the same anecdotes, narrative tropes and even language, which was used in the union's representations, can also sometimes be seen in the interviews recorded by the CHP. In 1924, for instance, Herbert Smith gave evidence to a wages commission, in which he detailed how many men had been killed and injured underground in the previous year alone. He invited the committee to:

Try and visualise this great army of bruised and broken humanity...marshal them in one huge procession, four men in a rank, each 1½ yards apart, and you get a procession of injured men stretching a distance of 45 miles, every 15 yards of that tragic march you would have an ambulance conveying a man who was seriously injured, and every 61 yards a hearse...this part of his wages never gets into a balance sheet...is never allowed for, or even thought of by the consumer.⁶⁵

Half a century later, the CHP interviewed Gwilym Williams, who, reflecting on the miners' hospital overlooking the colliery, used the exact phrase 'bruised and broken humanity' to describe the human casualties of the pit.⁶⁶ The choice of phrase could of course be entirely coincidental, although Smith's 'tragic march' analogy was repeated word for word in an issue of the *CWM* in 1926, which, as manager of the Aberbargoed institute and library, Williams might quite possibly have read.⁶⁷

A similar example can be seen in the interview with Mrs D.J. Williams. She remembered being at an election hustings in 1945, where the speaker had shown the crowd a photograph of the

⁶⁴ SWML, AUD/178, Interview with W.P. Bowen, c. 1972-74.

⁶⁵ *Report by a Court of Inquiry Concerning the Wages position in the Coal Mining Industry (Buckmaster)*, 1924, 10, cited in Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry*, 426.

⁶⁶ SWML, AUD/265, Interview with Gwilym Williams, 17 May, 1974.

⁶⁷ See *CWM*, 4:9, Sep. 1926, 190.

Aberpergwm colliery football team from 1930.⁶⁸ The significance of the photo, as the speaker explained, was that all of them had contracted silicosis – ‘so many had died, so that was the point he made.’⁶⁹ A startlingly similar example had been used by Margot Heinemann in her 1944 book *Britain’s Coal*, in which she began one chapter with a story about a football team from a colliery in west Wales. Listing all of the players and their current state of health, it transpired that seven had contracted silicosis, three had been otherwise injured and could never work again, and the last had died of rheumatic fever from working in wet places at the age of twenty-five.⁷⁰ Heinemann confessed that she had borrowed the example from a miners’ agent in west Wales, (quite possibly the same one whom Mrs Davies had heard speak), but what these examples arguably indicate, is the existence of what Alistair Thomson has described as a ‘cultural circuit.’⁷¹ Specific analogies and anecdotes of the ‘Price of Coal’ narrative were used and recycled by both the mining unions and their members, to the extent where many ordinary men and women had picked up or borrowed its stories and language and used them to illustrate their own experiences. The representations of deaths and injuries underground thus structured and influenced the way in which such experiences were remembered by individuals.

Yet the representations themselves had also, arguably, been shaped and influenced by the recollections of individual men and women. As noted above, it was overwhelmingly the smaller incidents – the roof-falls and haulage accidents – that had been remembered by the men and women interviewed by the CHP. And it was these smaller accidents, rather than the big pit explosions, that also characterised the representations of accidents underground. Of course, when talking about the dangers faced by their members, it made far more sense for the union to focus on the smaller accidents which the miners predominantly experienced (and remembered), rather than the comparatively rare gas explosions. The union’s references to deaths underground thus came in the form of overall figures and totals, or sometimes as imagined, nameless, and non-specific incidents which could best typify the general experience. Perhaps the best example of the latter was the May Day Pageant in 1939, in which the four nameless miners spoke of how they were killed by a roof-falls, shot-firing accidents, and pneumoconiosis. Together, they could stand for most miners killed underground as well as exemplifying the principal dangers that many in the audience would face on a daily basis.⁷²

⁶⁸ SWML, AUD/453, Interview with Mrs D.J. Williams, 14 August, 1973.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Margot Heinemann, *Britain’s Coal, A Study of the Mining Crisis*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1944), 64.

⁷¹ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 15.

⁷² SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Pontypool prompt script.

Meanwhile, the miners' papers and journals often grouped all the deaths that had occurred into aggregates, rather than reference any one specific incident. For example, the *CWM* wrote of how, 'since 1874 no less than 55,700 miners have been killed in the mines of this country,' whilst the *South Wales Miner* noted in 1934 that the past six years had seen 'no less than 3,119 ... killed and 329,500 injured.'⁷³

The importance of the interaction between individual memory and representations of the past in the development of collective memories is thus clearly evident here, and the closeness of this relationship might also be seen in the existence of certain recurring stories, or narrative tropes, that were a shared resource drawn on simultaneously by both representations and individuals. Perhaps the most prevalent of these examples are the stories of dead miners being unfairly scapegoated for accidents and explosions – most commonly through being blamed for smoking underground. One example of this can be seen in W.P. Bowen's memory of the Cambrian explosion, quoted above – where he said that the management had 'put the blame on a man, on in the face, shot-firing' – and W.C. Davies also recalled a similar case.⁷⁴ As an inspector, he had been called to the aftermath of a small explosion, and recounted the following encounter with the manager of the pit:

When we came up now we all got around the table a minute and...after a bit he put this here live match on the table see, and after a minute or two like I said, 'well that didn't cause it, did it.' It was alive and it hadn't been struck...but you see how quick they were, they always want to put the fault on the workmen.⁷⁵

Almost identical incidents can be seen in Lewis Jones' *Cwmardy*, B.L. Coombes' *These Poor Hands*, and in the memoirs of W.H. Davies from the Rhymney Valley, who recalled meeting an old, 'blue scarred' miner soon after the Senghennydd explosion, who warned him:

You watch, the coalowners will soon be saying that the miners themselves were responsible for the disaster. They'll find some poor fellow with fags in his pocket and they'll say straight away, someone must have been smoking. Crawshay of Cyfarthfa started that lie.⁷⁶

Other stories, about how the coalowners had valued the lives of the horses that worked down the pit more than those of the men, also featured frequently in both people's recollections of

⁷³ *CWM*, 1:5, May, 1923, 109; *SWM*, 27, 28 Aug. 1934.

⁷⁴ *SWML*, AUD/178, Interview with W.P. Bowen, c. 1972-74.

⁷⁵ *SWML*, AUD/188, Interview with W.C. Davies, August, 1973.

⁷⁶ See B.L. Coombes, *These Poor Hands: The Autobiography of a Miner working in South Wales*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), 27; Jones, *Cwmardy*, 119-136; and W.H. Davies, *Ups and Downs*, cited in Llywelyn ed., *Remember Senghennydd*, 41-42.

deaths and injuries underground, and in the depictions of past accidents by the union and the press.⁷⁷

Such stories suggest the existence of a shared understanding of the dangers of working underground within the mining communities. They were a shared resource, a body of narrative tropes, themes and stories that were widely understood within the pit villages. As a common reference point, they could be drawn on by leaders and activists in support of industrial and political causes, by novelists and other writers in search of dramatic material, or by individual men and women attempting to make sense of their own experiences. It was a collective memory had been shaped by both individual experiences of the dangers underground, and the narratives about them that had been propagated by the union and political parties, and had emerged out a continuous and reciprocal dialogue between the two.

III

Both the representations of the union and the recollections of individual men and women were thus often placed within the same narrative framework. What was missing from this narrative however – as had also been largely absent from the interviews recorded by the CHP – were big pit explosions. Despite constantly referring to past deaths and injuries that had occurred underground, the miners' union rarely, if ever, talked about pit disasters. The only occasions on which they tended to be mentioned were in the immediate aftermath of other explosions. In 1927 for example, the *CWM* referred back to Senghennydd in its reporting of the disaster at the Marine Colliery in Cwm, and also produced a list of 'Big Mining Disasters of the Past'.⁷⁸ In the 1960s, *The Miner* responded similarly to the explosion at Six Bells, but apart from these examples, the union's publications made few references to past disasters when talking about the 'Price of Coal'.⁷⁹ Even contemporary disasters did not always necessarily prompt a reference to a past tragedy. The 1965 explosion at the Cambrian colliery for instance, took the lives of thirty-one men almost exactly sixty years after an explosion at the very same pit had killed thirty-three miners in 1905 – yet *The Miner* did not make any historical connections, despite being provided with so obvious a parallel. Disasters were also absent

⁷⁷ See for example, SWML, AUD/268, Interview with W.H. Coleman, 5 July, 1973, and *AL*, 19 Dec. 1925, 1 May 1926.

⁷⁸ *CWM*, 5:3, Mar. 1927, 41, 46.

⁷⁹ *The Miner*, 8:5, Sep/Oct. 1960, 6, 23.

from union's other representations of the dangers of the pit. There does not appear to be any mention of them in speeches made by union officials, and Senghennydd and Gresford were mentioned only in passing in a lavish pageant of the coalfield's history staged by the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) on May Day in 1939. Even here they appeared only in an earlier draft of the script, and were absent from the final version.⁸⁰ Even the coalfield's Labour MPs – often sponsored by the SWMF – rarely referenced such tragedies in debates. On only three occasions did a south Wales MP mention a pit disaster in parliament outside of its immediate aftermath, with all three references coming from Ness Edwards, the MP for Caerphilly.⁸¹

The absence of disasters such as Senghennydd – some of the most infamous and striking events in the coalfield's history – from the narratives constructed by the union, can, in part, be explained by the nature of those narratives. One of the central elements of the 'Price of Coal,' as mentioned above, was its contrast of the monetary price of coal, with its cost in lives to the mining community – which was deeply rooted in the miners' sense that they were misunderstood and under-appreciated. As far back as the 1920s, articles had complained of the 'feeling of contempt for the miner' that 'still exists in some of our non-mining districts and the need to 'raise his status in the eyes of the general public.'⁸² Meanwhile, in 1939, the magazine *Plebs* claimed that, for many people, 'the word "miner" signifies underfeeding the family to get titbits for the whippet,' and that 'there is still a vast body of ignorant and unsympathetic critics who ... denounce the miners wholesale as a class.'⁸³ That same year, the SWMF President Arthur Horner gave a speech at the Federation's annual conference, in which he told 'those who declaim against the price of coal' to remember that it had been 'dragged out of the bosom of the reluctant earth by miners who have expended their blood to win it.'⁸⁴

⁸⁰ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Draft Script.

⁸¹ He referenced Senghennydd twice (see *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 717, 27 July 1965, 261 and *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 750, 18 July 1967, 1896) and the explosion at the Marine Colliery once (*Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 625, 29 June 1960, 1389). There do not appear to be any mentions of the explosions at Abercarn, the Albion colliery, Llanerch, Wattstown, Risca, Six Bells or Cambrian (either 1905 or 1965).

⁸² *CWM*, 1:4, Apr. 1923, 96.

⁸³ *Plebs*, Vol. 31 no. 4, Apr. 1939.

⁸⁴ SWCC:MNA/PP/28/40 – Papers of James Evans – Arthur Horner's address to SWMF Annual Conference, 1939, 6.

Page 2 THE DAILY MIRROR

19 MINERS WHO WAITED FOR DEATH

"Safest Place in Pit" That Proved a Tragic Trap

TWO SURVIVORS

Lord Mayor Opens Mansion House Relief Fund

Black Vein, the most tragic gallery in the Cwm pit of death, was entered by the rescue parties yesterday and twenty-two bodies found.

It is now revealed that nineteen men, unharmed by the explosion, took refuge in the "safest place in the pit."

They made themselves as comfortable as possible, but the fumes reached them and killed seventeen of them as they sat.

The Lord Mayor of London announced last night that he had opened a relief fund in aid of the dependents of the sixty-six men who lost their lives in this disaster and that at Bilsborough.

RESCUERS' PERIL

CHEAPER COAL?

Government Set Up Committee to Tackle Problem

TRANSPORT INQUIRIES

Steps are being taken by the Government to secure cheaper coal for the public, writes *The Daily Mirror* Lobby correspondent.

Allegations having been made that there was too wide a margin between pit-head price and that demanded from the consumer, the question of prices has been carefully examined.

Meeting representatives of merchants and railways at the Board of Trade recently, Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister went fully into the matter with them.

As the result a small standing joint committee is to be set up to endeavour to overcome their immediate difficulties, the chief of which is the question of transport.

SHOPS ACTS INQUIRY

Names of Members of Committee To Be Known Shortly

Sir W. Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary, stated in Parliament yesterday that he hoped to announce the names of the members of the Departmental Committee to inquire into the Shops Acts 1900 and 1903 within the next few days.

Fig. 1 – Section from page 2 of the *Daily Mirror*, 4 March, 1927.

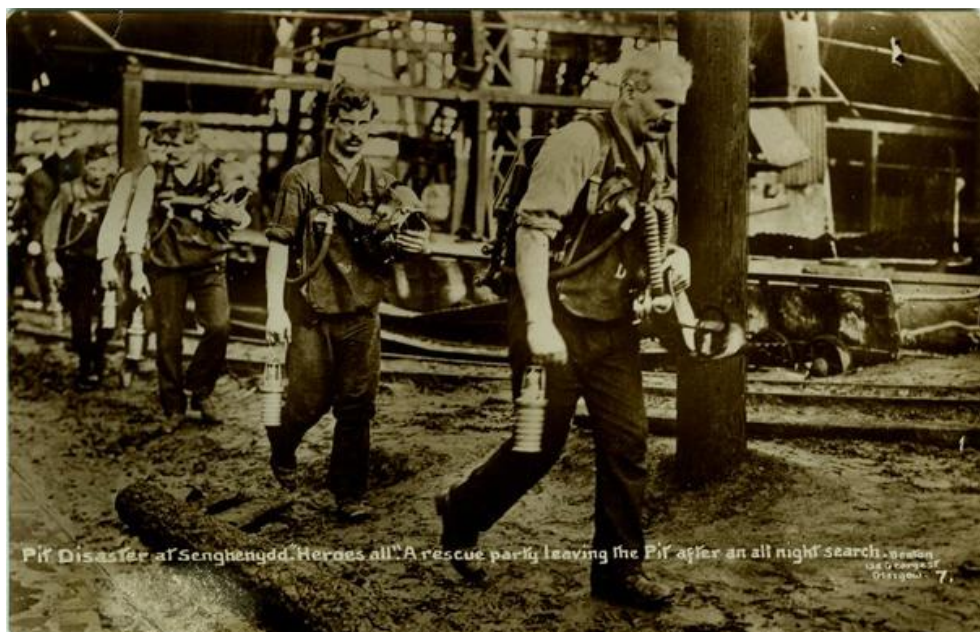


Fig. 2 – Photograph of rescue workers at Senghennydd, W. Benton, October 1913.

Particularly aggrieving was the impression that some of the public cared more about the amount they had to pay for coal than they did for the lives of those who mined it. In 1957 for example, the Conservative Government blamed an increase in the cost of fuel on the miners' 'insatiable demands for higher wages and improved conditions' – an accusation which

understandably incensed the South Wales Area NUM.⁸⁵ Castigating the ‘armchair critics’ who had made such arguments, but had ‘at no time volunteered to show the miner how to wield a shovel,’ it noted how ‘an average of 85 to 90 miners are killed and 350-450 die of pneumoconiosis each year in South Wales alone,’ not counting those otherwise maimed and injured.⁸⁶ There may be no better example of this, however, than the issue of the *Daily Mirror* following the explosion at the Marine Colliery at Cwm in 1927, (see Fig. 1) in which, directly adjacent to the leading story on the disaster, was an article headlined, ‘Cheaper Coal? Government Set Up Committee to Tackle Problem.’⁸⁷ The insensitivity and lack of awareness displayed in discussing how coal could be made cheaper whilst men were still trapped underground is a perfect example of the attitudes that fuelled this indignation and resentment. That this was less than four months after the miners had returned to work for lower wages and longer hours following a bitter seven-month lockout, would only have exacerbated the sense of injustice.

The apparent indifference and ingratitude towards the mining communities that was often displayed by the national press contrasted starkly, of course, with their reactions to big disasters, when reporters flocked to the stricken pit village and there were huge outpourings of public grief, sympathy, and donations. It is difficult for example, to find a report on a pit disaster that does not lionise the rescue workers and revel in the stories of human courage and determination. Headlines following the Senghennydd explosion reported ‘Rescuing Parties Labouring Heroically, Themselves in Dire Peril,’ and included photographs of the teams in their breathing apparatus (see Fig. 2 – Benton’s photograph was used by several papers. The caption simply reads, ‘Heroes All’).⁸⁸ Following the 1927 explosion at Cwm, the *Daily Mirror* reported how one man, himself escaping the explosion, returned to the pit only to die in trying to rescue his brother, whilst the *Western Mail* described the ‘epic heroism’ of those ‘below ground.’⁸⁹ It is understandable that the press chose to focus on such poignant and inspiring stories, and on the undoubted heroism displayed time and again by the miners. But it did not escape those same miners’ attention that the very same qualities of physical courage, stoicism and solidarity that were gloried in by the press when they were displayed in tragedy, were denounced when displayed in strikes or lockouts. This oscillation between being either ‘villains’ or ‘heroes’ was perhaps best put by the MP for Llanelli, James Griffiths, who complained that the public

⁸⁵ *The Miner*, 5:3, May/Jun. 1957, 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁷ *Daily Mirror*, 4 Mar. 1927, 2.

⁸⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 15 Oct. 1913, 4.

⁸⁹ *Daily Mirror*, 2 Mar. 1927, 3, *WM*, 2 Mar. 1927.

'weeps for them when there is an explosion, curses them, when there is a strike and forgets them the rest of the time.'⁹⁰ This perceived hypocrisy by the press was also satirised by the poet (and former miner) Idris Davies in his epic poem about 1926, 'The Angry Summer':

'Once you were heroes, you rescued your kind
Out of the galleries left blazing behind,
And we praised you in eloquent journalese
And chattered about you at parlour teas.
And now you won't work for your daily bread
You lazy miners!' the newspaper said.⁹¹

The outpourings of sympathy from people normally perceived to be indifferent or contemptuous towards the miners understandably caused a great deal of resentment. After the Gresford explosion in north Wales in 1934 for example, *The South Wales Miner* denounced the press and public sympathy with the mining community as 'bunkum and hypocrisy.'⁹² The fact that most miners were not killed in scores or hundreds in occasional, well publicised disasters, but every day in ones and twos, ignored and unnoticed by the national press further intensified this resentment. Even in the aftermath of the Senghennydd disaster the Vice-President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) was keen to ask 'What was to be done' for the '1,300 men killed, not by explosions, but by falls of roofs and sides?'⁹³ Similarly, following the Six Bells explosion in 1960, *The Miner* contrasted the public reaction to the disaster with the 'brutally callous' indifference to 'those who die singly in fatal accidents in the bowels of the earth'.⁹⁴

To the miners, the apparently selective compassion that was displayed only in the aftermath of a large tragedy just served to highlight the lack of compassion or sympathy people ordinarily had for their suffering. Indeed, this bitterness was so strong amongst some miners in south Wales, that many of them even opposed the NUM making a donation to the relief fund for the Six Bells explosion.⁹⁵ Given the strength of feeling this illustrates, it might be argued that the absence of pit disasters from the 'Price of Coal' narrative, can be explained as a reaction against the way they were covered in the national press. The union, as well as ordinary men

⁹⁰ Quoted in Andrews, *A Woman's Work is Never Done*, 14.

⁹¹ Davies, 'The Angry Summer', 95.

⁹² *SWM*, 30, 9 Oct. 1934.

⁹³ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 58, 13 February, 1914, 498-499.

⁹⁴ *The Miner*, 8:5, Sep/Oct. 1960, 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

and women, eschewed talking about past disasters to avoid playing into this heavily resented narrative. The miners thus omitted from their own representations the very feature with which they were so indelibly associated in the national imagination.

IV

The nature of the 'Price of Coal' narratives and the experiences of men and women within the mining communities both, therefore, provide some explanation for why pit disasters were largely absent from the collective memory that had emerged across the coalfield. This absence, however, was also partly a consequence of the ways in which the dangers of the pit were understood within the pit villages. Whilst this chapter has thus far focused on individual memories and representations of deaths and injuries underground and, in particular, the relationship between the two, this final section looks at the way that this collective memory conceptualised time.

As mentioned above, the 'Price of Coal' narrative, though often closely linked with the political and industrial rhetoric surrounding strikes and protests, did not share the same linear understanding of time that underpinned the union's historic narratives of progress through struggle. There was no attempt to construct a history of past accidents. Indeed, as noted above, it was not just pit disasters, but specific historical incidents of any sort that were absent from the union's representations of the dangers of the pit. Furthermore, the deaths and injuries that had occurred underground were also absent from the representations of historical hardship and suffering. Evocations of the 'bad old days', when miners worked twelve-hour shifts, children worked underground from the age of six or seven, and the sun was only ever seen on a Sunday, were a recurring feature in both the union's papers and the CHP interviews.⁹⁶ Yet, whilst deaths underground would, on the face of it, fit well within a narrative of how the miners had suffered in the past, they did not feature in these stories, either within the union's journals or within individual memory.

The memories of underground accidents that were recorded by the CHP, meanwhile, were strongly linked to the idea of belonging to a mining community, and often seem to have been understood as a part of a common occupational experience. This is suggested by the way in

⁹⁶ For examples of such narratives and a fuller discussion of them, see Chapter III.

which such recollections occur in the interviews, where, as noted above, the CHP only rarely asked about the dangers of working underground. Most of the examples that arise in the interviews occurred when the individual was describing their experiences as a miner, or in response to questions about the occupations of fathers or husbands. To give one example, W.H. Coleman was asked whether he had ever experienced 'short-time working' – reduced shifts due to a fall in demand. He confirmed that he had indeed had reduced work during the war, and recalled how 'the hooter would blow and let you know whether there was work or no.'⁹⁷ Within a few seconds however, he moved seamlessly from discussing the 'three days on and three days off' to describing how 'you were in danger no matter where you were' in the pit, recalling the 'narrow shaves' that he had had, and remembering the 'many' fatal accidents that he had witnessed underground.⁹⁸ There are countless such examples within the CHP interviews, and in such a context, it could be argued that the reason deaths and injuries were being recalled was that they signified how dangerous life was underground, and linked the risk of death and injury with the fact of being a miner or belonging to a mining community. Such was the close association between coalmining and danger that a question about pit-work often led immediately to a story which could serve as an example of how dangerous such work was. The memories thus exemplified the dangers that they had faced in their lives as miners, rather than as individuals, and were part of a collective occupational experience, as well as a personal one.

McIvor and Johnston have noted how the dangers of working underground were integral to miners' occupational identities. They describe coal mining as 'a *milieu* in which the body was constantly under threat,' and use their interviews to demonstrate how the risk of death and injury 'was seen as an integral element of the miners' occupation'.⁹⁹ This association can also be seen in the CHP interviews, where people sometimes used memories of accidents to establish their credentials as authentic members of the mining community. Edgar Evans, a Communist Party activist who was interviewed three times, worked in a shop in the mining village of Bedlinog. He began two of his interviews by telling the same story about how his 'father was a miner, all his life a miner,' and that, active in strikes and victimised by the owners, he had eventually lost his life underground when 'a runaway journey crushed him between the trams and the side'.¹⁰⁰ The stories, particularly of his father's death underground,

⁹⁷ SWML, AUD/268, Interview with W.H. Coleman, 5 July, 1973.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ McIvor and Johnston, *Miners' Lung*, 309.

¹⁰⁰ See SWML, AUD/210, Interview with Edgar Evans, 14 July, 1973 and AUD/213, Interview with Edgar Evans, 30 November, 1973.

served to emphasise that Evans was a member of the mining community, even though he himself had never worked underground. Mavis Llewellyn, also a member of the Communist Party, was a schoolteacher but from a mining family. Asked whether 1926 was 'the most important episode' in her life, she replied:

I don't know, one of my first memories...[was] standing in that window...waiting for them to bring my grandfather home, he'd been killed in the colliery...so from an early age, you sort of had mining and sympathy with the mining community even from something like that.¹⁰¹

Later in the interview she recalled the class solidarity between her striking father and a soldier during the Tonypandy riots – a solidarity rooted in the fact that the soldier's own father had been killed underground.¹⁰²

The point of making this argument is that the awareness of such dangers was not based solely on past experiences, but also on a contemporary reality. Deaths and injuries underground had not just happened in the past, but were a very real and present feature of the industry right up until its demise in the 1980s.¹⁰³ Thus, when individuals recalled mining accidents – and when the union referred to them in speeches, pageants and journals – they were referencing something that was a part of the mining communities' present and future, as well as its past. The dangers of working underground were not events in the same way as a strike, but were ongoing – a sacrifice that had been exacted from the mining communities' forefathers, from themselves and would, in the future, be exacted from their children. Rather than a traditional, narrative-based conception of the past, where history moves inexorably through time from cause to effect, the past served instead as a form of custom or precedent – emphasising an eternal, unchanging feature of this immemorial community and establishing its continuity across time as well as space. The consciousness of the dangers of working underground was

¹⁰¹ SWML, AUD/98, Interview of Mavis Llewellyn, 20 May, 1974.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ It should be emphasised that there was no significant reduction in the risks during the inter-war years. Barry Supple notes that although a significant improvement in safety had occurred in the late nineteenth century, 'there was little or no amelioration in the interwar period,' where 'the incidence of accidental deaths actually increased.' After the war, death rates slowly declined, averaging 0.17 deaths per 100,000 'man-shifts' between 1959 and 1974 compared to 0.42 per 100,000 man-shifts between 1922 and 1936. Crucially though, death and/or injury underground remained a very real risk when the interviews were conducted. Quotation from Supple, *British Coal Industry*, 426-427. Figures from Supple, *British Coal Industry*, 428 and William Ashworth, *The History of the British Coal Industry, Vol. 5, 1946-1982: The Nationalized Industry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 478-479. The continued presence of danger, despite any improvements that might have been made, was widely acknowledged in the CHP interviews and the local press – see for example SWML, AUD/233, Interview with Mr and Mrs I Rosser and MM Morgan, 27 March, 1974; AUD/619, Interview with Idris Suter, 21 January, 1978; AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978 and WM, 30 Jun. 1960, 18 May. 1965.

therefore cyclical rather than linear, and the individual recollections of deaths and injuries that had occurred in the pit, informed, drew upon, and were understood within this different understanding of time.

The conceptualisation of time as cyclical, of the dangers of working underground as a constant, recurring and unchanging presence, can be seen in the union's representations of accidents. For example, when writing about those who had died underground in 1924, the *CWM* described a continuous 'trail of death,' which went on 'day after day, week after week, and month after month'.¹⁰⁴ The idea of deaths underground as an endless cycle, devouring miner after miner can also be seen in the following passage from the Federation's May Day Pageant in 1939:

Woman: Time in the shape of a mine is three dead every day. It is the shape of time. One thousand and seventy three in a year. Have you got new men (otherwise we are lost) and mines will feed on men as wars do. Have you got new men to fight this other time? New men to overcome it, till time, in the shape of a mine, is the creator of an enriching life.

Man: Yes. We have new men. The new man, here, now, braving novel death, stands upright in the mine.¹⁰⁵

Similar examples can be seen in the local press. In the aftermath of the 1965 Cambrian explosion for example, the *South Wales Echo* reminded its readers that deaths underground in smaller accidents were 'regarded almost as routine,' and that 'this sort of life,' where the risk of death was ever present 'has bred a community that is unique,' observing that those who did not 'share the work and hazards remain outside.'¹⁰⁶ A few days later, it reflected that such accidents were 'as old as the industry,' and that the mining communities had seen 'tragedy after tragedy as miners have been blasted into eternity.'¹⁰⁷

The vast majority of the interviews carried out by the CHP were with retired miners who no longer faced these dangers on a daily basis. Because of this, one might not expect to see this particular conception of time and the past in their testimonies, as they themselves had stepped outside of the continuous cycle of death and injury. Such examples can still be found, however. W.H. Davies's father had died underground whilst he was still a boy, yet when asked whether he himself had had any reluctance to go down the pit as a consequence, he recalled;

¹⁰⁴ *CWM*, 3:2, Feb. 1925, 25.

¹⁰⁵ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Pontypool prompt script.

¹⁰⁶ *SWE*, 18 May 1965.

¹⁰⁷ *SWE*, 21 May 1965.

'I don't think so, it was so common. It was more or less a weekly occurrence to see someone being carried home on a stretcher...one took it as a part of life.'¹⁰⁸ Idris Suter, meanwhile, was asked whether he could remember there being many accidents at the pit in which he worked, and confirmed that he had seen a few men killed – 'which do always happen in the pit.'¹⁰⁹ Elved Evans was asked a similar question, and though at first stating that fatal accidents 'weren't too often,' nonetheless went on to recall 'two brothers getting killed and then one man getting killed by a horse – pulled a tram over him, and people with falls of roof,' and that 'it was the average in most places, fatal accidents.'¹¹⁰ This sense of danger as a constant and unchanging feature of life within mining communities can also be seen in the few interviews that were carried out with those who were still working. In one, a discussion between a group of activists from Mardy colliery, it did not take long for someone to explain that their political consciousness came from the dangers they faced underground: 'this is what life's all about – that you're going to be ripped apart, that you're going to be subject to exploitation time, after time, after time.'¹¹¹

An even more striking indication of this way of conceptualising time was the way that recollections of such accidents occurred in the interviews. As noted above, the majority of references to deaths and injuries that had occurred in the pit arose during conversations about work – in response to questions about whether they had worked underground, what job they had done there, or the occupations of family members. These references, however, were almost never dated – not even in relation to other life events – such as marriages, births, changes of house or job – nor in relation to wider historical events. This forms a stark contrast with recollections of strikes and lockouts, which, as already discussed, were often linked together with other industrial disputes as part of a linear history of struggle. Indeed, even when only one strike was recalled, or they were remembered in isolation, they were still often placed within the context of another significant occasion in people's lives. Casimira Duenos, for example, remembered how 'in 1912 we got married and we had seven weeks strike then,' thus placing the strike at a specific historical point within her life-story, and Hester Barron has also noted several instances of this kind for memories of 1926 in Durham.¹¹² Many of the accidents that were recalled in the CHP interviews were of friends, workmates and family members

¹⁰⁸ SWML, AUD/236, Interview with W.H. Davies, 29 November, 1973.

¹⁰⁹ SWML, AUD/619, Interview with Idris Suter, 21 January, 1978.

¹¹⁰ SWML, AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978.

¹¹¹ SWML, AUD/17, Maerdy Discussion Group Interview, March, 1980.

¹¹² SWML, AUD/200, Interview with Nicholas and Casimira Duenos (nee Esteban), 11 December, 1972. Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*, 225, 235.

being killed, or of serious personal injury, yet despite their obvious personal significance, they were seldom, if ever mentioned as significant incidents in relation to the specific history of an individual's life. Instead, they were overwhelmingly associated with occupation, with the idea of belonging to a mining community, and were primarily seen as an eternally recurring feature of a particular occupational experience, rather than as a major event in a linear, personal history.

The dangers of working underground – the fact that they were ever-present, with death and injury a constantly recurring feature – were not the only aspect of life within mining communities that might have led to this understanding of time. Curtis and Thompson's work on the experience of disability within mining communities has pointed out how those who worked underground 'typically followed a similar occupational trajectory,' beginning either on the surface, or, more commonly in south Wales, underground 'as assistants or "butties" to colliers,' who were often family members.¹¹³ Having served this apprenticeship, they would typically, at the age of 21, progress to working on the face itself, cutting coal as a collier – which was both the best paid and highest status work in the pit. Later in life, 'as bodies began to age and fail...the next-step was for a miner to leave face-work and to move to another role in the pit, typically to other underground work such as 'repairing roadways, labouring or doing any number of other, "lighter" tasks,' or in some cases, to work on the surface.¹¹⁴ Such work was never as well paid, nor had the same status as being a collier, and those who ended up on the surface were often returning 'to where they had first started work in the industry.'¹¹⁵ Work underground, therefore, did not generally follow an upwards, linear path, but a cyclical trajectory, with miners rising and then falling again in status and earnings.

Another factor that might have also encouraged this conception of time, was the way in which boys tended to follow their fathers down the pit, and in turn, be followed underground by their own sons as part of an endless, constantly recurring cycle. Working underground was seen by many as part of a natural progression, an integral stage or rite of passage within the life-cycles of men within mining communities. Ned Gittins was asked whether mining was seen as the inevitable choice once he had left school, and replied, 'oh yes, that was sacrosanct that was, nowhere else...in any case,' whilst Ronald Powe claimed that 'you'd automatically go into the colliery...the father worked in the colliery, and then his son would go into the colliery you

¹¹³ Curtis and Thompson, 'This is the country of premature old men', 595-6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 596.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 597.

know.’¹¹⁶ W.C. Davies, meanwhile, was asked why he had chosen to work in the pits, and replied simply, ‘well I suppose mining was in my blood...this was the job for us.’¹¹⁷ The assumption that boys would automatically follow their fathers and grandfathers underground, increased the sense of work as being cyclical, as part of an inevitable and recurring pattern.¹¹⁸ The response to the passage about time in the Federation’s May Day pageant is interesting in this respect, with its affirmation that ‘yes, we have new men’, suggesting that although one life might have been ended in the pit, the cycle would begin again with the next man to follow in his footsteps.¹¹⁹

The occupational continuity of mining communities was referenced by both John Sewel and Stephen Town in their studies of mining villages in south Wales, and it is a familiar trope of many studies of mining communities.¹²⁰ It is important to emphasise, however, that whilst the image of stable, enduring communities, where families had worked in the pit since time immemorial might fit the 1960s and 1970s reasonably well, it is not an accurate reflection of the early twentieth century, when, as has been noted above, there was a considerable amount of migration into the coalfield. Many of those interviewed by the CHP had moved to south Wales since the 1880s (or their parents had moved before they were born), and so did not share the same family links and traditions of working underground. Nonetheless, this occupational continuity was an important part of such communities’ self-image, and was no less important nor influential for having been partly imagined in some cases. Indeed, of those quoted above, Ned Gittins’ family had moved from north Wales, and W.C. Davies’s from south-west England, yet this did not stop the latter, in particular, from claiming that mining was in his blood. Mining was seen as a fundamental part of the community’s past and future, as well as its present, with a sense of solidarity and mutual obligation stretching across generations.

Such conceptions have also sometimes been associated with an absence of any wider political or historical consciousness – with communities that understood time as an endlessly recurring cycle unable to imagine a future that is significantly different from the present or the past. In respect of attitudes towards accidents underground, there is some evidence to suggest that a

¹¹⁶ SWML, AUD/231, Interview with Ned Gittins, August, 1973; AUD/617, Interview with Ronald Powe, 20 January, 1978.

¹¹⁷ SWML, AUD/188, Interview with W.C. Davies, August, 1973.

¹¹⁸ This does not mean that everyone thought work underground was the only option for their children, many were extremely reluctant to see their sons go down the pit. See Chapter III.

¹¹⁹ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Pontypool prompt script.

¹²⁰ See Sewel, *Colliery Closure and Social Change*, 7 and Stephen W. Town, *After the Mines: Changing employment opportunities in a South Wales valley*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978), 18, 28.

fatalistic acceptance of danger as unavoidable did, at times, hinder attempts to improve safety in the pits. This was noted by McIvor and Johnston, whilst there were also frequent complaints in the union's journals and papers about their members not taking advantage of the improvements that had been fought for.¹²¹ The influence of such attitudes can be overstated however, and McIvor and Johnston also emphasised that the 'risk acceptance threshold was fluid and subject to change over time,' with the 'younger generation of miners after the Second World War...less willing to tolerate the conditions their fathers had accepted.'¹²² The argument that mining communities in south Wales understood the dangers of the pit in a cyclical fashion should not, therefore, be taken as an argument that they were apolitical or that there were no attempts to reduce them. Seeing time as a recurring cycle does not necessarily preclude any attempt to improve that cycle – indeed, the assumption that their children and grandchildren would follow them down the pit could fuel a powerful commitment to making that work better.

Finally, it might be argued that cyclical understandings of time provide the best explanation for why pit disasters were so strangely absent from the mining community's collective memory. When the union wrote or spoke about the dangers of the pit, it made little sense to reference a specific tragedy (like Senghennydd) that was tied to a particular time and place, when the loss that it symbolised was still very much a feature of everyday life. It made even less sense to commemorate an anniversary or erect a memorial. Indeed, as noted above, it was not just big explosions, but specific historical incidents of any sort that were absent. Of course, the perils of the colliery, the risks of death and injury, were not historic features of some grim past, but part of the daily reality of life within any mining community. For this reason also, big explosions did not stand out as significant landmarks within the miners' history. Unlike the Tonypandy riots, they were not in themselves symbolic events that would be remembered as a part of the coalfield's shared experience, and were thus usually remembered only by those who had experienced them. It was only when the dangers of working underground were allowed to pass into history that tragedies like Senghennydd, and others, started to attract wider remembrance and commemoration. One of the few occasions for instance in which a miners' MP referenced a disaster in the House of Commons, occurred during a debate on pit closures – Ness Edwards warning in 1967 that 'the death of a pit is the death of a mining community,' and asking his fellow MPs to think back to the Senghennydd explosion and the

¹²¹ See *The Miner*, 1:2, Nov. 1944, 11, for example.

¹²² McIvor and Johnston, *Miners' Lung*, 262.

'men who have given their lives to the industry.'¹²³ Perhaps even more striking are the memorials that have been erected to commemorate these tragedies which, as Angela Gaffney noted, had previously been strangely absent from south Wales.¹²⁴ All of those that have been erected – at Senghennydd in 1981 (and then again in 2013), Ferndale in 1988, Cambrian in 1992, Cilfynydd in 1994, Six Bells in 2010, Abercarn in 2014, and Llanerch (for which fundraising is still ongoing) – were commissioned after the closure of those pits and the extinction of the mining industry – and with it, the disappearance of this occupational culture and way of life from the valleys of south Wales.¹²⁵

V

Individual memories of accidents that had occurred underground, and the representations of them by the miners' union and the Labour and Communist parties, were both placed within a common narrative framework that might be called the 'Price of Coal.' This narrative had shaped and influenced the ways in which people within the mining communities recalled their own personal experiences, and had done so to such an extent, that the same tropes, analogies and language used within that narrative also appeared in the interviews recorded by the CHP. These narratives, however, had themselves also been shaped by the personal experiences of death and injury within the pit villages. There was, thus, a close and reciprocal relationship between individual memories and representations of the past, which led to the emergence of a powerful collective memory of the dangers of working underground across the coalfield. This provides further insights into the relationship between individual and collective remembering, and again underscores the importance of individual recollections to understanding the nature of collective memory, and to explaining how such memories emerged.

Strikingly, big pit disasters, such as those at the Marine Colliery in 1927, or Senghennydd in 1913, were largely absent from this collective memory (although there is some evidence of them being remembered at a local level). This partly reflected the fact that they were comparatively rare, and were thus largely occluded by the smaller, every day accidents that

¹²³ Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 750, 18 July, 1967, 1896.

¹²⁴ See Gaffney, *Aftermath*, 99-100.

¹²⁵ At Gresford also, the memorial to the disaster was erected after the closure of the pit, as noted by Roger Laidlaw. He argues that the memorial's dedication was 'the moment when Wrexham stopped being a mining town and became a former mining town.' Laidlaw, 'Gresford', 137.

were far more frequent and which claimed so many more lives. It was also partly a consequence of the way in which such disasters were covered in the local and national press. The floods of sympathy which greeted them, and the gushing acclamation that was lavished on the stoic wives and heroic rescue workers, rang hollow to many within the mining communities, who, at other times, felt unappreciated, ignored, or even demonised. But this absence was also, arguably, a result of the differing conceptions of time within which the dangers of the pit were understood.

The dangers of working underground were understood within a cyclical conception of time, as part of an ever-present and unchanging feature of life within the mining communities. This stood in stark contrast to the collective memories of strikes, lockouts and protests, which were often recalled within a linear temporality, as part of a historic narrative of progress through struggle. It seems likely that the cyclical conceptions of time that existed in the mining communities were older understandings that had survived into the 1970s, given that they rooted in the nature of the dangers faced underground, and that those experiences were themselves much older. It is very difficult, however, to argue with any certainty that this was the case based solely on the CHP interviews, and without any substantial evidence from before the project. Similarly, it is difficult to say whether these perceptions of time shaped attitudes towards other aspects of life within the pit villages, though, again, it seems likely that such understandings would have been encouraged in some areas by the cyclical nature of work underground and generational continuity.

This way of understanding time, in particular, the way in which consciousness of both the past and the present were so closely linked, suggests also at the extraordinary 'presentness' of the past within mining communities. When people recalled historic accidents and deaths underground, they were not just remembering something from a now vanished era, but talking about something that was still very much a part of their everyday lives. Past accidents remained a vital part of everyday conceptions towards the world, rather than being allowed to pass, as it were, into history. That the dangers of the pit were understood within this fashion also demonstrates that linear understandings of time were by no means the only way in which people understood the past, and that different historical experiences could be understood within different temporalities.

III

Hard Times – Collective Memories of Hardship, Unemployment and the Inter-war Depression.

See the bleak mining village streets...half-starved children on the doorstep...note the girl of 11 or 12 with holes all over her stockings...in only a few years this girl will be one of Britain's young women, and later the mother of our future miners. Can one wonder if the seeds of social revolution are bred in the souls of these helpless children, who are forsaken?
...Memories of these starvation days will live forever in their minds.¹

Travelling through the valleys of south Wales in the midst of the great lockout in 1926, a visitor from Newport – ‘not a socialist or miner,’ but ‘just an ordinary man in the street’ – felt driven to put into words the suffering and hardship that he had encountered.² In a letter written to the *South Wales Argus*, quoted above, he set out the miners’ case, and evoked images of soup kitchens, impoverished villages and ragged and starving children, before finally warning the paper’s readers that memories of this hunger and poverty, would ‘live forever’ in the minds of the mining community.³ The hard times that the miners and their families experienced both during the great lockouts of 1921 and 1926, and throughout the depression of the 1920s and 1930s, did, indeed, remain seared into the consciousness of the coalfield. For those interviewed by the CHP in the 1970s, the interwar depression stood out as an exceptional time, a period of extended hardship and suffering, which seemed to have ended traditional ways of life within the mining communities, and left only destitution in its place. Steven Thompson has argued that its impact ‘was equal to the two World Wars in terms of the psychological trauma it inflicted on the population,’ whilst Stephanie Ward has claimed that ‘even in the twenty-first century,’ it ‘still has the ability to inform political debate.’⁴ By this point, memories of people picking for coal on spoil heaps, standing on street corners or in dole queues, and of idle pit wheels and deserted streets had long since become engrained within the imagery of a time known as the ‘Hungry Thirties.’

¹ SWA, 1 Jun. 1926.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Steven Thompson, *Unemployment, Poverty and Health in Interwar South Wales*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), 1; Stephanie Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain, The means test and protest in 1930s south Wales and northeast England*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 2.

Though very little has been written on collective memories of the unemployment and poverty during the inter-war years, the depression itself has generated a huge amount of historical work and controversy. This historiography is, to a large extent, dominated by the debate over whether the inter-war years should be characterised either as a time of poverty and hardship, or of rising living standards – often shorthand as the ‘healthy or hungry’ thirties. This debate is often dated from the publication of *The Slump*, in which John Stevenson and Chris Cook claimed that the prevailing cultural and political imagery of the inter-war years as ‘hard times’ was a political myth created by the post-war Left to provide historical foundation and vindication for the welfare state.⁵ They, and other historians, have argued that whilst unemployment and poverty existed in depressed areas like south Wales and the north east of England, the unemployed were never a majority of the population, and that for most people in Britain, falling prices led to a rise in living standards. In this account, the inter-war years were a time of rising prosperity, of new industries, and an increased range of consumer goods. The debate gained an added political edge with the return of mass unemployment in the early 1980s. In 1982, an article by Charles Webster attacked the empirical foundations of the idea of a ‘healthy’ inter-war years, by exposing the deficiencies of the Ministry of Health reports on which it had largely been based.⁶ Furthermore, he demonstrated that although there was an overall improvement in mortality rates across the two decades, the national figures concealed stark regional, class and gender inequalities – inequalities that worsened over the period. A focus on these, he argued, was ‘quite as valid a representation of reality, and as important historically’ as the secular rise in living standards.⁷ More recently, historians such as Matt Perry have pointed out that although the unemployed might only ever have constituted a minority of the population, mass unemployment permeated the general consciousness of the time, even in areas that were relatively unaffected, and that the imagery of the depression was central to the country’s experience of the 1920s and 1930s.⁸

Many historians of south Wales have simply ignored the controversy that has dominated the historiography across the Severn, arguing that more optimistic interpretations cannot possibly

⁵ John Stevenson and Chris Cook, *The Slump: Society and Politics during the Depression*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977).

⁶ Charles Webster, ‘Healthy or Hungry Thirties’, in *History Workshop Journal*, no. 13, (1982). The regional reports were infected with such political and social biases that they were dismissed as ‘so unreliable as to be valueless for any purpose’ by the officials who had commissioned them (see 119).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸ Matt Perry, *Bread and Work: The Experience of Unemployment 1918-39*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

apply to the coalfield, where 'a whole society was crucified by mass unemployment and near starvation.'⁹ Yet, as Steven Thompson's study of the inter-war depression in south Wales shows, whilst poverty and hunger were a reality for many, living and nutritional standards did improve for those in employment during the 1920s and 1930s, 'even in depressed areas such as south Wales.'¹⁰ However, although mortality rates improved throughout the inter-war years, they began from a worse basis than for England and Wales as a whole, and thereafter improved at both a slower rate and not to the same extent as in other areas. The inter-war years thus saw an 'intensification of regional and class inequalities,' as the mining communities of south Wales 'continued to lose ground in comparison with working-class families in other parts of Britain.'¹¹

Perhaps the most striking point to take from Thompson's work however is the enormous variation in experiences of poverty, hunger and unemployment within south Wales. The effects of the depression varied greatly according to region, age, occupation and gender, with substantial differences between and even within individual families. Most families made strenuous attempts to keep potential breadwinners well-fed and in a fit state for work, even when unemployed for long periods. Efforts were also made to shield children as much as was possible, so the worst effects of hunger and malnutrition fell overwhelmingly on women – both mothers and elder daughters. In the 1930s, school medical officers in the Rhondda noted that girls were 'physically inferior' to boys of their age, whilst there were also significant increases in stillbirth and neo-natal mortality during the two decades.¹² As Thompson concludes, 'it was the women of south Wales who bore the brunt of the economic difficulties faced by families during the interwar depression.'¹³

Alongside gender, the other biggest determinant of experience of the depression was geography. The western parts of the coalfield, particularly the anthracite region, largely escaped the worst of the depression, shielded by 'the more diverse nature of their economies and the relatively more buoyant market for Anthracite coal.'¹⁴ In contrast, areas like the Rhondda and the heads of the eastern valleys (from Merthyr and Dowlais, through Tredegar and Ebbw Vale to Brynmawr, Blaina and Nantyglo) were plunged into acute depression from

⁹ Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 230.

¹⁰ Thompson, *Unemployment, Poverty and Health*, 78.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 243, 101.

¹² *Ibid.*, 85-86.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

1921. Reliant almost solely upon the coal industry, unemployment reached over 50 per cent during the inter-war years, and in certain areas could be far worse. In 1932, the Employment Exchange in Blaina, to take one example, recorded an unemployment rate of 93 per cent.¹⁵ Interestingly, however, despite the striking variations in experiences of the depression, the collective memories of hardship and poverty that emerged across the coalfield were remarkably homogeneous, and do not appear to have been significantly differentiated by either gender or geography – a feature that will be explored below.

For many of the men and women in the mining communities of south Wales, the inter-war depression began in 1921. The mining industry had been overheated by the First World War, and there was a rapid contraction in demand following the Armistice. The conflict had also seen the loss of many overseas markets, which hit exporting coalfields like south Wales particularly badly. The return to the Gold Standard in 1925 made British exports even more uncompetitive, and the response of the coalowners was to cut wages and close pits, which the miners resisted in two epic lockouts in 1921 and 1926. The miners and their families endured considerable hardship during both disputes, and their defeat heralded the onset of depression and mass unemployment. Between January 1927 and April 1928, 56 pits were closed, and the number of miners employed in south Wales fell by over half – from 270,000 in 1921 to 130,000 in 1927 – in just six years. Things worsened even further in the early 1930s as the effects of the Great Depression started to be felt in Britain. As has been noted above, wage reductions were matched (and sometimes exceeded) by the fall in prices, leading to an overall rise in living standards for those in work, but mass unemployment became a reality for many communities across the coalfield. The economic situation was only ameliorated by rearmament and the onset of the Second World War in 1939, though even then, the effects were not always immediate. The Fall of France in 1940, before Britain's own war industries had been fully mobilised, saw another contraction in demand for coal, and even with the Luftwaffe in the skies above southern England, pits in south Wales that were to be vital for the war effort continued to close.

This chapter focuses on memories of the interwar depression in the south Wales coalfield and, like the previous two chapters, further explores the relationship between individual and collective remembering. As those chapters noted, collective memories had emerged out of the recollections and attitudes of individual men and women as much as they had from the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

representations of political parties, trade unions and the press. Collective memories of the depression were similarly created by this reciprocal process, but it is also argued that individual memory was not just important to the formation of collective memories, but also to the form that such memories took. Personal recollections of hardship and poverty were situated as distinctly individual experiences within a wider collective framework – integral to collective remembrance, rather than being replaced or subjugated by it. This chapter argues, therefore, that collective memory might be better conceptualised as a continuous spectrum, rather than as a series of delineated and distinct categories.

The last two chapters have also explored two different conceptions of time that appear to have existed within the mining communities. The great lockouts of the 1920s, together with other strikes and protests, were woven into a heroic narrative of progress through struggle. The dangers of working underground, meanwhile, were not understood in this linear conception of time, but were instead remembered as a cyclical experience, as a recurring and unchanging feature of life within the pit villages. Yet the depression was experienced and remembered in neither of these temporalities (though there were attempts to incorporate it within the history of progress through struggle). Instead, it was seen as an exceptional period, as a time which appeared to stand outside of history. It is argued, here, that mass unemployment – and the severe economic and social dislocation that it brought – served as a dramatic rupture, shattering existing attitudes and world-views, and leading to the emergence of different ways of conceptualising time and society. This chapter is thus divided into two distinct and separate parts. Whilst the first three sections focus on the relationship between individual and collective remembering, the final one explores the temporalities of these collective memories, and argues that the depression was remembered in a different, ‘discontinuous’ conception of time.

I

Representations of the hard times during the 1920s and 1930s had been prevalent across the coalfield during those hard times themselves. Reading through newspapers, political material and SWMF publications from the 1920s onwards gives a vivid impression of the economic catastrophe that was engulfing south Wales. The union in particular, consistently drew attention to the hardship being suffered by the miners and their families, with the *CWM*

reporting on the growing problems of poverty and unemployment. In January 1926, it warned in dramatic terms of the situation in the pit villages – ‘Hunger and suffering are everywhere the unwelcome guests, throughout the land stalks the spectre of unemployment, want and affliction have swept the homes of the miners, privation stares from a thousand eyes.’¹⁶ The SWMF’s representations were initially framed by the context of the lockouts in 1921 and 1926. Unemployment was coupled with low wages, and both were seen as consequences of the miners’ defeats. Representations of poverty and unemployment therefore, were used both to graphically illustrate the vindictiveness of the coalowners and the effects of their victory, and to provide a compelling argument for continued struggle. As the coalfield moved past the defeats of the 1920s and into the 1930s, the effects of the depression continued to feature prominently within union publications and speeches by union officials. The continual references sought to ensure that the problems of unemployment and poverty remained at the forefront of public consciousness, and made a persistent case for action to be taken to alleviate the situation.

The union was joined in such efforts by the Labour and Communist parties, both of whom represented the experiences of the inter-war depression in much the same fashion. In 1935, for instance, Will Mainwaring, the Labour MP for Rhondda East, claimed in a speech to the House of Commons that the government was ‘deliberately starving the people’ and that there was ‘no excuse.’¹⁷ He went on to describe the circumstances of the long term unemployed, and declared that:

There is no word in the English language that can adequately condemn this business...I am hanged if I am going to sit here quietly while a single child of an unemployed man is starving in this country. And they are starving, make no mistake about that.¹⁸

Increasingly, political denunciations of poverty were targeted at the Means Test. The radical ‘rank-and-file’ paper, the *South Wales Miner*, frequently condemned it as a ‘fascist measure’ that threw the ‘burden of unemployment on the working-class,’ whilst similar accusations were also made by local Communist Party figures.¹⁹ Llewellyn Jenkins, a councillor for Cilfynydd, appealed for unity between Labour and the Communists, in order ‘to smash the

¹⁶ *CWM*, 4:1, Jan. 1926, 6.

¹⁷ *GFP & RL*, 9 Feb. 1935.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *SWM*, 20, 17 Apr. 1934. See also *SWM*, 17, 20 Feb. 1934 and *SWM*, 26, 7 Aug. 1934.

National Government and their pernicious Unemployment Act, which was a real step in forcing workers to accept fascism.’²⁰

Interestingly, both the SWMF and political parties often tended to focus as much on hunger and low wages as they did on unemployment. The *CWM*, for example, complained that ‘wages are so low as to mean literal starvation to...the miners’ families,’ and claimed that ‘hard work and starvation are marching abreast.’²¹ Meanwhile, Frances Handy, a Labour organiser from Abertillery, wrote of ‘empty mouths and empty stomachs, and daddy wearing himself to a skeleton in the bowels of the earth.’²² If living standards and nutritional standards rose for those *in* work, as Thompson argues, this was a fact that was neither conceded nor recognised by the SWMF. This focus on low wages as much as unemployment was understandable – it was something that was far easier for example for the union to campaign on, falling more within the traditional scope of their activities than did mass unemployment. It also meant, however, that the depictions of ‘hard times’ could resonate with everyone working in the coal industry, rather than just the unemployed. Political and trade union representations thus constructed the idea of hard times as an experience universal to the mining communities, regardless of whether one was in or out of work.

These representations of hardship, unemployment and poverty, can be seen, in part, as a counterpoint to some of the depictions of such issues in the national press. As Perry has noted, national newspapers often ‘stigmatised those without work,’ representing the unemployed as ‘troublemakers, shirkers, comedic simpletons or charity cases.’²³ Unemployment was portrayed as a personal, moral failing on the part of individuals, rather than a societal issue, with stories – or, more often, rumours – of benefit abuse a recurring feature, and unemployed demonstrations and protests dismissed as the actions of political extremists. Just as the union’s representations of strikes sought to counter hegemonic and prevailing national narratives surrounding industrial action, so too did their representations of the depression. Indeed, this was stated explicitly by some union organisers in 1925, when setting out the reasons behind one unemployed demonstration:

It [is] necessary, from time to time, to sweep from the minds of the people, by personal contact and explanation, the mistaken notions and false conceptions which they derive from

²⁰ *GFP & RL*, 26 Jan. 1935.

²¹ *CWM*, 1:1 Jan. 1923, 12.

²² *CWM*, 1:2 Feb. 1923, 43.

²³ Perry, *Bread and Work*, 59, 80.

the press...Next Sunday's demonstration will be one of the biggest of the year, and in view of the Tory Government's callous disregard of the unemployed, it will be one of the most necessary.²⁴

The representations of the trade union and political parties might then be seen partly in this context – as a reaction to national narratives that dismissed or denied the existence of widespread hardship, or sought to cast it as a personal, rather than a social issue. In response, the miners' union and Labour and Communist parties attempted to affirm the existence of mass unemployment, draw attention to the plight of the unemployed, and insist on the necessity for action to be taken.

As Perry notes, however, national papers balanced such depictions with more sympathetic accounts of the effects of unemployment, in which the experience of south Wales often featured prominently.²⁵ *The Times*, for instance, published a series of articles in 1928 on the 'Stricken Coalfield,' which described the 'social disaster' that was unfolding in south Wales. The paper's correspondent wrote that they 'merely wished to record the plain fact that men, women and children are living in parts of these valleys in a state of destitution...gradually wasting away through lack of nourishment.'²⁶ The impression generated by such reports was reinforced by books like Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* and Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and, in south Wales, by the reporting of the local press throughout the inter-war years. Reports of pits, steel mills and ironworks closing appeared constantly in local papers, with large headlines detailing the 'Towns of Despair,' the 'Spectre of Starvation' and the 'Plight of Black Blaina.'²⁷ In 1932, an editorial in the *Glamorgan Free Press and Rhondda Leader* lamented the 'veritable nightmare of unemployment,' through which the valley had been living, whilst the constant reports of those prosecuted for picking coal from the spoil heaps served as a daily reminder of the hardship the mining communities were suffering.²⁸ Even though, as Thompson has noted, the experience of hardship varied considerably across the coalfield, this difference in experience was not reflected in the press. Papers from right across the coalfield, even in the relatively unaffected areas of the Anthracite coalfield in the west, reported colliery closures and overcrowded Labour Exchanges, and declared that

²⁴ *The Labour Voice, Llais Llafur*, 20 Jun. 1925.

²⁵ Perry, *Bread and Work*, 60.

²⁶ *The Times*, 28, 29 Mar., and 2, 3 Apr. 1928. Quote from 29 March.

²⁷ *SWA*, 11 Nov. 1921, 10 Nov. 1924, 2 Oct. 1935.

²⁸ Quote from *GFP & RL*, 5 Mar. 1932. For reports of prosecutions of people picking coal, see *GFP & RL*, 9 Jan. 1932 (13 prosecutions), 30 Jan. 1932 (17), 5 Mar. 1932 (12), 12 Mar. 1932 (10), 19 Mar. 1932 (13) for just the first three months of that year in the Rhondda alone.

‘unprecedented distress [was] being felt’ in places such as Ammanford and Cwmamman.²⁹ Such reports led to a pervasive sense that the coalfield as a whole had been engulfed by an economic catastrophe, and ensured that poverty, hunger and mass unemployment were represented as an indelible feature of south Wales throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

It was only with the onset of war in 1939 that the coalfield began to emerge from the inter-war depression, and even then only slowly. Poverty and unemployment continued to afflict many mining villages into the early 1940s, and, unsurprisingly, remained an important reference point for trade union and political figures. A concern that a lingering bitterness from the hardship of the inter-war years was holding back the war effort was voiced by several prominent individuals within the coalfield. Arthur Horner, for example, declared at the union’s annual conference that ‘we cannot...allow our present actions to be determined by our memories of the past...there is too much at stake for all of us.’³⁰ He himself, however, referenced the ‘hungry thirties,’ and the ‘destitute men, women and children’ in several speeches during the war, whilst Aneurin Bevan drew on identical themes in his attacks on the Conservatives.³¹ Meanwhile the Federation’s new journal *The Miner*, launched in 1944, stoked fears of a return to the ‘long years of unemployment and slack time’ under the Tories, and the ‘cycle of closed pits, broken homes, deserted villages, where the only caller is the Means Test man.’³² As the 1945 election approached, James Griffiths, former SWMF President and now the MP for Llanelli, declared that ‘a new generation’ had grown to adulthood over the past decade, ‘the children of the depression...born in an atmosphere of lock-outs, doles, silent pits and closed shops – “plant y gorthrwm”.’³³ The inter-war depression, and the idea of ‘never again’ returning to the dark days of the 1920s and 1930s, were a notable feature of the 1945 election in south Wales.

The prominence of the imagery of the ‘hungry thirties’ in Labour and SWMF rhetoric in the coalfield forms a contrast, however, to the national Labour Party campaign. 1945 occupies a significant place within left-wing national mythologies, often cast as a reaction against the poverty of the inter-war years, a vehement ‘never again’ to the suffering of the 1920s and 1930s. Yet Laura Beers has argued that, during the election itself, ‘Labour did not run a

²⁹ See *The Labour Voice*, *Llais Llafur*, 6 Jun. 1925, 5 Sep. 1925 and 16 Jan. 1932.

³⁰ SWCC:MNA/NUM/PP/46/63 – Papers of Arthur Horner – Address to Annual Conference, April 1943.

³¹ SWCC:MNA/NUM/PP/46/61 – Papers of Arthur Horner – Address to Annual Conference, April 1940; Aneurin Bevan, *Why Not Trust the Tories?* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1944).

³² *The Miner*, 1:7/8, (April/May, 1945), 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

primarily negative campaign.³⁴ As she observes, the only leaflet which adopted such an approach, 'Guilty Party' was the least popular amongst constituency parties whilst the campaign itself 'predominantly emphasised the party's own plans for a new socialist Britain.'³⁵ Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson and Nick Tiratsoo's *England Arise* has similarly argued that it was this positive focus on practical solutions that was most welcomed by the electorate, rather than negative depictions of the 1920s and 1930s.³⁶

The contrasting prominence of those 'hard times' in south Wales was perhaps partly related to the way in which they had been woven into the heroic narratives of strikes and protests by the union and political parties. This had begun early in the 1930s, with the repeated references to the Chartists and the Chartist Rising on unemployed demonstrations. Fliers for one march in 1933, consciously placed the contemporary actions of the unemployed within the same tradition as their ancestors, declaring that, as their 'Chartist forbears had marched in the hungry forties of the last century, their descendants would march in the Destitute Thirties of our era.'³⁷ The SWMF's May Day Pageant in 1939, meanwhile, opened by reflecting on how the children of south Wales grew up learning of the dangers of the pit, of the great lockout of 1926, and knew 'in their own bones what it was like to live in a distressed area.'³⁸ As discussed in the first chapter, the pageant traced a continuous line from the Chartists, through the early union struggles, the Tonypandy riots and the General Strike to the Welsh volunteers in the International Brigades, and the depression was absorbed within this heroic, linear history of progress through struggle. This continued after the Second World War, with the depression featuring prominently in a celebratory history of Pontypridd produced by the local Labour Party. The chapter on the aftermath of 1926 began by observing how:

The phrase the 'hungry forties' has passed out of memory of its reality into history – it refers to a period in the middle of the nineteenth century when, because of the price of a loaf, thousands in Britain could not afford to buy their daily bread. Perhaps, in a hundred years'

³⁴ Laura Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 181.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

³⁶ Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson, and Nick Tiratsoo, *'England Arise!' The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

³⁷ Monmouthshire Marchers' Council, *Monmouthshire Hunger March of August 1933*, (Abertillery, n.d.), 6-7, quoted in Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 260.

³⁸ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Dulais Valley script.

time, another phrase of the kind will be current coinage – ‘the hungry thirties’, referring this time to our own twentieth century.³⁹

It went on to describe the hardship suffered by the miners and their families, and expressed the hope that these pages would ‘stir’ memories of the ‘bad old days’ and inspire future generations to ‘turn their hands...to helping to build the future – we march on – the advent of the Labour Government is not the end but the beginning.’⁴⁰

Central to this narrative was the idea that the coalfield had experienced equivalent, or even greater hardship in the past. References to the ‘bad old days’ – particularly the ‘hungry forties’ of the nineteenth century – were part of a conscious attempt to lift the mining communities out of despondency following the shocks and dislocations inflicted by the depression. Contemporary hardship was placed within a longer historical context, which emphasised that, regardless of how bad the present had become, the past had been much worse. The *CWM*, for example, published an article in 1924 detailing a conversation with an old miner, in which:

He speaks of work long before he had reached his teens, of the day’s toil stretching into 12 and sometimes 14 hours. He tells us how, in the long winter months, the sun was never seen except on Sundays; of wages that made life a struggle and poverty a constant companion.⁴¹

The journal went on to claim that, bad as things might be in the present, ‘when we glance backwards’ at what had been achieved in the past, ‘our faith and courage are renewed, and we go on fighting with our hopes of victory renewed.’⁴²

Similar depictions of hardship were a recurring feature of the union’s journal throughout the 1920s, and continued into the following decades.⁴³ The *South Wales Miner*, condemning those who were too ‘afraid to look at the future,’ reminded its readers that in the past they had only had ‘daylight once a week,’ and that improvements had only been ‘won by struggle.’⁴⁴ Another pageant of the coalfield’s history, staged at Bedwellty in 1953, evoked similar themes, with a young girl explaining to the audience the truck system and tied housing – ‘if you don’t work for them you have nowhere to live, they’ll put you into the street quick enough.’⁴⁵ Later still, *The*

³⁹ SWCC:MNA/PP/21/6 – Papers of D. Evans – Pontypridd Trades Council and Labour Party pamphlet, 1948, *Action, Struggle, Achievement, Jubilee (1898-1948)*, 35.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴¹ *CWM*, 2:2, Feb. 1924, 46-47.

⁴² *CWM*, 2:2, Feb. 1924, 46-47.

⁴³ See also *CWM*, 1:6, Jun. 1923, 143-144; *CWM*, 2:3, Mar. 1924, 78; *CWM*, 2:7, Jul. 1924, 180.

⁴⁴ *SWM*, 14, 9 Jan. 1934.

⁴⁵ SWCC:MNB/PP/22/4 – Papers of Harold Finch – Script for the Pageant of Bedwellty, 1953

Miner, the successor to the *CWM*, reminded the miners and their families of how their forebears ‘only saw the light of day during week-ends,’ and ‘children were carried on the backs of fathers to work at the tender age of six and seven years.’⁴⁶ Within such narratives, the hardship and poverty of the inter-war years could be presented as simply a stage or temporary setback within a continued march of progress – rather than being an exceptional or historically unique collapse. Past experiences of hardship were thus used to demonstrate that times would not remain hard forever but would get better, as they had done before.

The hardship of the 1920s and 1930s remained a common historical reference point after the Second World War. References were characterised by much the same themes that had appeared in the contemporary representations of the depression – hunger and starvation in particular were often present, as was the imagery of people picking for coal on spoil heaps, whilst denunciations of the Means Test started to appear even more frequently. The union and political parties invoked memories of the depression against a range of opponents. The South Wales Area NUM, for example, referenced the inter-war years in criticisms of unemployment and low wages in the 1960s, in opposition to proposals to decentralise the coal industry (which would ‘bring about the ruin of the industry as experienced in the inter-war years’), and even in response to criticisms of wildcat strikes.⁴⁷ The local press also drew parallels between contemporary situations and the experiences of the past – though its references were less politically charged. One article in 1972, for example, recalled the ‘army of the unemployed’ of the 1930s, and declared that ‘the tragedy of 1972 is that it is becoming more and more like the 1930s.’⁴⁸ The 1920s and 1930s were represented very much as dark period of suffering and privation whose return was to be avoided if possible. They served as a grim warning, a threatening possibility that could be invoked against anything the union opposed.

Increasingly however, it was not hunger, unemployment, or even the Means Test to which the union referred, but just the period itself. The idea of hardship became so closely associated with this particular time as to be almost synonymous – a simple reference to the ‘thirties’ or to the inter-war years enough to evoke images of dole queues, soup kitchens and decimated villages. Local papers described how the 1930s – ‘the days of dole queues and soup kitchens’ – were ‘still bitterly engraved in the memories of many.’⁴⁹ By the 1960s, the union’s journal was

⁴⁶ *The Miner*, 8:3, May/Jun. 1960, 1.

⁴⁷ See for example, *The Miner*, 11:2, Mar/Apr. 1963, 15; *The Miner*, 9:4, Jul/Aug. 1961, 6 and *The Miner*, 8:1, Jan/Feb. 1960, 3-4. Quotation from *The Miner*, 8:5, Sep/Oct. 1960, 10.

⁴⁸ *RL*, 3 Mar. 1972.

⁴⁹ *RL*, 26 Mar. 1955.

simply referring to 'the grim 1930s,' to 'the dark inter-war years,' or to 'the thirties, the terrible thirties' without further comment.⁵⁰ As they did so, the depression, the hardship and poverty of the inter-war years, became elided with the great strikes and lockouts of the 1920s, referenced together as one overarching memory of suffering and struggle.

The 'hard times' of the inter-war years were thus a continuous point of historical reference from the 1920s onwards. Initially, they were consciously invoked as part of a heroic narrative of the coalfield's history, whilst, following the Second World War, the idea of the 1920s and 1930s themselves, increasingly became a shorthand for poverty and unemployment – a historical reference that served as a grim warning of the evils of the past. Referenced continuously by the union, by political parties and in the local press, it is nonetheless important to note that such representations often drew heavily on direct personal experiences of unemployment and poverty. Arthur Horner, for example, talked often of the effects of the depression in his capacity as SWMF president, and as a Communist Party activist. Describing during one election campaign how unemployment had 'destroyed thousands of homes, broken up family life, sent to a premature grave scores of mothers and children,' he claimed to know its shadow 'only too well – I am one of you.'⁵¹ The claim was not an empty one. Victimised for his political activities, and subsisting off his small stipend as a party official, Horner's comrades in the Communist Party were often 'astonished' to see first-hand the 'poverty in which he lived.'⁵² The miners for whom he claimed to speak, meanwhile, would later recall mistaking him for a particularly destitute member of the crowd before he took the platform. Goronwy Jones remembered how, 'his trousers were all ragged and he looked like a tramp – but my God could he speak.'⁵³ The point of this observation is to illustrate that it is not always easy to impose clear distinctions between individual experiences and representations of the past, especially when it comes to the inter-war depression. Many of those who wrote or talked publicly about unemployment and poverty, from people like Horner to trade union and political activists and novelists like Lewis Jones, had themselves direct, personal experience of such hardship. Representations of the depression were not an external force, shaping the way individual men and women understood their experiences, but themselves came out of such personal experiences – on which they drew heavily.

⁵⁰ *The Miner*, 11:2, Mar/Apr. 1963, 15; *The Miner*, 8:1, Jan/Feb. 1960, 3-4; *The Miner*, 11:3, May/Jun. 1963, 31.

⁵¹ SWCC:MNA/NUM/PP/46/20 – Papers of Arthur Horner – Election Addresses for 1933.

⁵² Nina Fishman, *Arthur Horner: A Political Biography, Volume I, 1894 to 1944: South Wales Miners' Federation; fighting fascism*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), 18.

⁵³ SWML, AUD/314, Interview with Goronwy Jones, October 1972.

One notable example of this was a screenplay titled 'Full Employment,' written sometime in the run-up to the D-Day landings in 1944.⁵⁴ The script seems to have been written by Dai Dan Evans, at the time a miners' agent and Communist Party activist in the Swansea Valley, who was later to become the General Secretary of the South Wales Area NUM. In it, a group of working-class men from across Britain, aboard a troopship bound for Europe, discussed their experiences of unemployment in the 1930s and the chances of change once the war is over. After the discussion, we see 'the thoughts' of the young Welshman (named 'Dan Evans'), thinking originally of happier times before they 'dissolve into memories of the depression.'⁵⁵ 'We see his mother...her face is lined and there is a tired look in her eyes...her worn hands burrow through the muddy wet muck of the slag,' searching for coal.⁵⁶ 'We dissolve to the entrance gates of a coal mine...convolvulus climbing up the haulage gear...dreary, bleak tenement houses on either side...dirty, ill-clad children sitting in the gutter.'⁵⁷ It was, in many respects, a fairly standard representation of the 'hungry thirties,' replete with much of the same imagery. Yet, it was also an attempt to represent his own experiences; the hardship, hunger and 'sheer poverty' which he recalled both himself and his community experiencing when interviewed (twice) by the CHP in the 1970s.⁵⁸ Whilst we would typically view such oral history interviews as (admittedly qualified and mediated) expressions of individual memory and experience, a screenplay is seen a public representation. Yet the interview is in many respects also a performance of a particular narrative of the past, and whilst there are important differences between the interviews and the screenplay – in terms of their assumed audience, their intended purpose and so forth – these differences, at least here, can reasonably be argued to be variations in the form such performances take, rather than their underlying nature.

⁵⁴ The screenplay is in the papers of Dai Dan Evans in the SWCC at Swansea University. Unfortunately it is not clear – and neither have I been able to find out – whether it was ever produced.

⁵⁵ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Full Employment – First Treatment.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ SWML, AUD/263, Interview with Dai Dan Evans, 5 December, 1972; AUD/264, Interview with Dai Dan Evans, 7 August, 1973.



Fig. 3 – Street in Brynmawr c. 1935.



Fig. 4 – ‘Coal Pickers During Strike.’ Painting by Nicholas Evans (1978).

An aspiring writer who found more success was the miner Bert Coombes from Resolven in the Vale of Neath. His work *These Poor Hands*, published in 1939, has been described as ‘the universal autobiography of the south Wales miners, perhaps of miners everywhere,’ such is

the extent to which it is seen as a defining representation of their experiences.⁵⁹ In its pages, Coombes described his personal experiences of the depression – the ‘haggard mothers,’ who hoped their children would ‘not get very hungry,’ nor ‘play too much, because they cannot say where the next pair of daps is coming from.’⁶⁰ He vividly evoked the ‘rotten feeling’ of the crowds waiting for work at the pithead:

What a worm a man feels when he must put a beseeching note into his voice when he asks for a job! It is not that he is afraid of the man or the work, but he is afraid of the refusal: of being told that his skill is not needed, that his strength and brain are useless, and that he must go home again and confess that he is not wanted.⁶¹

Though *These Poor Hands* was very much a public representation of the experiences of the mining community, written with a national audience in mind, it was also one that drew heavily on the personal experiences and memories of one, individual miner.

II

Given the extent to which many of the representations of ‘hard times’ drew on personal experiences of poverty and unemployment, it is perhaps unsurprising to note that there are striking similarities between the ways in which the depression was represented in the coalfield, and the ways in which it was remembered by individual men and women. Though it again remains difficult to reconstruct popular memories and attitudes towards hardship from the inter-war years themselves, south Wales’ status as a special area led to numerous sociological studies, which do afford some insight into what men and women thought about the hard times of the 1920s and 1930s. These studies, together with the interviews carried out by the CHP in the 1970s, are filled with the same imagery – unemployed on street corners, hungry children, dole queues, derelict streets and abandoned pits, and people picking for coal on spoil heaps – that appeared in the speeches and publications of political parties and the miners’ union. Though the similarities between coalfield representations and individual memory may not be too surprising however, it is striking that the same imagery and themes recur constantly in different individual recollections. This is despite the fact that, as Thompson, amongst others, has noted, individual experiences of the depression could vary considerably

⁵⁹ See introduction to B.L Coombes, *These Poor Hands: The Autobiography of a Miner working in South Wales*, (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2010), (1st ed. 1939), xxiii-xxiv.

⁶⁰ Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, 92. ‘Daps’ is a colloquial word for shoes.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

across the coalfield – particularly between different areas, and between men and women. This section explores the ways in which the depression was remembered by individual men and women across the coalfield, and attempts to explain why these memories were often so similar, despite considerable variety in actual personal experience.

Thanks to the work of Mass Observation (MO), there is some invaluable evidence to suggest how the depression was remembered by individual men and women from the beginning of the Second World War. In a diary written for MO in 1939, one Swansea woman, Mrs E. Baldwin, observed how ‘many people on buses etc. are looking and talking very seriously about the enormous amount of money being used [for rearmament], and yet previous to this war they could not possibly do anything for the unemployed.’⁶² A month later she recorded similarly indignant conversations about government expenditure overseas, ‘when we have suffered so much unemployment.’⁶³ She vigorously underlined that she had heard ‘many conversations in buses, homes and street,’ and that all people ‘were of the same mind.’⁶⁴ Her diary suggests that memories of poverty and unemployment were present and were an important point of discussion towards the end of the 1930s, and even better evidence for such powerful memories can be found from the eastern end of the coalfield. MO had sent researchers to the villages of Blaina and Nantyglo in the early 1940s, and their report, written in 1944, detailed the pervasive presence of the depression in the memories of both men and women. Those memories were referenced as soon as the second page, where the Observer reported a man talking about 1921 and the subsequent colliery closures as saying:

However long I live, I shall never forget that day. If I shut my eyes now, I can still see all those men streaming down the road at a time when they would be coming from work. Some talking, some silent...the expressions on their faces. They didn’t know how to take it, whether to be afraid or sceptical or just resigned...it was ruination for nearly everyone.⁶⁵

The chronic unemployment that the area had suffered in the previous decades is referenced time and again throughout the study, alongside harrowing recollections of ‘Blaina’s past history of blinding poverty.’⁶⁶ One miner’s wife, for instance, described how ‘all the children

⁶² University of Sussex (UoS), Mass-Observation Archive (MOA), 4/5242 – Mass Observation Diary – E. Baldwin, see entry for 14 Oct., 1939.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, entry for 5 Nov. 1939.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, entry for 5 Nov. 1939.

⁶⁵ UoS/MOA/2/64/1/D – Survey of Blaina and Nantyglo, 2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

here have been brought up in poverty,' and explained the 'continual struggle and sacrifice' that people had gone through to make ends meet.⁶⁷

What is perhaps most striking is the strength of these memories. The authors of the report claimed that anyone talking about the depression 'speaks always with an emphasis and sincerity which makes it difficult to suspect over-statement,' and later on, asserted that such memories were accompanied by an 'intensity of tone and emphatic gesture.'⁶⁸ The authors judged that it was 'past more than present events which serve as the determining factor in the shaping public opinion,' and later declared that memories of the past that are still more urgent and convincing than the changes brought about by war.'⁶⁹ A study of just two villages obviously cannot be taken as representative of the whole coalfield, but it does suggest that memories of the interwar depression were important amongst ordinary men and women during the war itself, and were not just being constantly referenced by the SWMF, Labour and Communist Party figures.

The insights provided by these sources into individual memories of the depression are interesting, even if those insights remain restricted to a particular time and place. And whilst there is, unfortunately, little indication of how unemployment and poverty were remembered in the 1950s and 1960s, it can be argued that memories of hard times were powerful, pervasive and widespread by the early 1970s. Nearly half of those interviewed by the Coalfield History Project (98 of 203) talked about poverty and unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s. Again, many of the themes that were so prevalent in both press reports and political and trade union material also featured heavily in the memories of those interviewed. Many people, for example, recalled picking for coal on the spoil heaps. 'Oh it was terrible. Terrible here,' remembered Mrs Jones from Ystradgynlais, 'I had to go up the mountain there and dig for coal...used to go up there with a pick and a sack.'⁷⁰ In another interview, Mrs Taylor (also from the Swansea Valley) recalled how 'in the depression time, they were digging coal themselves, opening little places...*it was illegal*...and there were some accidents as well.'⁷¹ Recollections of hunger were even more common. Dai Daniel Rees, for example, was asked about non-unionism following 1926, which instantly provoked a memory of the poverty and hunger during the inter-war years. 'There was nothing about here see...it was like starvation...I don't

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12, 67.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20, 218.

⁷⁰ SWML, AUD/477, Interview with Mrs Jones, 27 May, 1975.

⁷¹ SWML, AUD/473, Interview with Mrs Taylor, 21 March, 1975.

want to go back to them days, my God I don't.'⁷² Glyn Williams, meanwhile, remembered one old man in Glyncorrwg during the 1926 lockout and the depression that followed:

He was absolutely starving. He was seen...in the bins, buckets...round in the mornings to try and find something to eat, because he had nothing at all...I remember him in the meeting, I was calling for support for the strike, and him throwing his cap – he couldn't speak – bloody coalowners, jumping on his cap you know. Jumping on his cap in the hall.⁷³

Another common theme in the CHP interviews, though one which did not feature so heavily in either contemporary or post-war representations of the depression was movement. An estimated 400,000 people left south Wales during the inter-war years – mostly to more prosperous areas like London, Slough and the east midlands. This migration away from the coalfield was remembered by many of those who had been left behind. Eddie Williams for instance recalled how 'there was the drift, the drift was on then.'⁷⁴ That phrase, 'the drift' was used by several others also, indicating perhaps that the movement away was a common reference point within local conversations and memories. Elved Evans, meanwhile, recalled how 'we suffered a terrific loss of population...I remember counting fifteen, ten to fifteen houses empty in one street down here,' whilst Lillian Tanner simply stated, 'there was a general exodus from this place.'⁷⁵ This 'exodus' was a graphic rendition of what was happening to the community as a whole. Individuals fell unemployed and suffered hunger and poverty, but their very communities, the villages in which they lived seemed to be decaying or ebbing away. As well as those left behind, the CHP also interviewed some of those who had spent the inter-war years on the move and who had bitter memories of the experience. Oliver Powell from Tredegar was victimised following the lockout in 1926, and only returned to the pits once they were nationalised: 'I wandered round Southampton...I had a go at Bristol, Newport, Cardiff until I broke my bloody heart...you couldn't get a job, it was terrible wasn't it?'⁷⁶ Lew Howells of Aberdare had similar recollections, though of moving around within south Wales rather than leaving. Hounded by the 'genuinely seeking work' clause in the unemployment regulations, he remembered how 'you'd go and ask for a job, but no vacancies...walk your feet out, everywhere, no work to be had.'⁷⁷ Returning to 'the dole,' they would ask "'why don't you

⁷² SWML, AUD/238, Interview with Dai Daniel Rees, June, 1973.

⁷³ SWML, AUD/257, Interview with Glyn Williams, 21 May, 1974.

⁷⁴ SWML, AUD/616, Interview with Eddie Williams, 13 January, 1978.

⁷⁵ SWML, AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978; AUD/633, Interview with Lillian Tanner, 5 April, 1978.

⁷⁶ SWML, AUD/316, Interview with Oliver Powell, 29 November, 1973.

⁷⁷ SWML, AUD/566, Interview with Lew Howells, c. 1974-79.

go to this place, why don't you go to that place," and damned you was telling them "well I've been everywhere, walked my bloody feet off and I got no shoes."⁷⁸

The most deeply personal memories, however, were of the Means Test. As discussed above, many of the representations of poverty and hardship in the 1930s had been targeted against the test, and it had also featured heavily in post-war denunciations of the inter-war depression. Yet it was, if anything, even more prevalent in the memories of those recorded by the CHP, and such recollections of the test are notable not only for their frequency, but also for the depth of bitterness and resentment. Bob Morris recalled having to hide in a neighbour's house when the Means Test man came around Bedlinog – 'you daren't go home then' – having to wait until late in the evening before he could sneak home to have some food.⁷⁹ Mrs Evans meanwhile remembered how 'they had a Means Test at that time,' and described the effects that it had had on her father, 'whenever [he] would have to go down...you could always see the worry in him...oh it was bad then, it was really bad.'⁸⁰ Elved Evans' father was also unemployed, and had his dole cut off because both Elved and his brother were working. He recalled, with understandable bitterness, the effects that this had had on his father, now forced to depend on his children for subsistence in a society where masculinity was principally expressed through providing for one's family:

That's, what beat us, not the strikes. You know what I mean, people saying they weren't gonna live on their son's backs...that was the degradation and the Means Test...they beat us where the colliery company couldn't, there's no doubt about that.⁸¹

What is also striking about these individual recollections is their homogeneity. As noted before, experiences of hardship varied considerably, particularly by gender and region, with pronounced differences within individual communities and even individual families. One might, therefore, expect the memories recorded by the CHP to represent this variety of experience, with stronger or more prevalent memories of hardship in the east of the coalfield than the west, or amongst women than men. Alternatively, one might simply have expected a patchwork of differing voices at the expense of any common themes, reflecting the complex reality of individual experience. Yet such common themes can, nonetheless, be identified

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ SWML, AUD/237, Interview with Bob Morris, 9 November, 1973.

⁸⁰ SWML, AUD/172, Interview with Mrs Evans, 11 June, 1973 (actually she seems to be remembering the genuinely seeking work clause – but it is instructive how the Means Test became a standard symbol for this sort of suffering).

⁸¹ SWML, AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978.

amongst the variety of individual recollections, and nor does there appear to have been any substantial geographical or gendered variation in the frequency or nature of memories of hard times either. Almost exactly half of both men and women interviewed talked about hardship during the 1920s and 1930s, and their memories contained the same themes and images, were related in much the same manner, and recalled with a similar intensity.⁸² As regards regional variations, the differences between the various areas of the coalfield were slightly more pronounced, but are not striking.⁸³

There are perhaps three possible explanations for the striking similarities of individual recollections, despite differences in personal experience. The first is that mass unemployment and the poverty it caused, were not just experiences that happened to individuals, but were very visible to the whole community. Of those who talked about the inter-war years as a time of mass unemployment, nearly a third had never themselves fallen out of work. Yet the fact that the 1920s and 1930s were, nonetheless, still remembered by these individuals as 'hard times' is not surprising. Regardless of their own personal experience, such men and women were still a part of communities where unemployment was a reality for many – sometimes even a majority – of the population. The interviews recorded by the CHP are scattered with recollections of men waiting at the pithead for work, of how 'there was always eleven men looking for ten jobs,' and of management standing in judgement on men's lives: 'you can work, you can work, we don't want you two, you can bugger off home, and you can work, and you,' picking men out 'like cattle.'⁸⁴ Even if one's own living standards were technically rising, the presence of the destitute and the desperate in dole queues and on pit gates would have served as a constant reminder of the depression. One need not personally become unemployed to experience its shadow.

⁸² 64 of 129 of the interviews carried out with men, and 34 of the 74 carried out with women contained recollections of unemployment, poverty, hunger or other hardship during the depression.

⁸³ 27 of the 41 people interviewed from Gwent, 14 of the 31 from East Glamorgan, and 29 of the 56 from Mid-Glamorgan mentioned hardship. These were amongst the worst affected areas. By comparison, 27 of the 61 people interviewed from the relatively unaffected Anthracite referred to the hard times of the 1920s and 1930s, as did 5 from 13 of the similarly unaffected parts of west Glamorgan. One of the interviewees was from London.

⁸⁴ Quotes from SWML, AUD/237, Interview with Bob Morris, 9 November, 1973; AUD/635, Interview with Geordie Hardesty, 16 January, 1978. See also AUD/164, Interview with John Morgan Evans, 13 June, 1973; AUD/188, Interview with W.C. Davies, August, 1973; AUD/215, Interview with Walter Powell, 14 January, 1974; AUD/302, Interview with Harry Howells, August, 1973; AUD/658, Interview with Harry Davies, 19 January, 1977.

A second possible reason might be the striking homogeneity amongst the ways in which experiences of the depression were represented – both at the time and afterwards. Local papers across the coalfield had all invoked much the same imagery – of hunger, unemployment and people in dole queues and spoil heaps – despite variations in local experience. At a national level, newspapers, novels, films and other works had depicted a decade of unemployment and hardship across industrial Britain, in which south Wales often featured prominently as one of the worst-hit areas. Meanwhile, the miners' union and the Labour and Communist parties had consistently represented the depression as the experience of the whole coalfield – of the mining community generally rather than specific sections. Such representations may have acted to minimise regional distinctions and variations, promoting the emergence of a common narrative, and encouraging people to view their personal experiences within a broader, collective framework. The fact that south Wales was designated as a 'Special Area' by the Government might also have encouraged the idea that hardship was the experience of the whole coalfield – legitimating the perception that south Wales was particularly badly affected by the depression.

Finally, the emergence of homogeneous memories of the depression might also have been influenced by the migration that it had precipitated. As mentioned above, nearly 400,000 people had left Wales during the inter-war years, and there had also been a substantial degree of movement within the coalfield as well. Driven primarily by the economic collapse, this migration was predominantly from the worst affected areas at the top of the eastern valleys to the (relatively) prosperous anthracite coalfield in the west. Very nearly a quarter of those interviewed by the CHP had moved within the coalfield from one valley to another, and such movement might have led to the diffusion of stories about poverty and unemployment into relatively unaffected areas. Rees Brynmor Davies had grown up in the Rhondda, but his family had moved to Coelbren in the Dulais valley in the 1930s. Asked why his family had moved, he explained how his father had been made unemployed, and that:

Every family had one or two on the dole, and...during that period that if one was working and the other was on the dole...his brother would have to be his keeper. And quite openly I would say that is the reason why so many people left the Rhondda Valley to seek work elsewhere because they were not prepared to live on their brother or their father's earnings...that is the reason people are so bitter, because it broke up all the homes in the Rhondda Valley.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ SWML, AUD/207, Interview with Rees Brynmor Davies, 13 December, 1972.

He then went on to expand on how the test was a common subject of conversation amongst fellow exiles, and it is possible of course that such conversations were partly responsible for bringing narratives about and imagery of the depression into villages like Coelbren. John Williams, for example, was from Pont-y-Berem in the Gwendraeth Valley, right on the western-most edge of the coalfield. When he was interviewed by Robin Page Arnot in the 1960s, they had talked about the 'bad years after 1921,' and Williams recalled the time 'when Rhondda people came to Pont-y-Berem and were starving.'⁸⁶ Later in the interview, despite acknowledging that they had been 'better off' in their part of the coalfield, he still talked about how the Welfare Institutes had been affected by the 'bad times' of the inter-war years.⁸⁷ In this respect, the movement of people may have even acted to minimise local or regional variations within memory, establishing common themes that could apply to any number of different local experiences.

III

Widespread and relatively consistent memories of the depression appear to have existed amongst men and women across the coalfield by the 1970s – perhaps even as early as the 1940s in some areas. These memories, of course, do not in themselves indicate that there was a collective memory of 'hard times.' As mentioned before, collective memory is more than simply an aggregation of similar individual memories. It is a collective expression of how a community sees itself and its history – a shared understanding of past experiences. Yet, as with memories of strikes and underground accidents, there is considerable evidence that the recollections of hardship that were recorded by the CHP – and, indeed, those that were written down by MO – were shared and talked about within families and pit villages, and were collectively understood as the experiences of the mining community, not just of individuals. This section argues that the individual recollections and coalfield representations of the depression were part of a collective memory that existed across the coalfield, and further explores the relationship between individual and collective remembering.

⁸⁶ SWCC:MNB/PP/2/16 – Papers of R.P. Arnot – Personal Statements collected in South Wales – Interview with John Williams, 15 Aug. 1963.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Memories of poverty and unemployment appear to have been talked about and handed down within families – just as memories of strikes and pit accidents were. The discussions between Nancy Davies and her mother regarding the 1926 lockout were quoted in the first chapter, but they also discussed the hard times of the inter-war years in the same conversation. Talking about the enforced short-time working that was so common in the anthracite coalfield during the depression, Nancy asked ‘they was going in for two days and coming out for three days wasn’t they?’ – to which her mother replied ‘It was, they were lucky to have three days a week for a long time.’⁸⁸ Mrs Evans, meanwhile, mentioned the famous visit of King Edward VIII to the valleys, even though she said she couldn’t personally remember it: ‘I’m only going now by what my father said, he came to Mardy and, when he saw how some of the people were living, that’s the very words he said, I’ll see that something will get done about this.’⁸⁹

That such memories were collective, rather than simply isolated recollections of personal experience, is also indicated by the number of people who brought up the unemployment and poverty of the inter-war years without having personally experienced them. As mentioned above, nearly a third of those who recalled mass unemployment were never, themselves, unemployed. To give one example, John Morgan Evans recalled the inter-war years as a hard time, when ‘boys of seventeen or eighteen would have difficulty finding work,’ and managers would threaten those with low output by noting how ‘there was plenty on top of the pit looking for work.’⁹⁰ Of his own experiences however, Evans said that when he got to eighteen he had ‘had no trouble as regards work,’ and that he ‘never was threatened or any way that way.’⁹¹ Recollections such as these were of the experience of the mining community as a whole, rather than specific individuals, and indicate that memories of the depression were shared by many men and women within the pit villages, and not just those who had been most affected.

Even those who were recalling a direct, personal or family experience often still placed their memories within a wider, collective framework. Frank Williams, a miner and union official from Mardy talked about how his sister and her daughter ‘wasn’t having half enough food see,’ and went on to explain that ‘those were the conditions that were in Mardy see, tremendous poverty...years of starvation, with 100 per cent unemployed.’⁹² Though talking initially about

⁸⁸ SWML, AUD/342, Interview with Nancy Davies, 6 May, 1974.

⁸⁹ SWML, AUD/172, Interview with Mrs Evans, 11 June, 1973.

⁹⁰ SWML, AUD/164, Interview with John Morgan Evans, 13 June, 1973.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² SWML, AUD/169, Interview with Frank Williams, 15 May, 1973.

the experiences of close family, it is noticeable that he swiftly affirmed that these were general conditions, and that it was the whole village, not just his sister and niece who were affected. This collective conceptualisation of experience can also be seen in the interview with Dai 'Coity' Davies. His mother tragically passed away in 1930 at the age of just 54 from; 'pernicious anaemia, which you'll appreciate is a polite name for starvation...she sacrificed herself so that we could have the food that was necessary.'⁹³ Though obviously a deeply personal tragedy, Davies firmly saw her death as part of the collective experience of the mining community; 'I'm quite convinced...that my mother's death could be attributed to the awful conditions that obtained at that particular time...things were very bad in those days, very, very bad for the mining fraternity...miners and their families were living in abject poverty, abject poverty.'⁹⁴ Similar recollections were recorded by MO in the 1940s. One miner's wife was quoted as saying:

My husband was three years out...it became terrible, we saw the children failing before our eyes...father and I would say we didn't want things – to let the children have them...my eldest girl became ill...then they said she'd got tuberculosis...what we were doing for our children, dozens of others were doing. Mothers and fathers going without. You could see the look on the women's faces, the starvation look, the cheekbones and the eyes. We know, here in the mining villages, what it means when a woman looks like that.⁹⁵

Her memories here were, again, deeply personal, yet it is noticeable that the hardship of the depression and unemployment was still recalled as being experienced by the community, with 'dozens of others' going without to feed their children, and the ruination experienced by 'nearly everyone.'⁹⁶

This same, collective conceptualisation of experience was particularly evident in memories of the Means Test. Mavis Llewellyn, a teacher from Nantymoel who was very active in the Communist Party, actually successfully challenged the rulings of the UAB in court when they had struck her brother off because she was working. 'It was a most diabolical thing,' she remembered, 'and it affected...almost every family in the valley, everybody had somebody unemployed.'⁹⁷ This memory of the Means Test as a collective experience can also be seen in

⁹³ SWML, AUD/247, Interview with Dai 'Coity' Davies, 4 April, 1975.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ UoS/MOA/2/64/1/D – Survey of Blaina and Nantyglo, 222-23.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 222-23, 2.

⁹⁷ SWML, AUD/98, Interview with Mavis Llewellyn, 20 May, 1974.

interviews with Frank Williams and Watkin Gittins.⁹⁸ The latter recalled 'a very awkward experience to me' in which an offensively personal question was put to him by the official. This personal experience was shared with five other 'young men with widowed mothers who were asked the same question.'⁹⁹ The 'damnable cheek' to which he and the others had been subjected formed the context for his recollection of the 'grand demonstration...we had against the Means Test in Nelson.'¹⁰⁰ Gittins moved almost seamlessly between his recollections of this intensely personal humiliation, to the memory of the community demonstrating against the new regulations. In this respect he seems to regard this memory as not just an individual experience, but a communal one, his personal humiliation part of exactly the same story as the collective resistance of the community.

The fact that, within individual memory, the depression was often understood as a shared, communal experience, was related, in part, to the way in which memories of 'hard times' became so closely associated with occupational identities. Watkin Gittins for example talked of how his village, Bedlinog, 'because it has been a colliery village...has known unemployment and things.'¹⁰¹ Evan Hopkin, meanwhile, when asked about the depression, replied, 'well it went from bad to worse in mining didn't it.'¹⁰² The depression thus came to be remembered specifically as a part of the coalfield's history, rather than that of industrial Britain as a whole. Experiencing poverty and unemployment became part of what it meant to belong to a mining community, a common experience for everyone on the coalfield. This may, to some extent, explain the uniformity of many individuals' memories of 'hard times,' as hardship became seen as a universal rather than a personal experience. Perhaps the best example of this can be seen in Philippa Dolan's interview with Mrs Phillips, a miner's wife from Ystradgynlais. For Mrs Phillips, the inter-war years were remembered as unremittingly bleak, yet, when asked how she had managed, she fondly recalled how 'I was keeping pigs, of course, we were killing two pigs every year, so we didn't starve...we had plenty to eat...we had plenty of food.'¹⁰³ Nonetheless, she still asserted that 'we had hard times mind,' and that although, as she confessed, 'they were all working regular,' the 'pay was awful.'¹⁰⁴ Despite the fact that, to the casual observer, her and her family had had relatively positive experiences of the inter-war

⁹⁸ SWML, AUD/169, Interview with Frank Williams, 15 May, 1973; AUD/230, Interview with Watkin Gittins, 15 February, 1973.

⁹⁹ SWML, AUD/230, Interview with Watkin Gittins, 15 February, 1973.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² SWML, AUD/620, Interview with Evan Hopkin, 21 January, 1978.

¹⁰³ SWML, AUD/474, Interview with Mrs Phillips, 21 April, 1975.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

years (a relative positivity that was quite possibly evident to her at the time), she still subscribed to the dominant narrative of those two decades as a time of hardship, poverty and suffering. This remained true even when there was an obvious cognitive dissonance between her narrative of the time and her own memories. Recalling her husband's experiences, she claimed 'he couldn't have work anywhere...in the end you know,' but when then *immediately* asked, 'was he out of work a lot?' replied: 'No, no, no, wasn't out of work...no, he was always working.'¹⁰⁵ The experience of hardship and poverty in the inter-war years were seen as a fundamental part of the mining communities' self-image – and she saw them as characterising her own family's experiences as well.

Her recollections might be seen as an exemplary instance of collective memory – with Mrs Phillips recalling a version of the inter-war years that was based on wider, public narratives about the time, rather than her own personal experiences. She engaged with the vision of the 1920s and 1930s that the union, political parties and others constructed to such an extent that they even appeared to override her own individual memory of the period. This corresponds closely with the way that collective memory is conceptualised by theorists such as Wulf Kansteiner, in which such memories are created by public representations being adopted and reworked by individual men and women. Yet, as was discussed above, individual memories of poverty and unemployment had played a major role in shaping representations of the past – particularly for figures like B.L. Coombes and Dai Dan Evans. Furthermore, whilst representations of the past may have played some role in shaping individual men and women's recollections, these recollections were also, in many cases, very clearly drawn from personal experience. Thus, the relationship between individual memory and representations of the past was – as stressed in previous chapters – reciprocal rather than one-way.

Kansteiner's understanding of collective memory also places individual and collective remembering in a form of opposition – there being a 'collective' remembering of the past which is communal and shared, shaped by public narratives, and an 'individual' remembering which is drawn from personal experience. It often seems as if the embrace of the collective entails the rejection or subordination of the individual as it becomes subsumed within a wider collective identity. Yet, in most of the interviews recorded by the CHP, this sort of oppositional relationship between individual and collective memory is not apparent. Strong, shared memories did exist, but even here, this was not at the expense of any individual identity.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Individual experiences and memories of hardship were not subsumed within collective memory, but instead situated as *individual* experiences *within* a wider collective framework. Though they were understood as a communal experience, they were still, also, seen as individual. Individual memory, therefore, was crucial not just to the creation of collective memory but also to the final form that such memories took. It was not replaced or subjugated by collective remembrance, but was integral to it.

An example of this might be seen in the interview with Elizabeth Roberts. Born in Cwmfelinfach in 1888, she spoke harrowingly of her memories of the 1926 lockout, and the years afterwards when her husband was unemployed:

Oh I remember that well. I had a daughter died then. My oldest [crying] daughter died in Pontllanfraith in... [tails off] And... [long pause]. Oh I don't know, they were out then, oh I forget...for ages...my daughter died, she died, she was in the Graig y Nos, she had tuberculosis [crying], well she died whatever... [long pause] in 1926. And then they were out all that time you know, and I had five little ones, I buried the one boy before that...but we've seen hard times then. We *did* see hard times. I've seen...on a Friday morning...giving my children all that I had to give them to go to school, and my husband would have to walk to Cwmfelin to fetch the dole before he could have a cup of tea. Now that's the truth, and I'd be waiting to have my breakfast when he did come back.¹⁰⁶

It is impossible to convey the full depth of emotion on the recording in writing. Yet despite its intensely personal nature, her memory is still placed within a wider collective framework. For her, it served as proof that 'we' did experience hardship; that the mining communities did suffer. It is placed within the collective memory of 'hard times,' the phrase that appears so often in the CHP interviews, the phrase that, more than any other, symbolised a specific period of collective hardship. Yet none of this makes it any less a personal testimony, it remains a deeply moving example of individual memory, as much as it is also an expression of a collective consciousness. Other examples of memories that were simultaneously individual and collective can be seen in the *Fact* and MO surveys that were quoted, and in many of the CHP interviews used as examples of memories of hardship above.¹⁰⁷ It can also be seen to some extent, albeit in a different form, in the works produced by Dai Dan Evans and Bert Coombes that, though public representations, drew substantially on their own personal experiences.

¹⁰⁶ SWML, AUD/613, Interview with Elizabeth Roberts, 12 January, 1978.

¹⁰⁷ See the examples quoted from SWML, AUD/98, Interview with Mavis Llewellyn, 20 May, 1974; AUD/169, Interview with Frank Williams, 15 May, 1973; AUD/207, Interview with Rees Brynmor Davies, 13 December, 1972; AUD/230, Interview with Watkin Gittins, 15 February, 1973; AUD/247, Interview with Dai 'Coity' Davies, 4 April, 1975; and AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978.

In some cases therefore, it might be argued that memories of hardship cannot be characterised as having solely been either individual or collective, but were both simultaneously. Faced with such examples, it becomes difficult to maintain a rigid or clear distinction between these two forms of remembrance. It may still be possible to identify individual instances as being either collective or individual, but the idea that they represent two qualitatively or fundamentally different forms of remembering is less sustainable. Rather than a collection of different types, memory might, therefore, be better conceptualised as a continuous spectrum, upon which labels like ‘individual’ or ‘collective’ sit as points, rather than delineated and distinct categories. In terms of the relationship between individual and collective memory, this would suggest far from being inherently oppositional or alternative ways of conceptualising the past, that they could exist simultaneously. They should not *necessarily* be understood as mutually exclusive, where any sense of either individualism or collectivism must come at the other’s expense. They could, instead, be mutually reinforcing.

IV

The memories of the depression recorded by the CHP, together with the representations of ‘hard times’ produced within the coalfield offer some interesting insights into the relationship between individual and collective remembering. That relationship has, thus far, been the major question of this study, but this final section looks rather at the temporalities of those memories. The experiences of poverty and unemployment were recalled in a different conception of time to either the political and industrial struggles of the inter-war years, or to the accidents that had occurred underground. Furthermore, it is argued that the depression itself was not just a subject *of* remembrance, but also powerfully affected such memories in its own right, shaping the ways in which the miners and their families remembered the past, and thought about time and society.

As has been discussed above, both the miners’ union and political parties had tried to incorporate the inter-war depression within a heroic, linear history of progress – with the ‘hard times’ of the 1920s and 1930s cast as just another period of hardship in a wider chronicle of suffering and struggle. Yet though such attempts can be traced to the aftermath of the miners’ defeats in 1921 and 1926 – the impulse or desire to weave the experiences of poverty and

unemployment into a broader narrative was not always immediately apparent during the inter-war years themselves. Indeed, at the time, the depression was often seen as a unique and completely unprecedented collapse. Depictions of unemployment and the attendant suffering it brought were self-consciously historical – their tone and wording making it clear that this was no ordinary crisis. In 1923 Frank Hodges, then General Secretary of the MFGB, declared that the ‘world will never plumb the depths of misery experienced in South Wales during the last two years.’¹⁰⁸ Two years later, it was the just departed ‘Black 1924’ that, according to the local press, would ‘stand out in history’ as ‘one of the worst in south Wales.’¹⁰⁹ By 1926, miners’ agents from Blaina were already referring to the slump as ‘the great depression,’ lamenting how it ‘had come like a thief in the night and had overwhelmed the locality with suffering and want.’¹¹⁰

These perspectives were not just a contemporary response of the union, but were largely mirrored in the memories of those who had lived through the depression. Although there were some memories of earlier periods of hardship in the CHP interviews, for most men and women, the inter-war years were remembered as *the* hard times – a period of exceptional suffering, distinctly marked out from both the rest of the coalfield’s history and their own personal experiences.¹¹¹ This was so much so, that those two decades appeared to become virtually synonymous with the idea of hardship, poverty and unemployment. For instance, most of the references to hardship that occurred in the interviews were in direct response to questions about people’s experiences in the 1920s or 1930s – or were brought up when they were asked about other, unrelated things that had happened in those decades. The way in which such recollections occurred suggests that memories of hardship and poverty were particularly associated with a specific time, to the extent that simply thinking about or hearing a reference to it, was often enough to evoke a memory of hardship and poverty. The engrained association of hardship with the idea of the 1920s and 1930s might, arguably, also be seen in the way that people talked about such experiences. The exact phrase ‘hard times’ was used in reference to the inter-war period by fifteen separate individuals, whilst another eleven used variants such as ‘bad times’ or ‘times were hard.’ W.C. Davies, talking about the

¹⁰⁸ *CWM*, 1:3, Mar. 1923, 54.

¹⁰⁹ *AL*, 3 Jan. 1925.

¹¹⁰ *CWM*, 4:1, Jan. 1926, 13.

¹¹¹ Memories of earlier periods of hardship can be seen in 21 of the 203 interviews, and their presence was also acknowledged by some sociological studies in the 1930s. See Hilda Jennings, *Brynmawr: A Study of a Distressed Area*, (London: Allenson & Co., 1934), 152; Philip Massey, ‘Portrait of a Mining Town’, in *Fact*, no. 8, Nov., 1937, 8.

crowds of men looking for work, explained that ‘this was in the depression days,’ whilst Anne Thomas, reflecting on her inter-war experiences, recalled how ‘those were the really hungry thirties weren’t they?’¹¹² The depression thus stood out within the memories of the men and women of the mining communities. The experience of poverty and unemployment was not seen as a recurring feature of life within the pit villages, but as a distinct experience specific to a particular period of time. Nor was it placed alongside other events within a wider narrative of the coalfield’s history, but rather as a time apart, that was both exceptional and unparalleled. It was, therefore, remembered in neither a cyclical nor a linear temporality.

There are several possible explanations for why those decades came to be seen in this way – remembered as *the* time of hardship and suffering in the mining communities’ collective memory. In part, it might be explained simply by the material realities of the depression itself. Beginning in many parts of the coalfield in 1921, and continuing even into the Second World War, the sheer extent and duration of the economic collapse was itself exceptional. Furthermore, the levels of unemployment that affected some communities, and the mass exodus of people away from south Wales that resulted, would stand out within any historical appraisal of the coalfield, let alone the memories of those who lived directly through it. Matt Perry has noted how remarkably late the idea of unemployment itself was actually recognised, and that it ‘was not until the 1890s’ that the term ‘came into general use in the English language.’¹¹³ Even then, until the First World War it was seen as ‘a problem principally concerned with casual labour,’ rather than established workforces in staple industries.¹¹⁴ Whilst unemployment had undoubtedly existed prior to the First World War (regardless of whether it had been recognised as a distinct phenomenon), its arrival on a mass scale following 1921 did appear to mark out the inter-war depression as something different to anything that had happened before, both on a societal and a personal level.

Another obvious explanation is that it was the particular generation who had lived through the worst years of the 1920s and 1930s who had been interviewed by the CHP. It is hardly surprising that events that had been directly experienced, especially ones that had been so personally affecting, would be particularly prominent within individuals’ memories. It might also be noted, though, that the inter-war depression was equally prominent in the

¹¹² SWML, AUD/188, Interview with W.C. Davies, August, 1973; AUD/285, Interview with Anne Thomas, 28 November, 1973.

¹¹³ Perry, *Bread and Work*, 19.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

recollections of those born in the 1870s and 1880s, similarly standing out within their memories as an exceptional period, despite their experiences of the 'bad old days' and earlier times of poverty and hardship.

What was perhaps most significant, however, was the way which the depression was experienced within time. Strikes, riots, a police baton charge or an incidence of strikebreaking were all events, which, though varying in duration, can be placed within a clearly delineated moment of history. In contrast, the depression did not simply happen and then pass into history, but was an extended period of time, experienced as an era, or a stage in one's life. Even if one returned to work, the visual indications of the economic collapse – the empty houses, the queues at dole offices and pitheads, the ragged children in the streets – remained a feature of many pit villages for nearly two decades. The men and women of the coalfield thus initially came to terms with and came to understand the hardship of the inter-war years, not as something which had happened and affected their communities, but as a fundamental change to the nature of those communities. This had important consequences.

At the time, mass unemployment and the substantial migration away from certain areas of the coalfield were not seen as a temporary phenomenon, but as part of the new reality of the mining communities. In 1937, Philip Massey carried out a study of Blaina and Nantyglo for the magazine *Fact*, in which he described how the men and women of the two villages had become resigned to the effects of the depression. Though he acknowledged that, for some, the experiences of hardship in the 1860s and 1870s provided some optimism about a possible recovery, a fatalistic pessimism pervaded the overall report.¹¹⁵ One man reportedly told him that 'nothing can be done here to end the depression,' whilst another simply said that 'mining is dead.'¹¹⁶ Few of the people he spoke to believed that everybody in the area would find work again in the future, and most, he said, had 'become accustomed to the idea of their children leaving home when they are old enough to work,' and had even 'come to regard this as relatively desirable.'¹¹⁷ One of the principal attitudes to this 'transference,' as he described it, was that 'the place is really finished,' and that the only practical solution was to 'transfer the young and let the community gradually die.'¹¹⁸ People, at least in Blaina and Nantyglo, did not

¹¹⁵ Philip Massey, 'Portrait of a Mining Town', in *Fact*, no. 8, Nov. 1937, 8.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47, 45.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

generally expect things to return to the way they had been prior to the collapse, but saw unemployment and migration as a now permanent feature of life.

The effect that this could have on people's experience of time has been described by Marie Jahoda – a social psychologist who has carried out research into the unemployment during the 1930s:

Everyone living in industrialised society is used to firm time structures and to complaining about them. But when this structure is removed, as it is in its absence, it presents a major psychological burden. Days stretch long when there is nothing that has to be done; boredom and waste of time become the rule, particularly when the first shock has been overcome and the search for employment has been given up as futile.¹¹⁹

The depression thus had a major effect upon people's perceptions of time. As a dramatic and fundamental change to the nature of coalfield society, it could not be understood as part of a cyclical or recurring pattern, and was also difficult to place within a linear narrative. It was instead experienced and remembered within a different temporality altogether – in a conception of time that might be described as 'discontinuous.'

The 'hard times' of the 1920s and 1930s were seen as a permanent and profound rupture that seemed to break existing ways of work and life within the mining communities. Reinhart Koselleck has argued that the French Revolution can be seen as a time in which 'an experiential space was broken up within a generation,' and 'all expectations were shaken and new ones promoted,' and similar arguments might be made of the depression in parts of south Wales.¹²⁰ However, whereas he saw the events of 1789 as a point at which time had seemed to dramatically accelerate, the inter-war years were rather a period during which time had broken down. The Pilgrim Trust's report, *Men Without Work*, noted how unemployment left its victims 'with nothing to do, and that, until he loses his job, he does not realise how much it means to him in this way.'¹²¹ It went on to quote an unemployed miner from south Wales, who had said that 'time...is my worst enemy now.'¹²² Gwilym Williams, meanwhile, interviewed by the CHP in 1974, recalled how, during the 1930s, 'there was nothing left for us...we felt like we were in the brickfields of Egypt, we were...people who were looking for something that was

¹¹⁹ Marie Jahoda, *Employment and Unemployment: A Social Psychological Analysis*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 22.

¹²⁰ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 277.

¹²¹ Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work, A Report Made to the Pilgrim Trust*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 150.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 150.

better and would come eventually.¹²³ Such attitudes suggest that depression was experienced in a discontinuous temporality, seen to mark a radical disjuncture, an interminable period during which people had been left stranded by an older society having ended, whilst a new one had not yet arisen.

This different temporality was underpinned by the actual material effects that the depression had had in some of the pit villages. Time was seen to have broken down, in part, because existing patterns of work and life had also been disrupted. Prolonged unemployment profoundly affected the way of life for both the individuals concerned and the mining communities as a whole. As Stephanie Ward has noted, 'work was at the very centre of working-class culture in south Wales...an essential part of the route to adulthood and independence; it gave life its structure, helped forge friendship networks and was essential for an individual's standing within communities.'¹²⁴ The depression therefore brought 'dramatic changes to the "normal" life cycle pattern,' with older men facing 'permanent joblessness as much as a decade before they should have,' and younger workers often 'not entering employment at all.'¹²⁵ Perry has similarly noted how it 'broke the mainstay of the worker's daily routine...and of the life-cycle.'¹²⁶ The disorienting and demoralising effects of unemployment were recalled by many of those interviewed by the CHP. Walter Powell for instance, remembered the queues at the pithead of 'men begging for work, because apart from no money it was destroying the manner of their soul you know to be doing nothing.'¹²⁷ Powell's recollections mirrored the judgements of one Rhondda miner in the 1930s, who described unemployment as 'a new experience, of the most humiliating kind.'¹²⁸ He told of fellow miners 'who had worked in the only industry they had known for anything from fifteen to fifty years,' and who now had to adjust to a completely different way of living.¹²⁹

The effect of the 'hard times' on assumptions about the nature of life and work within the mining communities can perhaps most clearly be seen in the attitudes towards going underground. As was noted in the previous chapter, there was often an automatic assumption that sons would follow their fathers down the pit, and this generational continuity in

¹²³ SWML, AUD/265, Interview with Gwilym Williams, 17 May, 1974.

¹²⁴ Ward, *Unemployment and the State*, 96.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹²⁶ Perry, *Bread and Work*, 63.

¹²⁷ SWML, AUD/215, Interview with Walter Powell, 14 January, 1974.

¹²⁸ H.L. Beales and R.S. Lambert ed., *Memoirs of the Unemployed*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934), 143.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

employment – even if it was partly imagined – was a key element of many miners’ self identities. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, there was some evidence to suggest that people became increasingly reluctant either to see their children go underground, or to return to the mines themselves, and that this was, in part, a result of the depression. Massey, for instance, in his survey of Blaina and Nantyglo, noted that ‘one notable effect’ had been ‘the broadening of the minds of the population – the “coal complex” is disappearing.’¹³⁰ He went on to quote a large number of parents who asserted that their children would ‘never’ go underground, given what the ‘years of unemployment [had] meant to them and to their friends.’¹³¹ Similar arguments were also advanced in the local press, with the *Rhondda Leader*, for example, suggesting that ‘unemployment has proved a boon in disguise’ for some miners, as ‘many doomed to a lifetime in the pits, have now found more lucrative and congenial occupation.’¹³² Whilst it would be easy to dismiss the paper’s comments as an out-of-touch attempt to put an optimistic gloss on the very real hardship that existed in parts of the coalfield, it is possible that the mass unemployment of the 1920s and 1930s did lead to some men and women challenging assumptions about the inevitability of either themselves or their children working in the mines. Indeed, this exact argument was made by the Pilgrim Trust’s report on the unemployed, which stated that ‘by breaking a connection that has been accepted but never willed,’ unemployment gave people ‘an idea of new possibilities, or at least a detestation of the work they used to do’ – noting that this was particularly common amongst ‘those who have worked underground.’¹³³

It is important to note, however, that future aspirations – whether those of individuals for themselves, or of parents on behalf of their children – were being reshaped in many parts of Britain during this period, and in response to a range of factors. Selina Todd’s work in particular has demonstrated the impact of both World Wars on the aspirations of young women workers in England. Experiences of war time work – which was typically much better paid and afforded far more independence than domestic service – coupled with the experience of moving to new areas and meeting new people from different backgrounds, led to a growth in ‘new, half-formed ambitions and aspirations for travel, independence, and variety...[and] interesting jobs.’¹³⁴ For example, one young woman from Manchester, named

¹³⁰ Massey, ‘Portrait of a Mining Town,’ 33.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹³² *GFP & RL*, 9 Jan. 1932.

¹³³ Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work*, 154.

¹³⁴ Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England 1918-1950*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 142.

Emily Cleary, recalled that before 1914 there had been ‘nothing...except service’ for young women, but that the war had ‘made all the difference in the world.’¹³⁵ In south Wales, expectations that young women would go to work in domestic service had been nearly as strong as assumptions about boys following their fathers down the pit, and it is possible that the experiences of both wars also ‘broadened the post-war horizons’ of people within the mining communities – women in particular.¹³⁶ In 1919, for example, the *Aberdare Leader* acclaimed the end of the ‘Prussianism of the stately homes of England,’ asserting that ‘girls who have enjoyed the freedom of the factory, the short hour and the “time-off” of the shop or the office, [now] hesitate before recommitting themselves to domestic slavery.’¹³⁷ Miss Thomas and Mrs Taylor, meanwhile, both told Philippa Dolan of how they had been ‘dying to go’ to the munitions factories and to leave domestic service during the Second World War, and of how their wages had risen from 11 shillings to £3 and £5 a week respectively.¹³⁸

Following 1918, many women’s aspirations, including those of Emily Cleary, were thwarted by the harsh realities of poverty and unemployment, but people whose own hopes had been extinguished in the inter-war depression were to pass on those ambitions to their children. Todd and Hilary Young have shown the importance of intergenerational relationships in shaping the aspirations of younger people after 1945, and of how parents had exhorted ‘their children to carve out a very different kind of life’ to the hardship that they themselves had experienced.¹³⁹ Alan Watkins, who had grown up in Coventry after the war but whose family had moved from Ebbw Vale in 1942, recalled how his parents had ‘wanted us to do better...the encouragement was from them, “you can do that, I never had a chance to do it, I couldn’t do it but you do it.”’¹⁴⁰ For Todd and Young, the new economic prosperity and security following 1945 also ‘encouraged people to raise their social and economic expectations...especially...for their children.’¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class*, (London: John Murray, 2014), 40.

¹³⁶ Such assumptions were recalled by several women (see SWML, AUD/35, Interview with Margery Fasseem, 4 February, 1982; AUD/175, Interview with Mrs Lloyd, 18 July, 1974; AUD/399, Interview with Mrs Landon, 13 March, 1975; AUD/473, Interview with Mrs Taylor, 21 March, 1975) and some men (see AUD/190, Interview with John Williams, 17 May, 1973; AUD/194, Interview with Will Picton, 18 May, 1973; AUD/231, Interview with Ned Gittins, August, 1973; AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978). Quote from Todd, *The People*, 40.

¹³⁷ *AL*, 12 Apr. 1919.

¹³⁸ SWML, AUD/470, Interview with Miss Thomas, 18 March, 1975; AUD/473, Interview with Mrs Taylor, 21 March, 1975.

¹³⁹ Selina Todd and Hilary Young, ‘Baby-Boomers to “Beanstalkers”’, in *Cultural and Social History*, 9, no. 3, (2009), 452.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 459.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 454.

Besides the two World Wars and the prosperity of the 1950s, ideas about the future in working-class communities might also have been affected by the growth of cinema and celebrity culture during the inter-war years. Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer's work on children's aspirations in 1930s Middlesbrough, uses essays written by schoolboys for MO to show how children's attitudes towards their own futures were characterised by 'narratives of possibility and the refusal of material limitations,' rather than the grim realities of the depression.¹⁴² For many of the boys, a desire to succeed or excel in their future careers was 'driven...by a quest for fame,' with the influence of celebrity culture, mass-leisure and mass media apparent in many of the responses.¹⁴³ They were by no means unaware of the economic situation, indeed, several wrote about the idle men 'hanging round the street corner,' and how they hoped to avoid a similar fate, but their ideas about what jobs they themselves would work were also being shaped by films, sport and stories of the Empire.¹⁴⁴ Similar influences might also have been important in south Wales. MO's survey of Blaina and Nantyglo noted how boys in the area wanted to be, amongst other occupations, millionaires, trans-Atlantic flyers and big-game hunters, whilst BBC foreign correspondent, missionary and dancer were aims of many of the girls.¹⁴⁵ The observers underscored the fact that '*not one single Blaina boy mentioned work in the pits.*'¹⁴⁶

There were thus a range of factors influencing people's aspirations about the future and which might have caused people within the coalfield to rethink old assumptions about the inevitability of work underground. Besides mass-unemployment, the First and Second World Wars, celebrity culture, and the growth of cinema were all significant changes that might have reshaped people's horizons, and fostered a desire to break free of the cyclical patterns of life and work underground. It is also difficult to say with any certainty that events in the 1920s and 1930s effected a change to existing attitudes without any evidence of people's thinking from before the First World War. It is entirely possible – even likely – that some parents had wanted a different life for their children even before the industry's collapse, whilst the dangers of working underground were always an important consideration.

¹⁴² Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, 'Children, Class, and the Search for Security: Writing the Future in 1930s Britain,' in *Twentieth Century British History*, 28, no. 3, (2017), 369.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 376-377.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 382.

¹⁴⁵ UoS/MOA/2/64/1/D – Survey of Blaina and Nantyglo, 210-212

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 212.

Nonetheless, many of those who voiced opposition to themselves or their children working underground in the future explicitly stated that the recent experiences of poverty and unemployment were the decisive factor. Coombes, for instance, wrote in 1939 that his own son would not go underground could he, by any personal sacrifice, prevent it:

Some years ago fathers took their sons underground with them and showed them what the years of mining work had taught them...They felt they were teaching their children a skilled trade that was of value to the country and would bring them a decent wage in return. All that is changed now, because the conditions are so bad that mining offers nothing but poverty and injury.¹⁴⁷

His opposition to coalmining was thus said to be a direct result of the changes in the industry over the past twenty years, an argument echoed by several of those interviewed by MO a few years later.¹⁴⁸ Even those quoted in the previous chapter that had remembered how 'you'd automatically' follow your father down the pit, also acknowledged that 'as time went by,' things had changed and you would start hear people saying how 'a boy of mine would never work in the colliery.'¹⁴⁹ Therefore, whilst other factors undoubtedly also played an important role, for the people of the mining communities, it was the depression and mass-unemployment that was *seen* as having brought about such changes. It might be argued, therefore, that the depression broke, or at least disrupted the cyclical patterns of work and life within the pit villages, and the assumptions and attitudes associated with them.

These changed attitudes indicate that many within the mining communities no longer assumed that the future would necessarily be the same as the past. In Koselleck's terms, the 'horizon of expectation' of men and women within the pit villages was restructured – in part by the effects of the economic crisis – becoming detached from past experiences. Assumptions about generational continuity, about the inevitability of work in the pit, were shattered by the disappearance of such work on a mass scale, and people began to think about the futures of themselves, their children and their communities in new ways. Such thinking was, admittedly, often fatalistic rather than hopeful. One of those quoted in Massey's survey said that what was needed was a new economic system, and that there was 'no hope unless [the] system [was] changed,' but also thought there was no hope of changing the system.¹⁵⁰ Others talked of how there was 'no hope of recovery,' or said that the 'question of whether further reform [was]

¹⁴⁷ Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, 240.

¹⁴⁸ UoS/MOA/2/64/1/D – Survey of Blaina and Nantyglo, 60, 63.

¹⁴⁹ SWML, AUD/617, Interview with Ronald Powe, 20 January, 1978.

¹⁵⁰ Massey, 'Portrait of a Mining Town,' 45.

possible doesn't arise,' as they didn't think that 'we shall ever have another Labour government.'¹⁵¹

Yet, despite the weary resignation and despondency that greeted most of the observers, reporters and academics who had travelled to the stricken coalfield, there were some, even amongst the long-term unemployed, who articulated confident and coherent visions of a new socialist society that would soon arise. Of those who spoke to Massey, some talked of how the future would see a 'reduction of the working day to six hours,' or of a growing desire amongst the people to:

Take advantage of the advance of science – wireless, new houses, motor-cycles – whereas the old miners used to think such things were never intended for the workers: the seeds of socialism are seen in the workers' growing feeling that they have a right to these things.¹⁵²

One Rhondda miner, meanwhile, argued that 'it has long become clear...that the future means a shorter working day, more sharing of work and leisure, and they [the mining communities] are adapting themselves accordingly.'¹⁵³ In a separate report, written by the Pilgrim Trust, another member of the Rhondda unemployed, directly addressed questions about why people would remain in the valleys, given the apparent hopelessness of ever finding work again. Outsiders who thought them deluded, unrealistic or that they had simply given up, were 'totally wrong' in their understanding of people's mind-sets:

I want to suggest that our people are fully conscious of the economic principles that have brought change to the valleys. The question is, to migrate or remain. I have chosen to remain. There must then be an alternative life. There are about 30,000 in that particular group who have no industrial future, and have twenty or more years of life to face in some new way. So I remain in the club to continue my social contact with my unfortunate workmates, to prepare for the new community that will necessarily arise, and to keep myself fit I work in the level.¹⁵⁴

The way that long-term unemployment was adapted to was even remembered by some of those interviewed in the 1970s. William Rosser Jones for instance was out of work for fifteen years, and when asked how he had coped with this, remembered how he had accepted the impossibility of finding work again and thrown himself into his gardening:

I found that by doing allotments, that that was my saviour there's no doubt about it...for all the years that I had been underground, now I was...outside in the open...there were numerous

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 46, 47.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 46, 46-47.

¹⁵³ Beales and Lambert, *Memoirs of the Unemployed*, 146.

¹⁵⁴ Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work*, 311.

allotments about here at the time...all that period then was devoted to the gardens, and you were out in...God's beautiful fresh air.¹⁵⁵

The hard times of the 1920s and 1930s were thus a period in which people's conceptions of the future were radically restructured, and understandings of time and society were broken and reshaped. This is not to say, necessarily, that there was a permanent transformation to the nature of coalfield society. The fortunes of the mining industry were, to some extent, revived by war and nationalisation in the 1940s, and if the society that had existed prior to the collapse did not wholly return, neither the despondent pessimism nor the utopian hopes of a 'work-and-share' society were fully realised either. It is, of course, also difficult to say that the experiences of poverty and unemployment effected a lasting change to popular consciousness within the pit villages without any clear evidence as to what people had thought about time and society prior to the First World War. What can be argued, however, is that the depression was *experienced* as a fundamental rupture by the men and women who lived through it. At the time it was seen and thought of as a radical break from the past, as a unique and unprecedented period in which the future was uncertain and past experiences could no longer serve as a reliable guide. Such was the impact of the momentous dislocations of those two decades between the wars that it continued to be remembered in this way even into the 1970s – as a time that stood outside of history, in a discontinuous temporality that was neither cyclical nor linear.

¹⁵⁵ SWML, AUD/180, Interview with William Rosser Jones, 4 July, 1973.

IV

Enemies and Outcasts – Collective Memories of Police and Blacklegs.



Fig. 5 – Police escorting strike-breaking miners to work in the Garw Valley, 1929.

I got one of the [Communist Party] publications out once...and there had been a strike in South Wales see and it showed all the police marshalled outside to protect blacklegs, and they said, 'This is fascism, social fascism,' and I said, 'No.' I said 'this has happened when I was there, this has happened years ago, this has always been happening in the miners' struggles.'¹

Whilst memories of hardship came to be indelibly associated with the 1920s and 1930s, memories of strike-breakers, police and the accompanying violence, were seen as a recurring feature of strikes and lockouts throughout the twentieth century. To his comrades in the Communist Party, the massed ranks of imported police were a further indication of the alarming growth of fascism in Britain, but, for Max Goldberg – a former miner active in 1921 and 1926 and raised on stories of the battles between police and pickets in Tonypany in 1910

¹ SWML, AUD/347, Interview with Max Goldberg, 6 September, 1972.

– such scenes had ‘always been happening in the miners’ struggles.’² That Goldberg saw police and blacklegs in this manner, as a normal, even routine aspect of industrial disputes, is hardly surprising. It had been opposition to blackleg labour during the Cambrian Combine Strike that had led to the infamous Tonypandy riots and the fatal clashes with the police in 1910-11, whilst in 1925, another attempt to stop people working through a strike had also ended in violent clashes when a large number of striking miners had marched on the Rock Colliery in Glynneath. Hywel Francis and David Smith have identified no fewer than ‘eighteen major clashes between striking miners and the police’ during 1926 alone, and incidents of strike-breaking and police violence continued to provide a regular punctuation to the coalfield’s history into the 1930s.³ The union’s campaigns against the SWMIU, in particular, were accompanied by a considerable amount of intimidation and harassment on both sides, whilst unemployed demonstrations and anti-fascist agitation were also marred by violent clashes with the police. The frequency of such incidents during the 1920s and 1930s was largely reflected in the recollections recorded by the CHP, and, unsurprisingly, both police and blacklegs featured prominently within the collective memories of the mining communities.

Both the police and strikebreaking miners were a central element within the heroic narratives of the miners’ history that had been constructed after 1926. The police had featured conspicuously within this history as the most prominent of the forces ranged against the miners in their struggles for a better life. Blacklegs were mentioned less frequently, but still occupied a significant place as the ultimate outsiders – people seen to have sold-out and betrayed their own communities. Conventional depictions of coalminers have thus often stressed their revulsion of and their lasting hatred towards strike-breakers – ‘scabs’ as they were often known – with the police also seen as natural enemies. Such attitudes can certainly be seen in the CHP interviews, where considerable bitterness and hostility were expressed in a large number of the recordings. Yet despite the strength of feeling that that the actions of both police and blacklegs could evoke, there were, nonetheless, many nuances and exceptions to the recollections recorded by the CHP. Some of those interviewed appeared to bear little resentment either to those who had broken strikes or those who had violently policed them, and memories of both could often be far more complex. This chapter is primarily about the complexity of these memories.

² *Ibid.*

³ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 60.

One of the principal themes in the preceding chapters has been the nature of the relationship between individual and collective remembering. It has been shown that individual men and women did not just absorb or reflect wider historical narratives, but were actively involved in shaping and creating shared understandings of the past. Furthermore, it has also been argued that those individual memories were not subsumed by collective memory, but were integral to it. Far from being distinct, oppositional forms of remembering, they both existed on a continuous spectrum. If collective and individual memory are understood in this way, then individual memories that remained outside of any collective frameworks are especially interesting. Such exceptions offer further opportunities to explore the relationship between individual and collective remembering, and whilst previous chapters have all, to varying extents, explored conceptions of time, this final chapter focuses solely on that relationship.

One of the most striking aspects of the memories of both blacklegs and police, as will be seen below, was their local dimension, which was evident to a far greater extent than for memories of strikes, the depression or accidents underground. Memories of police brutality, for example, were predominantly centred on particular local incidents, whilst memories of blacklegs were even more specific, focusing often on particular individuals. This was, in part, because of what was being remembered – individuals crossing picket lines, and baton charges by the police were inherently local events, unlike the depression or the great lockouts of the 1920s. Furthermore, because they were events that occurred only in specific villages, rather than across the coalfield as a whole, the memories of police and blacklegs that appear in the CHP do so only in certain areas. Unlike hardship, strikes or deaths and injuries in the pit therefore, these memories were regionally specific – with police violence and strikebreaking being widely recalled in some parts of the coalfield, whilst being barely mentioned in others.

Despite their prominence within collective memory, neither police nor blacklegs have featured prominently within the historiography of mining communities. Roger Geary's work on policing during industrial disputes is perhaps the most substantial, though it focuses primarily on the actions and strategies employed by the police and the state during strikes, rather than on the attitudes of mining communities towards them.⁴ Shorter articles by Jane Morgan and Stephen Catterall have focused on police violence on picket lines and protest marches, and discussed the miners' resentment of their role, but beyond this, the police only feature occasionally in

⁴ See Roger Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes: 1893 to 1985*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

mining historiography, almost always as part of the forces arrayed against the miners during strikes or lockouts.⁵ The relationships between mining communities and the police have been considered in more depth by Hester Barron. Though, as she shows, relationships were often strained during the lockout, with miners and their families particularly aggrieved by baton charges and foul language, at times there was a degree of common ground and mutual respect. Some of the miners even expressed sympathy for the difficult situation in which the local police found themselves, whilst the Durham Constabulary in turn contributed towards some of the miners' fundraising efforts.⁶

Even less work has been produced on those who broke strikes. One notable exception is Alun Burge's article, 'In Search of Harry Blount,' which was based on the Nine Mile Point interviews he carried out in 1978, and which have been re-used here.⁷ It conveys a real sense of the lasting hatred and social ostracisation of blacklegs within pit villages, which is the central feature of most depictions of strike-breakers in the historiography. Hester Barron and Sue Bruley's work, meanwhile, has demonstrated the prominent role of women in actions against blacklegs.⁸ Such actions had a long history within British coalfields, and Angela John has situated rituals such as white-shirting within a long tradition of female participation in protest in Wales.⁹ The infamous 'white-shirting' ritual was used frequently in 1926 in particular – and involved seizing blacklegs (usually on the way to or from work) and forcibly dressing them in a white shirt. The prominence of women in attacks on strike-breakers, and the significance of gender to memories of such actions is an important theme within the CHP interviews, as will be seen below.

This chapter begins by looking at the memories of the police, and explores the way in which these violent clashes were represented by the miners' union and political parties, and at how they were remembered by individual men and women. It is argued that powerful, collective memories of police brutality emerged in certain areas of the coalfield, and that such memories were distinctively local, rooted in the experiences of particular communities. Despite this, however, such memories were still united by a number of common themes which recurred

⁵ Jane Morgan, 'Police and Labour in the Age of Lindsay, 1910-1936', in *Llafur*, 5, no. 1, (1988); Stephen Catterall, 'Police' in *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lockout: The Struggle for Dignity*, ed. John McIlroy, Alan Campbell and Keith Gildart, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004).

⁶ See Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*, 72-75.

⁷ Alun Burge, 'In search of Harry Blount: Scabbing Between the Wars in one South Wales community', *Llafur*, 6, no. 3, (1994)

⁸ Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*; Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926*.

⁹ Angela John, 'A Miner Struggle? Women's Protests in Welsh Mining History,' in *Llafur*, 4, no. 1, (1984).

consistently in the CHP interviews. One of these interviews – conducted with a retired police officer – offers a limited insight into the memories of the police themselves, and this section closes by discussing the exceptions and nuances that can be seen in many recollections. The second section focuses on how blacklegs and strike-breaking were recalled within the pit villages. Similarly, such memories were both locally specific and united by common themes, whilst the prominence of women is also emphasised. Again, one interview carried out with someone who had worked, or ‘blacklegged,’ through a strike provides a similar insight into the memories of those who had crossed picket lines, and it is once more apparent that memories of blacklegs, like those of the police, were far more complex than just resentment and hostility. These complexities are more fully discussed in the final section, which argues that these were not just the isolated and inevitable exceptions to any collective memory, but should instead be seen as conscious allowances made by individuals who were themselves fully in control of the collective narratives they had helped to shape and create.

I

The union’s representations of strikes and lockouts during the inter-war years were frequently accompanied by condemnations of police brutality. During the lockout of 1921, one union official in Ynysybwl claimed that the arrival of armed troops and police had led to a ‘reign of terror’ throughout the neighbouring Rhondda valleys, whilst a pamphlet produced shortly after the miners had returned to work criticised the ‘Prussianising of the police force.’¹⁰ The *CWM*, meanwhile, denounced police actions throughout 1926. In August, it accused the police of assisting the coalowners ‘to break the morale of the men’ through the use of ‘misrepresentation and intimidation,’ whilst the following month, an editorial complained that despite there being ‘no semblance of disorder, hundreds of police constables...are being used to intimidate the workers...to accept the terms proposed by the coalowners.’¹¹ Police action during past strikes remained a frequent point of reference into the 1930s. In 1934, when arguing in favour of a strike over the current wages settlement, the *South Wales Miner* invoked a lineage of past struggles, and noted how the police had been deployed against them during ‘the South Wales strike of 1898, the Cambrian Combine strike of 1910, and in the National

¹⁰ *AL*, 21 May 1921; SWCC:MNA/PP/21/3 – Papers of D. Evans – John Thomas, *The Miners’ Conflict with the Mineowners*, (1921), 43.

¹¹ *CWM*, 4:8, Aug. 1926, 171; *CWM*, 4:9, Sep. 1926, 191.

Strike of 1912.¹² The following year, in proposing action against the Means Test, Labour councillors in the Rhondda advised 'caution on the part of the authorities' in how they responded to the demonstration, as 'we do not want to see a repetition of the Tonypandy riots of long ago, nor our people aggravated by the importation of "foreign police"'.¹³

The fact that references to the violent confrontations between pickets and police at Tonypandy were so easily made within the context of demonstrations against unemployment regulations, illustrates the close, even automatic association of political and industrial struggles. The police repression of both was similarly linked, and both the union and the Labour and Communist parties also frequently denounced police harassment of other political activities. In August 1934, for example, following a baton charge on a meeting at Caerau in the Llynfi Valley, the *South Wales Miner* wrote of the 'terrific persecution...against working-class activities,' and claimed that the attack had 'aroused indignant protests throughout the coalfield.'¹⁴ Evidence for such protests is abundant in the union's correspondence and the papers of individual lodges, with Ammanford lodge, for example, attacking the 'increasingly fascist...campaign of tyranny' conducted by the police, whilst Cwmdu complained of their 'highly provocative' harassment of CLC meetings.¹⁵ Figures within both the Labour and Communist parties also expressed outrage at the actions of the police. Following a particularly violent baton charge at Nine Mile Point in 1929, the soon-to-be MP for Tredegar, Aneurin Bevan, warned that those 'very same miners who a few years ago were praised for their heroism [after the explosion at the Marine Colliery], would soon show that heroism against the hooligans and bullies of the police.'¹⁶ A few years later, following another police attack, this time on an unemployed march in Blaina, Communist Party councillor Phil Abrahams denounced the baton charge and the 'political prosecutions' that followed as acts of class-war against the miners.¹⁷

Police harassment of far-left activity and unemployed marches, was of course, not an experience exclusive to south Wales. Violent clashes with the unemployed were a regular

¹² *SWM*, 14, 9 Jan. 1934.

¹³ *GFP & RL*, 26 Jan. 1935.

¹⁴ *SWM*, 27, 28 Aug. 1934 and *SWM*, 28, 11 Sep. 1934.

¹⁵ SWCC:MNA/NUM/L/8/32 – Political papers of Ammanford lodge – International Labour Defence conference decision, 20 Oct. 1934; SWCC:MNA/NUM/L/26/22 – Cwmdu Lodge papers – Letter from A. Rickard, 27 Jan. 1941.

¹⁶ *SWA*, 14 Feb. 1929

¹⁷ SWCC:MNB/PP/1/D/5 – Papers of Phillip Abraham – Pamphlet, 'The True Story of the Police Attack upon the Blaina Demonstration on March 21, 1935,' 2 Apr. 1935.

occurrence across Britain and Northern Ireland, as can be seen in Matt Perry's study of unemployment in the 1930s.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the response of the police to other forms of protests and political activity could also lead to violence – most famously at the Battle of Cable Street in 1936. Yet despite the striking parallels between incidents involving the police in south Wales and those across the UK – particularly between Cable Street and the anti-fascist clashes at Tonypandy in 1936, for example – the miners' union and local Labour and Communist figures seldom placed the experiences of the coalfield within a national context. In its reporting of the campaigns against the SWMIU, the *South Wales Miner* argued that skirmishes at Bedwas and Taff-Merthyr demonstrated how 'the police are always used against the workers.'¹⁹ But beyond occasional examples such as this, it was always 'the miners' struggles' that were referred to, and the specific examples chosen were from south Wales, not the UK overall. Nevertheless, the reporting of clashes with the police across Britain in the national press may still have helped to foster the perception that the police were natural enemies of working-class struggles, and by extension, the south Wales miners.

These violent clashes with the police that occurred in the coalfield, whether they had taken place during industrial disputes or on other forms of protest, began to be incorporated within the union's heroic narrative of progress through struggle almost immediately. Speaking to the *Daily Herald* following the clash at Blaina, Phil Abrahams praised the response of the marchers, and claimed that 'the working-class won a wonderful victory...we won the streets,' placing the incident within a history of working-class protest.²⁰ Police brutality appeared often in these histories. One of the central episodes in the SWMF's May Day Pageant in 1939, for example, was a re-enactment of the police charges at Tonypandy in 1910, in which the audience were informed that they were watching how '500 men, women and children were injured by police bludgeons in...one night, and one person was killed.'²¹ The police were thus placed centrally within the unfolding narrative of the south Wales miners' history, as hostile, even violent opponents of the miners' progress. In 1948, they appeared in a celebratory history of the Pontypridd Labour Party, this time against the unemployed; a 'solid wall of police,' blocking one march, 'strung across banned routes' and harassing demonstrators at another.²² They also featured heavily in more formal iterations of this heroic narrative. Ness Edwards' account of

¹⁸ Perry, *Bread and Work*, 106-111.

¹⁹ *SWM*, 31, 23 Oct. 1934.

²⁰ *Daily Herald*, 25 Mar. 1935.

²¹ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Dulais Valley script.

²² SWCC:MNA/PP/21/6 – Papers of D. Evans – Pontypridd Trades Council and Labour Party pamphlet, 1948, *Action, Struggle, Achievement, Jubilee (1898-1948)*, 41-42.

the 1893 Haulier's Strike, for instance, wrote of a clash with non-striking miners in Ebbw Vale in which they were supported by the police. After their violent intervention, 'the strikers were running in all direction over the mountain tops,' an action, he claimed, that had 'left behind a bitterness which even today exists in the minds of their fellow workers.'²³ He also wrote about their later unprovoked charges and 'atrocious work' in subsequent books, and the brutalities in South Wales' of the Metropolitan Police also featured prominently in CLC lectures.²⁴

Police brutality also figured as a plot device in novels and screenplays. Lewis Jones' epic novels *Cwmardy* and *We Live* had 'hundreds of police in military formation' parading through the streets of a thinly disguised Tonypandy.²⁵ Initially bewildered as to their presence, the miners were soon awakened to the alliance between the coalowners and the state by a fierce baton charge in which 'the contact of clubs and heavy boots on living flesh brought men and women in sickening tumbles to the ground.'²⁶ Meanwhile, in a screenplay titled 'Full Employment' by Dai Dan Evans', one young miner from south Wales told his fellow soldiers of his experiences of unemployment before the war, and of how their march to London had been 'turned back by the police.'²⁷

Yet, whilst incidents of police brutality featured heavily in trade union and political material during the 1920s and 1930s, there were relatively few references to them after the Second World War. The official journal of the South Wales Area NUM, *The Miner*, referred to 'cracked skulls' from 'brutal police attacks' in the past on at least two occasions, but these form a stark contrast to the same paper's constant invocation of both 1926 and the depression.²⁸ Whilst both strikes and the hard times of the inter-war years retained a powerful hold on the historical consciousness of the union into the 1950s and 1960s, police violence appears to have dropped out of narratives about the heroic struggles of the past. This may, in part, have been related to the fact that there were far fewer clashes in the post-war period than there had been during the inter-war years. Roger Geary has argued that there was a 'decline in violent labour protest' and less confrontation between strikers and police over the course of the

²³ Edwards, *The History of the South Wales Miners*, 116-117.

²⁴ Edwards, *The History of the South Wales Miners' Federation*, 40; SWCC:MNA/PP/115/31 – George Thomas papers – NCLC Lecture 10 – The Labour Movement to 1914.

²⁵ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We Live*, 220.

²⁶ Jones, *Cwmardy & We Live*, 221, 224.

²⁷ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Screenplay titled 'Full Employment.'

²⁸ Both references were in relation to the Cambrian Combine Strike, see *The Miner*, 8:3, May/Jun. 1960, 3, and *The Miner*, 11:3, May/Jun. 1963, 32.

century, and the lack of contemporary incidents might have reduced the incentive or the need to invoke historical examples.²⁹ What this would suggest, is that there was perhaps a transiency to representations of police violence – prevalent in the immediate aftermath of specific incidents and initially incorporated into the narratives of progress through struggle, only to fade away after 1945. This transiency suggests that, whilst specific actions of the police caused a great deal of bitterness within the mining communities, this bitterness was directed more at those specific actions, rather than at the police themselves, and that they did not cause a lasting resentment towards the police in general.

If the brutality in the inter-war years gradually seemed to drop out of the union's representations, it was not forgotten by individual men and women. The CHP recorded bitter memories of baton charges and other violence right into the 1970s, with nearly a third of those interviewed (60 of 203) expressing negative memories of the police, and nearly a quarter (46) recalling baton charges or other acts of violence. Myrddin Hywel Powell for example, recalled an instance in the 1925 Anthracite strike when they were ambushed by the police, and his friend 'had a baton across his head...he was only fifteen, he was chased down the mountain, and he was hit on the head.'³⁰ James Vale also had vivid memories of the disturbances in 1925. He remembered one constable in particular, a PC Morris, 'lashing out...catching this old boy across the face...the blood was splashing all about the place...then he gave another biffing to a youngster, *a youngster*.'³¹ At the other end of the coalfield in Tredegar, Mrs Maddy recalled watching from her window as the police charged at striking miners in 1926 – 'I never seen anything like it mind. Frightening. I was frightened then of the police really, didn't know what was going to happen.'³²

Violent experiences of the sort detailed above, unsurprisingly left a lasting sense of mistrust and antipathy towards the police. Bryn Lewis, for instance, recalled that after the Tonypandy riots, the miners and their families 'were always bitter...if a policeman was in trouble with the crowd nobody would help...they would go and hit hell out of a policeman.'³³ Elizabeth Roberts, meanwhile, broke off her account of clashes between pickets and police in Nine Mile Point to stress that she 'never did like a policeman...I hate the sight of a policeman.'³⁴ Asked why, and

²⁹ Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, 48.

³⁰ SWML, AUD/295, Interview with Myrddin Hywel Powell, 19 September, 1975.

³¹ SWML, AUD/223. Interview with James Vale, 10 May, 1974.

³² SWML, AUD/87, Interview with Mrs Maddy, July 1974.

³³ SWML, AUD/348, Interview with Mr and Mrs Bryn Lewis, 28 January, 1973.

³⁴ SWML, AUD/613, Interview with Elizabeth Roberts, 12 January, 1978.

asked whether this applied even to the local police in Ynysddu, she answered 'I don't like any of them – I never speak to them if I can help it...when you see a policeman there's trouble.'³⁵ Jesse Clark, another veteran of the Cambrian Combine strike, was more explicit in his assessment of the role the police had played in the dispute:

They were there to beat us and they were government men...where there's wages concerns and all this and that, it's just the same as that Jack London said in his book, *The Iron Heel*, they're out for the moneyed people...the small fry, let them dangle or twist.³⁶

Others drew parallels between past incidents and contemporary industrial action in the 1970s. Elved Evans, interviewed in 1978, talked about baton charges in the 1920s that 'the older ones still remember,' and compared them with the way the police 'treated pickets at Grunwick,' where they were 'too smart with their sticks.'³⁷

Bitterness towards the police may have persisted for longer in individual memory but, beyond this, there were obvious similarities between such memories, and the way that police brutality was reported or represented in novels and political and trade union material. Graphic depictions of violence on defenceless people feature heavily in both, for instance, whilst the narrative framework within which such memories were situated was often the same. Jesse Clark, quoted above, placed his experiences within the context of the same narrative of progress through struggle, in which the police were always allied with the coalowners against the miners. Henry John did likewise when recalling his own experiences of the baton charge at Glynneath in 1925, noting that 'a policeman has never been a friend of the workers...his balance of sympathy has always been with...the top man.'³⁸ The way in which Elved Evans linked his own experiences with contemporary events at Grunwick also suggests that he saw them as part of a tradition of working-class struggle, in which the police were consistently recurring enemies. There were thus a considerable number of individual memories in which the police – as they did in the union's heroic narratives of progress – featured as the implacable opponents of the miners' struggle for a better life.

That such experiences with the police were seen as part of the mining communities' struggle is a significant point. Like the recollections of 'hard times', they were remembered as collective experiences within a shared or common narrative. To Jesse Clark, it was 'us' who the police

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ SWML, AUD/325, Interview with Jesse Clark, c. 1972-1974.

³⁷ SWML, AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978.

³⁸ SWML, AUD/220, Interview with Henry John, 1 December, 1972.

'were there to beat,' whilst Henry John, in his recounting of the Glynneath riots, used the terms 'us' and 'we' a total of twenty-one times, and the term 'I' on only three.³⁹ This collective conceptualisation did not make such memories any less individual however. Instead, as with the recollections of 'hard times,' they were seen as personal examples of a common experience. There is also some evidence that these experiences were shared and talked about within pit villages. Dai Dan Evans and Merfyn Payne both remembered being told about the Cambrian strike, and how 'the stories we heard were that the police were brutal there...we've got no reason to doubt it.'⁴⁰ Similar recollections can also be seen in the interview with Max Goldberg, who had spent some time in the Rhondda during the course of his activities with the Communist Party. Lodging with a fellow party comrade, Jack Jones, he remembered of Jack and his parents how:

They used to tell me of Shoni Mawr, big John. Used to tell me of how they fought from the mountainside in 1910...they took the railings and they turned the spikes up in order to stop the police...I only know like what they told me about this and it was real tough in those days you know.⁴¹

The way that clashes with the police were remembered as collective experiences that were shared by the mining community as a whole, together with the fact that they were actively talked about, passed down and discussed within the pit villages, suggests that this was very much a collective memory of police brutality. Its emergence in many areas across the coalfield is particularly interesting, given the fact that the actual events that were being remembered varied so widely between different areas. The people interviewed by the CHP each recalled specific, local incidents, such as Tonypandy in 1910, the Glynneath riots during the Anthracite strike, or the Blaina riots in 1935. The memories of such clashes were thus not so much a single, monolithic collective memory of a certain event or time, but rather a patchwork of various local memories of particular local incidents. This was largely, of course, a consequence of what was being remembered. Riots, baton charges and other violent disturbances occurred in numerous places across the coalfield throughout the inter-war years, and this was naturally reflected in the mosaic of different local memories within south Wales. These memories had

³⁹ SWML, AUD/325, Interview with Jesse Clark, c. 1972-1974; AUD/220, Interview with Henry John, 1 December, 1972.

⁴⁰ SWML, AUD/263, Interview with Dai Dan Evans, 5 December, 1972; AUD/395, Interview with Merfyn Payne, 18 June, 1975.

⁴¹ SWML, AUD/347, Interview with Max Goldberg, 6 September, 1972.

emerged out of the experiences of particular individuals and communities, and were rooted in specific, local experiences.

The local nature of such memories should thus be emphasised, and it also led to a strong regional variation within the CHP interviews when it came to memories of the police. More than a third of the interviews in which either hostile attitudes toward the police or recollections of baton charges arose came from the Nine Mile Point and Bedlinog community studies for example, whilst only one of the people interviewed by Philippa Dolan for her Swansea Valley Project referenced any such incidents.⁴² The memories were also often associated with a particular sense of place. Arthur Roberts, for example, remembered how, following the baton charge in Cwmfelinfach, one street 'was nicknamed afterwards Baton Avenue, or Baton Row or something,' suggesting that the incident remained a topic of local conversation with particular streets serving as mnemonic reference points.⁴³

A similar example might be seen in the memories of the riots at Glynneath during the Anthracite strike in 1925. Three of those interviewed by the CHP gave accounts of the clash at the Rock Colliery between would-be-pickets and police in which the same themes and details ran throughout the narrative. The peaceful intent of the marchers and the brutality of the police, especially against vulnerable people, were referenced by all, but most noticeable perhaps is the fact that they all remarked on the lack of stones on the approach to the ambush point. Ben Davies claimed that 'there was not a stone to be found near the place,' and James Vale remembered that 'there wasn't a stick nor stone, there was nothing there.'⁴⁴ Henry John meanwhile recalled the 'mountain bareness,' with 'not a stone to be seen.'⁴⁵ The significance of this point is that the miners were later to be accused of having initiated hostilities by throwing stones, thus provoking the baton charge. In this respect, the lack of stones served to exonerate the miners and indict the police as liars, thus facilitating a collective narrative of unjustly brutalised miners struggling against the violent and duplicitous forces of the state. The fact that all three men narrated this incident in the same way, with this same detail, indicates that stories about the 'Battle of the Rock' were common currency in the communities in which

⁴² Of the 60 interviews containing negative memories of the police, 12 were from Alun Burge's Nine Mile Point study, and 8 from Alun Morgan's Bedlinog study. For the 45 recollections of baton charges these numbers were 11 and 6 respectively.

⁴³ SWML, AUD/634, Interview with Mr and Mrs Arthur Roberts, 7 April, 1978.

⁴⁴ SWML, AUD/168, Interview with Ben Davies, 11 June, 1973; AUD/223, Interview with James Vale, 10 May, 1974.

⁴⁵ SWML, AUD/220, Interview with Henry John, 1 December, 1972.

the men lived. Ben Davies for instance had not actually taken part in the march, but had 'enquired and...had the whole story of how it happened' shortly after moving to the village.⁴⁶ This particular narrative seems to have emerged, therefore, out of the repetition of stories and the sharing of individual experiences within the village of Abercraf. Over time, the sharing of individual experiences about the march led to the emergence of this collective memory of police violence – one that was very much rooted in local experience.

Yet despite the importance of place, and the local nature of such memories, there were striking similarities in the way that different incidents of police violence were recalled. The emergence of a common memory across the coalfield was arguably facilitated by the common themes that recurred consistently within the interviews. The consistent, graphic depictions of violence have already been alluded to, but many of those interviewed by the CHP also alleged that the police who had attacked them were drunk, or had been drinking.⁴⁷ Or, to take another example, several of those interviewed also talked about completely innocent bystanders – people who had had no involvement with either the pickets or protests – being attacked, arrested or even imprisoned by the police.⁴⁸ The significance of these common themes is that they allowed a collective account of the past to be constructed – despite the differences in what individuals could actually remember. Even if people had no experience of the particular incident that trade union or political figures were talking about, they could still share in the collective understanding of police violence through their similar memories of different events. A Communist Party poster decrying police baton charges during the stay-down-strikes of the 1930s, for example, might still have resonated with a miner from the western coalfield who could all too vividly recall 'blood splashing all about the place,' as the police lashed out at Glynneath in 1925.⁴⁹ Or to take a less abstract example, how many of the audience who saw the re-enactment of the Tonypandy riots at the Fed's May Day Pageant in 1939, replete with

⁴⁶ SWML, AUD/168, Interview with Ben Davies, 11 June, 1973.

⁴⁷ See SWML, AUD/308, Interview with Jake Brookes, 13 September, 1973; AUD/575, Interview with Mrs Brown, Mrs Miller and Bob Boole, c. 1975 (both Blaina riots); AUD/346, Interview with Glyn Evans, 5 March, 1973 (1925 Anthracite strike); AUD/634, Interview with Mr and Mrs Arthur Roberts, 7 April, 1978; AUD/620, Interview with Evan Hopkin, 21 January, 1978 (both Nine Mile Point baton charge); and AUD/178, Interview with W.P. Bowen, c. 1972-74 (Tonypandy riots). Aneurin Bevan also made the same accusation following the police actions at Nine Mile Point – see SWA, 14 Feb. 1929.

⁴⁸ See SWML, AUD/257, Interview with Glyn Williams, 21 May, 1974 (Clashes at Glyncoerrwg); AUD/302, Interview with Mr and Mrs Harry Howells, August 1973; AUD/230, Interview with Watkin Gittins, 15 February, 1973; AUD/231, Interview with Ned Gittins, August 1973 (all Bedlinog); AUD/222, Interview with Dick Cooke, 24 January, 1974 (1925 Anthracite strike); AUD/178, Interview with W.P. Bowen, c. 1972-74; AUD/303, Interview with Mr B. Edwards, 23 July, 1973 (both Tonypandy riots); and AUD/614, Interview with John Holland, 13 January, 1978 (Nine Mile Point).

⁴⁹ SWML, AUD/223, Interview with James Vale, 10 May, 1974.

police charges and '500 men, women and children...injured by police bludgeons in...one night,' would have been reminded of the baton charges in the neighbouring town of Blaina just four years before?⁵⁰ In this respect, the fact that the same themes and symbols kept recurring within individuals' memories helped the emergence of a shared memory of clashes with the police, and a shared understanding of what such incidents meant.

The most common theme of all in the recollections recorded by the CHP was the stones thrown at the police. These were mentioned by no less than thirty of those interviewed, and, aside from the unusual example of the Rock Colliery detailed above, were an important element of these collective memories in their own right. Though union and political representations tended to ignore the stones, focusing instead on the injustices of the police violence, this retaliation was a key part of the miners' own recollections. The miners and their families did not see themselves just as passive victims, but, emphasised that they could hold their own when it came to physical confrontation with the forces of the coalowners and the state. Glyn Williams, for example, recalled clashes in Glyncorrwg during 1926, where 'thousands' of miners were 'waiting for the blacklegs coming out of work.'⁵¹ Forced back by a heavy police presence, the miners 'retreated up the mountain,' hurling stones at the police, who charged after them, 'dodging as best they could.'⁵² Will Picton remembered marching down the Rhondda Fach on an unemployed demonstration which was similarly obstructed:

When we come on to the top of the North Road, Ferndale, there was about two hundred police there, with their capes and their batons ready... they said, 'You can't go any further.' We said, 'We are going to go further,' and with that...some of the Mardy people broke away from the end of the demonstration...and they crawled up the mountain and the next thing, we saw the boulders coming down the mountain, and there was a scatter.⁵³

Meanwhile, Mr Edwards, a miner and volunteer with a local ambulance, talked about the injuries caused by the police batons during the Cambrian Combine Strike, but also brought up an incident where 'a gang of schoolboys...on top of that bridge by there...they kept about twenty or thirty policemen back...throwing stones at them down by there, and the police couldn't get at them.'⁵⁴

⁵⁰ SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/4/45 – Material relating to May Day Pageant 1939 – Dulais Valley script.

⁵¹ SWML, AUD/257, Interview with Glyn Williams, 21 May, 1974.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ SWML, AUD/193, Interview with Will Picton, 9 May, 1973.

⁵⁴ SWML, AUD/303, Interview with Mr B. Edwards, 23 July, 1973.

Stone-throwing was particularly prominent in the memories recorded in the south-east of the coalfield. During the disturbances at Taff-Merthyr, Edgar Evans recalled how 'somebody...rolled a big stone down the mountainside, which was a stupid thing to do because it could have hit a car which was passing.'⁵⁵ That 'somebody' was Bob Morris, who, also interviewed as a part of the Bedlinog community study, gave the following account:

Everybody from Bedlinog congregated down at Taff that day and they were fighting the police...and I remember me and Wyndham Jones...we rolled this big stone down the mountain...down it went...over the top of these buses that were fetching the police up. Well if it caught anybody it would have smashed them, but the police gave chase now and we run miles.⁵⁶

A similar incident, though targeting blacklegs rather than the police, occurred during the struggles at Nine Mile Point. Evan Jones remembered a train that had brought blackleg labour in from outside the village:

One morning, I went up there, there's a bridge in Ynysddu coming over the railway you know...train come down here now with these scabs in, someone dropped one of the stones of the bridge on the carriage. That stopped them, they didn't come any more [laughs].⁵⁷

This particular incident was mentioned by eleven of the men and women interviewed in Alun Burge's Nine Mile Point study, and had also been referenced by P.J. Matthews, interviewed five years earlier by the CHP. Not all were as sanguine about the action as Jones however. Windsor Gregory, for example, described how:

They lifted a stone up to stop the train. And I don't know...I bet it took about ten or twelve men to pick it up, and they put it on top of the bridge, and as the train come they shoved it over and it went right through the carriage...could have killed them all, and they wasn't really worried about it...their intentions were to kill them.⁵⁸

The sheer number of people who remembered the incident suggests that it remained a talking point for long afterwards within the villages of Cwmfelinfach and Ynysddu.

As discussed before, the experiences of the police, of the violence experienced by those on the other side of the picket lines are difficult to reconstruct, though the one interview that the CHP were able to carry out with a policeman, William Knipe, does afford some insight.

⁵⁵ SWML, AUD/213, Interview with Edgar Evans, 30 November, 1973.

⁵⁶ SWML, AUD/237, Interview with Bob Morris, 9 November, 1973.

⁵⁷ SWML, AUD/618, Interview with Evan Jones, 20 January, 1978.

⁵⁸ SWML, AUD/629, Interview with Windsor Gregory, 29 March, 1978.

Unsurprisingly, baton charges and stones were also a central element of Knipe's recollections. He had been involved in the Cambrian Combine dispute, and remembered how, on the night of the riots, 'the stones were coming down so thick and heavy...I had my eye nearly knocked out there...another brick come down...and knocked 5 teeth and the flesh out.'⁵⁹ Eight years later, during a dock strike in Cardiff, he talked about using his baton on the strikers – 'and damn it, it didn't matter how hard you hit them on the head you wouldn't hurt them man...the old stick [didn't] seem to have any effect on these...it did in Tonypandy but [not] here.'⁶⁰ Though it is interesting in itself to see how these experiences were remembered from the other side of the picket lines, they also show that the memories of the police could mirror those of the union, with the miners and the police seen as natural – and violent – enemies during strikes.

Just as the miners and their union saw strikes as episodes in a linear narrative of progress through struggle, Knipe constructed his own mirrored narrative of baton charges around the strikes he had been involved in. His own personal history of industrial disputes began in Senghennydd in 1908 – 'that's where the first blacklegs were imported...I made my first baton charge there.'⁶¹ A year later, 'there was the Cardiff dock strike...and the same year...Newport dockers come out, we were there again...that led up from there to Tonypandy, Cambrian Coal Strike.'⁶² Finally, following the First World War, there were strikes in Cardiff in 1919, and then at Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen in 1925. His efforts to construct this parallel narrative of policing during industrial disputes even went beyond the interview. As his papers, deposited with the South Wales Coalfield Collection, show, he wrote regular letters on his experiences (particularly those at Tonypandy) to local papers, and also contributed an article to the police's *Force* magazine, in which he gave a history of his strike experiences from 1908 up to 1926.⁶³

It is too simplistic, however, to characterise Knipe as an outsider, engaging in his own, mirrored, oppositional narratives of police and pickets. Growing up in the mining villages near Pontypool, he had begun his working life at the steelworks in Panteg. Thrown out of work by a local depression, he had joined the force after having met several policemen whilst playing rugby for Pontypool against Cardiff. Like most police officers therefore, he was not far removed from the working-class communities that he both served and fought against, and at

⁵⁹ SWML, AUD/344, Interview with William Knipe, 2 February 1973.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ SWCC:MNA/PP/70/3 – Papers of William Henry Knipe – Articles and letters written by Knipe.

several points in his recollections of the Cambrian Combine Strike, emphasised his sympathy with the miners:

They were fighting for what they ought to have had years before...their wages were very low and I know for a fact that they were working 12 hours a day...half-naked on their backs or on their belly hewing the coal out for a mere pittance. The only time...they'd see daylight was a Saturday afternoon in the winter.⁶⁴

Later in the recording, he stressed that he 'never held out any grudge against a collier...for what they done to me, for I knew the circumstances which they were working in,' and declared that there was no 'better race in the world than the old Welsh collier...wonderful people, wonderful.'⁶⁵ The warmth with which Knipe spoke about the miners – people who had 'knocked 5 teeth and the flesh out' with a brick – may seem incongruous, but he insisted that this goodwill was mutual. Though he conceded that the miners and police 'were both bitter against one another' during the strike, he claimed that after they had returned to work, 'we were friends again as though nothing had happened in no time...it was forgotten very quickly.'⁶⁶ Knipe thus evidently escaped, or perhaps just didn't register, the bitterness and hostility that was spoken about by so many others of those interviewed by the CHP. Instead, he retained positive memories of the mining community, despite the reciprocal violence that was otherwise central to his recollections and experiences. Indeed, asked about his experiences during the First World War, in which he had served alongside 'dozens' of the men he had faced at Tonypandy, he remembered how they had 'very often used to chat about it,' and that later stationed in Pontypridd, 'many of the old miners used to come down' to see him.⁶⁷

Given the strong collective memories of police brutality in the rest of the CHP, it would be easy to write off Knipe as an unrepresentative exception. Yet similar recollections can also be seen in several other of the interviews, and some people had fond memories of the police's involvement in strikes. Anne Thomas, for example, talked about police from Portsmouth and Sussex being drafted into the Rhondda in 1926, recalling how 'they had a marvellous time here you know...tea and Welsh cakes,' whilst Mrs Evans said of the police during the Cambrian strike, that 'they were very nice, I haven't got nothing to say.'⁶⁸ More positive attitudes like

⁶⁴ SWML, AUD/344, Interview with William Knipe, 2 February 1973.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ SWML, AUD/285, Interview with Anne Thomas, 28 November, 1973; AUD/327, Interview with Mrs M Evans, 1969.

these could sometimes cause arguments within families. William Thomas, for instance, was in the midst of recalling the way that the miners had fought back against the Portsmouth police in 1926, when his wife joined the discussion:

[Mr Thomas] 'We went down...and made a bit of a disturbance...round the backs of the hotels you see, there was no light, we put a rope across, from one back door to the other, that high from the ground...and they come after us, about a dozen of them. They fell over that rope, good golly they did have it.'

[Mrs Thomas] 'Oh, pity!'

[Mr T] 'Pity? They were cruel!'

[Mrs T] 'Well...'

[Mr T] 'They were cruel.'

[Mrs T] 'All you lot do the same.'

[Mr T] 'If they had you they'd beat you to death. Oh Duw!'

[Mrs T] 'Well it wasn't their fault they had to come here was it?'

[Mr T] 'Ah but they used to beat you up for nothing!'⁶⁹

Often a distinction was made between different police officers or forces. Dai 'Coity' Davies for instance, was scathing about the 'the vicious and brutal way that these police officers from Devon did their work,' particularly of one incident where his father had been beaten up for picking coal from the spoil heaps, 'set upon by Devon police, with no accusations, nothing said, just beaten up and then frogmarched through the village.'⁷⁰ Of the local police, however, he recalled that we 'got on very well...he was the old village bobby, and there was no great animosity against him.'⁷¹ The distinction between local and imported police is a familiar one, and, as Hester Barron has noted, was true of Durham in 1926, but it could also be reversed.⁷² Several of those interviewed, for example, claimed that the Glamorgan police were worse than any outsiders. Max Goldberg remembered how 'the Glamorgan police were the worst, the Metropolitan police were not too bad.'⁷³ Bryn Lewis, meanwhile, had been very friendly with the Metropolitan Police who had arrived at Tonypany in 1910, recalling how 'they were wonderful chaps to talk to...a different attitude altogether to the Glamorgan and Monmouthshire police...[who] thought they could beat anybody and nobody could beat

⁶⁹ SWML, AUD/450, Interview with William Thomas, 19 December, 1974.

⁷⁰ SWML, AUD/247, Interview with Dai 'Coity' Davies, 4 April, 1975.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*, 72-75.

⁷³ SWML, AUD/347, Interview with Max Goldberg, 6 September, 1972.

them.⁷⁴ This is perhaps not all that surprising given the predominance of localised incidents within collective memories of the police. On such occasions it was local officers who would be involved in the confrontations and whose actions earned the enmity of the mining communities.

Differing or conflicting attitudes towards the police did not just occur when talking about different forces however, but can also be seen in response to the same individuals. Merfyn Payne was one of the many interviewed by the CHP who placed police brutality at the centre of his account of strikes. He had also done the same when interviewed a decade before by Robin Page Arnot, yet of Lionel Lindsay, the hated Chief Constable of the Glamorgan police, he remembered:

He wasn't a bad man, though he was a hell of a bad policeman...because he was completely on the side of the bosses. And I don't blame the police as much as I ought to be blaming them, because they were in the same position as us, if they didn't do as they were expected to do.⁷⁵

To take another example, Jake Brookes – who bitterly recalled being kicked in the ribs in Blaina in 1935 – was also more ambivalent in his attitudes towards the police. In the lead up to the fateful demonstration, he had visited the superintendent:

His name was Eugene Davies I think...and he was a rather friendly character. And on the morning that we went up to ask permission for our demonstration...he showed us all round...and then he showed us his baton that was in there, and he said...and this is the actual words, 'I've had this for twenty-five years...and I've never had occasion to use it. May it remain on the wall and I'll never have to use it.'⁷⁶

The recollections of both Brookes and Payne suggest that hostility towards the police was transient rather than lasting. Although their actions during strikes and protests were deplored and resented, at other times relations could be functional – even friendly. Brookes' account seems to suggest that the police had wanted to avoid the violence at Blaina as much as the miners had, whilst Payne also expressed some understanding for the situations in which their opponents found themselves. Beneath the memories of violent clashes, in which they featured as recurrent opponents, more sympathetic attitudes towards the police can also be found.

⁷⁴ SWML, AUD/348, Interview with Mr and Mrs Bryn Lewis, 28 January, 1973.

⁷⁵ SWML, AUD/395, Interview with Merfyn Payne, 18 June, 1975. See also SWCC:MNB/PP/2/15 – Papers of R.P. Arnot – Notes on interview conducted with Merfyn Payne, 11 Oct. 1961.

⁷⁶ SWML, AUD/308, Interview with Jake Brookes, 13 September, 1973.

More friendly or sympathetic attitudes had also been present at the time. Towards the end of the lockout in 1926, one miner wrote to the *South Wales Echo* to suggest an amnesty for those miners arrested or imprisoned during the clashes on the picket lines. He claimed that 'in spite of the little incidents...the Welsh collier realises that the policeman on the whole is an excellent fellow,' whilst he believed the police, also, had 'strong sympathies with those whose fight is against an ill-paid dangerous job.'⁷⁷ Three years later, following clashes at Nine Mile Point, Aneurin Bevan had been characteristically strident in his denunciations of police baton charges. Yet he also took care to emphasise that 'the policemen he had met were very decent fellows, and would not resort to an attempt such as was made unless there had been some stimulant.'⁷⁸ A point had been reached, he claimed, where 'even a policeman would not do dirty work unless he was prepared for it.'⁷⁹ Phillip Massey's survey of Blaina and Nantyglo, meanwhile, was carried out in 1937, just two years after the unprovoked police attack on an unemployed demonstration. Yet he judged that 'the majority of the people regard the police as fair,' with the riot being 'generally blamed on the authorities against which the demonstration was held, and not on the police.'⁸⁰

This is not to challenge the idea that the police were often resented and featured as enemies in the mining communities' collective memory. Such collective memories clearly appear to have existed, and were an important part of the historical consciousness of the coalfield. Furthermore, as has been emphasised, these memories had not been created by coalfield representations of police violence, but were locally rooted, specific to particular communities and incidents, and had emerged out of the experiences of men and women within the pit villages. These exceptions, and the dissidents to the linear narratives of struggle, do show, however, that these collective memories could often be considerably more nuanced and complex than might be expected, and were not characterised solely by hostility.

II

⁷⁷ *SWE*, 13 Nov. 1926.

⁷⁸ *SWA*, 14 Feb. 1929.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Massey, 'Portrait of a Mining Town, 39.

If the police occupied a significant place within the collective memories of the coalfield, then strike-breakers, or blacklegs, were similarly important. Yet, whilst police brutality appears to have slowly dropped out of the union's historical narratives after the Second World War, blacklegs had never figured prominently within these representations to begin with. This relative absence is understandable, perhaps, given the heroic nature of such narratives. Those who had broken strikes were seen as having betrayed their communities at the worst possible time, and would have been an incongruous and unwelcome presence within narratives that celebrated the solidarity of the miners at such times of struggle. They tended, therefore, to be referenced infrequently, if at all, by the union or political parties, reflecting their status as *personae non gratae* within the mining communities. The bitterness and lasting division caused by strike-breaking also provided a further reason to quietly omit those who had stepped beyond the bounds of acceptable behaviour when they had stepped across the picket lines. There was little desire from either the miners' union or political parties to rake over such bitter – and internal – fissures within the pit villages.

Where historical representations did feature blacklegs, the purpose was often to legitimate violent action against them in the present. Ness Edwards' histories of the South Wales Miners, for example, published during 1926, gave a prominent role to the Scotch Cattle – a clandestine, 19th century organisation of miners and ironworkers who, dressed in robes and cattle horns, conducted campaigns of violence and intimidation against strike-breakers, owners and officials. Edwards placed them at the centre of his history, making *them* the authentic antecedents of the SWMF, not the moderate and conciliatory unionism embodied by figures like Mabon. The actions of the Scotch Cattle during a strike in 1832 were examples of 'the miners' courage reasserting itself,' as they 'stiffened the weaklings with threats and displays of violence.'⁸¹ Their threats to the miners still working at Risca were also quoted:

If you will not take warning by these feu lines, we will make more worke for your Doctor than when them men was burnd at Risca...unless you comply with our termes we will show you the worth of your lives you Risca fools. You are all working under the drop. And tell that tall tyrant to mind his own bissness as we do intend to shake he and his house down to the ground – Yours in Blood – At The Black Vein.⁸²

⁸¹ Edwards, *The History of the South Wales Miners*, 34-35.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 34-35. The men burned at Risca referred to a local colliery accident, the 'tall tyrant' would have been the owner or manager of the pit, and 'The Black Vein' was the name of the colliery the men at which the men worked.

Faced with such threats, all the collieries were stopped by the 2nd March, 'even spreading through Dowlais, Merthyr, and as far as Aberdare.'⁸³ Those who read Edwards' work, or even perhaps just encountered its striking cover (see Fig. 6), would have been left in no doubt as to the appropriate treatment of those who crossed picket lines – particularly during 1926 when the book had been published.

'Pen Dar's' histories of the miners, published in weekly episodes by the *Aberdare Leader* in 1925, also referenced blacklegs imported from Cardiff during a coal strike in 1857. He described how the strike-breakers were met at the train station by 'a crowd of several hundreds of men, women and children,' who 'hooted and called out "turncoats",' following which six of the crowd were 'sentenced to hard labour in Cardiff Gaol.'⁸⁴ Pen Dar's opinion of the strikers and their actions was clear, however, as he gave the names of the jailed six, and wondered whether there were 'any relatives of these heroes living in Mountain Ash now?'⁸⁵ The lauding of such actions as heroic, the depiction of the Scotch Cattle as the forerunners of the mighty SWMF, and the use of this longer historical memory of social compulsion against blacklegs, served to legitimise and even inspire actions against strike-breakers during the inter-war years. Francis and Smith, for example, noted how miners from Ystradgynlais 'indulged in historical gymnastics and disguised themselves as "Scotch Cattle"' during 1926, as they broke arms and windows in 'desperate guerrilla actions' against strike-breakers as the lockout drew to a close.⁸⁶ Beyond these examples, there appear to have been few, if any historical representations of strike-breakers, though the SWMF did make contemporary references to them during strikes. Such references focused particularly on the blacklegs' masculinity – either appealing to it or undermining it. As some miners drifted back to work towards the end of 1926, the *CWM* appealed to them to 'get back into the ranks; regain your self-respect and the respect of all honest men,' urging them to 'play the man.'⁸⁷

⁸³ Edwards, *The History of the South Wales Miners*, 34-35.

⁸⁴ *AL*, 26 Dec. 1925.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 62-63.

⁸⁷ *CWM*, 4:11, Nov. 1926, 235.

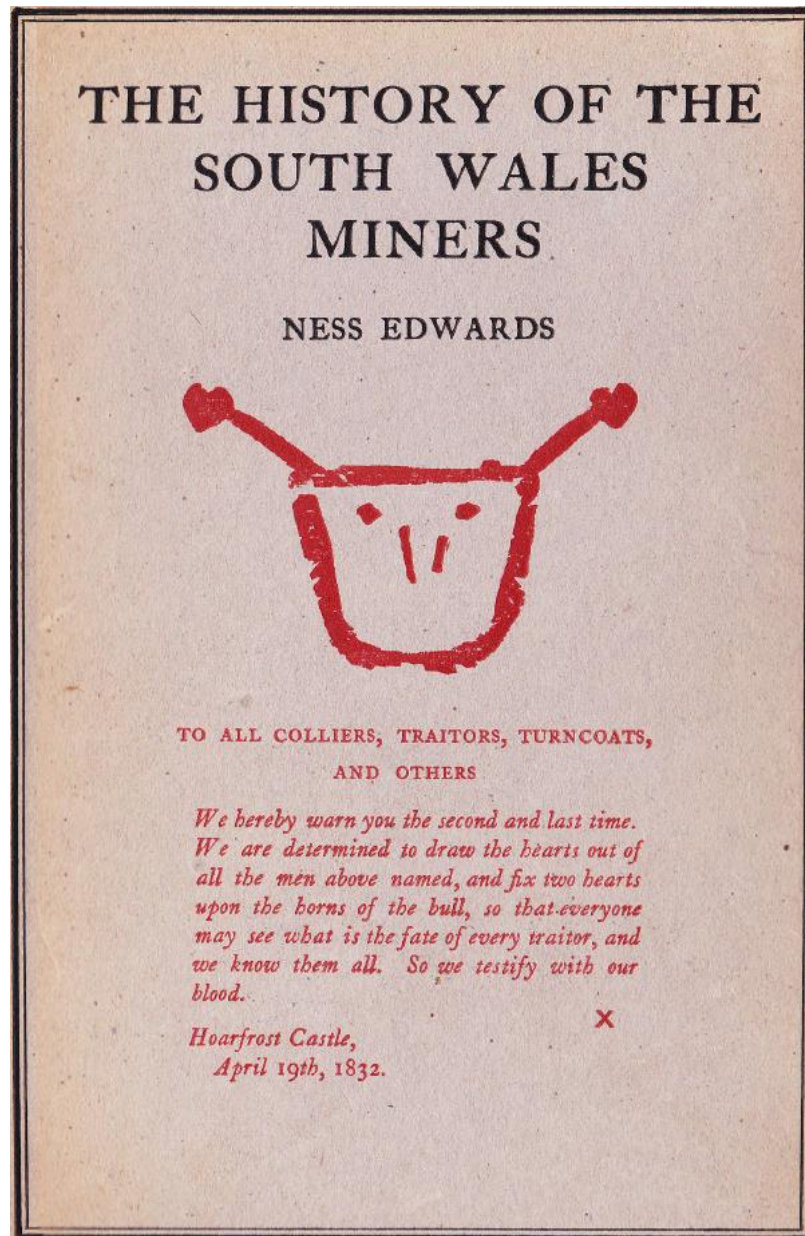


Fig. 6 – Cover of Ness Edwards' *History of the South Wales Miners*, (London: The Labour Publishing Company, 1926).

Blacklegs featured heavily in the interviews recorded by the CHP, with thirty-eight men and women relating bitter memories of people who had worked through strikes. The strong sense of betrayal engendered by their actions and the lasting anger towards them was still clearly evident decades later. For Ray Williams, there was nothing worse, 'I don't think anything's lower than a scab...they were the scum of the earth.'⁸⁸ Merfyn Payne, meanwhile, believed that, 'a man who has been a scab never gets any peace in his heart...there was a sense of shame...and I would say with great sincerity, they carried that mark on their hearts until they

⁸⁸ SWML, AUD/623, Interview with Ray Williams, 24 January, 1978.

died.⁸⁹ The use of religious metaphors to suggest that those who had broken strikes carried, or were branded, with a mark was present in a number of the interviews, but none more so, perhaps, than the interview Alun Burge carried out with Jack Rowe:

You were a man who's hated after your district, Dick Clarke, hated, in the club, out with him. Edmund, branded, Jim Challenger, branded...those men, have been branded in these localities, branded. If you talk about Seary...I know the family, if you turn around and talk about Seary, the first thing that springs to mind is that he was a scab. It's a name that's with them forever. Branded. It'll be with their children, branded. We got to know that Dick Clarke was meddling with this other union business...he had to go...the mark of the beast was there. The hallmark of a traitor.⁹⁰

As with some of the memories of hardship, it is impossible to convey the sheer hatred expressed on the recording in writing. As discussed above, such hardship had left powerful memories across the coalfield, and in part, may have fuelled resentment at the idea that some had avoided it by selling out their communities. Mrs Lloyd remembered how, during the lockout in 1926, there was one blackleg living next-door who everyday would be escorted home from work by the police. She recalled, 'we were, well, almost starving' but the blackleg's wife would be there every day, calling out, 'come along Joe, steak and onions today.'⁹¹ Elizabeth Roberts – whose emotional memories of the hardship she and her family had suffered in 1926 were quoted in the last chapter – made a similar point, recounting how 'we were suffering and they were doing alright, and the longer they were scabbing the longer we'd be without.'⁹²

The resentment of strike-breakers frequently found expression in acts of violence or other forms of social compulsion, and these were a central element of many people's recollections. Goronwy Jones remembered one strike-breaker in Ynysybwl who was escorted to work by the police. One day, however, 'the policemen didn't bring him up nor did no policeman take him down...he was...found in the river half beaten to death.'⁹³ Extreme, often quite shocking violence involving blacklegs was mentioned in many other interviews. Windsor Gregory remembered one man being attacked in Cwmfelinfach – 'he was kicked to death outside my house, well very like to death anyway, the man he was crippled you know, I don't think he

⁸⁹ SWML, AUD/395, Interview with Merfyn Payne, 18 June, 1975.

⁹⁰ SWML, AUD/628, Interview with Jack Rowe, 28 April, 1978.

⁹¹ SWML, AUD/175, Interview with Mrs Lloyd, 18 July, 1974.

⁹² SWML, AUD/613, Interview with Elizabeth Roberts, 12 January, 1978.

⁹³ SWML, AUD/314, Interview with Goronwy Jones, October, 1972.

worked again afterwards.’⁹⁴ Action against strike-breakers was not solely restricted to physical beatings either. White-shirting rituals were mentioned by some of those interviewed, whilst Elizabeth Roberts talked of one incident where a crowd had got hold of a blackleg:

Down the line you could see a lot of crowd like, and naturally you go and see don’t you. And they was tarring and feathering one of the men, one of the scabs, and they stripped him and put a white night shirt on him and covered him with tar.⁹⁵

Alun Burge, who had interviewed both Gregory and Roberts, described another incident involving a strike-breaker who had appendicitis. The SWMF refused to allow its car to be used to take him to hospital, and when the ambulance arrived, its path was blocked by his neighbours. The man died a few days later, and ‘on the day of his funeral crowds gathered outside the house singing jovially “Will he no come back again”’.⁹⁶

Just as bitter memories of ‘scabs’ persisted into the 1970s, so too did the social ostracisation of them and their families. Several of those interviewed said that the people who had worked through strikes were still not spoken to at work, ignored in pubs (or even barred) and had their shops and businesses boycotted.⁹⁷ Their houses were also often daubed with graffiti, leaving them visibly marked out as social pariahs. Bryn Lewis said that, in Tonypany, the officials had the word ‘scab’ written on their walls – ‘and there was one house up till eight years ago by the side of the New Inn, still had Scab on it.’⁹⁸ W.P. Bowen described an overman who had received similar treatment, though in this case the graffiti had remained up to that year before being removed – ‘they were doing the wall you know, re-cementing it, otherwise I believe they’d have left it there.’⁹⁹ The children of blacklegs were also marked as outcasts like their fathers, as Jack Rowe had said. Elved Evans said of one woman in the village that, ‘they say about Mrs so and so, “oh, your father was a scab,” you know, she had nothing to do with it – she was a child at that period, and she’s a woman now in her 70s.’¹⁰⁰

Hatred of and violence towards those who had broken strikes were thus consistent themes in most people’s memories of blacklegs, and this hostility, together with the enduring nature of

⁹⁴ SWML, AUD/629, Interview with Windsor Gregory, 29 March, 1978.

⁹⁵ SWML, AUD/613, Interview with Elizabeth Roberts, 12 January, 1978.

⁹⁶ Burge, ‘In Search of Harry Blount,’ 65.

⁹⁷ SWML, AUD/76, Interview with Hywel Jefferies, 15 November, 1982; AUD/220, Interview with Henry John, 1 December, 1972; AUD/395, Interview with Merfyn Payne, 18 June, 1975; AUD/450, Interview with William Thomas, 19 December, 1974; AUD/628, Interview with Jack Rowe, 28 April, 1978.

⁹⁸ SWML, AUD/348, Interview with Mr and Mrs Bryn Lewis, 28 January, 1973.

⁹⁹ SWML, AUD/178, Interview with W.P. Bowen, c. 1972-74.

¹⁰⁰ SWML, AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978.

such memories – ‘never forgot, and never forgiven,’ as one miner put it – corresponds closely with typical assumptions about the attitudes of mining communities towards those who had crossed picket lines.¹⁰¹ The CHP interviews provide substantial evidence to support such assumptions, and also suggest that the union’s narratives had a firm basis within the wider popular consciousness of the coalfield. The consistent and common themes in the memories of individual men and women suggest that this was a common attitude towards strike-breakers, and the collective nature of these memories is also indicated by the way in which they were conceptualised as a shared or communal experience. The actions of blacklegs were not seen as a personal affront, but as a betrayal of the whole community, and it was everybody who resented the ‘scabs,’ with the reprisals inflicted by the community rather than individuals.

There were other common themes in the memories of blacklegs, however, besides hatred and violence, and perhaps the most notable of these was the role played by the women of the pit villages in the intimidation and ostracisation of strike-breakers. Women were particularly prominent in such actions during 1926, as was reported by many local newspapers, and their involvement was also emphasised in the interviews recorded by the CHP – especially those conducted with women.¹⁰² Mrs Evans remembered how, during 1926, her mother was ‘pelting the doors...and making faces at them and all through the windows,’ whilst Lillian May Price, a miner’s wife from Bedwas and a member of the Communist Party, was also heavily involved in the intimidation of strike-breakers in her village. She described how:

We used to go up in the night and watch them coming out [of the pit], and the women, what we’d do now, we got hold of them and we used to give them a rough time, and I said, ‘Take their bloody trousers off, they won’t go to work without their trousers.’ So that’s what we did, we used to take their trousers off, take their food off them and throw it away.¹⁰³

She also recalled hurling stones and verbal abuse on other occasions, and her actions eventually led her into trouble – ‘I had about five or six summonses, I had one for riotous assembly, unlawful behaviour, I had one for assaulting the boxer...and I stuck them in the front window...for everybody to see...they thought I’d be ashamed...but I was bloody proud of it.’¹⁰⁴ Some of those interviewed claimed that women were not just prominent in such actions, but

¹⁰¹ SWML, AUD/630, Interview with George Nicholas and Reg Gibbs, 19 April, 1978.

¹⁰² See SWA, 5 Aug. 1926 and 25 Aug. 1926, WM, 5 Nov. 1926 and SWE, 8 Nov. 1926.

¹⁰³ SWML, AUD/172, Interview with Mrs Evans, 11 June, 1973; AUD/448, Interview with Lillian May Price, 25 October, 1974.

¹⁰⁴ SWML, AUD/448, Interview with Lillian May Price, 25 October, 1974.

foremost in them, and were more hostile towards the blacklegs than men. Mrs Arthur asserted that the 'women were worse than the men,' and that 'they were picking up big stones, and throwing them straight at these men's faces,' whilst the men in the crowd 'were shouting "Mind the boy! Mind the boy!"'.¹⁰⁵

Women's involvement in such actions also posed a direct challenge to the masculinity of those crossing the picket lines, as they were publically humiliated by the wives, mothers and daughters of the striking miners. Attacks on their masculinity were central to the way that blacklegs were depicted, whether in trade union material or in individual recollections. A particularly scathing account can be seen in B.L. Coombes' *These Poor Hands*. Their capacity to work and their ability as colliers in particular were derided – 'there were about sixty...but not ten of them were real miners...they did just as much work as they pleased – which was rarely a great amount.'¹⁰⁶ Coombes described how the blacklegs, owning no tools of their own, helped themselves to those of the 'real miners,' which had been left at their workplaces when they were locked out, but, as they had 'no skill in handling them, they soon broke the handles and blades, for this is often more of a sign of clumsiness than strength.'¹⁰⁷ These broken tools were only returned to their rightful owners on the 'rare occasions when the blacklegs felt the instincts of a normal man.'¹⁰⁸

Many of those interviewed by the CHP passed similar verdicts on the strike-breakers that they remembered. Ray Williams, for example, described how the blacklegs at Nine Mile Point had worked in the east pit – 'well, I say worked, they were there – they didn't know how to work, they'd never seen a pit before, most of them.'¹⁰⁹ Sam Butcher, meanwhile, recalled how 'they were bringing men in that...couldn't lift a shovel, let alone hew coal,' and many others offered similar judgements.¹¹⁰ In coalfield communities, where ideas of masculinity were based on hard work and providing for one's family, such attacks on blacklegs' capacity for work were direct attacks on their status as men. These attacks were important – by the fact that they were still working, blacklegs might otherwise have undermined the masculinity of those

¹⁰⁵ SWML, AUD/633, Interview with Lillian Tanner, 5 April, 1978.

¹⁰⁶ Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, 181.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁰⁹ SWML, AUD/623, Interview with Ray Williams, 24 January, 1978.

¹¹⁰ SWML, AUD/631, Interview with Sam Butcher, 13 April, 1978. See also AUD/184, Interview with Reg Fine, 2 July, 1973; AUD/237, Interview with Bob Morris, 9 November, 1973; AUD/316, Interview with Oliver Powell, 29 November, 1973; AUD/621, Interview with Elved Evans, 4 January, 1978; AUD/626, Interview with Tom John, 31 January, 1978.

miners who were out on strike. Blacklegs were thus depicted as feckless and useless workers, lacking the skill or strength to be real miners, and at all other times shunning work which was too hard, skilful and dangerous for them. During industrial disputes, masculinity was inverted, and 'heroic manhood' was associated with striking.¹¹¹

The involvement of women in the intimidation of strike-breakers, however, should not be seen solely, or even primarily, in the context of their relationship to conceptions of masculinity. Sue Bruley, for example, has argued that in their assertiveness and dominance, such actions 'were in effect contesting the masculinist basis of political power in the coalfield.'¹¹² The sense of pride and self-assertion with which many women recounted their activities was evident in many of the interviews – they were seen as significant, and independent, contributions to industrial action and communal resistance. As quoted above, Lillian May Price proudly pinned her court summons in her front window, whilst Elizabeth Roberts also had fond memories of her own exploits:

A few of us women living down Babell Row, we used to get up about five o'clock in the morning and go down the...station, and throw stones – I done it! I'm not ashamed! – at the scabs coming off the train. If you hit 'em you hit 'em and they'd have it...my husband wouldn't get in a crowd like that, he was a bit on the nervous side I think, you know. But I was young then, and I tell you [conspiratorially] I used to enjoy it!¹¹³

The common themes that can be seen across the CHP interviews – from the violence and hostility, through to the role played by women and the attacks on strike-breakers masculinity – are especially interesting given the locally specific nature of such memories. Memories of blacklegging were, much like those of the clashes with the police, a patchwork of local memories recalling similar but separate incidents, rather than a singular collective memory of one particular event or time. Indeed, such was the extent to which they were rooted in the experiences of certain villages, that they were often targeted at distinct individuals. Many of those interviewed by the CHP even recalled the names of those who had crossed picket-lines, demonstrating how the bitterness of such memories was typically centred on specific people within the community.¹¹⁴ That memories of blacklegs were so locally specific again led to

¹¹¹ Sue Bruley, 'Women' in *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lockout*, ed. McIlroy, Campbell and Gildart, 239.

¹¹² Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926*, 110-111.

¹¹³ SWML, AUD/613, Interview with Elizabeth Roberts, 12 January, 1978.

¹¹⁴ See for example, SWML, AUD/172, Interview with Mrs Evans, 11 June, 1973; AUD/175, Interview with Mrs Lloyd, 18 July, 1974; AUD/184, Interview with Reg Fine, 2 July, 1973; AUD/188, Interview with W.C.

distinct regional variations across the coalfield, with the majority of references coming from the Nine Mile Point and Bedlinog community studies, whilst only four were recorded in the western valleys.¹¹⁵

Cast as pariahs and outsiders even into the 1970s, many of those who had crossed picket lines had either left the coalfield or been shunned by the rest of their communities. Such individuals were, therefore, often difficult to find or reluctant to speak to researchers, and their experiences and memories are consequently very difficult to reconstruct. There are some interviews in the CHP, however, that provide some insight into how strikes were remembered by those who had broken them. Haydn Thomas, for example, had worked through the strikes against the SWMIU at Taff-Merthyr in the 1930s, and his memories of the time were dominated by the anger and hostility he and his family had experienced. He recalled how 'we couldn't go out by night' and the crowds hissing at them as they were escorted to work in the mornings 'they were dirty, throwing stones at our front door...marking the door and all things like that.'¹¹⁶ He himself was able to recall much of the abuse with some equanimity from a perspective of forty years later, but the effect on his parents at the time who, 'nearly went crackers then,' suggests at the strain he and his family must have felt.¹¹⁷ The situation for his wife was arguably worse, confined to the house as 'the boy' or 'somebody else' did the shopping, and denied any social interaction as no one would speak to her, 'even sisters in law and brothers.'¹¹⁸

Even the children of blacklegs often received similar treatment, as was mentioned above, and as can be seen in the interview with Windsor Gregory. His father and older brother both worked through strikes, and he remembered how he and his other brothers 'had the same name as the rest,' despite never breaking strikes themselves.¹¹⁹ 'It was all wrong we was all small, we couldn't tell my father or...parents what to do – they're telling you at that time,' he recalled, and told of how their windows used to be 'pelted in.'¹²⁰ Though he was young enough to avoid being attacked himself, his other brothers were not so lucky – 'I seen my brother

Davies, August, 1973; AUD/257, Interview with Glyn Williams, 21 May, 1974; AUD/285, Interview with Anne Thomas, 28 November, 1973; AUD/348, Interview with Mr and Mrs Bryn Lewis, 28 January, 1973; AUD/628, Interview with Jack Rowe, 28 April, 1978; AUD/630, Interview with George Nicholas and Reg Gibbs, 19 April, 1978.

¹¹⁵ 15 from Nine Mile Point and 7 from Bedlinog, out of a total of 38.

¹¹⁶ SWML, AUD/224, Interview with Haydn Thomas, April, 1974.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ SWML, AUD/613, Interview with Elizabeth Roberts, 12 January, 1978.

¹²⁰ SWML, AUD/629, Interview with Windsor Gregory, 29 March, 1978.

come home many times, face all hit in.’¹²¹ Gregory’s interview also demonstrates the extent to which incidents of strike-breaking were still remembered – and even passed on – into the 1970s, and continued to poison relationships. He described how one young boy had shouted abuse at him just the other day:

His father used to tell him all about these things and he took a dislike to me...I was coming from the club when that boy shouted on the bridge. I said ‘what are you bothering about, you wasn’t born, even your father wasn’t born at that time,’ I said, ‘you don’t know what you’re talking about.’¹²²

Whilst bitterness towards blacklegs lasted for decades, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this was the only response within mining communities. Indeed, although there was deep and widespread hostility, some people expressed more nuanced attitudes towards strike-breakers, dissenting from the prevailing attitudes. Attitudes could even differ sharply within families, as can be seen in the interview with Watkin Gittins and his wife Emily. Whilst Watkin himself remembered those who had worked through the Taff-Merthyr strike with some serenity, recalling that, ‘it created discontentment among families and friends but it has gone pretty good now, it has passed over now,’ his wife was in no mood to be so charitable.¹²³ Interrupting a discussion about a local leader (Edgar Evans), at a point when blacklegs were no longer being discussed, she recalled how ‘we gave it them we did every day,’ claiming that ‘they didn’t care if we starved as long as they lived,’ before finally adding, for good measure, that ‘them that worked there, they’ve got to suffer today for it, they still haven’t got a conscience like we got.’¹²⁴ She then left the room, but her continued, angry denunciations could still be heard faintly in the background of the recording, as she made a cup of tea. Her husband, by contrast, had fond memories of competing in London as part of a choir, and in particular of ‘a soloist by the name of Mr Haydn Thomas,’ who won first-prize.¹²⁵ Yet, as was apparent from the interview the CHP carried out with Haydn Thomas, the prize winning soloist had worked through the Taff-Merthyr strikes and was himself a blackleg.

Whilst Watkin Gittins may have held little animosity towards them, some even went so far as to express sympathy with those who had broken the strikes. Lillian May Price, whose

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ SWML, AUD/230, Interview with Watkin Gittins, 15 February, 1973.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

memories of throwing stones at and accosting blacklegs were quoted above, was, nonetheless, sympathetic to those who had crossed picket lines, despite also taking pride in her actions. She was asked why she thought people had become 'scabs', and replied, 'I think it was the fact that they had families, and they were hungry and they had nobody to help them.'¹²⁶ She pointed out that, whilst her family had roots in the area and had been there for years, 'some of the families like had moved in there and didn't know nobody, they didn't have anybody to help them out, and I don't expect they were known so well in the shops...who could blame them, they were starving like the rest of us.'¹²⁷ Jesse Clark had also been heavily involved in picketing against blacklegs during the Cambrian Combine Strike, though he too retained no hard feelings towards those he had clashed with. He grew quite irritated with the interviewer's questions, replying sharply to one query about why people had blacklegged by saying, 'well what do you want to ask that now...say you was a married man...sometimes you were all spent out...and where you gonna get your next meal? And pay for your lodge and clothes and all this and that?'¹²⁸ Later in the interview, as the interviewer returned to the pickets, he interjected – 'Oh, dear, dear...you're coming to the pickets, the picket scheme, and I don't wish to get on to that point.'¹²⁹ He explained that some men 'wouldn't want to go to work see, but were forced by the depression.'¹³⁰ The idea that those that had blacklegged had been forced back to work by sheer poverty was particularly evident regarding the 1926 lockout. Both Ben Davies and Thomas Thomas were asked about whether people had returned to work early, and what they thought of them. Ben Davies replied that some had 'drifted back at the end,' but that 'one must recall we were utterly defeated at the time,' whilst Thomas Thomas responded 'oh well, it had come to this, they did either go back or starve, see.'¹³¹

It is important to emphasise, however, that where such sympathy was expressed, it was not done so to all who had crossed picket lines. Many of those interviewed made a distinction between two types of blacklegs – ordinary miners caught up in difficult circumstances with whom one could sympathise, and ideological 'scabs' for whom there was no forgiveness. Dai Dan Evans, for example, divided blacklegs into 'Federation men who had been driven to the scab union because of sheer poverty,' and 'the hard core...real scabs...like Dai Abedai and all

¹²⁶ SWML, AUD/448, Interview with Lillian May Price, 25 October, 1974.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ SWML, AUD/325, Interview with Jesse Clark, c. 1972-1974.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ SWML, AUD/168, Interview with Ben Davies, 11 June, 1973; 168, AUD/83, Interview with Thomas Thomas, 3 August, 1973.

those see.’¹³² Idris Suter, meanwhile, said of one blackleg, Harry Blount, that ‘he was a proper bleeding scab too,’ differentiating him from the other strike-breakers.¹³³ Such distinctions can also be found in the writings of B.L. Coombes. His account of 1926, as noted above, is pervaded by a righteous anger towards strike-breakers, yet Coombes made an exception for his friend Billy Ward, who returned to work during the dispute, observing that ‘Billy did not have the support of other men living near, as we did, and I suppose the thought of his wife and children helped [the] threat of the official.’¹³⁴ Years later, Billy returned to the village and was welcomed as an old friend, his crossing of pickets lines seemingly forgotten.

The understanding and sympathy expressed by some, might partly be put down to the effects of time. As people grew older, attitudes might have softened as the initial hatred and resentment faded away, and they became more accepting of – or at least, prepared to overlook – the actions of those who had crossed picket lines. Such changes in attitudes were by no means universal, however, nor even necessarily common. Many of those interviewed by the CHP, such as Jack Rowe and Emily Gittins, had neither forgotten nor forgiven those they considered as ‘scabs,’ whilst the continuing ostracisation and abuse directed towards even their children into the 1970s also indicates the enduring nature of such bitterness. The exceptions that were made, and the sympathy that was expressed, was not simply a consequence of generational change. Indeed, as seen in the examples from Evans, Suter and Coombes that were quoted above, softer attitudes towards some blacklegs could easily co-exist with the continued demonisation of others.

The effects of the depression in parts of the coalfield have already been discussed, and, given the extent of the poverty and hardship experienced in some areas, it is not surprising that some miners cracked under the pressure and sought whatever work they could find. Miners and their families were, of course, acutely aware of conditions during the inter-war years both at the time and in the 1970s, and it was the contemporary awareness and later memories of the ‘hard times’ that saw many of those interviewed by the CHP make exceptions for some of those driven back to work, and express sympathy and understanding. Trevor Humphries’ description of the men who had been recruited to work at Nine Mile Point – ‘only street corner boys, old daps on their feet and one thing or another’ – probably applied to many of those who, already destitute, crossed picket lines and subsequently found themselves outcast within

¹³² SWML, AUD/264, Interview with Dai Dan Evans, 7 August, 1973.

¹³³ SWML, AUD/619, Interview with Idris Suter, 21 January, 1978.

¹³⁴ Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, 185.

their communities.¹³⁵ Such attitudes do not, of course, in any sense refute conventional ideas about mining communities' lasting hostility towards blacklegs. Indeed, the powerful, locally rooted collective memories of strike-breaking that can be found in the CHP provide ample evidence of such hostility. What they do show, however, is that despite this hostility, many within the mining communities could nonetheless sympathise with the desperate situations that others found themselves in, and that memories of strikebreaking – just the same as those of the police – were often very nuanced and complex.

III

The miners' hostility towards both strike-breakers and the police is a recurring theme in conventional depictions of mining communities. They were alleged to be a central element within the distinctive political and industrial culture of the south Wales coalfield in particular, where Francis and Smith have argued they were where this 'alternative culture...revealed itself most clearly.'¹³⁶ More broadly, enduring memories of how they were betrayed by 'scabs,' and beaten and harassed by the police, are often said to have left a deep legacy of bitterness and distrust, and it is typically assumed that both figures were vilified and shunned within the pit villages. There is considerable evidence to support this characterisation and these assumptions in both the records of the union and the interviews recorded by the CHP. Bitter memories of the violent confrontations with the police, and a lasting revulsion towards blacklegs were expressed by many men and women. Furthermore, these memories were often conceptualised as communal or shared experiences, and were actively talked about and passed down within the pit villages. Collective memories of police and blacklegs thus emerged across the coalfield, in which both were cast as enemies of the mining community.

As has been argued throughout, one of the most striking aspects of these memories, was their local dimension. What emerged was not a single, monolithic collective memory, but rather a patchwork of local memories, which were rooted in specific local experiences. Though these fitted into a wider narrative framework – as particular examples of the opposition the miners had faced in their heroic struggles – the memories themselves had grown out of the experiences within the pit villages, rather than being created by the representations of the

¹³⁵ SWML, AUD/636, Interview with Trevor Humphries, 9 January, 1978.

¹³⁶ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 59.

union and political parties. Again, therefore, it can be seen that collective memory was not just the result of representations of the past being received and reworked by individual men and women, but was a reciprocal process in which the miners, their families and their communities played an important part.

Not all memories of either police or blacklegs were unremittingly hostile, however. Expressions of sympathy or understanding for those who had broken strikes, and recollections of more friendly relations with the police were also not uncommon, and some individuals who had otherwise bitter memories made allowances for certain individuals who had either broken strikes or policed them. Such exceptions indicate the complexity of these collective memories, though they do not in any sense repudiate the idea that the policing and breaking of strikes were generally recalled with anger and resentment. Indeed, there will be always exceptions to any collective narratives, however strong and locally rooted they might be. As Jon Lawrence has argued, when studying popular consciousness, 'we must expect to find heterogeneity...not holistic unity,' there is no 'single, unified popular thought-world that can be revealed' by historical study.¹³⁷ Despite the prevalence and strength of some of the collective memories that can be found in the CHP, memory remained a chaotic and often contradictory phenomenon, and could never be completely reduced to one homogeneous narrative.

The complexity of collective memories of police and blacklegs, however, was more than just a reflection of the inherent complexity of popular consciousness. The understanding advanced towards police officers by individuals such as Jake Brookes and Merfyn Payne, for example, was expressed in the context of their memories of violent baton charges, in which the police had functioned as the brutal opponents of the miners struggles.¹³⁸ The same might also be said of the memories of blacklegs. Many of those who expressed sympathy, such as Lillian May Price for instance, were also proud of the role that they had played in the attacks and intimidation of them at the time.¹³⁹ This was also even the case for people who had been amongst the key architects of the wider narratives of police violence and the 'treachery' of strike-breakers, such as union activists, writers and political leaders. When Aneurin Bevan described the police that he had met as 'very decent fellows,' who 'would not resort...to dirty

¹³⁷ Jon Lawrence, 'The Voice of the People? Re-reading the Field-notes of Classic Post-war Social Science Studies', <https://manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com/2015/08/14/the-voice-of-the-people-re-reading-the-field-notes-of-classic-post-war-social-science-studies/> (Accessed 5 May 2017).

¹³⁸ SWML, AUD/308, Interview with Jake Brookes, 13 September, 1973; AUD/395, Interview with Merfyn Payne, 18 June, 1975.

¹³⁹ SWML, AUD/448, Interview with Lillian May Price, 25 October, 1974.

work' unless pushed into it by higher authorities, he did so in the midst of a wider denunciation of the baton charges at Nine Mile Point, and the 'hooligans and bullies of the police.'¹⁴⁰ To take another example, B.L. Coombes' scathing attack on the blacklegs who had arrived at his colliery in 1926 did not prevent him from exempting his good friend Billy Ward from this vitriol – even though he too had crossed the picket lines.

These more nuanced memories and attitudes were not just examples of individual men and women rejecting or standing outside of the wider collective memories. They were people who very much shared in such collective memories, and who were involved in their creation – very noticeably so in the case of Bevan and Coombes. In this respect, they were making conscious and deliberate exceptions for specific individuals within the wider framework of an otherwise hostile collective memory. The police's actions at times of strikes were resented, but at other times relationships could be warmer, and hostility put aside. Blacklegs were generally despised, but there was often understanding and sympathy for some of those who had been driven across picket lines by desperate circumstances. The exceptions were thus a fundamental part of these collective memories. The hostility, though widespread, was not universal or axiomatic, but to some extent selective, and the ability to exempt some individuals was an important element.

They were able to do so because individual memory was not something that was either subsumed by collective memory or else stood outside it, but was instead integral to collective remembrance. Even when engaging closely in wider collective memories of particular incidents, people's recollections of them still retained a degree of independence. Studies of collective and individual memory have often characterised the two as being distinct and separate forms of remembering. In addition, by focusing too heavily on the role of public representations in shaping shared understandings of the past, they have encouraged the perception that collective memory is something that is primarily created by political parties, the press, popular culture and so forth, and then received and engaged with by the wider public. Such thinking leads to an implicit assumption that collective memory is something that is both separate from and external to the experiences of individual men and women. Yet the memories of both police and blacklegs that have been discussed here – with all their nuances and complexities – can, arguably, only be fully comprehended by understanding memory as a continuous spectrum, where recollections could be both collective and individual

¹⁴⁰ SWA, 14 Feb. 1929.

simultaneously, and in which shared understandings of the past emerged through a reciprocal interaction between the experiences of individuals and representations of the past. The collective memories of police and blacklegs in the south Wales coalfield had thus been created by the men and women of the pit villages rather than for them, and it was those people – from Jake Brookes and Lillian May Price to Aneurin Bevan – who determined what their communities' history meant, and could decide who was to be vilified, and who could be forgiven.

Conclusion.

The Coalfield History Project began at a time of anxiety and uncertainty across the south Wales coalfield. As was discussed at the beginning of this study, a fear that something was being lost – that the distinctive, ‘alternative culture’ of the mining communities was ebbing away – was pervasive throughout the 1960s, and had not been fully dispelled even by the stunning victories of 1972 and 1974. The aims of the researchers – and of works like *The Fed* that emerged out of the project – had been to find, record and sustain that consciousness, which was assumed to have included a powerful collective memory of past struggles. In many respects, the CHP researchers did, indeed, find the collective memory that they were searching for. Past strikes and protests were widely recalled across the coalfield as courageous attempts to improve the lives and conditions of the miners and their families in the face of bitter opposition from the coalowners and the state. Those struggles were then often linked with both each other and with older disputes, as part of a chain of protest and struggle stretching back into the coalfield’s history. It was this exact sort of heroic, linear narrative of progress through struggle that the miners’ union, and the Labour and Communist parties had tried to construct following their defeats in 1921 and 1926, and the CHP interviews suggest that it was engaged with by many miners (though less so by the women of the mining communities).

These memories of strikes and lockouts were thus not just isolated individual recollections, but were recalled within a common narrative framework. Furthermore, the fact that so many individuals recalled stories about past struggles that they had been told by parents or other family members suggests that such memories were actively talked about and discussed both within families and the wider community. For some, the relationship between past strikes and protests and these family links to the mining industry even went beyond the telling of stories, with a tradition of struggle imagined as passing from generation to generation. Such conclusions, therefore, also support the claims of Ferdynand Zweig, Dave Douglass and others, about coalfield societies possessing powerful collective memories of past struggles that had been handed down.

Yet, collective memory within the mining communities of south Wales was not simply a chronicle of the miners’ struggles. Indeed, the heroic narrative of progress through struggle was not even the predominant memory of strikes and lockouts, with the disputes of 1898, 1910-12, 1921 and 1926 primarily recalled as instances of cooperation and solidarity, rather

than confrontation. There were strong collective memories of the soup kitchens, of the support of shopkeepers and of good times in the summer weather amongst both men and women, and these were similarly passed down and discussed within families and the wider community. There were also significant memories of deaths and injuries that had occurred in the pit. Those dangers were often recalled within a particular narrative framework – ‘the Price of Coal’ – which was highly politicised, oppositional towards the coalowners and linked to (though also distinct from) the union’s representations of strikes and lockouts. Surprisingly, however, given the way in which they often symbolised coal mining communities in the press and popular culture, big pit disasters were largely absent from this narrative, and from the broader collective memory of deaths underground.

Powerful collective memories of the hardship, unemployment and poverty during the inter-war depression were also evident from the interviews recorded by the CHP. Strikingly, such memories were very widespread, with little apparent variation either between men and women, or between different areas of the coalfield – this despite the fact that experiences of the depression were often heavily differentiated by region and gender, as has been pointed out by historians such as Steven Thompson.¹ ‘Hard times’ during the 1920s and 1930s, along with the risks of working underground, were seen as integral to the idea of belonging to a mining community, rather than just the experience of certain sections. There were also bitter memories of clashes with the police, and of those who had crossed picket lines during strikes. Such memories have, like memories of strikes and protests, often been closely associated with mining communities by historians and sociologists. Again, however, the collective memories of police and blacklegs were considerably more complex than just resentment and hatred. Many expressed a degree of understanding for the circumstances in which their erstwhile opponents had found themselves, and exceptions were sometimes made for individual police officers or strike-breakers.

Of particular significance for conventional ideas about miners and collective memory is the movement and migration that characterised the lives of those interviewed. There was a substantial amount of movement into the coalfield before the First World War, followed by an exodus away from south Wales during the inter-war depression, whilst many miners and their families moved within the coalfield from one valley or area to another during the course of their lives. The fluidity of the mining communities significantly qualifies stereotypical

¹ Thompson, *Unemployment, Poverty and Health*, 22, 231.

depictions of such communities as being isolated, static and unchanging. Such explanations for the miners' collective memory that have been advanced have often relied upon such depictions – and on assumptions about occupational continuity and homogeneity. Yet, although family links and stories being passed down from generation to generation were an important factor in the emergence of these collective memories, so too was the migration and movement that was also a distinctive feature of coalfield society. The movement of people between different areas of the coalfield arguably helped to spread stories about political and industrial struggles, confrontations with the police and the experiences of unemployment across the coalfield. As men and women moved, they took their memories with them, and as they talked about their experiences with their new neighbours, friends and workmates, such memories transcended their local origins to be shared more widely across south Wales.

The way that these broader understandings of the past were often rooted in particular, local experiences, was integral to the nature of collective memory within the mining communities of south Wales. Many of the collective memories that have been discussed throughout – of strikes and protests; of deaths and injuries underground; of hardship during the depression; of clashes with the police and blacklegs – existed at a coalfield level. The narrative frameworks of those memories were propagated by the Fed (and later the South Wales Area NUM) and were cast as the history of the south Wales miners as a whole. Yet they were often based on specific local or even personal experiences. The great lockouts such as 1921 and 1926 were widely remembered, but many of the memories of strikes recorded by the CHP were of smaller, local or regional disputes, such as the 1925 anthracite strike or the stay-down strikes against the SWMIU at Nine Mile Point and Taff-Merthyr in the 1930s. The same was particularly true for memories of both the police and strike-breakers, which were almost always of incidents within particular communities. Memories of the dangers of the pit, meanwhile, were centred largely on personal experiences of underground accidents, and this was also partly the case for the hardship of the inter-war years (although there was also a general awareness of its wider effects). Thus, although certain historical events were common reference points, much of the collective memory within the mining communities had emerged not from particularly significant events being widely remembered across the coalfield, but from local and personal experiences being placed and remembered within a broader narrative framework.

Given this, it is perhaps surprising that there were not more regional variations within memory, or indeed that there was a wider collective memory at all, rather than a series of disparate and fractured local and individual memories. Yet it was precisely this local dimension

that was the great strength of collective remembering within the mining communities of south Wales – the broader narrative frameworks were powerful not in spite of this fact, but because of it. Experiences and events that were significant to individuals or to particular communities could be placed within a wider context, as specific examples of incidents that experienced by the mining community as a whole. Thus, instead of being centred on one particular event, which relatively few people might have actually lived through, the collective memories that emerged were of particular experiences, which could be easily related to by any person or any community that had experienced something similar. People often did not remember the same historical events, but different events within the same narrative framework. Collective memory within the mining communities of south Wales, therefore, was not a single or monolithic memory, but rather a patchwork or mosaic of individual, local and coalfield-wide memories that together formed a common, shared understanding of the coalfield's history.

I

Aside from its specific relevance to the historiography of coal mining communities, most of the historical and sociological debates concerning collective memory have, implicitly or explicitly, focused on the relationship between individual and collective remembering. That relationship was central to the criticisms made of Halbwachs, to Kansteiner's call to focus more on reception, and also to the subsequent criticisms of these approaches by Anna Green and Graham Smith.² For the most part, these debates have defined individual and collective memory as two different and distinct types of remembering, and discussed how these two forms of memory interacted with each other. This interaction has typically been characterised as oppositional, with the memories of individual men and women seen as having either been subsumed within wider public narratives to form a collective memory, or else standing independent or defiant of them to remain individual.

The relationship between individual and collective memory has, accordingly, been one of the two central questions of this study. Perhaps the first point to emphasise about that relationship is the importance of individual memory. Individuals within the mining communities did not just receive, adopt or rework the representations of the past produced by

² Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory'; Green, 'Individual Remembering and "Collective Memory"'; Smith, 'Beyond Individual/Collective Memory'. See Introduction for a fuller discussion.

the union, political parties, the press and so forth, but played an active and independent role in shaping collective understandings of the past, and even creating new ones. The union's narratives about the dangers of the pit were heavily influenced by the personal recollections of underground accidents, just as those recollections were themselves influenced by the 'Price of Coal' narrative. Collective memories of the soup kitchens and of the community pulling together during strikes, meanwhile, did not originate in any representations of industrial disputes, and were not even significantly influenced by such narratives, but instead emerged directly out of the personal experiences of men and women of the pit villages. Such examples highlight the problems in focusing solely on discourses about the past and how they were received as a way of understanding collective memory. Within this approach, collective memory is seen primarily from the perspective of representations of the past – even when wider public attitudes are looked at, it is solely in terms of how they relate to those representations. Yet, a popular consciousness of the past existed outside of its relationship to historical discourses, and was not present only as an audience for them. Looking at the memories and attitudes towards the past of individual men and women on their own terms is, therefore, important to properly reconstructing the mining communities' understandings of their past. Collective memory was a constant and *reciprocal* relationship between the memories of individual men and women, and the representations of the past constructed by the press, political parties, trade unions, and in popular culture.

Even when personal recollections of particular events closely mirrored prevailing collective narratives, they often continued to remain independent of them. For example, many of the people recorded by the CHP engaged with the collective memories of 'hard times' during the 1920s and 1930s, and talked about the hardship, unemployment and poverty that the mining communities had suffered during those two decades. Yet they did not remember the experience of the mining community at the expense of their experiences as individuals. Instead, their own recollections were placed within a wider collective framework, as personal examples of common experience. In such instances, the memories of individual men and women were not being subsumed by a collective memory even when they were fully engaging with it, as the relationship between the two was not necessarily oppositional, nor mutually exclusive. Instead such recollections were examples of memories that were simultaneously both individual and collective. Despite recalling events that had directly affected themselves, many men and women still described how this showed that 'we' or 'we in the mining community' had experienced hardship. If some memories appear to have been both individual and collective simultaneously, then the argument that these constituted two distinct and

different forms of remembering becomes more difficult to sustain. The relationship between them should instead be seen, as Fentress and Wickham suggested, as a more fluid one, without any 'rigid boundaries separating one "type" of memory from another.'³

It might be argued that most of the references to the past that have been quoted in this study – whether in newspapers, political speeches, or oral history interviews – were all, in a sense, engaged in a similar process of telling stories about the past. This is arguably true for all forms of memory – even individuals order their personal recollections into some form of narrative in order to make sense of their experiences, regardless of whether these are then told to anybody else or written down. This is, of course, not to say that an individual's memory of an event that they experienced is the same as a newspaper article or a speech referencing that incident. There are significant and important differences between any types of references to the past, in terms of their purpose and intention, the materials upon which they draw, and the form that such references take, amongst other things. A union activist referencing the Chartist rising before a demonstration in the 1930s was not 'remembering' a direct experience of the Chartists, either collective or individual. Yet it was not drastically dissimilar to someone from the Labour or Communist parties referring to the lockouts in 1921 and 1926 at the same protest – even assuming that they had actually lived through those events. Again, there are significant differences between someone drawing on their own experiences to reference the past for political and industrial reasons and recalling those same experiences in a written memoir or in a one-to-one interview with a historian. In both cases however, they are still drawing on the past to create a particular narrative – even if the audience for or the purpose of that narrative has changed. In the context of the oral history interview, whether the individual concerned was remembering something that happened to them as an individual or as a part of a group is an important distinction – but categorising these as two fundamentally different and separate activities is a separation unlikely to be recognised by the individual themselves. Instead, the relationship here is better understood as a continuous spectrum ranging from public representations of the past through to the individual recollection of personal experiences. Such a conceptualisation of memory does not mean denying that some memories were either individual or collective, but is instead about trying to understand how they related to each other. Rather than being distinct categories or separate types of remembering, 'individual' and 'collective' memory should be seen instead as points along this spectrum.

³ Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 25.

Graham Smith's work on remembering within groups provides important insights here into how individual memories started to become collective, and how individuals were able to create new shared narratives in which dissident or discordant recollections could be expressed. He labelled the processes that he identified as 'transactive memory' – which he defined as a form of remembering that operated 'at the intersection between individual and group memory.'⁴ But although his arguments are important, the attempt to categorise and define new forms of memory – such as transactive – is arguably unnecessary. Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that 'we sometimes demand definitions for the sake not of the content, but of their form,' and that they could often be 'a kind of ornamental coping that supports nothing.'⁵ The same could arguably be said of attempts to precisely define terms like 'individual' and 'collective' memory. If memory is seen as a continuous spectrum then there is little point in trying to precisely label the point at which memory becomes either individual or collective as the relationship between them was fluid and continuous.

Anna Green has claimed that 'few would argue that there is any linear or aggregative relationship between individual memory and collective memory.'⁶ Although collective memory is far more than an aggregation of similar individual recollections (as has been noted at several points), the idea that both individual and collective forms of remembering exist on the same spectrum does appear to contradict Green's claim that there is no direct relationship between the two. Indeed, this study argues that the two are, in fact, intrinsically related to each other – even if there remain important differences between them. By conceptualising memory in such a way, this study attempts to acknowledge Green's call to 're-assert the value of individual remembering and the capacity of the conscious self to contest and critique cultural scripts or discourses,' whilst also trying to avoid the danger of 'romanticising the individuality of memories' and thus 'missing the importance of social...contexts and processes' that was highlighted by Graham Smith.⁷ It also, arguably, provides a response to the challenge for collective memory studies that was identified by Fentress and Wickham, of finding a way of conceptualising collective memory that, 'while doing full justice to the collective side of one's conscious life, does not render the individual a sort of automaton, passively obeying the

⁴ Smith, 'Beyond Individual/Collective Memory', 80.

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 217.

⁶ Green, 'Individual Remembering and "Collective Memory"', 37.

⁷ Green, 'Individual Remembering and "Collective Memory"', 42-43; Smith, 'Beyond Individual/Collective Memory', 88.

interiorised collective will.⁸ Above all, it provides a way of conceptualising memory that, perhaps, more closely reflects the relationship between the collective and the individual.

Such arguments also raise questions about the nature of the relationship between individual and collective memory in other contexts. Firstly, this study shows that, within the mining communities, individual memories were integral in shaping and even creating shared understandings of the past. In doing so, it further emphasises the need for historians of collective memory generally to examine the thoughts and recollections of individual men and women on their own terms, and not just for evidence as to how particular representations were received. Secondly, although the examples used here are all from south Wales, and it thus remains inherently difficult to extend any conclusions beyond this particular case study with any certainty, the conclusions drawn from them are fundamentally about the nature of the relationship between individual and collective forms of remembering, rather than the nature of coal-mining communities. If individual and collective memory here were intrinsically related to each other – as particular points upon the same spectrum – then it is possible that memory in other times and places may also have had this same fluid and continuous relationship. This particular way of conceptualising different forms of remembering may, therefore, also apply in other contexts beyond the specific case of the south Wales coalfield during the twentieth century.

II

The second central question of this study relates to the different understandings of time within which the experiences of the inter-war years were remembered. In the interviews recorded by the CHP, different historical experiences were often recalled within different temporal frameworks. Strikes, lockouts and other protests were typically remembered within a linear conception of time. They were linked together with other industrial or political disputes, as part of a linear narrative of progress through struggle – or sometimes placed within the context of other important life events such as births and marriages, as reference points within a personal chronology. In contrast, deaths and injuries that had occurred underground were often recalled within a cyclical conception of time. Memories of accidents rarely, if ever, included a date or any other chronological reference point, and were not usually placed within

⁸ Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, ix.

the context of significant personal or wider historical events. Instead, the dangers of the pit were seen as an indelible feature of life within mining communities – an unchanging and ever recurring experience linking past, present and future generations of miners and their families. Memories of poverty and unemployment, meanwhile, were inextricably linked with the 1920s and 1930s. Both in surveys from the time and interviews from the 1970s, the inter-war depression was seen as an exceptional period that seemed to stand outside of history. Cyclical and linear conceptions of time were wholly inadequate for understanding an experience that appeared not to change existing society so much as break it, and the ‘hard times’ of those two decades were thus remembered in a different, discontinuous temporality.

The three time-frames that can be seen in the CHP interviews – linear, cyclical and discontinuous – were not fixed or static, but were themselves reshaped and affected by the experiences of the 1920s and 1930s. In the first instance, cyclical patterns of work and life within the pit villages were disrupted by the advent of mass unemployment, and with them, so too were the cyclical conceptions of time that they had engendered. Though they persisted into the 1970s – particularly as a way of conceptualising the dangers of the pit – they were challenged and, in some senses, broken. Secondly, the progressive narratives and the linear temporalities that underpinned them, arose largely in response to the disasters that had befallen the coalfield following 1921 and 1926. This was most obvious in the attempts of the union to construct a heroic narrative of progress through struggle, but can also, perhaps, be seen in the visions of a new, utopian, work-and-share society that flourished amongst some of the unemployed. These promised a future that was different from both the present and the past – that was neither the unending half-life of long-term unemployment, nor an ever-recurring cycle of work, life and death underground. Both cyclical and linear time-frames were thus profoundly affected by the experiences of poverty and unemployment, yet the scale of the economic collapse was such that those experiences also generated – and were themselves experienced in – a wholly new, discontinuous temporality. Understandings of time therefore, were, as Koselleck argued, ‘an entity which alters along with history.’⁹

In both Koselleck’s and Rhodri Hayward’s work, linear historical time emerges triumphant over older temporalities or ways of understanding the self after a momentous historical change. Koselleck, for instance, describes the French Revolution as a period which ‘seemed to outstrip all previous experience,’ and during which the ordinary dimensions of time ‘seemed to have

⁹ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 271.

fallen apart' – such was the rapidly increasing disconnection between experience and expectation.¹⁰ Yet although the inter-war depression was, in many senses, experienced as a similarly dramatic rupture, it cannot be seen in this same way – as the point at which a linear conception of time replaced other time-frames. Indeed, all three temporalities survived into the 1970s, where they were being readily drawn-upon by the men and women who were interviewed by the CHP. Linear narratives did not triumph over cyclical or discontinuous ones, but co-existed alongside them, with many of those interviewed using two or three different temporal frameworks within the same interview. Understandings of time within the mining communities of south Wales thus correspond closely with Koselleck's other arguments about the 'plurality' of historical time, in which 'many forms' existed, all 'superimposed on one another.'¹¹ That there was no one, sole temporality within which the inter-war years were experienced and remembered is a point that is crucial to any attempt to understand the collective memories of the 1920s and 1930s. There was no singularly authentic conception of time that was an inherent or natural way of understanding the past, or in which the men and women of the mining communities understood their experiences and told their stories.

The plurality of historical time-frames that can be seen here might also have implications for other historical and sociological studies that use interviews, and which focus on people's lives and experiences. The sociologist Jane Elliott has noted how such works have increasingly focused on 'narrative' as an analytical framework for personal testimonies, and how there is a growing 'interest in the idea that people might be thought of as having...a "narrative identity."' ¹² Many scholars have thus structured their interviews in such a way as to try to allow respondents 'to provide narrative accounts of their lives,' in the belief that these narratives 'provide good evidence about the everyday lives of research subjects and the meanings they attach to their experiences,' whilst also affording wider insights into the 'broader culture shared by a community of individuals.'¹³ The assumption of a particular temporal dimension is integral to these approaches. One of the defining features of a narrative is said to be the 'presumption that time has a uni-linear direction moving from past to present to future,' with some studies arguing that life stories are only coherent to the extent to which they are located in this specific, linear temporal context.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33, 149.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xxii.

¹² Jane Elliott, *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9, 49.

Yet the testimonies recorded by the CHP do not always conform to these theories and assumptions. People's lives were often too complex to fit into a singular, coherent narrative, or be understood within a linear conception of time. Such a structure might provide a sense of unity or overarching meaning to an individual's life story, but in doing so, it risked distorting or simplifying some experiences, and excluding others. Many thus rejected any compulsion to order their memories in this way – yet the absence of this structure did not render these accounts incoherent, indecipherable or meaningless. Instead, people mobilised a range of alternative frameworks and temporalities in their recollections, switching comfortably and intuitively between them within the same interview. This, to some extent, challenges the primacy that many studies have accorded to 'narrative' as a way of analysing personal testimonies. Whilst it was undoubtedly a crucial element of many interviews, and used widely – including by some of those recorded by the CHP – it was by no means the only way in which people told their stories or made sense of their lives and experiences. Jesse Clark, for instance, had lived through the Tonypandy riots, half-a-dozen strikes, the Great Depression and two World Wars. Yet when pressed to recognise the important and momentous nature of his experiences, he repeatedly declined to echo the grand, sweeping, linear narrative that the researcher was looking for. Upon being finally asked, 'you could say that history was being made in the valleys in those days?' he just laconically replied, 'well, history's getting made every day somewhere or other.'¹⁵

Within the south Wales coalfield, the experiences of the inter-war years were remembered in a plurality of different, overlapping and shifting temporalities. Linear or narrative based understandings of the past were neither natural nor inherent, but instead subjective and historically contingent. In this respect, this study echoes some of the arguments made by Koselleck, Hayward, Thompson and others about the nature of historical time. Unlike these works, however, it has explored conceptions of time at a popular level rather than a cultural or intellectual one. Through using both oral history interviews and sociological surveys, it thus provides some insight into how men and women within the mining communities thought about the past, present and the future. Popular understandings of time are an important historical question, as it is difficult to fully reconstruct how people thought without understanding how they conceptualised time, and how those conceptions might have changed. Raphael Samuel has warned about the dangers of 'investing the historical subject

¹⁵ SWML, AUD/326, Interview with Jesse Clark, 1969.

with a contemporary psyche or interpreting their actions in contemporary terms,' and it might be argued that there is a similar danger in terms of temporalities.¹⁶ Otherwise, there is a risk of anachronistically assuming particular ways of thinking on behalf of individuals and societies from the past who might have thought about time in very different ways.

III

Fears that the distinctive, 'alternative culture' of the south Wales miners being lost – which have been discussed throughout this study – had not been shared by everyone. Indeed, some during the 1970s had struck a far more optimistic note. Of the interviews on which this study has largely been based, one of the very last to be recorded was with Len Jeffreys, a miner and a Communist Party activist from Cwmfelinfach. Towards the end of the interview, having discussed at length his experiences of the political and industrial struggles of the inter-war years, he reflected on how:

When I was a boy, we thought we were the kings of the earth, and the only people who mattered were the miners of south Wales! Plus the miners of Scotland and the others of course. But it's broad now, there's bloody engineers who can leave you standing...so I'm optimistic about the future...the workers are bound to succeed...the thing is how to succeed with the least amount of suffering.¹⁷

Far from having ebbed away, he believed that the political and industrial consciousness that the miners had possessed when he was younger was now shared by a broad section of the working-class as a whole. For Jeffreys, the fact that this consciousness had not only been sustained, but had also expanded, was an indication that the forward march of progress through struggle was nearing a triumphant end.

There is a sad irony for the historian in listening to his words and their optimism today, given the fact that the following year was to see the election of Margaret Thatcher, and the knowledge of what was to happen to the mining communities during the 1980s and early 1990s. The 'alternative culture' that was widely believed to be being lost could still be seen in the interviews carried out in the 1970s. Whether it existed beyond that particular generation –

¹⁶ Raphael Samuel, 'Reading the signs: II. Fact grubbers and mind-readers,' in *History Workshop Journal*, No. 33, (1992), 244.

¹⁷ SWML, AUD/612, Interview with Len Jeffreys, 20 February, 1978.

or indeed, whether it was this that fuelled the epic resistance of the miners and their families across Britain during 1984-85 – is a question that goes beyond this study. So too are speculations about whether it was able to survive the defeat and the deindustrialisation that followed, or whether anything that resembles the ‘proletarian internationalism’ of the inter-war years still exists, given recent political developments in the now former mining areas of south Wales.

Yet, whilst the political radicalism and industrial militancy for which the miners were renowned, and questions about its existence or survival are important, an excessive focus on this ‘alternative culture’ risks giving a distorted and one-dimensional picture of the south Wales coalfield. In reality, the mining communities were far more nuanced and complex – as the researchers of the CHP and historians like Francis and Smith were well aware. Indeed, it was in the distinctive individuality of the men and women of the pit villages and the variety and diversity of their communities, that the nature of the coalfield was most clearly revealed – just as much as in the particular political and industrial consciousness that was so strikingly captured in works like *The Fed*. Emphasising the importance of individual experiences and attitudes – and, in the context of this study, individual memory – does not mean disputing or challenging the importance of the collective however – a focus on one need not be at the other’s expense. Individual attitudes might often have stood independent or even defiant of a wider consciousness, but to remain individual did not automatically entail being excluded from the collective. Instead, the thoughts, attitudes and memories of individual men and women were often integral to the collective consciousness that they themselves had shaped or created.

The two major arguments of this study – about the nature of the relationship between individual and collective memory, and conceptions of time within the mining communities – are both about collective ways of thinking about the past, but both arguments are rooted in the analysis of the individual recollections recorded by the CHP. Indeed, it might be argued that is difficult to fully understand or reconstruct popular consciousness without also examining the attitudes and memories of individuals on their own terms. In doing so, this study provides some answers to questions about whether an ‘alternative cultural pattern’ existed in the mining communities of south Wales, whilst also offering an explanation for how individual men and women related to and interacted with a broader collective consciousness of the past. Furthermore, in examining how the mining communities remembered, reacted to and were affected by the momentous events of those two decades between the wars, it

provides some insight into how popular consciousness can be affected by brutal ruptures and dislocations that dramatically transform societies and radically restructure the ways in which they relate to the wider world.

Appendix I.

Information on the Coalfield History Project interviews.

How the interviews were selected.

This study was based on a selection of 198 of the oral history interviews held in the South Wales Miners' Library at Swansea University. The majority of these interviews were selected from the first Coalfield History Project that was carried out by Hywel Francis, David Egan, Alun Morgan and Merfyn Jones between 1972 and 1974. This project was broken down into a number of studies, each of which focused on a particular group within the coalfield, from 'local leaders,' to people involved with the miners' institutes, to men and women who lived in certain villages.

The interviews used here were primarily chosen from the following studies:

Abercraf Community study (11 interviews).

Bedlinog Community study (19 interviews).

Mardy Community study (20 interviews).

Rank-and-file study (17 interviews).

South Wales Miners' Federation Founder Member study (23 interviews).

There was a second Coalfield History Project that was carried out between 1979 and 1982, whilst a number of other smaller oral history projects have been carried out by other researchers and are also held as part of audio resources of the South Wales Coalfield Collection. In particular, this study used one project carried out by Philippa Dolan in 1975, and one by Alun Burge in 1978. These were:

Women's work-experiences in the Swansea Valley (36 interviews).

Nine Mile Point colliery study (26 interviews).

The five studies carried out by the first CHP, and the two independent studies together comprise over three-quarters of the interviews selected. These seven studies were chosen because they were the most representative of rank-and-file experience (other studies focused explicitly on union officials or local leaders for example), and because they included the vast majority of the interviews that were carried out with women. The remaining forty-six

interviews were chosen to try to offset the imbalances in the seven studies as much as was possible. Recordings were chosen either because they were carried out with women, or because they were from different areas of the coalfield to the rest of the interviews.

Of the 198 recordings used, 12 were secondary interviews that were carried out with people who had already been interviewed once. However, some interviews were with two, or sometimes even three separate people at the same time, and the total number of unique individuals that were spoken to (after secondary interviews are subtracted and interviews with multiple people are accounted for) was 203. The 203 people can be broken down as follows:

There were 129 men and 74 women.

In terms of geography, the breakdown is complicated by the movement within the coalfield (as was discussed at several points). Bearing in mind these caveats, and counting the area in which the individual concerned had finally settled as the area in which they lived, the interviews can be categorised as follows:

41 were from Gwent (the Eastern valley, the Ebbw Fach and the Ebbw Fawr valleys and the Sirhowy valley).

31 were from east Glamorgan (the Rhymney and Taff valleys).

56 were from mid-Glamorgan (the Cynon, Rhondda Fach, Rhondda Fawr, Ogmore, Garw and Llynfi valleys).

13 were from west-Glamorgan (the Afan and Dulais valleys and the Vale of Neath).

61 were from the Anthracite coalfield in the western most part of Glamorgan and into Carmarthenshire (the Swansea, Amman and Gwendraeth valleys).

1 interviewee (Margery Fasseem – AUD/35) was from London.

Breaking down the interviews into 'activists' and 'rank-and-file' miners is both difficult and inherently problematic – as has been discussed. As a tentative and very loose attempt at definition, I have categorised miners who held some official position on the lodge, or who were members of a political party as 'activists', and everyone else as 'rank-and-file,' though this is not, of course, without its problems. Under such definitions:

There are 65 activists, and 135 rank-and-file miners.

The majority of the people interviewed (105) were born between 1890 and 1910, with the youngest born in 1927 and the oldest in 1878. For 54 people however, there was no indication of the year in which they were born, so it is unfortunately impossible to provide a detailed breakdown.

More information on the interviews carried out by the first Coalfield History Project can be found in *The Final Report of the Coalfield History Project* (1974), held at the South Wales Miners' Library. Unfortunately there is very little further information on the interviews carried out by Philippa Dolan and Alun Burge.

Index of interviews.

Provided below is a brief index of the interviews that have been used in this study. Each interview, together with its reference code, the date it was recorded and the study to which it belonged is provided. The gender and (in some cases, approximate) year of birth is also included.

The seventh column (headed A/O) refers to whether the individual in the interview was either an activist (A) or a member of the rank-and-file (O) – according to the admittedly problematic definitions set out above.

The final six columns of the table relate to what was discussed within the interviews.

M – Whether the individual concerned had moved from one valley to another, or had left the coalfield altogether at some point in their lives. ‘Y’ indicates that the person had moved, ‘O’ indicates that there was no reference made to any movement or migration.

SK – Whether soup kitchens were remembered. Again, ‘Y’ indicates that they were recalled, ‘O’ signifies that there was no mention of them.

HT – Whether the person remembered the ‘hard times’ of the 1920s and 1930s, i.e. experiences of poverty and/or unemployment. Again, ‘Y’ indicates that they were recalled, ‘O’ signifies that there was no mention of them.

D – Whether the person recalled an accident, death or injury resulting from work underground, or otherwise talked about the dangers of the pit. Again, ‘Y’ indicates that they were recalled, ‘O’ signifies that there was no mention of them.

P – Whether the person had positive ‘P’ or negative ‘N’ memories of the police, or did not mention them at all ‘O’.

B – Whether the person had remembered blacklegs. ‘Y’ indicates that there were recalled, ‘O’ signifies that there was no mention of them.

These six particular memories were chosen because they are amongst the most central memories to this study as a whole. Ideally many more memories (of the summer during strikes, of direct or indirect experiences of unemployment, or whether the accidents referred to were roof-falls, explosions, industrial diseases etc.) would also be included in the table, but unfortunately, it was impossible to fit this all into a printable document.

AUD	Name	Date	Study	Gender	Year of birth	A/O	M	SK	HT	D	P	B
11	Lil and Goff Price	25.10.74	1974-79 Interviews	F	?	A	0	0	0	0	0	0
35	Margery Fassem	4.2.82	Rank-and-File (79-82)	F	1911	A	0	0	Y	0	0	0
55	Glyn Williams	8.1.80	Rank-and-File (79-82)	M	?	A	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
76	Hywel Jefferies	15.11.82	Rank-and-File (79-82)	M	?	O	0	0	0	Y	0	Y
81	Bryn Thomas	23.11.72	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	1905	O	0	0	Y	Y	N	0
83	Thomas Thomas	3.8.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	c.1884	O	0	Y	0	0	0	Y
86	Mr Maddy	7.74	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	1895	O	Y	0	Y	0	N	0
87	Mrs Maddy	7.74	Rank-and-File (72-74)	F	1897	O	Y	0	0	0	N	0
98	Mavis Llewellyn	20.5.74	Local Leaders	F	c. 1908	A	0	Y	Y	Y	N	0
107	Margaret Plummer	1983	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1922	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
111	Ernest Fervert Simons	2.2.81	Rank-and-File (79-82)	M	1906	O	Y	Y	N	Y	0	0
114	Unknown Woman	1983	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
135	Nan Jones	3.6.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
164	John Morgan Evans	13.6.73	Mardy Community Study	M	c.1912	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
165	Trevor Davies	3.7.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1902	O	0	0	Y	Y	N	0
166	Mrs Trevor Davies	3.7.73	Mardy Community Study	F	1903	O	0	0	Y	0	0	0
168	Ben Davies	11.6.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1903	A	Y	Y	Y	0	N	0
169	Frank Williams	15.5.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1899	A	0	Y	Y	Y	N	0
170	Lee Hutchinson	13.5.74	Miners' Institutes	M	1904	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
171	Idris Cox	9.6.73	Adult Education	M	1900	A	0	0	0	0	N	0
172	Mrs John Morgan Evans	11.6.73	Mardy Community Study	F	?	O	0	0	Y	0	N	Y
174	George Baker	18.7.74	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	?	A	0	0	0	0	0	0
175	Mrs Eddie Lloyd	18.7.74	Rank-and-File (72-74)	F	1910	O	Y	0	0	0	0	Y
176	Tom Adlam	18.7.74	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	?	A	0	0	0	0	0	0
178	WP Bowen	72-74	SWMF Founder Members	M	1885	O	0	0	0	Y	N	Y
179	T Jones	72-74	SWMF Founder Members	M	1880	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0

180	Mr William Rosser Jones	4.7.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1894	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
181	Mrs William Rosser Jones	4.7.73	Mardy Community Study	F	?	O	0	Y	0	0	0	0
182	Arthur Morgan	4.7.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1899	O	0	0	0	Y	0	0
183	Maria Williams	1.7.73	Mardy Community Study	F	1910	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
184	Reg Fine	2.7.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1908	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	Y
186	Gwilym Williams	3.7.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1885	O	0	Y	Y	N	0	0
187	Joe Ball	4.7.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1927	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
188	WC Davies	8.73	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	1900	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	Y
190	John Williams	17.5.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1894	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0
191	Octavius Morgan	17.5.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1902	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0
192	Mr and Mrs Fred Morris	18.5.73	Mardy Community Study	M; F	1902 /	A	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0
193	Will Picton	9.5.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1902	A	Y	0	Y	Y	N	0
194	Will Picton	18.5.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1902	A	Y	0	Y	0	0	0
195	Will 'Box' Thomas	21.5.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1897	A	0	0	Y	0	0	0
196	Will 'Box' Thomas	30.5.73	Mardy Community Study	M	1897	A	0	0	0	Y	0	0
197	Thomas Page	5.7.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1879	O	0	0	0	Y	0	0
198	Eddie Thomas	4.2.74	Miners' Institutes	M	1898	A	0	0	0	0	0	0
200	Nicolas & Casimira Duenos	11.12.72	Abercraf Community Study	M;F	1886 / 1892	O	Y	0	0	0	0	0
201	Henry Lewis	4.12.72	Abercraf Community Study	M	1896	A	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	0
206	Rhys Morgan Watkins	13.12.72	Abercraf Community Study	M	1904	O	Y	Y	0	Y	0	0
207	Rees Brynmor Davies	13.12.72	Abercraf Community Study	M	1903	A	Y	0	Y	Y	0	0
208	WC Thomas	9.7.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1885	A	0	0	Y	0	0	0
209	A James Martin	11.7.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1885	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
210	Edgar Evans	14.7.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1900	A	Y	0	Y	Y	N	Y
212	Edgar Evans	9.7.75	1974-79 Interviews	M	1900	A	0	Y	0	0	0	Y
213	Edgar Evans	30.11.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1900	A	Y	0	0	Y	N	0
214	Penry Davies	20.10.73	Abercraf Community Study	M	c. 1888	O	Y	0	0	Y	0	0
215	Walter Powell	14.1.74	Miners' Institutes	M	c. 1907	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
216	Lucy James	19.4.74	Abercraf Community Study	F	1904	O	Y	0	0	Y	0	0
217	O. Edwards	12.11.73	Local Leaders	M	1903	A	Y	0	Y	Y	0	0

218	Mrs Rees	11.73	Rank-and-File (72-74)	F	?	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
219	Del Davies	9.5.74	Abercraf Community Study	M	1923	O	0	0	0	Y	0	0
220	Henry John	1.12.72	Abercraf Community Study	M	1900	A	0	Y	0	0	N	Y
221	Jim Evans	29.11.72	Abercraf Community Study	M	1904	O	Y	Y	Y	0	0	0
222	Dick Cooke	24.1.74	Abercraf Community Study	M	1905	A	0	Y	Y	Y	N	0
223	James Vale	10.5.74	Abercraf Community Study	M	1898	A	Y	Y	0	Y	N	0
224	Haydn Thomas	4.74	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1896	O	0	0	0	Y	0	0
225	Haydn Thomas	5.74	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1896	O	0	0	0	Y	0	0
226	Benny Cooke	4.74	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1914	A	0	0	0	Y	N	Y
227	Morgan Lewis Jones	2.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	?	A	0	0	0	0	0	0
228	Morgan Lewis Jones	6.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	?	A	0	0	0	0	0	0
229	H Roberts	6.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1900	A	0	0	0	0	0	Y
230	Watkin Gittins	15.2.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M; F	1903	O	0	0	Y	0	N	Y
231	Ned Gittins	8.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1899	A	0	0	Y	0	N	0
233	Mr and Mrs I Rosser & MM Morgan	27.3.74	Bedlinog Community Study	M; M; F	?	O	Y	0	0	Y	N	0
235	Norman Thomas & JB Thomas	6.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M; M	? / 1905	A	Y	0	Y	0	0	Y
236	WH Davies	29.11.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1903	A	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
237	Bob Morris	9.11.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1915	O	0	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
238	Dai Daniel Rees	6.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1902	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	Y
239	Albert Davies	8.11.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1902	O	0	0	0	Y	0	0
240	Delwyn Jones	10.9.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1903	O	Y	0	0	Y	0	0
241	Tom Jenkin	28.6.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1884	O	0	Y	0	0	0	0
242	Joseph Davies	6.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1880	O	Y	0	0	Y	0	0
243	Mr and Mrs Harry Edwards	6.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1905	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
246	Ned Gittins	4.4.75	1974-79 Interviews	M	1899	A	0	Y	0	0	0	0
247	Dai Coity Davies	4.4.75	1974-79 Interviews	M	1917	A	Y	Y	Y	0	P/N	0
249	David Brown	2.7.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1882	O	Y	Y	0	Y	0	0
254	George Hughes	8.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	?	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
255	Albert Morgan	8.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1878	O	0	0	0	Y	0	0

257	Glyn Williams	21.5.74	NUM Officials Study	M	1908	A	0	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
263	Dai Dan Evans	5.12.72	NUM Officials Study	M	1898	A	0	Y	0	Y	N	0
264	Dai Dan Evans	7.8.73	NUM Officials Study	M	1898	A	0	0	0	0	0	Y
265	Gwilym Williams	17.5.74	Miners' Institutes	M	c. 1918	A	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
266	DM Davies	22.5.74	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	1911	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
268	WH Coleman	5.7.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1883	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0
270	John Jones	5.7.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1881	O	Y	0	0	Y	0	0
282	Len Williams	21.5.74	Adult Education	M	1901	A	0	0	0	Y	0	0
285	Anne Thomas	28.11.73	Labour Party Leaders	F	c. 1905	A	0	0	Y	0	P	Y
286	George Thomas	5.11.73	Adult Education	M	c. 1898	A	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
295	Myrddin Hywel Powell	19.9.75	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	1910	O	0	Y	0	0	N	0
300	PJ Matthews	7.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1882	O	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
301	Jim Minton	8.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1882	A	Y	Y	Y	Y	0	0
302	Harry Howells	8.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	1903	A	0	0	Y	Y	N	Y
303	B. Edwards	23.7.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1886	O	0	0	Y	Y	P	Y
304	Mr and Mrs F Saint	23.7.73	SWMF Founder Members	M; F	1882 / ?	O	0	0	0	Y	N	0
305	WT Curnick	17.7.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1884	A	Y	0	Y	Y	0	0
307	GC Nelves	16.9.73	Local Leaders	M	1898	A	0	Y	0	0	0	0
308	Jake Brookes	13.9.73	SWMF Founder Members	M	1900	A	0	0	0	Y	P/N	0
309	George Protheroe	10.72	Local Leaders	M	1892	A	0	0	Y	0	0	0
310	Abel Morgan	19.10.72	SWMF Founder Members	M	1878	A	0	Y	0	0	0	0
311	Abel Morgan	9.10.72	SWMF Founder Members	M	1878	A	Y	Y	0	Y	0	0
312	Ernest Lewis	2.10.72	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	1888	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
313	Ernest Lewis	16.10.72	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	1888	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
314	Goronwy Jones	10.72	Local Leaders	M	1900	A	0	Y	Y	0	N	Y
315	William Smith	5.74	SWMF Founder Members	M	1880	O	Y	Y	0	Y	0	0
316	Oliver Powell	29.11.73	Miners' Institutes	M	?	A	0	Y	Y	0	N	Y
323	WH Taylor	8.73	Local Leaders	M	1890	A	0	0	Y	Y	N	0
324	Bert Huntley	15.2.73	Cambrian Combine	M	c.1889	O	0	0	0	Y	N	0
325	Jesse Clark	72-74	Cambrian Combine	M	1886	O	0	Y	0	0	N	Y

326	Jesse Clark	1969	Cambrian Combine	M	1886	O	0	0	0	Y	N	0
327	Mrs M Evans	1969	Cambrian Combine	F	?	O	0	0	0	Y	P	0
328	Tom Davies	12.73	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	1900	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
329	Phil Abrahams	14.1.74	Local Leaders	M	?	A	0	0	Y	0	N	0
342	Nancy Davies	6.5.74	Rank-and-File (72-74)	F	1921	O	Y	Y	Y	0	0	0
344	William Knipe	2.2.73	Cambrian Combine	M	?	O	Y	0	0	0	P	Y
346	Glyn Evans	5.3.73	Adult Education	M	?	A	0	Y	0	0	N	0
347	Max Goldberg	6.9.72	Adult Education	M	c. 1900	A	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
348	Mr & Mrs Bryn Lewis	28.1.73	Cambrian Combine	M; F	?	O	0	Y	0	0	P/N	Y
349	Tom Hopkins	7.5.74	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M	1903	O	0	0	0	N	N	0
350	Mr and Mrs Ivor Thomas	5.6.74	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M; F	1899 / ?	O	0	0	0	Y	0	0
351	Mr and Mrs Ivor Thomas	10.6.74	Rank-and-File (72-74)	M; F	1899 / ?	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
376	Mrs Davies	6.5.61	Big Hewer	F	?	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
394	Mr and Mrs DJ Davies	14.10.74	1974-79 Interviews	M; F	?	A	Y	0	0	0	0	0
395	Merfyn Payne	18.6.75	1974-79 Interviews	M	1883	A	0	Y	0	0	P/N	Y
396	JL Williams	24.4.73	Bedlinog Community Study	M	c. 1892	A	Y	0	Y	0	0	0
399	Mrs Landon	13.3.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	0	Y	0	0	0
447	Evan John	2.12.75	1974-79 Interviews	M	1910	A	0	Y	0	Y	N	0
448	Lillian May Price	25.10.74	1974-79 Interviews	F	1908	A	Y	Y	0	0	N	Y
450	William Thomas	19.12.74	1974-79 Interviews	M	1900	O	0	Y	0	0	P/N	Y
453	Mrs DJ Williams	14.8.73	Local Leaders	F	?	A	0	0	0	Y	0	0
454	Mrs John	9.1.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	0	Y	0	0	0
457	Miss Jones	18.3.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1897	O	0	0	0	Y	0	0
458	Edith Jones	8.4.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1892	O	0	Y	0	0	0	0
459	Mrs Richards	15.4.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1908	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0

460	Mrs Roderick	30.5.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	Y	Y	0	Y	0	0
461	Mrs Alexander	29.4.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	0	Y	0	P	0
462	Mrs Thomas	1.5.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1908	O	0	Y	0	0	0	0
463	Miss Morgan	6.5.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1888	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
464	Mrs Hannah Morgan	13.5.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
470	Miss Thomas	18.3.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	0	0	0	N	0
471	Mrs Prosser	18.3.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0
472	Mrs Morgan	14.3.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1893	O	0	Y	Y	0	0	0
473	Mrs Taylor	21.3.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0
474	Mrs Phillips	21.4.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	c.1894	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0
475	Agnes Owen & Mary Jones	17.4.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F; F	?	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
476	Miss Griffiths	5.5.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	Y	0	0	0	0
477	Mrs Jones	27.5.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1910	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0
478	Mrs Lewis	30.5.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
479	Mary Morgan	29.5.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	0	Y	0	0	0

480	Nellie Jones, Kittie Williams & Agnes Owen	23.4.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F; F; F	?	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
481	Bessie Webb & Hannah Evans	24.4.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F; F	?	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	N
482	Bessie Hopkins	23.4.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0
483	Myra Davies	28.4.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
484	Mrs Thomas	10.6.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1915	O	0	Y	0	0	0	0
485	Mrs Williams	11.6.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1916	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
486	Elizabeth Morgan	11.6.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	c. 1906	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	0
487	Mrs Jones	27.6.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	0	Y	0	0	0
488	Mrs Exon	29.6.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
489	Gwen Terry	16.6.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	1909	O	0	0	0	Y	0	0
490	Mrs Kelly	27.6.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	0	O	Y	0	0	0	0	0
491	Diana Davies	25.6.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	?	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
492	Mrs Edith Edwards	26.6.75	Women in the Swansea Valley	F	c.1910	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
553	Eben Jones	72-74	Tumble Community Study	M	1883	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
566	Lew Howells	?	1974-79 Interviews	M	?	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
575	Mrs Brown, Mrs Miller & Bob Boole	?	Miscellaneous (Misc.)	F; F; M	?	O	0	Y	Y	0	N	0

612	Len Jeffreys	20.2.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	?	A	0	0	0	0	N	0
613	Elizabeth Roberts	12.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	F	1888	O	0	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
614	John Holland	13.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1905	O	Y	Y	0	0	N	0
615	Vida Gilchrist	22.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	F	1898	O	0	0	0	0	0	0
616	Eddie Williams	13.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1916	O	0	0	Y	0	0	Y
617	Ronald Powe	20.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1927	O	0	0	Y	0	0	0
618	Evan Jones	20.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1899	O	Y	0	Y	Y	0	Y
619	Idris Suter	21.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1891	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	Y
620	Evan Hopkins	21.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1899	A	Y	0	Y	0	N	0
621	Elved Evans	4.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1910	O	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
622	Norman Evans	28.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1890	A	Y	0	0	Y	0	0
623	Ray Williams	24.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1905	O	0	Y	0	0	N	Y
624	Mr and Mrs Len Evans	31.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M; F	1905	O	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
625	Mrs Moon	24.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	F	1908	O	0	Y	0	0	0	Y
626	Tom John	31.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1895	A	0	Y	0	Y	0	Y
627	Mr & Mrs Ivor Huggins	1.2.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M; F	1904 / 1913	A	Y	Y	Y	0	N	Y
628	Jack Rowe	28.4.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1900	A	Y	Y	Y	0	N	Y
629	Windsor Gregory	29.3.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	?	O	Y	0	0	Y	0	Y
630	George Nicholas and Reg Gibbs	19.4.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M; M	1906 / 1909	O	Y	Y	Y	0	N	Y
631	Sam Butcher	13.4.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1894	O	Y	Y	0	0	0	Y
633	Lillian Tanner	5.4.78	Nine Mile Point Study	F	1910	O	0	Y	Y	Y	0	Y
634	Mr and Mrs Arthur Roberts	7.4.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M; F	1900	A	0	0	Y	0	N	0
635	Geordie Hardesty	16.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1900	O	0	0	Y	Y	0	0
636	Trevor Humphries	9.1.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1902	A	0	Y	0	Y	N	Y
637	Mrs (Rosa) Dowling	7.4.78	Nine Mile Point Study	F	1897	O	Y	Y	0	Y	N	0
638	Harold Jones	5.4.78	Nine Mile Point Study	M	1900	A	0	Y	0	Y	0	0
658	Harry Davies	19.1.77	Misc. (74-79)	M	1897	A	0	0	Y	Y	N	Y

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