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**Revisiting the Legacy of Deindustrialisation: Towards a History of Emotion,  
Camaraderie, and Class in a Former Coalmining Borough in South  
Yorkshire, 1970s to the Present**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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**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.....

## Abstract

This thesis is centred around the memories and experiences of ex-coal miners in and surrounding Barnsley, South Yorkshire. It is a socio-cultural history that takes coalmining and coalfield deindustrialisation (alongside regeneration) as its foci. Drawing heavily on the oral histories of ex-miners, it illustrates the symbolic and economic violence of deindustrialisation and its emotional legacy by bringing together an analysis of emotion, camaraderie, and class in men's working lives from 1970s to the present. It outlines three main arguments. Firstly, it argues that a stigmatisation of people and places persists in a web of discursive representations of coal in the twenty-first century. Representations involving moral condemnation, condescending compassion, and class erasure are discerned as a cultural legacy of deindustrialisation. Many interviewees have internalised these historical and contemporary representations, affecting how they remember and render coalmining. Secondly, arising from men's testimonies was a reoccurring motif of camaraderie. Situating itself within deindustrialisation scholarship, it argues that camaraderie has perhaps been overlooked as an analytical tool and historical experience. Employing Monique Scheer's concept of 'emotional practices,' it illustrates how camaraderie was inextricably linked to men's subjectivity and the exercise of power, cutting across dimensions of class, masculinity, and age. Lamentations over the loss of camaraderie in 'new' workplaces signify a more profound rupture in men's emotional lives; it disrupts how they express and experience emotion, important in the constitution of a collective sense of self. Lastly, taking into consideration a politics of 'moving on' permeating regeneration and neoliberal discourse, it argues that utterances 'move on' and 'get on' are meaningful ways ex-miners understand and respond to the legacy of deindustrialisation. These emotive responses can affect conceptions of time, and memories and experiences of industrial closures, and are instrumental in accommodating the structural violence of deindustrialisation and its aftermath.

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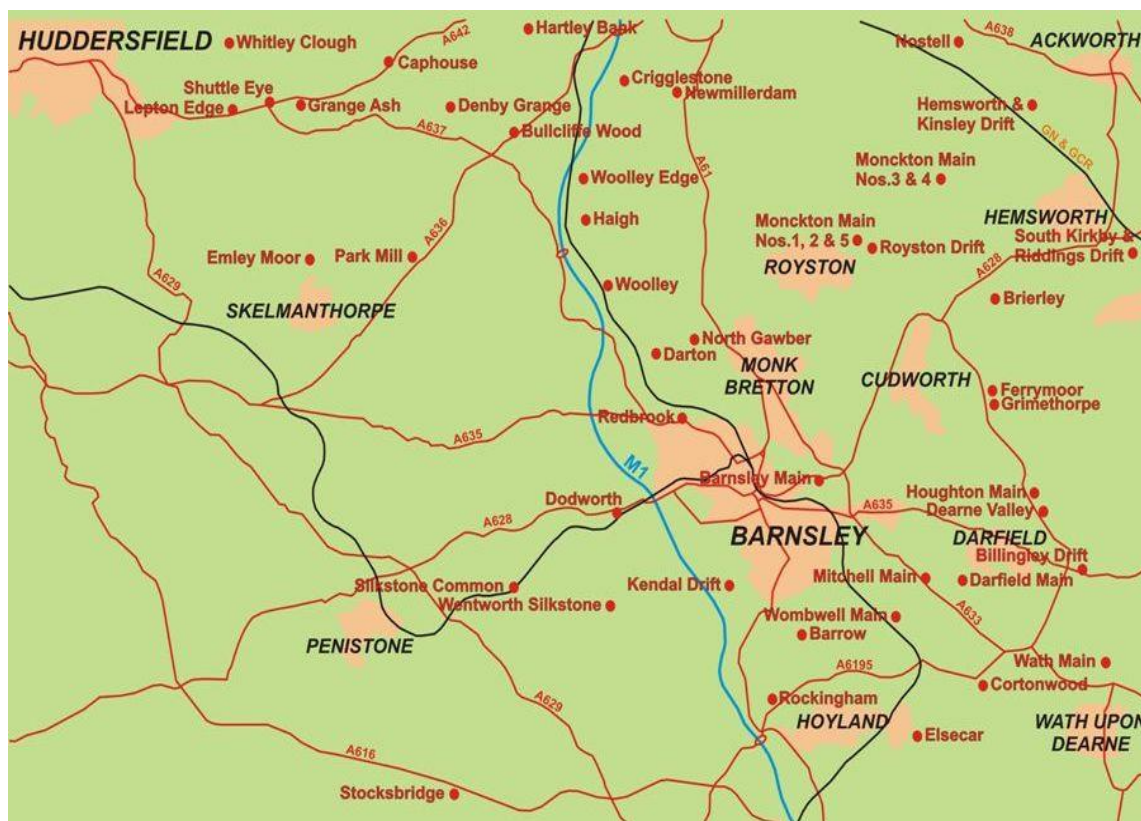
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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Edward Jan Kadziorski, a former coal miner at Wentworth Silkstone Colliery in Barnsley, South Yorkshire.

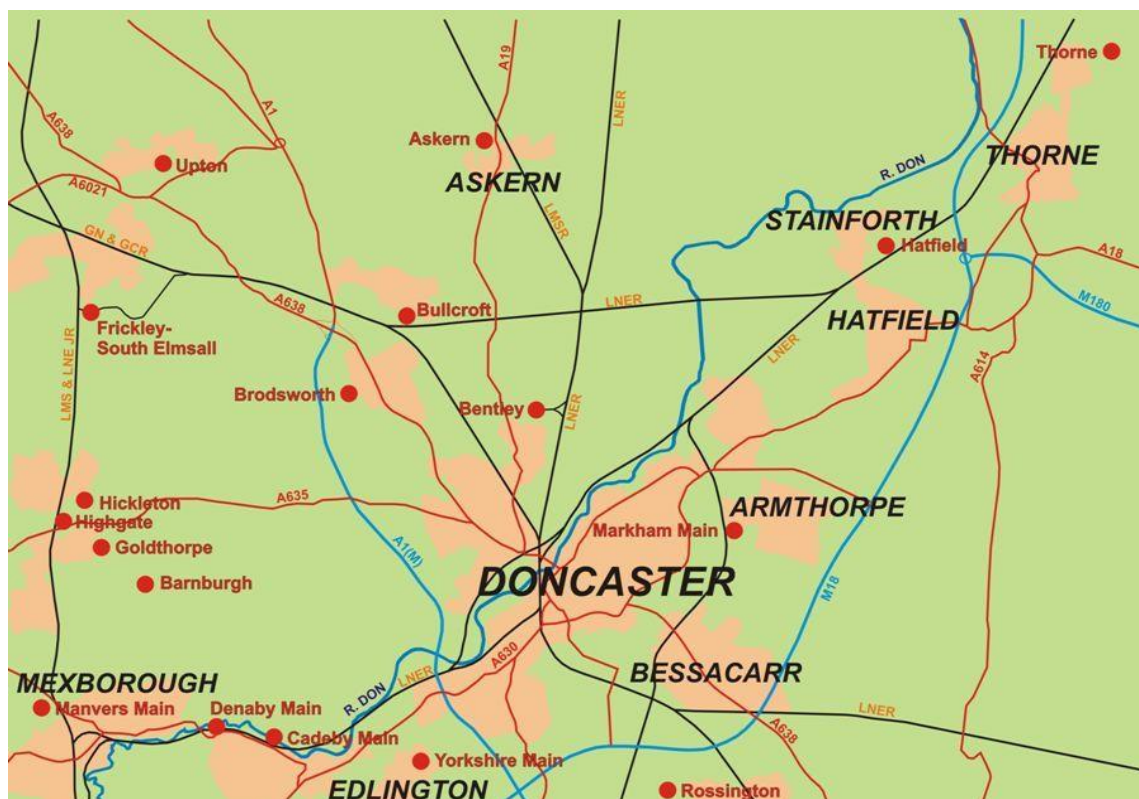


### Map of the Barnsley Coalfield After Nationalisation 1947



Source: Northern Mine Research Society. <https://www.nmrs.org.uk/mines-map/coal-mining-in-the-british-isles/yorkshire-coalfield/barnsley>.

### Map of the Doncaster Coalfield After Nationalisation 1947



Source: Northern Mine Research Society: <https://www.nmrs.org.uk/mines-map/coal-mining-in-the-british-isles/yorkshire-coalfield/doncaster>.

## Introduction

This study is centred around the memories and experiences of ex-coal miners in and surrounding Barnsley, South Yorkshire. It is a socio-cultural history that takes coalmining and deindustrialisation (alongside regeneration) as its foci. Notwithstanding the recent encouragement in scholarship to expand our ‘spatial and temporal focus,’ this study investigates a ‘traditional’ industrial region associated with white working-class communities.<sup>1</sup> But it does not, as Steven High worries, contribute to the ‘coding of the working class as white.’<sup>2</sup> Rather, by illustrating the symbolic and economic violence of deindustrialisation—and the industrial experience—it looks to bring coal miners into dialogue with historical and contemporary workers from within and outside of the UK—a far cry from earlier attempts to construct the figure of the miner as an ‘archetypal proletarian.’<sup>3</sup>

The Metropolitan Borough of Barnsley, one of four boroughs of South Yorkshire formed under the Local Government Act 1972, is located north of Sheffield and South of Leeds. With a population of 245,000, the region covers 127 square miles, stretching across the Pennines uplands in the west to the Dearne Valley lowlands in the east. Marked by regional differences in landscape and affluence in the west, a large number of residents reside in the more urbanised areas in the north, east, and south, comprising towns and villages of the former coalfield.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Lawson, ‘Making Sense of the ruins: The historiography of deindustrialisation and its continued relevance in neoliberal times,’ *History Compass* 18 (2020) 8. British historian Ben Jones has also encouraged a shift in focus from the ‘traditional’ areas of London and the ‘North’ in historical studies on working-class life. See Ben Jones, *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England: Community, identity and social memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2012) 2.

<sup>2</sup> Steven High, ‘A New Era in deindustrialisation studies?’, accessed September 30, 2019, [www.workingclassstudies.wordpress.com/2019/09/30/a-new-era-in-deindustrialization-studies](http://www.workingclassstudies.wordpress.com/2019/09/30/a-new-era-in-deindustrialization-studies).

<sup>3</sup> For critiques on the figure of the coal miner as a stereotype, see Royden Harrison, *Independent Collier: The Coal Miner as Archetypal Proletarian Reconsidered*, ed. Royden Harrison (Brighton: Harvester, 1979); David Howell, ‘Goodbye To All That?: A review of literature on the 1984/5 miners’ strike,’ *Work, Employment and Society* 1 (1987); and Peter Ackers, ‘Life after Death: Mining History without a Coal Industry,’ *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* 1 (1996).

<sup>4</sup> Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, ‘Barnsley Our Borough Profile 2019,’ accessed August 5, 2020, <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/media/17269/our-borough-profile-20190724.pdf>.

Identifying Barnsley with a 'coalfield' locates it in 'time' and 'space.' As Doreen Massey demonstrates, any local place is 'always already a product in part of "global" forces...' <sup>5</sup> At the same time, Massey argues, 'The identity of places is very much bound up with the *histories* which are told of them, *how* those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant.' <sup>6</sup> As local historian Brian Elliot points out, Barnsley is often thought of as having 'no history before the Industrial Revolution.' On the contrary, retail shops and markets 'gave Barnsley both character and life' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. <sup>7</sup>

What follows in this study then is a slice of history of Barnsley and Britain from the 1970s to the present. Though it begins by telling a familiar history of coalmining and coalfield deindustrialisation, it attempts to tell this history in a different way by focusing on the interrelationship between emotion, camaraderie, and class, bringing together stories of hardship, resiliency, and exploitation in men's working lives.

It presents three main arguments. Firstly, it argues that a stigmatisation of people and place persists in a web of cultural representations of coal in the twenty-first century. Marginalisation often occurs against the backdrop of political or cultural tensions; discursive practices involving moral condemnation, condescending compassion, and class erasure can also be discerned as a cultural legacy of deindustrialisation. Many ex-miners have internalised these contemporary and historical representations, affecting how they remember and render coalmining in their oral testimonies.

Secondly, arising from men's self-representations of coalmining was an appeal to camaraderie. Situating itself within deindustrial scholarship, this thesis argues that camaraderie has been

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<sup>5</sup> Doreen Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts,' *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995) 183.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Elliot, *The Making of Barnsley* (Barnsley: Wharnccliffe Books, 1986) 1.

overlooked—in favour of community—as a concept and historical experience. A closer look at the everyday practices, lived relationships, and emotional experiences of camaraderie reveals how it was inextricably linked with the circulation of feeling and power at work. By conceptualising camaraderie as an ‘emotional practice,’ I show how interviewees’ lamentations over the loss of a workplace camaraderie signifies a profound rupture in men’s emotional lives; it disrupts how they express and experience emotion, important in the constitution of self and a sense of the collective.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, this study explores the legacy of deindustrialisation and regeneration. There remains a mood of betrayal and anger, and resiliency and uncertainty, amongst many ex-miners and in ex-mining villages. Taking into consideration the politics of ‘moving on’ in neoliberal and regeneration discourse, and the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation,’ this thesis argues that the utterances ‘move on’ and ‘get on’ are meaningful ways ex-miners make sense of and respond to pit closures now and in the past.<sup>9</sup> Firstly, they are useful in countering the symbolic violence accompanying negative characterisations of being ‘stuck in the past.’ Secondly, they are practical ways of adapting to the ‘internalised uncertainties’ of work and its loss.<sup>10</sup> These expressions can affect conceptions of time and memories and experiences of industrial closures, and are instrumental in accommodating the ‘structural violence’ of coalfield deindustrialisation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Monique Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History?) A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion,’ *History and Theory* 51 (2012).

<sup>9</sup> Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation: Working-Class Writing and Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>11</sup> The work of Steven High is influential here. High conceives of deindustrialisation in the context of the ‘structural violence of capitalism’; he describes it as a ‘slow,’ ‘attritional,’ and ‘class-based’ violence, often overlooked because of how we conceive of injustices. Placing an emphasis on job loss, displacement, and invisibility, High frames industrial closures as evidence of structural violence. See Steven High, ‘The “Normalised Quiet of Unseen Power”: Recognising the Structural Violence of Deindustrialisation as Loss,’ *Urban History Review* 48 (2021) 98.

### A Political-Economy of Coalfield Deindustrialisation

Although this study is concerned with the socio-cultural aspects of industrial work and closures, it begins by looking at the decline of the British coal industry. With a focus on Barnsley and South Yorkshire, it illustrates that the end of deep-coalmining was not inevitable, nor linear, but marred by political-economic conflict. It shows how the pace of closures in the 1980s to 1990s impacted coalfield regeneration. Bringing together a reading of deindustrialisation with regeneration, themes of class and class struggle are highlighted.<sup>12</sup> Any understanding of people's memories and experiences of work and its loss need to be grounded in these political-economic contexts.

It was not until the opening of the Barnsley canal and the development of railways that Barnsley became known as a 'mining town.'<sup>13</sup> Against a backdrop of coalmining catastrophes, technological revolutions facilitated South Yorkshire's industrialisation in the early 1900s.<sup>14</sup> With Barnsley as its major locality, situated upon the Barnsley Bed seam, South Yorkshire coal was renowned: 'As well as being exported, it was heavily used by steamship lines, railway companies, manufacturing industry and for power generation over the whole of the eastern and southern counties of England.'<sup>15</sup> Inter-war trade depressions, alongside 'internecine competition' between small colliery owners, however, saw British collieries decrease by 'one half' by the end of the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> More than 2,000 miners were out of work in Barnsley in 1931, with unemployment levels as high as 60 per cent in the mid-1930s.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This should not be read as a history of economic regeneration, but rather as illustrative of some of the ways regenerative efforts have been impacted by pit closures.

<sup>13</sup> Elliot, *The Making of Barnsley*, 78.

<sup>14</sup> Pit disasters included a flood at Husker Pit in 1838, an explosion at Lundwood Colliery in 1857, and an explosion at Swaithes Main in 1875. See Andrew Vine, 'Shock waves for town left with single pit,' *Yorkshire Post*, October 14, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Hill, *The South Yorkshire Coalfield: A History and Development*, 2001, quoted in John Kirk with Steve Jefferys and Christine Wall, 'Representing Identity and Work in Transition: The Case of South Yorkshire Coal-mining Communities in the UK,' in *Changing Work and Community Identities in European Regions: Perspectives on the Past and Present*, ed. John Kirk, Sylvie Contrepois, and Steve Jefferys (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 194.

<sup>16</sup> David Waddington et al., *Out of the Ashes? The Social Impact of Industrial Contraction and Regeneration on Britain's Mining Communities* (London: The Stationary Office, 2001) 10.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Beresford, 'Coal, coal mining and the enterprise culture: A study of Doncaster' (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2013) 125-126.

Although a sense of optimism accompanied the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946, the National Coal Board systemically shut down ‘smaller’ and ‘less efficient’ mines afterwards.<sup>18</sup> Without a ‘clear policy on how to keep the industry working efficiently,’ partly due to the pace of nationalisation, rationalisation occurred in the 1950s.<sup>19</sup> In the 1960s, cheap imported oil from the Middle East and natural gas from the North Sea, and the passing of *Clean Air Acts* in 1956 and 1968, weakened the dominance of coal as a primary source of fuel.<sup>20</sup> Many miners were also ‘caught in a pincer movement between pit closures and mechanisation,’ resulting in the loss of 378,000 jobs, ‘mostly in the “peripheral” coalfields’ in, for instance, Durham, Scotland, and South Wales.<sup>21</sup>

Closures meant miners from these areas relocated to ‘newer’ coalfields of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire.<sup>22</sup> Roughly 20 collieries also closed in Barnsley from the 1960s to early 1970s.<sup>23</sup> However, these pit closures were usually managed. Whilst Huw Beynon, Andrew Cox, and Ray Hudson illustrate that the NCB ‘operated as a broker with successive governments,’ Jim Phillips argues deindustrialisation in Scotland was shaped by ‘moral economy arguments,’ emphasising the protection and restoration of coalfields in the 1950s to late 1970s.<sup>24</sup> Similar arguments were, however, disregarded with ‘accelerated contraction’ under Margaret Thatcher’s governments.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Waddington et al., *Out of the Ashes*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Kirk, with Jefferys and Wall, ‘Representing Identity and Work in Transition,’ 187.

<sup>20</sup> Huw Beynon, Andrew Cox, and Ray Hudson, ‘Discussion Paper No. 1: The Decline of King Coal,’ *The Coalfields Research Programme* (1999) 1.

<sup>21</sup> Waddington et al., *Out of the Ashes*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Perchard, “Broken Men” and “Thatcher’s Children”: Memory and Legacy in Scotland’s Coalfields,’ *International Labour and Working-Class History* 84 (2013) 85.

<sup>23</sup> John North and Derek Spooner, ‘The Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Coalfield: The Focus of the Coal Board’s Investment Strategy,’ *The Geographical Journal* 148 (1982) 30-32.

<sup>24</sup> Beynon, Cox, and Hudson, ‘The Decline of King Coal,’ 2; Jim Phillips, ‘Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields, 1947 to 1991,’ *International Labour and Working-Class History* 84 (2013) 99.

<sup>25</sup> Phillips, ‘Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields,’ 99.

Before the 1984-85 miners' strike, coal had experienced a temporary reprieve with the rise of oil prices in the 1970s.<sup>26</sup> The OPEC oil crisis, alongside successful national strikes over wages in 1972 and 1974, impeded the retreat from coal and strengthened the position of organised labour.<sup>27</sup> The *1974 Plan for Coal* introduced major investments in Barnsley and expansions of the Selby Coalfield.<sup>28</sup> A combination of economics, ideology, and politics would trigger the demise of UK coalmining, however. Surging oil prices prompted multinational oil corporations to diversify into coal production through lower-cost open cast pits (and usually via unorganised labour) in industrialising or industrialised countries. The use of gas and nuclear power for electricity generation also jeopardised a 'staple market for coal.'<sup>29</sup> Shifts in the market were 'compounded' by policies and ideology.<sup>30</sup>

A neoliberal 'ideology,' David Harvey argues, was also a political and class project brought on by economic stagnation and a crisis of capital accumulation of the 1970s.<sup>31</sup> The election of Thatcher in 1979 expedited a decisive shift from a social democratic to neoliberal state. Disseminating a free-market capitalist agenda with alternative versions of society premised on 'individualism,' 'freedom,' and 'liberty,' neoliberalism advanced the roll-back of the state: privatisation of public assets, cutbacks of welfare expenditure, and lowering of corporate taxes.<sup>32</sup> 'Economic liberalisation,' as John Kirk illustrates, initiated 'changes in the way the UK energy market operated, encouraging a move away from coal and towards nuclear power and gas, with an increased reliance on energy resources from overseas.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Beynon, Cox, and Hudson, 'The Decline of King Coal,' 3.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Richards, *Miners on Strike: Class Solidarity and Divisions in Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> North and Spooner, 'The Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Coalfield,' 25.

<sup>29</sup> Waddington et al., *Out of the Ashes*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 19.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>33</sup> Kirk, with Jefferys and Wall, 'Representing Identity and Work in Transition,' 191.



According to Ray Hudson and David Sadler, the coal industry ‘epitomis[ed] the post-war settlement—the series of compromises between capital, Government, and trade unions...’<sup>34</sup> Coal miners were discerned ‘as the clearest example of a monopoly interest acting against the requirements of market forces and the public good.’<sup>35</sup> It was an amalgam of cheaper sources of fuel, ideological shifts, and the confidence of organised labour that contributed to the 1984-85 miners’ strike ending in defeat.

The subsequent dismantling of organised labour, the creation of a reserve pool of labour, and the making of ‘uneconomic’ pits soon followed. A market for coal was further squeezed with the privatisation of the electricity generating industry and the subsidisation of nuclear power.<sup>36</sup> A shift from coal for electricity generating was also couched in environmental rhetoric. As illustrated in ‘Our Common Inheritance,’ a 1990 White Paper on the environment, coal was often referred to as a pollutant, with no mention of clean coal technology, nor how it may reduce emissions. At the same time, the electricity generating industry imported coal from abroad and the government approved an ‘unrivalled air pollutant’ in the form of a bitumen-in-water fuel by 1993.<sup>37</sup> As *The Guardian* explained, there was a ‘rigging of the energy market in favour of gas and nuclear power.’<sup>38</sup>

These political-economic processes expedited closures and the privatisation of the coal industry in 1994. With more than 30 pits, employing nearly 50 per cent of the town’s total workforce in 1961, the Barnsley coal industry was ruined with the closures of Grimethorpe in 1993 and Goldthorpe in 1994.<sup>39</sup> This wave of pit closures ‘represented perhaps the most dramatic example of the processes

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<sup>34</sup> Ray Hudson and David Sadler, ‘State policies and the changing geography of the coal industry in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and 1990s,’ quoted in Waddington et. al., *Out of the Ashes*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Beynon, Cox, and Hudson, ‘The Decline of King Coal,’ 5-6.

<sup>36</sup> Waddington et al., *Out of the Ashes*, 16-17.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Mining Massacre,’ *Barnsley Chronicle*, October 16, 1992. For clarity, Grimethorpe was the last pit to close of the Barnsley Coalfield and Goldthorpe was the last pit to close in the Barnsley borough.

of deindustrialisation sweeping across many industrial districts in the UK after 1979.<sup>40</sup> By 1994 there were 15 deep-coal mines remaining, with the last pit, Kellingley Colliery, closing in December 2015.

The speed and pace of closures in the Barnsley and Dearne Valley areas impacted coalfield regeneration. Despite Barnsley having ‘managed to create a bidding culture which [was] the envy of other towns,’ villages across the area endured a series of setbacks with economic regeneration.<sup>41</sup> In the Dearne Valley, a mainly mono-industrial area, regeneration, firstly, involved undertaking extensive land reclamation and infrastructure projects in hopes of creating a climate for capital investment.

Subsequent pit closures exacerbated these circumstances. After the announcement of the pit closure programme in 1992, Barnsley Council Leader Hedley Salt protested: ‘This will knock back Barnsley’s regeneration efforts by years. We were making progress but it is a classic case of two steps forward and five back. It will take us two years to attract new industry.’<sup>42</sup> Efforts to regenerate the area were also ‘hamstrung’ by match funding under the European Commission’s RECHAR programme.<sup>43</sup> The national government’s refusal to relax its spending restrictions on local authorities meant cutbacks in public expenditure to fund regeneration initiatives. Barbara Edwards, deputy director of the Coalfield Communities Campaign, explained ‘We have got to the stage of biting into essential services and it’s very difficult.’<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kirk, with Jefferys and Wall, ‘Representing Identity and Work in Transition,’ 191.

<sup>41</sup> Barnsley was the only town in the UK under John Major’s Conservative government to receive City Challenge Money on two occasions with the Dearne Valley City Challenge 1992 and Barnsley North East Corridor City Challenge 1993. As well as being the first town to receive significant money from Yorkshire Forward’s Urban Renaissance Initiative in 2003, Barnsley also received ongoing funding from the Single Regeneration Budget against fierce competition. See Brian Lewis with Don Stewart, *From the Enemy Within to the Russians are Coming: The Single Regeneration Budget 5 and 6 in the Yorkshire Coalfields, 2000-2007* (Leeds: Yorkshire Forward, 2007) 13.

<sup>42</sup> Vine, ‘Shock waves for town left with single pit.’

<sup>43</sup> Robert Taylor, ‘Anger as EC job aid goes begging,’ *Yorkshire Post*, October 15, 1992.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Funding was a source of frustration elsewhere. Ex-coalfields competed for regeneration money. A local commentator explained, ‘Our town or city was placed in direct competition with another and you won or lost as you would in a penalty shoot-out. We did not mind that for we were good...’<sup>45</sup> Those areas who ‘lost’ likely did ‘mind.’ In the *Barnsley Chronicle’s* letters to the editor, people expressed frustration over regeneration. Stephen Graham, a resident of Royston, juxtaposed the North East Corridor project with inactivity in Royston and Carlton: ‘I thought socialism was about giving people an equal slice of the cake—not if you live in Barnsley.’<sup>46</sup>

Declining coalfield areas were not tackled by the national government in ‘any meaningful sense’ until 1997.<sup>47</sup> A commitment to the long-term problems, including unemployment and poverty, were outlined in the Coalfield Taskforce Report.<sup>48</sup> However, setbacks persisted from previous ‘experiments’ in economic policy designed to expedite regeneration with the Dearne Valley Enterprise Zone—running from 1995 to 2005.<sup>49</sup> The outcome of these zones was often the relocation of local businesses rather than the creation of new industry; or, they ‘created jobs with lower skills and lower wages than had previously been available.’<sup>50</sup> There was a perception that companies also left after tax breaks ceased.<sup>51</sup> A legacy of cynicism pervaded news coverage after the announcement of a Sheffield Enterprise Zone in 2011: ‘Can enterprise zones do the job this time around?’, asked the BBC.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Lewis and Stewart, *From the Enemy Within to the Russians are Coming*, 67.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen Graham, ‘More Equal than Others,’ *Barnsley Chronicle*, June 17, 1994. A similar sentiment was expressed in my conversations with some residents about Grimethorpe. The village received more than 100m between 1996–2008. See Karen McVeigh, ‘Grimethorpe, the mining village that hit rock bottom—then bounced back,’ *The Guardian*, March 3, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/03/grimethorpe-hit-rock-bottom-then-bounced-back>.

<sup>47</sup> Kirk, with Jefferys and Wall, ‘Representing Identity and Work in Transition,’ 195.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 213. See note 7.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Enterprise Zones Monitoring Report 2006/2007,’ *Department for Communities and Local Government* (2009), <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/enterprise-zones-monitoring-report0607.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Joshua Emden et al., ‘Lessons Learned: Just Transitions from Around the World,’ *Institute for Public Policy Research*, December 2020, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Frank Interview, November 22, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Len Tingle, ‘Can enterprise zones do the job this time around?’ *BBC News*, August 12, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-14507978>.

Although the ‘disadvantage in coalfields is deep-seated rather than rooted in the post-2008 recession,’ regeneration materialises alongside economic oppression through neoliberal austerity.<sup>53</sup> Barnsley was ‘still count[ing] the cost of a decade of austerity’ when it received a prestigious regeneration award in 2021.<sup>54</sup> Barnsley was identified in 2019 as ‘most affected by austerity cuts,’ creating ‘a lot of desperation and despair’ for people in and out of work.<sup>55</sup> In 2019, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust reported that ex-coalfields ‘lag behind national averages and behind other parts of the country. This is evident in the weaknesses of the local economy, the extent of economic and social disadvantage, and the incidence of ill-health.’<sup>56</sup>

Deindustrialisation, as Jim Tomlinson argues, is a major feature of UK socio-economic developments in post-war Britain. In challenging a ‘declinist narrative,’ used to justify cuts on public spending, Tomlinson argues that deindustrialisation ‘has acted in a significant way to increase insecurity and hence harm economic welfare.’<sup>57</sup> Economic ‘harm’ pervades a history of class struggle. As for ex-miners and their communities, class struggle ‘from above’ was (and is) waged through attacks on labour, capital flight, and austerity measures.<sup>58</sup> Whilst this history of

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<sup>53</sup> Mike Foden, Steve Fothergill, and Tony Gore, *The State of the coalfields: Economic and social conditions in the former mining communities of England, Scotland and Wales* (Sheffield Hallam University: Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, 2014) 35-36.

<sup>54</sup> John Harris, “‘Things vanish off the edge’: Barnsley counts the cost of a decade of austerity,’ *Guardian*, June 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/21/things-vanish-off-the-edge-barnsley-counts-the-cost-of-a-decade-of-austerity>.

<sup>55</sup> Patrick Butler, “‘Desperation and despair’: Barnsley’s long battle with austerity,’ *Guardian*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jan/28/desperation-despair-barnsley-long-battle-with-austerity>.

<sup>56</sup> Christina Beatty, Steve Fothergill, and Tony Gore, *The State of the Coalfields 2019: Economic and social conditions in the former coalfields of England, Scotland and Wales* (Sheffield Hallam University: Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, 2019) 7.

<sup>57</sup> Jim Tomlinson, ‘De-industrialisation Not Decline: A New Meta-narrative for Post-war British History,’ *Twentieth Century British History* 27 (2016) 97.

<sup>58</sup> As Raju Das illustrates, deindustrialisation involves class struggle ‘from below’ and ‘from above.’ Whilst the former consists of workers’ strikes, the latter consists of closing down factories, disciplining workers, capital flight, bailouts and austerity, and/or dispossession of land and other assets. See Raju Das, ‘From Labour Geography to Class Geography: Reasserting the Marxist Theory of Class,’ *Human Geography* 5 (2012) 26.

class-based violence is not always explicitly articulated by interviewees, their memories and experiences of deindustrialisation and its aftermath are shaped in ‘class ways.’<sup>59</sup>

### Revisiting Deindustrial Scholarship: Class, Emotion, and Camaraderie

The study of deindustrialisation has developed into a recognised interdisciplinary field of scholarship. Whilst earlier work focused on the causes, scope, responses, and immediate effects of industrial closures, the passage of time enabled researchers to explore its cultural significance and long-term effects through engagements with memory and representation.<sup>60</sup> Building on these cultural critiques, scholars have also examined the lived experience of deindustrialisation, illustrating political resistance and resiliency, transformations in class and cultures, and the legacy of industrial work in terms of the environment, health and well-being, and socio-spatial inequality in the aftermath of deindustrialisation.<sup>61</sup>

Our interest here primarily lies with building on work exploring class erasure, changes and continuities in working-class culture, experience, and identity, and the legacy of deindustrialisation. Despite the ‘disappearance’ of the British coal industry, Keith Gildart and colleagues state: ‘the memories of the industry remains etched on the bodies, minds, and memories of those who toiled underground.’<sup>62</sup> Our objective here is to locate ourselves in deindustrial scholarship by weaving through concepts of class, emotion, and camaraderie, with a particular interest in the conceptual

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<sup>59</sup> For a reading of ‘class’ that places an emphasis on processes over locations, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, ‘Class as process and relationship’ in *Democracy Against Capitalism: Reviewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 76-107.

<sup>60</sup> For literature reviews on deindustrialisation, see Steven High, ‘“The Wounds of Class”: A Historiographical Reflection on the Study of Deindustrialisation, 1973-2013,’ *History Compass* 11 (2013); Tim Strangleman and James Rhodes, ‘The “New” Sociology of Deindustrialisation? Understanding Industrial Change,’ *Sociology Compass* 8 (2014); and Tim Strangleman, James Rhodes, and Sherry Lee Linkon, ‘Introduction to Crumbling Cultures: Deindustrialisation, Class, and Memory,’ *International Labour and Working-Class History* 84 (2013).

<sup>61</sup> For a more recent collection of essays, see Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard, *The Deindustrialised World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, ed. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Keith Gildart et al., ‘Revisiting the history of the British coal industry: the politics of legacy, memory and heritage,’ *Waseda Rilas Journal* 8 (2020) 408.

and methodological tools used in examining how working-class people make sense of, experience, and resist deindustrialisation.

A theme of ‘combatting working-class erasure’ inflects scholarship concerned with representations and experiences of the working class.<sup>63</sup> John Kirk has identified an ‘absent-presence’ of the British working class. Mapping the field of representation, or what Beverley Skeggs identifies as ‘the symbolic,’ Kirk argues ‘class struggle is alive and well, fought out’ through discourse and culture, ‘where notions of class are made and re-made, with very real material effects on people’s lives.’<sup>64</sup> A ‘consequence’ of this struggle is ‘to reinforce modes of dis-identification with the idea of being working class.’<sup>65</sup>

In the aftermath of deindustrialisation, Steven High argues that ‘working-class communities are often enveloped in silence and contend with stigmatisation’ and ‘working people are increasingly made to feel ashamed of their class origins.’<sup>66</sup> Alongside this stigmatisation has been the displacement of working-class people through processes of gentrification, as well as the aestheticisation of industrial ruins, referred to by some critics as ‘ruin porn.’<sup>67</sup> Notions of both ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’ of industrial workers in France has been broached by Jackie Clarke. Clarke argues the ‘fragmentation and declining visibility of the industrial working class’ is often accompanied by representations that ‘relegate these people and places to a time and space outside

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<sup>63</sup> Lachlan MacKinnon, ‘Post-industrial memoryscapes: Combatting working-class erasure in North America and Europe,’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Memory and Place*, ed. Sarah Nardi, Hilary Orange, Steven High, and Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>64</sup> John Kirk, *Class, Culture and Social Change: On the Trail of the Working Class* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 203. See also Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004) 173.

<sup>65</sup> Kirk, *Class, Culture and Social Change*, 204.

<sup>66</sup> Steven High, ‘Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialisation,’ *International Labour and Working-Class History* 84 (2013) 141.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 148.

of the contemporary social world.<sup>68</sup> For Clarke, it is ‘worth thinking again about what the stakes of visibility and invisibility are today.’<sup>69</sup>

Building on this scholarship, this dissertation explores how class erasure interweaves in the denigration and commemoration of coalmining in the contemporary period. As my group of interviewees illustrate, this did not go unchallenged. Emotional investments in work, identity, and place inflect the ways interviewees counter negative, or absent, portrayals of miners and mining in oral history interviews.

Feeling, affect, and emotion feature prominently in deindustrial scholarship. Unsurprisingly, narratives of loss and resiliency permeate oral testimonies of workers and their families affected by deindustrialisation.<sup>70</sup> As Andrew Perchard shows with the closure of a smelter plant in Scotland, ‘emotions of many in the immediate aftermath of the closure were familiar ones of betrayal, shock, and anger, along with resistance.’<sup>71</sup> The emotional impact of job loss and cultural fragmentation not only propels, but also is a central component of deindustrial scholarship. In some cases, this has, perhaps, come at the expense, as Kirk argues, of overlooking how cultural formations persist after closures.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Jackie Clarke, ‘Closing Moulinex: Thoughts on the Visibility and Invisibility of Industrial Labour in Contemporary France,’ *Modern and Contemporary France* 19 (2011) 446.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Katherine Dudley, *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Steven High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969-1984* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2003); Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialisation*, ed. Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott (London: Cornell University Press, 2003); Steven High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialisation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Alessandro Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Perchard, ‘A Little Local Difficulty? Deindustrialisation and Glocalisation in a Scottish Town,’ in *The Deindustrialised World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, ed. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017) Chapter 13, para 36, Kindle.

<sup>72</sup> Kirk, with Jefferys and Wall, ‘Representing Identity and Work in Transition,’ 201-203. See, for example, Simon Charlesworth, *A Phenomenology of Working Class Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Royce Turner, *Coal Was Our Life: An Essay on Life in a Yorkshire Former Pit Town* (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam Press, 2000).

Those interested in understanding both changes and continuities in working-class culture, experience, and identity have turned to Raymond Williams' concept of 'structures of feeling' and E.P. Thompson's concept of 'moral economy.'<sup>73</sup> For instance, Kirk illustrates how a 'structure of feeling,' evidence of a 'whole way of life,' shapes how workers understand and experience a 'sense of disempowerment' through changes in meanings of 'commitment' and 'recognition' in the railway industry. In turn, Kirk states how a 'residual structure of feeling' can also shape 'acts of resistance,' in particular, a 'commitment to a class politics,' to a dominant structure of feeling—in this case a neoliberal order.<sup>74</sup>

In a similar vein, Tim Strangleman shows how 'older' railway workers' lamentations over the loss of a moral order was 'part mourning for the eclipse of their own structure of feeling' built around a 'set of ideas, beliefs and norms that have helped to shape their identity and the way in which they live their lives.'<sup>75</sup> Scholars have also turned to the concept of 'moral economy' in their investigations of deindustrialisation, particularly in Scotland.<sup>76</sup> Understood as a pre-existing system of 'moral-political values regarding economic activities and responsibilities,' they show the ways it shapes people's understandings, experiences, and responses to industrial decline.<sup>77</sup> Both Phillips

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<sup>73</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); and E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century,' *Past and Present* 50 (1971). See also Tim Strangleman, 'Deindustrialisation and the Historical Sociological Imagination: Making Sense of Work and Industrial Change,' *Sociology* 51 (2017).

<sup>74</sup> Kirk, *Class, Culture and Social Change*, 176-177.

<sup>75</sup> Tim Strangleman, 'Work Identity in Crisis? Rethinking the Problem of Attachment and Loss at Work,' *Sociology* 46 (2012) 422. As a way to understand changes in culture and identity, this framework, as Steven High also points out, is present in the essays featured in the *International Labour and Working-Class History*'s special edition on deindustrialisation in 2013. See High, 'Beyond Aesthetics,' 145.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Jim Tomlinson, 'Re-inventing the "moral economy" in post-war Britain,' *Historical Research* 84 (2011); and Jim Phillips and Andrew Perchard, 'Transgressing the Moral Economy: Wheelerism and Management of the Nationalised Coal Industry in Scotland,' *Contemporary British History* 25 (2011).

<sup>77</sup> E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century,' 1971, quoted in Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard, 'Introduction' in *The Deindustrialised World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, ed. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017) Chapter 1, para 4, Kindle.



and Perchard have demonstrated its impact on a Scottish national consciousness and political autonomy in the present.<sup>78</sup>

Both concepts are useful in illustrating the lasting effects of industrial cultures, what Sherry Lee Linkon also calls the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation,’ shaping how people mediate industrial change. But they also help us to better elucidate the emotional effects of job loss and cultural fragmentation, particularly in the context of work and community. Although there is a focus on emotional experience, emotion is often overlooked as a concept—outside of nostalgia and a ‘turn to affect’—as well as a category of historical analysis in deindustrial literature.<sup>79</sup> This thesis builds upon the notion that emotions can change over time by turning to the history of emotions and its methodological tools.

It does so in a way, as Peter Stearns, Barbara Rosenwein, and William Reddy urge, that integrates ‘the category of emotion into social, cultural, and political history...’<sup>80</sup> Introducing concepts such as ‘emotionology,’<sup>81</sup> ‘emotional community,’<sup>82</sup> and ‘emotional regime,’<sup>83</sup> historians elucidate how emotional standards and codes instructed emotional expressions at particular times and places. By illustrating the ways power circulates through feeling, they not only demonstrate that emotions

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<sup>78</sup> See Perchard, ‘Broken Men and Thatcher’s Children’; and Jim Phillips, ‘The Moral Economy of Deindustrialisation in Post-1945 Scotland,’ in *The Deindustrialised World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, ed. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).

<sup>79</sup> For recent work that has approached deindustrialisation through a ‘turn to affect,’ see Valerie Walkerdine and Luis Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community After De-industrialisation: A Psychosocial Approach to Affect* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Jay Emery, ‘Belonging, memory and history in the north Nottinghamshire coalfield,’ *Journal of Historical Geography* 59 (2018).

<sup>80</sup> Jan Plamper, ‘The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns,’ *History and Theory* 49 (2010) 237.

<sup>81</sup> Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns, ‘Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards,’ *The American Historical Review* 90 (1985).

<sup>82</sup> Barbara Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History,’ *The American Historical Review* 107 (2002); and Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (London, Cornell University Press, 2006). Lucy Taksa uses the concept of ‘emotional communities’ in her article, ‘Romance of the Rails: Deindustrialisation, Nostalgia, and Community,’ in *The Deindustrialised World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, ed. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017) Chapter 6, para 8, Kindle.

<sup>83</sup> William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

vary over time (i.e., in meanings, expressions, evaluations), but also that they are affective causes of historical processes. Arising from this work, as the Stearns argue, was a need for scholars to distinguish between emotional prescription and emotional experience. The former governed, but did not determine the latter.<sup>84</sup>

A focus solely on emotional codes, Claire Langhamer writes, tells us ‘more about how “ordinary” people were instructed to feel than about the messiness of their actual emotional practice.’<sup>85</sup> Although these codes shape how emotions are generated, managed, and expressed, Monique Scheer argues concepts like ‘emotional communities’ and ‘emotional styles’ must ‘be drawn into the everyday social life via an emphasis on the practices that generate and sustain such a community or culture.’<sup>86</sup>

Turning to the concept of ‘emotional practices,’ Scheer attempts to transcend a dichotomy of ‘expression and experience’ and ‘structure and agency’ and ‘body and mind’ that historians of emotions encounter.<sup>87</sup> Influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and a definition of emotion based around practice theory, Scheer argues emotional practices are ‘habits’ and ‘rituals,’ manipulating the ‘body and mind to evoke feelings where there are none, to focus diffuse arousals and give them an intelligible shape, or to change or remove emotions already there.’<sup>88</sup> They are, in other words, ways of ‘doing emotions.’<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Stearns, ‘Emotionology,’ 824.

<sup>85</sup> Claire Langhamer, ‘An archive of feeling? Mass Observation and the mid-century moment,’ *Insights* (9) 2016, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice,’ 216.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 194.

Two things are worth noting. Firstly, these practices can be deliberate and habitual; they involve a ‘knowing body,’ bringing the body and mind together with a ‘socially-ordered world.’<sup>90</sup> As Scheer explains, they ‘are not only habituated and automatically executed movements of the body, but also encompass learned, culturally specific, and habitual distribution of attention to “inner” processes of thought, feeling, and perception.’<sup>91</sup> They are understood as skilful acts contingent on cultural and bodily knowledge. Secondly, emotion and emotional expression are understood as part of the same process—not separate. Emotions do not simply follow events, but rather trigger ‘habits’ and ‘rituals’ that intend on ways of feeling important in the constitution of a sense of self and collective experience. In this scenario, ‘doings and sayings’ involve experience and expression, arising from and through cultural and bodily knowledge. As Scheer asserts, emotions also can change ‘because the practices in which they are embodied, and bodies themselves, undergo transformation.’<sup>92</sup>

Drawing on the work of Scheer, I suggest the concept of ‘emotional practice’ offers valuable insight into our understandings of emotional experiences and expressions of camaraderie in men’s working lives (during and after coalmining). Notwithstanding the fact that lamentations over the loss or decline of camaraderie usually permeate the oral testimonies of ex-miners, I argue camaraderie as a category of historical analysis is overlooked in deindustrial literature.<sup>93</sup> This is, in part, because scholarship on coalfield areas has historically been driven by a sustained interest in community, usually coalescing around discussions of class and place.<sup>94</sup> A renewed interest in coalmining communities, Tim Strangleman writes, has also occurred behind a backdrop of

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<sup>90</sup> The ‘knowing body’ has also been referred to as the ‘mindful body’ in anthropology. See Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock, ‘The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology,’ *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* (1) 1987.

<sup>91</sup> Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice,’ 200.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>93</sup> In the case of coalmining, for example, see Tim Strangleman, ‘Networks, Place and Identities in Post-Industrial Mining Communities,’ *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25 (2001) 260; Waddington et. al., *Out of the Ashes*, 212; Perchard, ‘Broken Men and Thatcher’s Children,’ 88; and Emery, ‘Belonging, memory and history in the north Nottinghamshire coalfield,’ 87.

<sup>94</sup> For a review of British sociology’s relationship with the coal industry and its communities, see Tim Strangleman, ‘Mining a productive seam? The coal industry, community and sociology,’ *Contemporary British History* 32 (2018).

coalfield deindustrialisation, with coalfields becoming a “post-industrial laboratory” in the present.<sup>95</sup>

Although camaraderie occupies a place in this literature (and deindustrial scholarship more broadly), it is often approached as either a descriptive term used to characterise fellowship, as synonymous with solidarity, as a by-product of dangerous work conditions and workplace culture, and/or is subsumed under analytical categories of community and culture. Building on this work, and my oral history interviews, this thesis argues camaraderie can also be understood as a learnt, skilful, embodied practice, intending on ways of being and feeling at work, which cut across dimensions of class, masculinity, and age. By focusing on everyday human relations, men’s emotional investments and experiences, and practices of camaraderie, specifically in terms of work, I argue its loss is a profound rupture in men’s working lives, marked by experiences of deskilling, emotional immobilisation, and the unravelling of relations between the constitution of self and the collective.<sup>96</sup>

As Jörg Arnold suggests after the last deep-coal mine closure in 2015, it is ‘a good moment’ to ‘contextualise’ and ‘historicise’ the ‘figure of the coal miner and the myths that surround him; and to interrogate critically and refine the central concepts that are customarily invoked in relation to the coal industry.’<sup>97</sup> This thesis offers a contribution to the history of coalmining and deindustrialisation by revisiting camaraderie as both a concept and experience. A closer look at camaraderie affords insight into changes and continuities in the history of work and feeling,

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<sup>95</sup> Strangleman, ‘Mining a productive seam’, 25. Sociologist Ray Pahl used the term ‘post-industrial laboratory’ in his study of the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. See Ray Pahl, *Divisions of Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

<sup>96</sup> The approach adopted here is influenced by Selina Todd’s work on class experience and relations, and by Michael Roper’s work on subjectivity, emotion, and masculinity. Selina Todd, ‘Class, experience and Britain’s twentieth century,’ *Social History* 39 (2014); and Michael Roper, ‘Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History,’ *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005).

<sup>97</sup> Jörg Arnold, “‘Like being on death row’: Britain and the end of coal, c. 1970 to the present,” *Contemporary British History* 32 (2018), 11.

subjectivity formation, the circulation of power and knowledge, and resiliency amongst the British working class.

### Researching Ex-Coalfields: A 'Post-Industrial Laboratory'?

This thesis brings together archival research, discourse and content analysis of UK newspapers, academic literature, and, most importantly, oral history interviews with ex-coal miners and their family members in the Barnsley and Dearne Valley areas in South Yorkshire.<sup>98</sup> From a methodological perspective, life and oral history evidence guides our understandings of coalmining and coalfield deindustrialisation. Rather than treat it as merely a supplementary body of evidence next to archival material or existing work, oral testimonies are the pathway into this field of research. It is through this distinctive approach that allows us to tackle the history of emotions and camaraderie.

Roughly 40 semi-structured interviews were carried out, mainly with ex-coal miners, mostly between their 60s and 80s, in the summer of 2016 and between 2018 and 2019.<sup>99</sup> Many interviews were arranged and organised through either the aid of a distant relative, the National Union of Mineworkers headquarters in Barnsley, the National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield, on Facebook, and via word-of-mouth communication from interviewees. On a number of occasions, I was contacted after an interview by research participants, telling me that another person, usually a mate of theirs, was also interested in speaking with me.

As part of this research project, I lived in Barnsley between 2018 and 2019. During this time, I frequented a local working men's club in the area, where I also met (and was introduced to) men,

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<sup>98</sup> Interviewees in this thesis were given pseudonyms to protect their identity and privacy.

<sup>99</sup> Excerpts taken from transcribed interviews place an emphasis on the clarity of meaning rather than present a syntactical faithfulness to the accents and dialects of historical actors.

some of whom I interviewed.<sup>100</sup> My Canadian accent often prompted interactions with people at the club, as well as in taxi queues, pubs, the town centre, the local museum and discovery centre, and mining memorabilia events across the area. After initially explaining ‘What are you doing in Barnsley?’, I found myself having casual and, sometimes significant, conversations about the history of coalmining in Barnsley and Britain. It was sometimes through these encounters that interviews were later organised; however, they did not always materialise into actual interviews.

My interest here lies with exploring and elucidating these tensions in doing fieldwork in ex-coalfields. As scholars have widely illustrated, researchers must engage in ongoing self-reflexivity, particularly in the context of knowledge production. Drawing on feminist methodologies, Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor point to the ways social encounters are mediated by class cultures: ‘the narrative tools drawn on, the allusions, facial expressions, body language and vocabulary are...likely to be revealing of assumptions about the world view, tastes, and prejudices of the interviewer.’<sup>101</sup> As much as I may self-identify as part of the working class (and I do), my role as a researcher of a recognised university, alongside cultural differences, affected the ways interviewees interacted with me. As we will see throughout this study, some people were reluctant to broach certain topics, openly questioning at times what I may think before sharing memories, experiences, and perspectives.

Some people were also simply unwilling to speak with me. This was experienced in many ways. As illustrated above, some people committed to doing interviews only later to withdrawal. This may have been because they were too kind to say ‘no’ after being asked, or they may have changed their

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<sup>100</sup> It was through a family contact in which I acquired access into a local working men’s club.

<sup>101</sup> Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor, *Moving Histories of Class and Community: Identity, Place and Belonging in Contemporary England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 142.

mind after reflecting upon what this might entail.<sup>102</sup> After asking a man I interacted with a few times at the local club if he was willing to be interviewed, he explained to me coalmining was in the ‘past’ and he did not want to revisit it. His reluctance, perhaps, signified a ‘risk’ of remembering: ‘It is an emotional risk to try to reconstruct one’s life to tell someone else, even if they are a stranger – it can be harder still if you know them well.’<sup>103</sup> A wide range of emotional experiences and expressions featured in men’s oral testimonies, illustrating a sense of abandonment and resiliency. A legacy of emotional hardship in ex-coalfields likely prompted some people to refrain from doing interviews.

But people also had other misgivings, I argue, that need to be situated within the context of coalfields as a “post-industrial laboratory” in which to study industrial and social changes.<sup>104</sup> I encountered this legacy in two specific instances. Firstly, Frank hinted at a sense of despondency between the work of researchers and the outcome of regeneration in his area. Upon explaining that the ‘post deindustrialisation period has been unsuccessful,’ Frank pointed out that ex-mining localities have had a ‘plethora of academics that came in and wrote all sorts of things down.’<sup>105</sup>

Secondly, a member from the NUM headquarters in Barnsley was suspicious of me and my interests in speaking with ex-miners for this project. For instance, upon running into him at an event, he referred to me in a group setting as an ‘alligator.’ This had to do, I suspect, not only with me returning to Barnsley to do fieldwork, but also my slightly increasing presence at the union office for either events or interviews. Despite my interests in labour and class, and what I felt

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<sup>102</sup> There were instances where interviewees seemed put off by having to look at the overview of the study and informed consent form. They were not interested in reading an 8-10-page document that, according to the research ethics committee, I had to present to them, after already explaining what this project was about and that their identity would remain anonymous. As Edward put it, ‘do you want to speak to me or not?’ He refused to read it. Edward Interview, October 29, 2018.

<sup>103</sup> Rogaly and Taylor, *Moving Histories of Class and Community*, 7.

<sup>104</sup> Strangleman, ‘Mining a productive seam,’ 33.

<sup>105</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

was/is still a study about resistance and resiliency of working-class people and places, I was seen as simply another person who opted to study an ex-coalfield, then leave, and earn a degree. This encounter affected both me and the research.

Although there were a number of reasons that facilitated this place-specific project, from my grandfather working in the mines to my mum being born in Barnsley, the union official was also right: I was here to earn a degree and I was likely to leave Barnsley afterwards. But there is a big difference between being reflective of this and being challenged by it. The latter created a situation where I became overtly self-critical, becoming obsessively concerned with the purpose of this work, and my interactions with people, criticising everything from my body language to vocabulary. I even started to interpret previous cancellations of interviews as a sign of being viewed as an ‘alligator.’ In this scenario, there was a danger of too much introspection; it produced a sense of isolation and loneliness in the field. Consequently, I refrained from organising interviews for a brief period by returning instead to the archive.

I tell this story not to induce sympathy, nor criticise the union official, but rather to illustrate how a legacy of mistrust permeates ex-coalfields. This mistrust resonates from people’s memories and experiences of the 1984-85 miners’ strike, pit closure programme, and economic regeneration in ex-coalfields. This sense of betrayal also extends into the field of cultural representations. After explaining that he enjoyed speaking with me, James said his mates were concerned that he was doing an interview. They told James: ‘make sure he [the interviewer] doesn’t make us look stupid.’<sup>106</sup> A cultural legacy of stigmatisation could also affect a person’s desire to participate in an interview. Academics also have a role to play here. As far as it relates to ‘elite observers,’ Linkon

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<sup>106</sup> James Interview, August 20, 2019.



argues, many have 'ignored the injuries of economic displacement or dismissed them as self-inflicted.'<sup>107</sup>

There was a desire by interviewees to use the interview as a way to counter negative cultural representations. As Alessandro Portelli illustrates, the oral history interview is a place of 'dialogue' and 'experience,' marked by 'the opening of a narrative space for the subjectivity of the interviewee, which becomes in turn a significant historical fact.'<sup>108</sup> From this perspective, people's involvement in this project also needs to be understood as part of their ongoing struggle over memory and representation in the aftermath of deindustrialisation. It is this struggle over the symbolic and economic violence of deindustrialisation that frames this history of class, camaraderie, and emotion. Those who have (and have not) participated in this study have shaped its development and framework.

### Summary

This dissertation is divided into three sections. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 explore historical and contemporary representations of coalmining, coal miners, and mining settlements. The first revisits three coalmining-related events set against the backdrop of coalfield deindustrialisation and regeneration, illustrating the ways working-class people are blamed, patronised, and erased in media, political, and public discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The second turns to the experiential and discursive worlds of my group of interviewees. Emerging from oral testimonies were portrayals of coalmining which usually countered externalised and internalised representations that were recognised as demeaning to the collective identity and memory of miners and mining settlements.

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<sup>107</sup> Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation*, xiv.

<sup>108</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'Living Voices: The Oral History Interview as Dialogue and Experience,' *The Oral History Review* 45 (2018) 239.

Interviewees placed an emphasis on both essential work and skilled labour, which were connected to an unparalleled sense of camaraderie between workers underground. Camaraderie, in particular, featured prominently in men's oral testimonies, bringing together nuanced emotional experiences of work.

The second section of this thesis focuses on camaraderie as both a concept and experience. In Chapter 3, I take a long-view approach to the decline or loss of camaraderie by focusing on the everyday relations, experiences, and practices between miners in coalmining work. Introducing the concept of 'emotional practice,' I illustrate that camaraderie was a skilful act men learnt and embodied, important in generating ways of feeling and being, and that its decline with pit closures was experienced as a process of deskilling and immobilisation at work. Drawing on the insights of emotional practices of camaraderie, Chapter 4 explores the emotional legacy and purpose of the 'scab' in ex-coalfields with heightened strike activity in 1984-85. Notwithstanding the propositions for people to 'move on' from their resentment towards strike-breakers, it illustrates how there is a paradoxical desire by interviewees and mining communities to both include and exclude the figure of the 'scab' in popular memory.

The last chapter builds upon the insights on representation and embodiment covered in the previous chapters, bringing a historical approach to wider work on deindustrialisation. It takes as its focus the popular and powerful rhetoric of 'move on.' In doing so, it weaves together a reading of a politics of 'moving on' permeating neoliberal and regenerative discourse with how expressions of 'move on' and 'get on' interweave in oral history interviews. On the one hand, it illustrates that these emotive utterances are meaningful ways people respond to and resist the symbolic and economic violence of deindustrialisation and its aftermath. On the other hand, these emotional

prescriptions can affect how people conceive of time, remember and experience pit closures, and adapt to new conditions of economic insecurity and exploitation.

Drawing on the concept of the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation,’ this chapter argues that the past, i.e., industrial closures, not only has a lasting effect in the present, but the present, when taking on an air of inevitability, can haunt how people construct memory and narrate experiences of deindustrialisation. A closer look at the dialectical interplay between the present and past reveals that time also flows backwards from so-called ‘inevitable’ experiences in the present to past events. This points to the way that the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation’ can be considered according to a second kind of temporality, one which helps to accommodate the structural violence of capitalism.

## Chapter 1

### **Class Erasure Through the Denigration and Commemoration of Coalmining: Exploring the Cultural Legacy of Coalfield Deindustrialisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

I think a lot of the time...it is difficult getting it over as, ah, as what we think. A lot of people think that we dinosaurs and we're living in the past.<sup>109</sup>

-Charlie, ex-coal miner

Contemporary perceptions of the British coal miner as a 'dinosaur,' who extracted a dirty and dangerous fossil fuel, accompany the cultural peripheralisation of ex-miners and mining settlements through moral condemnation, condescending compassion, and class erasure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>110</sup> Despite the fact that ex-coalfields are still confronted with socio-economic hardship, they continue to grapple with a cultural legacy of marginalisation.<sup>111</sup> Drawing on media, political, and academic discourses, this chapter weaves together historical and contemporary representations of coalmining, illustrating a longer historical trajectory of the denigration of working-class people and places.

'King Coal' is simultaneously celebrated for fuelling the global growth of Britain and condemned for its global environmental effects in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>112</sup> In 2019, 'King Coal' garnered new (and unwelcomed) significance with the approval of a new deep-coal mine near Whitehaven in west Cumbria called Woodhouse Colliery. The proposed opening of England's first deep-mine in more than 30 years marked a return to, rather than departure from 'King Coal.' Plans to extract coal

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<sup>109</sup> Charlie Interview, August 18, 2016.

<sup>110</sup> Jörg Arnold has also picked up on a prehistoric theme in political discourse. In a 2015 exchange in the House of Commons, the coal industry was referred to as 'Jurassic Park' by the then Prime Minister David Cameron. See Arnold, 'Like being on death row,' 4.

<sup>111</sup> For studies on the socio-economic state of ex-coalfields see, The State of the Coalfields 2014 and 2019 reports carried out by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University.

<sup>112</sup> Allusions to 'King Coal' have found cultural purchase in news coverage on pit closures in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This popular expression has featured in *The Guardian's* news items on Selby's (2002), Daw Mill's (2013), and Kellingley's (2015) closures. More recently, this utterance featured in a 2020 article entitled 'Is this the end for "king coal" in Britain?'

prompted concerns over an environmental crisis. Tim Farron, Liberal Democrat MP, called the decision to open a mine a ‘kick in the teeth in the fight to tackle climate change.’<sup>113</sup>

Since 2019, Woodhouse Colliery has sparked local, national, and international debate. It is worth revisiting some of the main arguments for and against the proposed mine for two reasons. The first can expose the inequities and absurdities of capitalism as an ongoing process held together by deindustrialisation (e.g., pit closure) and industrialisation (e.g., pit opening).<sup>114</sup> The second can afford perspectives into contemporary perceptions of coalmining that can shape (and are shaped by) the ways we represent and remember miners, mining settlements, and deindustrialisation. This thesis is concerned with the second point. The following chapters explore men’s own representations.

Arguments in favour of a new mine attempted to flip carbon dioxide emission targets on their head. West Cumbria Mining argued that since the metallurgical (or coking) coal is used to manufacture steel, it was not in violation of the UK’s 2025 phase-out of coal-fired power stations. The Cumbria County Council also claimed emissions from coalmining would ‘most likely be a substitute for those of similar operations elsewhere rather than being a source of additional emissions.’<sup>115</sup> The more popular case for a new deep-mine, ironically, was the same one conveyed by mining communities combatting pit closures in the 1980s and 1990s. As part of their sales pitch to open a new mine, West Cumbria Mining declared: ‘Opening a mine brings significant

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<sup>113</sup> Samuel Osborne, ‘UK’s first deep coal mine in decades given approval in “kick in teeth fight to tackle climate change,”’ *Independent*, November 3, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/deep-coal-mine-cumbria-woodhouse-colliery-tim-farron-trudy-harrison-a9183341.html>. See also Donnachadh McCarthy, ‘The UK’s first deep coal mine in decades will be a disaster for Britain’s fight against climate change,’ *Independent*, December 4, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/woodhouse-coal-mine-disaster-mockery-britain-climate-change-promises-a9232136.html>.

<sup>114</sup> Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott argue ‘deindustrialisation and industrialisation are merely two ongoing aspects of the history of capitalism.’ See Cowie and Heathcott, ‘The Meanings of Deindustrialization,’ in *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, ed. Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott (London: Cornell University Press, 2003) 15.

<sup>115</sup> James Murray, ‘What impact will the Woodhouse Colliery have on the UK and its climate targets?’ *NS Energy Business*, January 7, 2021, <https://www.nsenerybusiness.com/features/what-is-woodhouse-colliery-coal>.

opportunities for the local community. These opportunities include direct employment, demand for local suppliers, skills training for all and improved infrastructure.’<sup>116</sup>

A coalition of local politicians and Cumbrian councillors backed this decision on socio-economic grounds. Trudy Harrison, local Conservative MP for Copeland in west Cumbria, hailed the council’s approval as ‘fantastic news,’ insisting ‘it is vital that this development goes ahead and I am pleased that common sense has prevailed.’<sup>117</sup> Perhaps more reflective of the environmental costs, Councillor Geoff Cook argued that ‘the need for coking coal, the number of jobs on offer and the chance to remove contamination outweighed concerns about climate change and local amenity.’<sup>118</sup>

The case for a new mine near Whitehaven on the basis of jobs, decontamination, and economic growth is particularly striking when placed in its historical contexts. Coalmining ceased in Whitehaven with the closure of Haig Colliery in 1986. The coalfield, however, had undergone industrial contraction prior to and after the nationalisation of the coal industry. In the 1950s, Cumbria welcomed Sellafield, a nuclear power station, south of Whitehaven, and like coalmining, the plant was important in the development and contamination of the area. Recent plans to decommission the nuclear facility, alongside the closure of the Marchon chemical works in 2005, made a return to coalmining more appealing. The approval of Woodhouse Colliery is a response to the closure of the chemical plant, and the restructuring of the nuclear plant. Akin to the chemical works in the 1940s, and the nuclear power station in the 1950s, coalmining is part of a regenerative

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<sup>116</sup> ‘What it means for West Cumbria,’ West Cumbria Mining, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://www.westcumbriamining.com/will-mean-west-cumbria>.

<sup>117</sup> Helen Pidd, ‘Government under fire for approval of new coalmine in Cumbria,’ *Guardian*, November 3, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/nov/03/government-under-fire-after-approval-of-new-coal-mine-in-cumbria>.

<sup>118</sup> Phillip Inman, ‘Deep coal mine gets go ahead in Cumbria despite protests,’ *Guardian*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/mar/19/deep-coal-mine-gets-go-ahead-in-cumbria-despite-protests>.

effort in the 2020s. In this historical scenario, coalmining went from a problem to a potential solution of economic growth.

This contradiction of economic regeneration cuts across a history of death, disease, and pollution. Outrage over the historical disposability of deindustrialising areas was overshadowed by a global climate crisis and climate prevention politics in the national press. Journalists turned to local residents and objectors of the new mine, illustrating their fears over potential flooding in the area and concerns over drilling in areas with radioactive material in the seabed. They also showed the agency of a concerned citizenry, including young people leading climate strikes and local residents creating t-shirts and banners with anti-mine slogans, such as, 'Keep Cumbrian Coal in the Hole.'<sup>119</sup> People were clear: jobs, though important, should not come at the expense of the environment.<sup>120</sup>

Other tensions emerged alongside coverage of local divisions. For a few opponents of Woodhouse Colliery, it was about dispelling a contradiction between wealth creation and climate protection.<sup>121</sup> Readers in *The Guardian* were assured that 'green' capitalism could assuage economic interests. At the same time, Cumbria County Council's approval of Woodhouse Colliery was seen as inconsistent with the actions and rhetoric of the national government. The proposal of a new pit occurred the same week the Treasury launched a 'net zero review' into how the UK could cut its emissions.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Tommy Greene, 'Cumbria coalmine plans pit climate protection against job creation,' *Guardian*, February 4, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/04/boris-johnson-bringing-ignominy-to-uk-over-go-ahead-for-cumbrian-coalmine>. See also Kris Tatum, 'Extinction Rebellion Cumbria hold coal mine protest outside council offices,' *News and Star*, February 16, 2020, <https://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/18233881.extinction-rebellion-cumbria-hold-coal-mine-protest-outside-council-offices>; and Jane Dalton, 'Teenage climate campaigners on hunger strike over plan for new UK deep coal mine,' *Independent*, January 18, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/coal-mine-cumbria-hunger-strike-students-b1788067.html>.

<sup>120</sup> For a critique see Dominic Lawson, 'It's sheer madness to import the coal essential for our steel industry when we can produce it ourselves,' *Daily Mail*, February 8, 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-9235143/DOMINIC-LAWSON-sheer-madness-import-coal-essential-steel-industry.html>.

<sup>121</sup> 'Coalmine plans in Cumbria and a false dilemma,' *Guardian*, February 7, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/07/coalmine-plans-in-cumbria-and-a-false-dilemma>.

<sup>122</sup> Pidd, 'Government under fire for approval of new coal mine in Cumbria.'

Whilst environmental campaigners brought forth legal challenges around drilling and emissions, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick declined to ‘call in’ the planning application on the mine until March 2021, citing how new concerns emerged that were of ‘more than local importance.’<sup>123</sup> At stake was also the ‘reputational and symbolic damage to the UK,’ which a new colliery produced.<sup>124</sup> Public criticisms over the pit grew with UK preparing to host the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. Woodhouse Colliery signified a political nightmare since it compromised the UK’s global integrity on climate change. This was made explicit by government advisors and energy campaigners. An advisor to developing countries at COP26 argued, ‘The UK’s rhetoric loses credibility when a coalmine is approved’; another consultant contended that the UK ‘would have to remain constrained on formulating an opinion on another sovereign’s policy choice’; and an executive from Greenpeace asserted: the summit ‘slogan’ cannot be ‘Do as we say, not as we do’, since it weakens UK’s ‘climate credentials.’<sup>125</sup>

The proposed opening of a single mine threatened UK’s identity as a leader in tackling the climate crisis. An image of Britain associated with a return to ‘King Coal’ had geopolitical consequences. A new mine and its imagined workforce extracting coal symbolised a crisis of representation embedded in a politics of climate protection. The decision to review the mine was prompted not only by ecological, but also by political, cultural, and economic factors. As to how or why some

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<sup>123</sup> Gavin Cordon, ‘Robert Jenrick launches public inquiry on Cumbria coal mine as campaigners hail “startling U-turn,”’ *Evening Standard*, March 12, 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/robert-jenrick-cumbria-coal-mine-public-inquiry-campaigners-u-turn-b923672.html>.

<sup>124</sup> India Bourke, ‘To have any climate credibility, Britain must cancel its new coal mine,’ *New Statesman*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/environment/2021/02/have-any-climate-credibility-britain-must-cancel-its-new-coal-mine>. See also Roger Harrabin, ‘Cumbria coal mine plan “damaging PM’s reputation,”’ *BBC News*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-56223327>; Rhys Blakely, ‘Cumbria coalmine plans halted after climate protests,’ *Times*, February 9, 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/coal-mine-plans-near-whitehaven-halted-b88wdnw10>; and Fiona Harvey, ‘Experts pile pressure on Boris Johnson over “shocking” new coalmine,’ *Guardian*, February 5, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/05/experts-pile-pressure-on-boris-johnson-over-shocking-new-coalmine>.

<sup>125</sup> Harvey, ‘Experts pile pressure on Boris Johnson over shocking new coalmine.’



people in west Cumbria welcomed back coalmining was, at best, a secondary factor, or at worst, inconceivable.

In 2021, coalmining in Britain was discerned as an adversary by new and old opponents. Although the historical and cultural contexts had shifted, coal and its producers and mining areas have long been characterised as anachronistic in British history. Dating back to the early-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the coal miner and mining settlements featured as the ‘other’ in travelogues. Whilst Richard Ayton described miners as a ‘race fallen from the common rank of men,’ H.V. Morton described them as ‘the only Englishmen who squat like Arabs.’<sup>126</sup> Since the dawn of industrial mining, David Gilbert writes, ‘metaphors of darkness, difference and racial otherness spilled out from below ground onto the face of the earth, marking off mining settlements from the rest of the nation.’<sup>127</sup>

There is a ‘broad dichotomy’ of views permeating popular and academic literatures of coalmining. For some, miners and mining are seen as ‘heroic and progressive’; for others, they are ‘backward and regressive.’<sup>128</sup> John Kirk makes a similar argument in his analysis of working-class representations in film and literature; the ‘specialness’ assigned to coalmining can also be ‘marked negatively,’ in some instances, even in the same text, illustrating a ‘contradictory amalgam’ in cultural representations.<sup>129</sup> According to Kirk, a ‘wholly different understanding of the mining communities and their cultural and political significance’ emerged by the 1990s, however.<sup>130</sup> In 1995, Raphael Samuel highlighted an ‘anti-heroic narrative’ in his article ‘North and South.’ The miner as a ‘brave and resilient’ actor gave way to a ‘new imaginative complex’ of ecological,

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<sup>126</sup> David Gilbert, ‘Imagined Communities and Mining Communities,’ *Labour History Review* 60 (1995) 47-48.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>128</sup> Tim Strangleman et al., ‘Heritage Work: Re-Representing the Work Ethic in the Coalfields,’ *Sociological Research Online* 4 (1999) 3.12.

<sup>129</sup> Kirk, with Jefferys and Wall, ‘Representing Identity and Work in Transition,’ 198-199.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

political, and cultural retrogression. According to Samuel, ‘in the first shock of disindustrialisation’ [sic] the ‘North’ was turned into a ‘by-word for backwardness’ in the 1980s.<sup>131</sup> A similar reimagining of place is present in the social construction of the ‘Rust Belt’ in the United States. Whilst Steven High argues the region was remade through images of ‘brute labour,’ ‘environmental degradation,’ and ‘industrial decline,’ Sherry Lee Linkon and James Russo assert that ‘It became much too easy to blame’ towns like Youngstown, Ohio, ‘for its own losses.’<sup>132</sup> Deindustrialisation, as James Rhodes argues, was a social and cultural process reconfiguring places and identities across the US and the UK.<sup>133</sup>

As shown by Tim Strangleman and colleagues, economic agents in ex-coalfields turned to a discourse of culture, articulating positive and negative attributes of mining communities in the UK. A presupposed homogenous work ethic was valued, then sold to investors. Simultaneously, this ‘same culture,’ they argue, could ‘be labelled as old fashioned, backward looking, inflexible and unsuited to the fluid dynamic labour market of the late twentieth century.’<sup>134</sup> Cultural explanations for socio-economic problems in ex-coalfields further ‘demonised’ working-class people and places in the UK.<sup>135</sup>

Recent work by Jörg Arnold shows how coal miners were also cast as ‘residual proletarians,’ ‘who embraced workplace attitudes, modes of sociability and states of consciousness that belonged to a bygone era’ in journalistic discourse on Kellingley’s closure in 2015.<sup>136</sup> For Arnold, contemporary

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<sup>131</sup> Raphael Samuel, ‘North and South,’ *London Review of Books*, June 22, 1995, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v17/n12/raphael-samuel/north-and-south>.

<sup>132</sup> High, *Industrial Sunset*, Chapter 1, ‘Gold Doesn’t Rust: Regions of the North American Mind’; and Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 189.

<sup>133</sup> James Rhodes, ‘Stigmatisation, space, and boundaries in de-industrial Burnley,’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35 (2012); and James Rhodes, ‘Youngstown’s “Ghost”? Memory, Identity, and Deindustrialisation,’ *International Labour and Working-Class History* 84 (2013).

<sup>134</sup> Strangleman et al., ‘Heritage Work,’ 6.13.

<sup>135</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (London: Verso, 2011).

<sup>136</sup> Arnold, ‘Like being on death row,’ 8.

imaginings of the ‘coal miner’ as ‘both admirable and pitifully out of date’ were influenced by popular memories of the 1980s and 1984-85 miners’ strike.<sup>137</sup> This chapter builds on the work of Arnold twofold. Firstly, it agrees with Arnold that the contemporary era is a useful starting point to explore representations of coalmining. It does so by looking at three coalmining-related events and processes marred by cultural tensions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Secondly, it argues that narratives of ‘risk’ in discourse on coal around deadly and dangerous work, previously highlighted by Arnold, overlap with a climate crisis in the present.<sup>138</sup> This chapter suggests that a politics of climate protection may unintentionally contribute to the erasure of class and class struggle of the ‘long-running’ processes of coalfield deindustrialisation.<sup>139</sup>

As illustrated with Woodhouse Colliery, ‘uneconomic’ pits have been superseded by ecological calamities in opposition to UK coalmining. Nevertheless, the marginalisation of coal miners and mining localities persists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This chapter looks at three events against a backdrop of coalfield deindustrialisation and regeneration, illustrating how cultural tensions permeate discursive representations of (ex)coal miners and mining settlements. The first section focuses on Margaret Thatcher’s funeral. It demonstrates how people and places were characterised as culturally defunct because they supposedly transgressed moral codes on funeral processions.

The second section revisits news coverage and online social forums of the last deep-coal mine closure and the decline of coal-fired power stations in the UK. Whilst miners were usually rendered as anachronistic, since coalmining was discerned as a dangerous and deadly work, they were also erased as producers of British wealth in commemorations of coalmining. Additionally, miners were

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<sup>137</sup> Arnold, ‘Like being on death row,’ 4.

<sup>138</sup> Jörg Arnold, “‘The Death of Sympathy.’” Coal Mining, Workplace Hazards, and the Politics of Risk in Britain, ca. 1970-1990,’ *Historical Social Research* 41 (2016), 91.

<sup>139</sup> Phillips, ‘Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy,’ 99.

depicted—sometimes condescendingly—as merely victims of workplace accidents and disasters.

These portrayals, alongside coal as a dangerous fossil fuel, have also been exploited by some social commentators in further legitimising the end of deep-coalmining in the present.

The third section looks at the cultural regeneration of place. Using Barnsley as a case study, I argue that popular conceptions of miners as engaged in struggle, both under and aboveground, contribute to the cultural peripheralisation of coalmining in the regeneration of the town centre. By contrast, Barnsley's market town status and glassworks industry featured prominently in the remaking of place. How coalmining is remembered and represented still matters. Perceptions of coal miners as antiquated, whilst used to partly explain for socio-economic issues plaguing ex-coalfields, have implications for the popular memory and history of coalfield deindustrialisation in the UK.

### 'Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead'

There is an emotional legacy of betrayal and hatred in ex-coalfields. Many harbour resentment towards, as one interviewee described, the 'architect' behind the destruction of the coal industry:

Margaret Thatcher.<sup>140</sup> On 17 April 2013 (Thatcher's funeral), the national press captured this mood in Goldthorpe. Congregations of men (mainly) and women, comprising generations of mining families, were heavily criticised as 'tasteless.'<sup>141</sup> These public gatherings, as well as protests in London, prompted a debate around morality and death in coverage of Thatcher's funeral.

Emerging from this event were characterisations of ex-miners and their localities as anachronistic, reflecting and enforcing a longer trajectory of cultural stigmatisation.

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<sup>140</sup> Dennis Interview, September 1, 2016.

<sup>141</sup> This was felt instantaneously, according to one research participant. In an interview with Luther, he said after he arrived home from the mock funeral in Goldthorpe, his wife said to him: 'You're not doing yourself any favours doing that procession.' In response, Luther asked his wife, 'Is that you saying that, or is that them saying that?' Luther Interview, September 9, 2019.

Whilst Thatcher's state-funded funeral held at St. Paul's Cathedral was met by protests over austerity measures, a mock funeral was staged in the ex-mining village of Goldthorpe. The funeral procession in Goldthorpe featured an effigy of Thatcher paraded around town in a coffin before being burned on a pyre next to a wreath with 'scab' scrawled on it. A popular sentiment of 'Never Forgive, Never Forget' was on display for the country to consume. Many working-class families still felt betrayed not only by pit closures, but also by a neoliberal agenda imposed under Thatcher's political regime. Dave Douglass, a former Doncaster miner, who congregated with friends to commemorate the 'end of mining,' told a reporter: "I'm here to mourn her birth as she represents the system we are still suffering under...If people say it's in bad taste to do this. I would say it was in bad taste when miners were killed on the picket lines."<sup>142</sup>

Douglass was right: a question of 'taste' garnered a lot of traction in the press. Demonstrations in the North and the South were described as uncivilised by political figures. Attending the funeral from Canada, former prime minister Brian Mulroney stated: 'Am I surprised some people act the way they do in a completely uncivilised manner? This is unfortunately part of our societies. She should have been allowed the privilege of going to her grave in peace.'<sup>143</sup> Whilst Conservative MP Ken Clarke described celebrations as 'rather tasteless, adolescents making silly points,' former British prime minister Tony Blair declared: 'I think that's pretty poor taste. You've got to, even if you disagree with someone very strongly—particularly at the moment of their passing show some respect.'<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Andrew Sparrow and Paul Owen, 'Politics Blog: Margaret Thatcher's funeral—Tuesday 16 April,' *Guardian*, April 17, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/blog/2013/apr/17/lady-thatcher-funeral-live-blog?commentpage>.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> 'Ken Clarke attacks "tasteless" protests,' *ITV News*, April 17, 2013, <https://www.itv.com/news/update/2013-04-17/ken-clarke-attacks-tasteless-protests>; and 'Tony Blair: Margaret Thatcher death celebration parties in poor taste,' *BBC News*, April 9, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-22080238>.

There was a tendency by protestors in London to defend their demonstrations as civil to the press. An anthropology student favoured a silent protest over the state-funded funeral amid austerity measures, insisting that he wanted to ‘maintain a dignified protest. It’s counterproductive to catcall and sing Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead.’<sup>145</sup> Rebecca Lush Blum, organiser of the ‘Turn Your Head on Thatcher’ Facebook group, said if Thatcher ‘was getting that quiet family funeral then we all would have stayed away.’<sup>146</sup> Although still critical of Thatcher, a set of codes and standards inflected how some people voiced political discontent. This was not, however, the case with the mock funeral in Goldthorpe.

There was an effort by some news organisations to draw a point of distinction between the London protests and ‘celebrations’ in ex-mining areas. As reported by Mike McCarthy from *Sky News*, ‘There is a truly unique atmosphere. As much of the nation mourns, the mood among former miners and their families in many coalfields is upbeat and celebratory.’<sup>147</sup> If this alone was not convincing, McCarthy disclosed that even babies were wearing t-shirts with ‘The Witch is Dead’ written on them.<sup>148</sup>

Accompanying these ‘celebrations’ was a journalistic shift in focus towards a debate on taste and respect. Ex-miners and their family members—understood as a fraction of the working class—were discerned as lacking both. A writer for the *Daily Mail* compared the events in an ex-mining village as ‘a snub to the dignified pageantry of the funeral service’ in London. Apparently, it was in

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<sup>145</sup> Matthew Taylor and Paul Lewis, ‘Hundreds of protesters turn backs on Margaret Thatcher’s coffin,’ *Guardian*, April 18, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/17/protesters-turn-backs-thatcher-coffin>.

<sup>146</sup> Rebecca Lush Blum, ‘Why I’m turning my back on Margaret Thatcher at her funeral,’ *Guardian*, April 17, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/17/margaret-thatcher-funeral-turning-my-back>.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Thatcher’s Funeral: Pockets of Protests,’ *Sky News*, April 17, 2013, <https://news.sky.com/story/thatcher-funeral-pockets-of-protests-10448460>.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

‘Middle England’ where ‘ordinariness’ existed.<sup>149</sup> A motif of respect propelled coverage on ITV News. Geraint Vincent, special correspondent, asked an attendee at the mock funeral: ‘What about the respect for the dead? There was an old lady’s funeral. It was today.’ The man responded, ‘Sorry but I can’t. I just can’t do it.’<sup>150</sup> A similar sentiment was echoed by former Scottish MP, Tommy Sheridan. ‘Some people will say it’s wrong to celebrate the death and demise of an old woman. Well, I’ve got to say to you, in order to have respect for the dead you first of all have to have respect for the living.’<sup>151</sup>

A journalistic emphasis on morality and protest obfuscated, or worse, neutralised articulations of class grievances in the present and past—whether in the form of austerity or the mobilisation of the state against organised labour. For instance, Vincent later reported: ‘The miners lost their fight decades ago and the time for protest has long since passed. Time today for a drink and a joke. Time, in fact, for a party.’<sup>152</sup> A writer for *The Guardian* depoliticised gatherings as ‘funeral parties’ relegating them to a blip in history: ‘[they] will be consigned to a footnote.’<sup>153</sup> A journalist from the *South Wales Argus* labelled ‘funeral parties’ as ‘crass, distasteful ways of making a protest.’ Her frustration lay with the misogyny underlying gendered terms, like ‘Witch,’ used to describe Thatcher: ‘if Thatcher had been a man, this witch nonsense would have not have been on people’s lips.’<sup>154</sup> She is probably right; instead, it likely would have been another derogatory remark.

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<sup>149</sup> Paul Harris, ‘Ding, dong! Meet the quiet, decent majority: The ordinary people of Middle England who turned out for Margaret Thatcher’s funeral,’ *Daily Mail*, April 17, 2013, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2310745/Margaret-Thatcher-The-ordinary-people-Middle-England-turned-Prime-Ministers-funeral.html>.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Reaction to Thatcher funeral,’ *ITV News*, April 17, 2013, <https://www.itv.com/news/calendar/story/2013-04-17/reaction-to-thatcher-funeral>.

<sup>151</sup> Alun Palmer, Vicky Smith, and Andy Lines, ‘Margaret Thatcher funeral protests in London and across country pass peacefully,’ *Mirror*, April 17, 2013, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/margaret-thatcher-funeral-protests-photos-1837644>.

<sup>152</sup> ‘Reaction to Thatcher funeral.’

<sup>153</sup> Sparrow and Owen, ‘Politics Blog.’

<sup>154</sup> Maria Williams, ‘Tasteless Thatcher protests an attack on all women,’ *South Wales Argus*, April 15, 2013, <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/10355740.the-newsdesk-tasteless-thatcher-protests-an-attack-on-all-women>.

This cultural 'transgression' was further highlighted after BBC reporter, James Vincent, posted an image of the burning of the effigy on Twitter.<sup>155</sup> Those who were featured in the image, mainly men, were identified by online contributors as 'mindless,' 'disgraceful,' and 'uncivilised.' One social commentator wrote: 'they all make me sick.' At the same time, this image seemed to reinforce class stereotypes of places and people in attendance as lazy, redundant, and thick. Whilst one poster asked, 'Why aren't they at work? If they're unemployed who's paying for all that drink?', another facetiously wrote, 'Looks like a lovely estate! How did they all get the day off work?' One person even joked about the demise of coalmining: 'clearly having to use wood for a fire as they have no coal.' For others, it was another instance of 'miners bleating.'<sup>156</sup>

What was overlooked or ignored was how people could have taken the day off like demonstrators in London. But, more importantly, it was that poverty, unemployment, and the abandoned homes in the image, those same points of ridicule in social posts, were, in part, what facilitated the mock funeral and burning of the effigy. As one commentator pointed out: 'look at all those boarded up houses! The real story of Thatcher's legacy.'<sup>157</sup> There was a tendency by journalists, politicians, and social commentators to depoliticise gatherings by identifying them as 'parties,' or to characterise assemblies as immoral because they were understood as inappropriate emotional expressions. Residents of some ex-mining localities were later held responsible by some people for poverty and unemployment.

As Sophie Bush and Morgan Daniels demonstrate, the use of 'death taboos' have political and cultural implications. Invocations of 'respect' and 'etiquette' by 'official organs' of the state can

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<sup>155</sup> James Vincent (@BBCJamesVincent), 'People here in Goldthorpe really celebrating Baroness Thatcher's death. Incredible scenes here,' Twitter, April 17, 2013, 10.24 a.m., ET, <https://twitter.com/BBCJamesVincent/status/324528836597391360>.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.



minimise counter-narratives in the form of a mock funeral. The authors argue that cultural practices are important forms of emotional expression, especially for those ‘who felt deeply estranged from narratives of respect, admiration, and sympathy’ which were being championed by the state.<sup>158</sup>

It is striking how supporters of Thatcher deplored the politicisation of her funeral as disrespectful, because they also exploited her death in legitimising a current political-economic system. When discussing Thatcher’s legacy, prime minister David Cameron declared, ‘I think in a way we’re all Thatcherites now because, I mean, I think one of the things about her legacy is some of those big arguments that she had, you know, everyone now accepts.’<sup>159</sup> Taste and respect meant honouring, not criticising, Thatcher. This suggestion by Cameron that ‘we’re all Thatcherites now’ signified economic and ideological progress, which, apparently, ‘everyone now accepts.’ Whilst ex-miners, their family members, and ex-mining towns were rendered ‘uncivilised’ in the media because ‘funeral parties’ transgressed cultural norms, they were also juxtaposed with socio-economic ‘progress.’ Whether due to a long-lasting hatred, the style of protest, or images of areas, such as Goldthorpe, as derelict, they were discerned as anachronistic. Economic explanations for their plight were rendered silent by cultural stigmatisation.

### The Denigration and Commemoration of ‘King Coal’

The forward march to ending Britain’s relationship with coal coincides with an increasing recognition of a global climate crisis. The costs associated with fossil fuels are widely illustrated through the environmental journalism of *The Guardian* and *Observer*.<sup>160</sup> This second example brings

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<sup>158</sup> Sophie Bush and Morgan Daniels, ‘No Flowers: Performative Interventions “at the Moment of” Margaret Thatcher’s Passing,’ *The Drama Review* 59 (2015) 109.

<sup>159</sup> Sparrow and Owen, ‘Politics Blog.’

<sup>160</sup> ‘We Believe: The Guardian’s environmental pledge 2019,’ *Guardian*, October 15 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2019/oct/16/the-guardians-climate-pledge-2019>.

together a climate crisis backdrop with a discursive analysis of media coverage on Kellingley Colliery's closure in 2015. Drawing on the work of Arnold, it argues that new and old narratives of 'risk' in discourse on coal overlap in justifications of the end of deep-mining in the UK. Although it is necessary to recognise the bodily and environmental effects of coalmining, I suggest that an overemphasis on these 'risks,' especially in abstraction from class exploitation, can affect how we understand and remember deindustrialisation, and how we render coal miners in the present. Arising from commemorations of 'King Coal' are important political and cultural implications. Whilst coal was being fetishised as an energy commodity, coal miners (and workers) were erased as historical producers of Great Britain's wealth.

In March 2015, *The Guardian* launched a climate appeal called 'Keep it in the Ground.'<sup>161</sup> They declared, as part of their global fight to reduce carbon emissions, 'You care—so does Tilda Swinton, the Minister for energy and climate change and some of the world's most senior scientists.'<sup>162</sup> An inconvenient truth also materialises here. *The Guardian's* politics of climate protection eluded critical commentary in their coverage of Kellingley Colliery's closure in December 2015.<sup>163</sup> Emotional appeals by miners to save the industry were, surely for some of their readers, seen as unhinged since coal was identified as a major ecological danger in the same year by the newspaper.

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<sup>161</sup> Alan Rusbridger, 'Climate change: why the Guardian is putting threat to Earth front and centre,' *Guardian*, March 6, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/mar/06/climate-change-guardian-threat-to-earth-alan-rusbridger>.

<sup>162</sup> Emma Howard, 'Keep it in the Ground campaign: six things we've learned,' *Guardian*, March 25, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/keep-it-in-the-ground-blog/2015/mar/25/keep-it-in-the-ground-campaign-six-things-weve-learned>.

<sup>163</sup> Jörg Arnold raises a similar point of their coverage of the thirtieth anniversary of the miners' strike of 1984-85. The 'newspaper drew no connection between the "Keep it in the Ground" appeal of 2015 and the struggle of 1984/85, which had been waged under the slogan "Coal not Dole."' See Arnold, 'Death of Sympathy,' 108.

Take this one example. Chris Kitchen, Secretary of the NUM, was quoted as saying: ‘When you see what has been done for others [e.g., subsidies], it makes you wonder if this is anything to do with climate change, or even economics, or if it is purely a political stance: “Thirty years ago we wanted to kill off the mining industry and this year we’ve finally got the chance.”’<sup>164</sup> Kitchen’s efforts to underline the political-economic conflict behind the ruination of the industry coincided with a minimisation of its environmental impact. Kitchen’s statement, alongside some men mourning the loss of mining jobs, could be perceived as expressing a conflict of interest in environmental terms.

Despite Kitchen’s attempt to place the last deep-pit closure in a historical framework, many online posters on *The Guardian* viewed the end of deep-mining as having a lot to do with climate protection. One poster, though extending their best wishes to miners, appropriated a news headline: ‘The end of an era—but it is an era that needs to end.’ Other online contributors were less considerate. Whilst one stated ‘Crocodile tears here,’ another poster questioned if a ‘community based on such health and environmentally destructive commodity [should] be saved?’ In another instance, a writer rebuked a statement made by the union’s branch secretary at Kellingley Colliery, who earlier remarked, ‘you only celebrate victory,’ by suggesting instead: ‘Perhaps it’s a victory for common sense and green eco-friendly living.’<sup>165</sup>

A contempt for coal and those who lamented its loss was articulated via a discourse of nostalgia for an eco-unfriendly ‘way of life.’ Wrapped up in a politics of climate protection, coalmining was conceptualised as a blight lying in the way of a healthy environment. Personal and communal

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<sup>164</sup> Susanna Rustin, ‘The end of deep coal mining in Britain: “They’ve knocked us down,”’ *Guardian*, December 5, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/dec/05/end-deep-coal-mining-kellingley-colliery-yorkshire>.

<sup>165</sup> The evidence presented here brings together three comment sections of news articles featured in *The Guardian*. See Rustin, ‘The end of deep coal mining in Britain’; Terry Macalister, ‘Kellingley colliery closure: “shabby end” for a once mighty industry,’ *Guardian*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/18/kellingley-colliery-shabby-end-for-an-industry#comments>; and Adam Vaughan, ‘The coal truth: how a major energy source lost its power in Britain,’ *Guardian*, July 19, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jul/19/how-coal-lost-power-britain>.

appeals to coal helped spawn new and revive old anachronisms associated with miners and mining. Alongside critiques of ecological catastrophe were also negative appraisals of mining work: ‘Good. Coal mining is a dirty dangerous job that produced dirty dangerous fuel.’<sup>166</sup>

Apparent grievances over the nature of work underground was a popular talking point, with some celebrating the end of deep-coalmining as primitive labour. Those who still yearned to work underground were seen as belonging to another world. According to one poster, any consideration to ‘support’ the industry under these circumstances was absurd: ‘Why is coal mining so special it needs support, it’s filthy dirty dangerous work and in the rest of the world it is something you don’t want your children to be involved in here it seems to be a family expectation or curse.’ Another wrote it was ‘insane that we’re talking about work that belongs in the Victorian era: it is stupidly dangerous and unhealthy. Is anyone seriously trying to romanticise crawling around in the dark all day...’<sup>167</sup>

For others, the eradication of an ‘uneconomic’ industry was also a cause for celebration: ‘Join me in celebrating the ending of this truly dreadful history,’ a contributor remarked. Not all of these remarks went unchallenged. Responding to the aforementioned poster, a writer argued, ‘you say dreadful I say way of life and well paid for men that did it also provided a backbone for small communities which are gone look at them now crime ridden drug addled places with nothing.’<sup>168</sup> In defending the industry and the culture which grew from it, this contributor offered a damning representation of the state of ex-coalfields. Commentators seemed to have reached a consensus on the aftermath of coalfield deindustrialisation. Who was responsible for the socio-economic outcome was a different story.

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<sup>166</sup> Rustin, ‘The end of deep coal mining in Britain.’

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

Two things particularly stand out about the online posts. The first was the suggestion that coalmining was being romanticised in news coverage. Yet, miners did not, nor journalists, declare a desire to extract coal because they relished unhealthy working conditions. As Chapter 2 illustrates, the ex-miners with whom I spoke with did the opposite. If interviewees (in the media coverage) lamented anything it was the loss of work and camaraderie. Even though reportage on camaraderie often remained at the level of generality, i.e., ‘everyone stuck together,’ it usually also appeared as an antiquated form of ‘brotherhood,’ since mining was recognised as dangerous and deadly work.<sup>169</sup> As one poster argued, ‘Let us not get excited or romanticise the inherently dangerous working environment of deep coal mines. Camaraderie can come from the sharing of danger, but could also come from [a] positive and successful workplace.’<sup>170</sup>

Attempts by journalists to capture the emotional significance of loss prompted suggestions of romanticising coalmining. Sincere or otherwise, efforts to convey the emotional experiences of miners were sometimes underscored by a condescending compassion. This is particularly striking when coalmining was brought into conversation with the environment, workplace dangers, or economics. One writer insisted that whilst miners ‘do not accept that coal has had its day, though it is by far the “dirtiest” source of energy,’ it was ‘hard not to feel sympathy’ for them.<sup>171</sup> After quoting a miner who professed ‘they loved the industry,’ a journalist suggested ‘it’s difficult to love Kellingley itself’ since it ‘feels like a monument to industrial decrepitude.’<sup>172</sup> The most striking example is featured in the BBC documentary, *The Last Miners*. Reporters from *BBC Look North* were filmed by the documentary crew trying to persuade miners, after losing their jobs, to give

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<sup>169</sup> Danni Hewson, ‘Kellingley miners remember life at UK’s last deep pit,’ *BBC News*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-35124235>.

<sup>170</sup> Rustin, ‘The end of deep coal mining in Britain.’

<sup>171</sup> Martin Fletcher, ‘The last days of the Big K,’ *New Statesman*, November 4, 2015, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/energy/2015/11/last-days-big-k>.

<sup>172</sup> Harry Wallop, ‘Kellingley Colliery: End of the mine,’ *Telegraph*, December 12, 2015, <https://s.telegraph.co.uk/graphics/projects/Kellingley-Colliery-coal-mine-closure/index.html>.

them ‘a bit more’ enthusiasm and ‘devastation’ for their evening news story.<sup>173</sup> This was not lost on some miners, either. After working his last shift, a miner responded to photographers with: ‘Smile. You’ve just lost your job.’<sup>174</sup>

The second noteworthy point about the online posts was how opposition to coalmining rested on two arguments: coal as a dangerous fossil fuel and coalmining as a dangerous job. Commentators often illustrated the destructive and hazardous work conditions of coalmining alongside its environmental effects. Drawing on Arnold’s work, I argue, the trope ‘blood on the coal’ overlapped with coal as a major polluter in 2015. If people could not be swayed by environmental arguments, then they at least should reflect on the industry’s deadly history in welcoming the end of ‘King Coal.’

Links between coal and dangerous work carried over to *The Guardian’s* online forums in 2017 after publishing an article on the closures of coal-fired power stations and the abandonment of Coal Forum. Despite the end of deep-coalmining two years earlier, social commentators referred to workplace injuries and disease-related stories in discussions of coalmining. According to one poster, ‘Either way it would have to go. My grandfather ran away to sea with the Merchant Navy rather than go down to the Northumbria pits. Given how bloody awful the working conditions were...and given that coal is the very dirtiest carbon fuel, seeing it go is a cause for celebration (and future generations will likely thank us.)’<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> *The Last Miners, Episode Two*, directed by Wes Pollitt (London, BBC1 London, 2016) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTF2caDbbmU>.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Vaughan, ‘The coal truth.’

Other contributors invoked mining's past through shared memories of their relatives who worked underground. Whilst one commentator wrote, 'they [father and grandfathers] told us over and over again, in the early 1950s that we should never become coal miners, even for the NCB.' Another recalled the physical toll mining took on their grandfather: 'one of those who went underground daily, suffered pneumoconiosis (compensation denied), had one leg torn open and skull fractured, struggled to survive through the strike, never went on holiday...I thank heaven I escaped his role in life.'<sup>176</sup>

These anecdotes are vital since they afford perspective into the legacy of coalmining. Ex-miners suffer from coal-related injuries and diseases and, in many cases, they or their families are denied compensation.<sup>177</sup> But let's also be clear here: whilst coal is a dangerous fossil fuel and coalmining is dangerous work, neither have played a salient role, especially the latter, in the historical ruination of deep-mining in the UK. A singular emphasis on the negative effects of coalmining on workers' health and the environment can make closures appear as inevitable or merely positive outcomes. It is necessary to illustrate the impact of industrial work on the body, especially as a 'corrective to romanticised "smokestack nostalgia" representations of benign workplaces,' as well as its environmental legacies in the present.<sup>178</sup> Yet, there is a potential danger if these readings gain cultural currency in either explanations or justifications of deindustrialisation.

A politics of climate protection, for instance, can influence the popular memory of coalmining and deindustrialisation. There is, perhaps, already a creeping propensity to situate Britain's 'withdrawal

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<sup>176</sup> Vaughan, 'The coal truth.'

<sup>177</sup> Stories of people, in particular, widows of former miners, being denied compensation for coal-related deaths was raised by Frank, who continues to volunteer as an advisor to ex-miners and their families. Frank Interview, 2018.

<sup>178</sup> Arthur McIvor, 'Deindustrialisation Embodied: Work, Health, and Disability in the United Kingdom since the Mid-Twentieth Century,' in *The Deindustrialised World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, ed. by Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017) Chapter 1, para 28, Kindle. See also, Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston, *Miners' Lung: A History of Dust Disease in British Coal Mining* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).

from coal’ against a historical backdrop of ecological crises and environmental politics.<sup>179</sup> This is also evident in journalism. In 2019, a journalist claimed that it was the ‘1980s movement to cleaner energy [that] made the need for coal almost obsolete.’<sup>180</sup> And in 2020, in a news item suggesting, once again, the dethroning of ‘King Coal,’ the writer argues how coal ‘evokes images of grimy poverty while its links to deadly air pollution, and its role in the dangerous overheating of our climate, have made it an increasingly unpopular source of energy in the UK.’<sup>181</sup>

An increasing and confined focus on the environment, whether in terms of pit closures or in opposition to a new mine, also runs the ‘risk’ of erasing class and class conflict from the history of coalfield deindustrialisation. An appeal for climate justice—absent of a class politics—has the danger of turning past industrial disputes into backward-looking protests, or, of overlooking the class dimensions of environmental activism.<sup>182</sup> As much as one may rejoice in the ‘dethroning’ of a ‘dirty’ and ‘dangerous’ industry, it is equally important to recognise these were supplementary (and sometimes overlapping) issues—next to organised labour and relative profitability of British-mined coal in the international marketplace—in the ruination of the coal industry in the 1980s and 1990s, for example. An attempt by West Cumbria Mining to open a new mine is further evidence of the logic of capitalism at work in the history of British coalmining in the 2020s.

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<sup>179</sup> Rapid Transition Alliance, ‘Dethroning king coal – how a once dominant fuel source is falling rapidly from favour,’ January 22, 2020, <https://www.rapidtransition.org/stories/dethroning-king-coal-how-a-once-dominant-fuel-source-is-falling-rapidly-from-favour>. The Rapid Transition Alliance is a network of international agencies supported by the KR Foundation. It is coordinated by clean energy campaigners from the New Weather Institute, the Institute of Development Studies, and the School of Global Studies at the University of Sussex.

<sup>180</sup> Patrick Hollis, ‘The Coal Industry is Nostalgic but Archaic: Here’s why it should stay that way,’ April 4 2019, <https://pihollis123.medium.com/the-coal-industry-is-nostalgic-but-archaic-heres-why-it-should-stay-that-way-df4a20ad0f24>.

<sup>181</sup> Robin McKie, ‘Is this the end for “king coal” in Britain?’ *Guardian*, August 9, 2020, [www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/09/is-this-the-end-for-king-coal-in-britain](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/09/is-this-the-end-for-king-coal-in-britain).

<sup>182</sup> When the 1992 pit closure programme was announced, the Coalfield Communities Campaign were fighting for the ‘reversal’ of Government planning guidelines supporting opencast coalmining because of its environmental effects. See Richard Sadler, ‘Opencast “gold mines” pile agony for depressed areas,’ *Yorkshire Post*, October 14, 1992.



Coal miners were also largely erased as producers of Britain's industrial wealth in news coverage on the end of deep-coalmining. Writers, who reported on Kellingley, tended to first commemorate coal as a historical energy resource, with many invoking the popular term 'King Coal.' This was best evidenced in headlines such as 'Goodbye Old King Coal' and 'The Rise and Fall of King Coal.'<sup>183</sup> A commemoration of coal was underscored by abstraction; writers often isolated the commodity from the miners who extracted it.<sup>184</sup> It was coal and the coal industry, not workers, who were explicitly recognised for their historical contributions. Audiences were told how coal 'fuelled the British empire' and 'stoked the industrial revolution.'<sup>185</sup> Or, how the coal industry provided 'fuel for the nation's steam engines, iron works, railways, and factories' and how it was 'seen as the backbone of the nation's industrial economy, the fuel for everything from steamboats to power plants.'<sup>186</sup> In other articles, coal was identified as providing people jobs: 'coal heated our homes, fuelled the industrial revolution, and provided millions of jobs in coalfields...'<sup>187</sup>

If, and when, coal miners were explicitly recognised as creators of wealth, it was either to raise a regenerative argument or a cultural inquiry. Macalister ended his article by quoting Wigan MP, Lisa Nandy, who declared: 'Britain's miners built the prosperity of this country through dangerous, difficult and dirty work in our coal mines.' 'Prosperity' was invoked by Nandy to encourage capital

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<sup>183</sup> Lucy Thornton, 'Goodbye Old King Coal: Community Heartbroken as Britain's last deep pit Kellingley closes,' *Mirror*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/goodbye-old-king-coal-community-7032178>; and Brian Blessed, 'The Rise and Fall of King Coal as Kellingley finally closes,' *BBC News*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-england-leeds-35126512>.

<sup>184</sup> Richard Budge of RJB Mining was notably identified as 'King Coal' after purchasing 17 of the UK's remaining 19 deep-mines in 1994. See "'King Coal' Richard Budge, of RJB Mining, dies aged 69," *BBC News*, July 18, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-36825236>.

<sup>185</sup> Jill Lawless, 'Britain's coal mining days are over,' *Insider*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/ap-pride-vies-with-sadness-as-britains-last-coal-pit-closes-2015-12>; 'Miners say closure of Britain's last deep pit mine is a "travesty,"' *ITV News*, December 17, 2015, <https://www.itv.com/news/2015-12-17/miners-say-closure-of-britains-last-deep-pit-mine-is-a-travesty>.

<sup>186</sup> Scott Patterson, 'End of an Era: England Closes Its Last Deep-Pit Coal Mine,' *Wall Street Journal*, December 11, 2015, [https://www.wsj.com/articles/pit-closure-marks-dying-embers-of-british-coal-industry-1449837861#comments\\_sector](https://www.wsj.com/articles/pit-closure-marks-dying-embers-of-british-coal-industry-1449837861#comments_sector); and Fletcher, 'The last days of the Big K.'

<sup>187</sup> 'The UK's last deep pit coal mines,' *BBC News*, August 19, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33959137>.

investment in ex-coalfields.<sup>188</sup> A pressing question about culture also emerged. Although ‘it is easy to romanticise miners,’ a writer suggested, it is worth asking ‘whether Britain will lose some of its character once it no longer has men below ground, carving out the nation’s wealth?’<sup>189</sup>

Contemporary imaginations of the coal miner as a producer of British wealth, or as an essential worker, were usually rendered silent by an explicit focus on dangerous work, industrial conflict, or how men would cope after the end of deep-mining. The harmful effects of work garnered more purchase in representations of miners and mining settlements: the commemoration of coal and the coal industry (wealth and power) obscured miners, whilst the disparaged elements (dangers, disasters, and diseases) foregrounded them. There was a tendency to frame narratives of British prosperity around coal as a commodity rather than the exploited labour that extracted and used coal to fuel industrial and global growth. A historical fetishisation of coal as an energy resource expunged miners (and other workers) as being creators of wealth in the broadest sense.<sup>190</sup> A discursive fixation with coal contributed to the peripheralisation of miners in eulogies about a commodity and *its* subsequent role in the creation of wealth. Labour was upstaged by the product.

### Coalfield Regeneration: The Remaking of Place Identity

Using Barnsley as a case study, this third section explores the relationship between memory and culture and the remaking of place. Although coalmining has far from vanished from the popular memory of the Barnsley Area, dominant perceptions of heroic and dangerous labour, alongside notions of tight-knit communities, I argue, can also contribute to its peripheralisation in cultural regeneration. The local council and business developers have imagined the town’s future through a

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<sup>188</sup> Macalister, ‘Kellingley colliery closure.’

<sup>189</sup> Wallop, ‘Kellingley colliery.’

<sup>190</sup> I am making a banal, but rather important point. To be clear: my point of contention is not that news coverage somehow overlooked class exploitation, that is, the extraction of surplus value from wage/salaried labourers, as illustrated by Marx. Rather, writers simply glossed over, at least explicitly, how the labour of coal miners (and workers more generally) helped produce the material wealth of Britain in favour of paying homage to coal and the coal industry.

past exploiting its central market and glass industry. In an effort to illustrate the cultural tensions in reimagining place, I juxtapose a local mining group's attempt to memorialise a pit disaster with the council's attempts to revitalise Barnsley's town centre. This chapter argues that the memory of 'social heroism,' although helping to preserve collective representations of coalmining, can conflict with the cultural remaking of place.<sup>191</sup>

Coalmining finds cultural expression through heritage sites, national museums, memorial plaques, physical remains, and cultural traditions in and outside of the Barnsley Area.<sup>192</sup> The Durham Miners' Gala continues to draw large crowds of spectators every year.<sup>193</sup> Recently, the Oaks Colliery Disaster Memorial was unveiled in Barnsley in 2017. Ian Roberts argues that popular notions of miners waging battle with 'elemental forces' of underground work, and mining communities engaging in industrial conflicts, has become more entrenched in the 'public imagination' of Wearside near Sunderland.<sup>194</sup> Despite the suggestion the 'mining industry has experienced a successful recovery of memory' in contrast to shipbuilding, tensions persist around preserving memories.<sup>195</sup> As Keith Gildart and colleagues illustrate, ex-miners still express frustration over how 'particular narratives and experiences are pushed to the margins' in local heritage projects.<sup>196</sup> This section builds on this work by illustrating how the memorialisation of a coalmining past can clash with cultural regeneration, contributing to 'working-class invisibility.'<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Ian Roberts, 'Collective Representations, Divided Memory and Patterns of Paradox: Mining and Shipbuilding,' *Sociological Research Online* 12 (2007), 7.4.

<sup>192</sup> For studies on the politics of memory and heritage sites, see Bella Dicks, *Heritage, Place and Community* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2000); Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell experiment: Public history in a postindustrial city* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2006); and Natasha Vall, 'Coal is our strife: representing mining heritage in North East England,' *Cotemporary British History* 32 (2018).

<sup>193</sup> Mary Mellor and Carol Stephenson, 'The Durham Miners' Gala and the spirit of community,' *Community Development Journal* 40 (2005).

<sup>194</sup> Roberts, 'Collective Representations,' 7.3 to 7.4.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>196</sup> Gildart et al., 'Revisiting the history of the British coal industry,' 4.

<sup>197</sup> Clarke, 'Closing Moulinex,' 446.

Since the 1984-85 miners' strike, there were concerns about 'improving Barnsley's image.' The area's association with the industrial revolution and industrial militancy conflicted with a 'corporate image' that the Barnsley council and chamber of commerce were trying to cultivate with the revitalisation of the town centre.<sup>198</sup> In their 1985 annual report, the chamber of commerce announced that they would 'take every opportunity not only to counteract this image, which is, of course, neither true nor typical, but to promote Barnsley showing its strengths and advantages.'<sup>199</sup> There was a desire, by those in charge with regeneration, to seek out more modern, progressive, and attractive imagery in marketing Barnsley.

The reimagining of the area's town centre has, henceforth, been a focal point in the cultural remaking of the Barnsley borough. In the early 2000s, Barnsley adopted a regeneration agenda favouring culture and creativity as a way to 'move beyond its mining past.'<sup>200</sup> As part of the Renaissance Towns Initiative project, led by Yorkshire Forward, Barnsley was reimagined as a 'Tuscan hill village' with a halo of light hovering over its landscape, supported economically by the revitalisation of its town's market.<sup>201</sup> As expressed by architect, Will Alsop, 'If we can just make this town beautiful, people will come.'<sup>202</sup> Although this Tuscany vision failed to materialise on a large scale, it signified efforts to imagine a future that, in some respects, was remarkably different from its past. As for coalmining, there remained an effort on the part of the local council, key

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<sup>198</sup> 'Discussion Paper: Improving Barnsley's Image,' *Head of Employment Division*, 1985, Barnsley Archives and Local Studies Department.

<sup>199</sup> 'Sluggish economy slow in reviving,' *Barnsley Chronicle*, April 5, 1985, 39.

<sup>200</sup> Myrna Margulies Breitbart, 'Halo over Barnsley: Centering the Margins in the Transformation of a Former Mining Community,' in *Creative Economies in Post-Industrial Cities: Manufacturing a (Different) Scene*, ed. Myrna Margulies Breitbart (London: Routledge, 2016) 155.

<sup>201</sup> *All Barnsley Might Dream*, directed by Squint/Opera and Alsop Architects (United Kingdom, 2003), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJRO43XtdTM>. See also *Post Barnsley*, directed by Squint/Opera and Alsop Architects (United Kingdom, 2003) <https://vimeo.com/109781953>.

<sup>202</sup> 'Tuscan vision for Barnsley,' *BBC News*, January 10, 2003, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/2644955.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/2644955.stm).

partners, and stakeholders to eliminate an ‘out dated and cliché mining image that is often associated with the town.’<sup>203</sup>

Over the past 15 years, Barnsley’s regenerative efforts—although undergoing changes in design and scope against a backdrop of funding challenges, economic recession, and local skepticism—have produced significant changes in the town centre’s built environment.<sup>204</sup> Physical alterations of the landscape have accompanied the remaking of a place identity, which has imagined the future through its multiple past(s). The glass industry—a historic industry in its own right, and one that still manufactures products in and around the Barnsley Area—was foregrounded in the council’s ‘historic’ and ‘forward looking’ town centre.<sup>205</sup> The name given to the major redevelopment of the town centre is: The Glass Works. According to their website, this ‘name reflects the heritage Barnsley is so proud of—glass manufacturing made a tremendous contribution to the town’s economy and the Glass Works development will follow in its footsteps’ and it stays ‘true to the values that make Barnsley so special...’<sup>206</sup> The town centre’s renaissance rests on two old identities: its town market and glass industry.

The Glass Works programme includes new shops, restaurants, cinema, a Superbowl UK bowling venue, family restaurants, revitalised indoor market, and innovative library. The town’s new and stylish library at the Lightbox, opposite to the Glass Works, also takes its name from its glass exterior design, described as the ‘cornerstone’ of the town.<sup>207</sup> Not too far up the street is The Glass

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<sup>203</sup> Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, ‘Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council Investment Plan 2010 to 2014,’ accessed August 10, 2020, <https://barnsleymbc.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Cabinet/201006231000/Agenda/1c5be25-1293fdc9507--7fff-part1.pdf>, 12.

<sup>204</sup> ‘The Glass Works claims major national regeneration award ahead of opening,’ Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, June 11, 2021, <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/news/the-glass-works-claims-major-national-regeneration-award-ahead-of-opening>.

<sup>205</sup> ‘The Development – The Glass Works Barnsley,’ accessed July 15, 2019, <https://theglassworksbarnsley.com>.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> ‘Library opens as Barnsley’s new “cornerstone,”’ *BBC News*, July 13, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-48974891>.

House Pub Restaurant alongside the Premier Inn Hotel in the Gateway Plaza development, a centre for relatively new condo flats, offices, and small businesses.

Prior to the announcement of The Glass Works project, John Kirk and colleagues illustrated how 'Barnsley's mining past is not the tradition that helps constitute its current identity, which underlines the view that memory/history can be as much about forgetting as remembering.'<sup>208</sup> Forgetting a coalmining 'tradition' in the remaking of place is not simply about erasure. A regenerative focus on the town's market and glass industry also shapes and reflects individual and collective memories of coalmining in both form and content.

When and, if, incorporated into the remaking of place, edifices honouring coal miners and coalmining, such as, plaques and memorials—despite their efforts to memorialise the past—are themselves often seen as anachronistic. It is not the new, colourful, and stylish chain of storefronts, but rather, in the case of the Oaks memorial, a bronze, solemn, and eloquent statue through which coalmining finds cultural expression on the outskirts of The Glass Works. Similar edifices are scattered throughout the borough of Barnsley, including the preservation of a winding wheel and pithead gear of Barnsley Main Colliery.<sup>209</sup> Although coalmining infuses the collective memory of the region, it is usually located on the periphery of the town centre and entrenched in statues or plaques honouring labour and community.<sup>210</sup>

This is best evidenced by the Oaks memorial honouring hundreds of lives claimed by England's worst coalmining disaster in 1866. The statue features a woman with coal flowing down her

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<sup>208</sup> Kirk, with Jefferys and Wall, 'Representing Identity and Work in Transition,' 211.

<sup>209</sup> 'Barnsley Main colliery gets Grade II listed status,' *BBC News*, June 20, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-22986039>.

<sup>210</sup> Before and after interviews, some interviewees took me to see memorial sites scattered across the Barnsley area because they wanted me to see it.

back—perhaps illustrating that mining families and miners were the ‘backbone’ of the nation—holding a grieving child following the explosion at the colliery. It is an image that is applicable to many coalmining disasters.<sup>211</sup> Supported by People and Mining, a local group, mainly of ex-miners, determined to preserve the memory of coalmining, and by the NUM Yorkshire Area and local historians and residents, the monument’s development was backed by public donations. Local sculptor, Graham Ibbeson, also volunteered his services. When raising funds for this memorial, the local group declared: ‘Barnsley is a town renowned for its long association with the coal industry’ and ‘we are proud of our great mining heritage and all men, women and children who served in the coal industry and those who live in our communities.’<sup>212</sup>

Efforts by People and Mining to memorialise the Oaks disaster reflected contrasting narratives of pride of place. It was the glassworks, not coalmining, heritage that was championed by the council and developers in regeneration. Moreover, it was illustrated, in conversations with those involved in the memorial, that tensions surrounded the monument’s placement. Unopposed to the monument itself per se, the local council was opposed to a coalmining memorial directly outside of the town hall because it may counter their efforts in remaking Barnsley. As part of Barnsley’s cultural heritage, then, coalmining, although not absent, was identified as being on the margins.<sup>213</sup> Popular associations of coalmining with labour and community have contributed to its cultural peripheralisation in the remaking of place.

The Oaks monument can honour an unfashionable history of labour and communal hardship in the Barnsley area. For ex-miners Ronald and Dennis, who were involved in its development, a

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<sup>211</sup> ‘Oaks Disaster 1866,’ Oaks Colliery Disaster Website, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.oaks1866.com/memorials/oaks-memorial-sculpture-by-graham-ibbeson>.

<sup>212</sup> People and Mining, ‘The Oaks Disaster 1866,’ Barnsley: People of Mining, 2016.

<sup>213</sup> An apparent desire for the local council to transcend the town’s coalmining past was expressed, both negatively and positively, in conversations with people in Barnsley.

collective memory of coalmining work was important since it preserved a history of labour struggle. Dennis stated, 'The monument represents a history...it represents a history of conflict. It represents a history of suffering and struggle. I suppose, really, we've lost that history of struggle.'<sup>214</sup> It was the memory of the sacrifices of miners and mining families that Ronald hoped to preserve with the Oaks memorial:

When you look particularly around Barnsley, the number of people who has been killed in the Barnsley Area, it is mind-boggling. I still find that disturbing. The numbers. Nobody were blamed for most of these disasters. Mainly, at the end of the day they were put down as an act of God. And that way none of the coal companies had paid any compensation for [voice softens] anything toward 'em. That memory is important to keep going...how much effort went into mining and its costs.<sup>215</sup>

Remembering the human and social 'costs' associated with coalmining, however, can conflict with regenerative efforts, since funerary monuments foreground, not revival, but death and exploitation.

This does not mean these visual representations are futile. They may be more important now in raising historical awareness of how employers (public and private) can also 'make use of the energies of its young people for generations, and then throw the place away like an orange peel and walk off.'<sup>216</sup> This popular form of memorialisation, nevertheless, has strengthened coal's association with a particular version of the past that is difficult to coopt into practices of placemaking. Unlike the less politically-charged and more economically-friendly portrayals of a 'strong work ethic' found in regeneration literature, representations of labour 'struggle and suffering' rest uneasy with local efforts to attract capital investment.<sup>217</sup>

A sense of community arising from 'struggle and suffering' is also discerned as problematic in terms of regeneration. In 2008, Steven Houghton, Barnsley council leader, alluded to the historical

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<sup>214</sup> Dennis Interview, November 20, 2018.

<sup>215</sup> Ronald Interview, December 12, 2018.

<sup>216</sup> Staughton Lynd, *The Fight Against Shutdowns: Youngstown's Steel Mill Closings* (San Pedro: Singlejack Books, 1982) 4.

<sup>217</sup> Strangleman et al., 'Heritage Work,' 7.2.



and paradoxical effects of ‘community’ when talking about Barnsley’s place in the future:

‘Barnsley’s great strength is its sense of community. People look after each other, and when the mines were shut people really came together. But Barnsley’s sense of community is also its greatest weakness. It can make people inward-looking and resistant to change.’<sup>218</sup> Occupying a place in this interpretation of community is a coalmining culture. A supposed nostalgia for a mining community was discerned as an obstacle in regeneration. A distancing from coalmining in the remaking of Barnsley was as much about making the town more ‘progressive’ as with reconfiguring cultural ‘attitudes.’<sup>219</sup>

From this perspective, the Oaks memorial can be seen as problematic. It is unsurprising that some made an effort, including the sculptor himself, to establish a link between the monument and the present: ‘The biggest monument to the Oaks disaster is what has happened to the community in Barnsley, how that has moved forward in 150 years. The people around us, the mining village, we have all moved forward, it has become a vibrant town.’<sup>220</sup> Here, Ibbeson seemingly romanticised a present, illustrating how the town and its residents had ‘moved forward’ from its mining past.

Not everyone viewed Barnsley, nor the monument, this way, including some ex-miners. Although Christopher was ‘proud’ that a mining heritage was remembered through the Oaks memorial, he was concerned about a creeping nostalgia and its implications in the present.

It is history now. It’s not coming back. And I think we need to focus more energy on building the future for our future generations. You know, I think it’s right and proper that we remember what our community is based on. But we’ve also got to admit that’s gone. It’s not coming back.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Adam Branson, ‘Tough Lover: Steven Houghton, leader, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council,’ *Placemaking Resource*, April 4, 2008, [www.placemakingresource.com/article/799490/tough-lover-steve-houghton-leader-barnsley-metropolitan-borough-council](http://www.placemakingresource.com/article/799490/tough-lover-steve-houghton-leader-barnsley-metropolitan-borough-council).

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> ‘Memorial to hundreds killed in England’s biggest mining disaster,’ *Yorkshire Post*, May 7, 2017, <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/memorial-hundreds-killed-englands-biggest-mining-disaster-1777475>.

<sup>221</sup> Christopher Interview, November 17, 2018.

Christopher's insistence that he was 'fine' with the memorial is noteworthy; he did not want to appear overtly critical, nor suggest that the Oaks monument was futile because it was important to remember 'our community.' Nevertheless, Christopher was ambivalent towards the Oaks memorial, since it would not create industries in areas that desperately needed them. Nor would it, echoing Houghton, 'fuel' the aspirations of a younger generation of residents.<sup>222</sup> Ernie reiterated a similar sentiment after bringing up the monument: 'It's too late. Why they've done it, I don't know.'<sup>223</sup> Ernie questioned the memorial's utility and how it may affect perceptions of people and places as negatively immersed in the past.<sup>224</sup>

Visual representations of labour and community can conflict with regenerative efforts. A desire by the local council, developers, and some residents (including ex-miners) to 'move on' from a coalmining past has political implications. A tendency to view the Oaks memorial as fixated with the past at the detriment to the present, or future, obfuscates what the past may tell us about the present. Funerary monuments help preserve a collective memory of miners and mining localities as both essential and exploited; they were exploited in the extraction of a valuable fuel, then later discarded when this fuel was no longer valuable, illustrating the disposability of people and places once 'essential' to Britain. It is worth asking a provocative question: Will frontline workers, some of whom have been publicly praised during a health pandemic, suffer a similar fate as our 'essential workers' of the contemporary period?

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<sup>222</sup> Christopher Interview.

<sup>223</sup> Ernie Interview, August 15, 2016.

<sup>224</sup> Steven High also illustrates how some people in Sturgeon Falls, Ontario, Canada, were not interested in memorialising the paper mill in the town. See High, *One Job Town: Work, Belonging, and Betrayal in Northern Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

## Conclusion

Drawing on three specific events, this chapter examines how coal miners and mining settlements have been remembered and represented in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It argues that the cultural peripheralisation of miners, their families, and mining areas persists—specifically amid trying political, economic, and cultural circumstances—long after the wave of pit closures in the 1980s and 1990s. Emerging from discursive representations were renderings of (ex)miners as anachronistic. They were discerned as either lacking taste and respect, romanticising a ‘primitive’ form of labour, and being fixated with the past. Despite the recent suggestion that miners have ‘won the culture war hands down,’ this chapter argues miners have been blamed, patronised, and erased, raising the cultural, social, and political implications of class.<sup>225</sup>

An inclination to blame former mining areas for their economic plight is evidenced in public discourse surrounding the burning of the effigy of Thatcher. Class stereotypes, such as lazy, thick, and deplorable, were drawn on to explain why and how ‘celebrations’ unfolded. A tendency for some journalists to hone in on ‘taste’ and ‘respect,’ whilst distinguishing the South from the North, were illustrative of symptoms of a deeper cultural malaise amongst generations of people, primarily men, from ex-mining areas. It is noteworthy that there has also been an effort by those in charge of regeneration to transcend a working-class culture in coalfield areas. An emphasis on renewal, flexibility, and adaptability has made it increasingly acceptable to lay the blame primarily on people and places for their misfortunes.

There was a tendency to patronise ex-miners in coverage on the end of deep-mining in the UK.

When illustrating coal’s historical significance, journalists often included the perspectives of some

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<sup>225</sup> Kristian Niemietz, ‘The miners may have lost their strike, but they won the culture war hands down,’ *Telegraph*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/06/06/miners-may-have-lost-strike-won-culture-war-hands>.

Kellingley miners. This inclusion of men's work experiences should be understood less as a sign of romanticising than as an act of sympathetic listening. In some cases, however, sympathetic listeners later conveyed an ecological crisis associated with coal, or worse, failed to mention—in the case of *The Guardian*—the newspaper's involvement in promulgating an environmental agenda. Any sympathy extended to coal miners was usually accompanied by a 'but' implying either inevitability or social progress.

A perhaps genuine attempt by some journalists to include the perspectives and experiences of miners also raises moral and ethical questions about capturing the emotional experiences of loss of its subjects. What is the underlying logic and politics of this coverage? Why are we including intimate stories of workers' pain and loss? Who is this for: the viewer, reporter, or subject? As one interviewee indicated in *The Last Miners*, 'it is a shame that we couldn't have the same level of interests when we were trying to keep the mines open as the same level of interest now the mines are closing.'<sup>226</sup>

A condescending compassion is also present when coalmining was characterised as a dangerous occupation belonging in the past. But, more importantly, an inclination for some people to legitimise the end of deep-mining on the basis of injuries, diseases and death, can contribute to a reimagining of the history and memory of coalfield deindustrialisation. A theme of class erasure also surfaced when coal was fetishised for fuelling the industrial growth of Britain. Coal miners and coalmining communities were discerned less as essential workers or producers of wealth than as victims—albeit fleetingly—of dangerous work and its absence. Popular tropes of deadly work, alongside tight-knit communities, inflects the collective memory of mining and its cultural presence in the remaking of place. Barnsley's local council and economic developers have exploited the

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<sup>226</sup> *The Last Miners*.

town's glass industry in their most recent efforts to regenerate the town centre, contributing to both the 'invisibility' and 'visibility' of labour in particular cultural forms.

A popular motif of backwardness permeating discursive representations of coalmining has continued with the proposal of Woodhouse Colliery. Although coal poses an unequivocal ecological threat, the proposed opening of a new mine can affect not only the popular memory of coalfield deindustrialisation, but also how we remember and render miners and mining settlements. On a deeper and more personal level, cultural representations matter to many ex-miners; they continue to influence how my interviewees construct their memories and narrate experiences of coalmining. We now turn our focus to the oral narratives of ex-miners from and surrounding the Barnsley area.

## Chapter 2

### **Countering Historical and Contemporary Representations of Coalmining in Oral Testimonies: Re-Representing the Coal Miner Through Essential Work, Skilled Labour, and Camaraderie**

Building on the last chapter exploring the cultural legacy of coalfield deindustrialisation and regeneration, this chapter focuses on the discursive and experiential worlds of ex-coal miners. Its interest lies with how they defined and articulated their worlds of work and themselves as coal miners. Emerging from my oral history interviews were self-representations of coalmining as essential work and skilled labour, bound together by a workplace camaraderie in the pits. These portrayals usually countered historical and contemporary representations of coalmining, discerned by interviewees, as degrading to the collective memory and identity of miners and mining settlements. They usually also involved a critical commentary on the socio-economic and cultural legacies of deindustrialisation, bringing us to the lived and embodied experiences of work and its loss. It argues that a cultural legacy of marginalisation is bound up with how ex-miners construct memory and narrate experience, revealing an ongoing struggle over the memory and representation of coalmining in oral history interviews.

This chapter should be read as a dynamic exchange with the previous chapter. To summarise briefly, (ex)miners and mining settlements were rendered as anachronistic and nostalgic, whilst simultaneously erased as historical producers of British wealth and power. These depictions are not confined to ex-coalfields. As John Kirk, Sylvie Contrepolis, and Steve Jefferys illustrate, the ‘material world and cultural life of working-class communities across Europe have come to be regarded, it seems, as extinct or increasingly obsolete...the object only of heritage spectacles and exercises in nostalgia.’<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> John Kirk, Sylvie Contrepolis, and Steve Jefferys, ‘Approaching Regional and Identity Change in Europe,’ in *Changing Work and Community Identities in European Regions: Perspectives on the Past and Present*, ed. John Kirk, Sylvie Contrepolis, and Steve Jefferys (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 8-9.

In men's oral history interviews, contrasting representations of coalmining are present, bringing together positive and negative accounts of the industry's legacy. A 'dual experience,' previously illustrated by Dennis Warwick and Gary Littlejohn in their analysis of mining communities in West Yorkshire, also permeates ex-mineworkers' oral testimonies. There is, as Warwick and Littlejohn argue, 'hardness, ugliness and danger on one side, friendliness, closeness, and solidarity on the other...Further while there is clearly felt stigma in and about pit villages, there is also a sense of a shared glory and pride.'<sup>228</sup> As we will shortly see, my interviewees not only situate themselves within, but also contest stigmatising cultural representations. In doing so, there is sometimes a tendency to produce their own dualistic readings of coal miners and coalmining.

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How ex-miners recount and recall their experiences of coalmining in oral history interviews are mediated by discursive representations of the past and present. Memory is not, as Alessandro Portelli shows, a 'passive depository of facts' that narrators independently recall, outside of social and cultural and historical and geographical contexts, in the act of remembrance.<sup>229</sup> Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird further illustrate how personal memory does not occur outside of public discourse: 'Memories are formed through a complex process of interaction between an individual's experiences and publicly available constructs, including prior accounts of similar experiences.'<sup>230</sup> They point to a dialectical relationship between personal and popular memory—a dynamic that is similarly present through the employment of concepts such as 'collective,' 'public,' and 'social' memory—arguing that popular memory is 'a product of contest'

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<sup>228</sup> Dennis Warwick and Gary Littlejohn, *Coal, Capital, and Culture: A Sociological Analysis of Mining Communities in West Yorkshire* (London: Routledge, 1992) 17.

<sup>229</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?' in *The Oral History Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2015) 52.

<sup>230</sup> Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) 14.

and it 'is shaped by a variety of representations of the past that struggle for dominance in the public domain.'<sup>231</sup>

In their exploration of the struggle over memory in Youngstown, Ohio, an ex-steel town, Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo demonstrate that any single representation is 'part of a complex web of representations' which reflect and shape one another.<sup>232</sup> Although some representations are clearly more powerful than others, they argue that 'neither image creators nor audiences are passive or powerless,' since people 'bring their own interests to bear as they interpret what they see and hear and as they construct their own representations.'<sup>233</sup>

These interests often intersect with composure in oral testimonies.<sup>234</sup> Whilst composing their memories ex-coal miners sought composure; as narrators, they constructed a sense of self, as well as a collective identity, around essential and/or skilled work in their interviews. Citing Alistair Thomson, John Kirk writes, 'composing the self is not only a way of imagining, or re-imagining, the past, but of making sense of the present and situating oneself within it.'<sup>235</sup> Arising from such efforts are sometimes notable tensions between the past and present. Representations of industrial work and its loss, as illustrated by Tim Strangleman, James Rhodes, and Sherry Lee Linkon, can reveal tensions 'between past ideas about work, class, identity, and place and a present in which those things have been destabilised not only by deindustrialisation but also by current economic conditions.'<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Summerfield and Peniston-Bird, 13

<sup>232</sup> Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 6-7.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>234</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews,' *Cultural and Social History* 1 (2004) 69.

<sup>235</sup> Kirk, *Class, Culture and Social Change*, 148. See Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia,' in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>236</sup> Strangleman, Rhodes, and Linkon, 'Introduction to Crumbling Cultures,' 9.



The present conditions from which men narrate stories and experiences of coalmining must be taken into account when considering nostalgia and memory in oral history interviews. Concerns over a ‘creeping industrial nostalgia’ in deindustrial scholarship were highlighted by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott in the early 2000s.<sup>237</sup> Introducing the term ‘smokestack nostalgia,’ they argue ‘that we have to strip industrial work of its broad-shouldered, social-realist patina and see it for what it was: tough work that people did because it paid well and it was located in their communities.’<sup>238</sup> Emerging from some work, according to Cowie and Heathcott, was a tendency to romanticise an industrial past.

It is necessary to not simply conceive of nostalgia as a sentimental attachment. Foregrounding the reflective, interpretive, and political aspects of nostalgia, Strangleman suggests that we must be critical in how we understand and approach nostalgia, since ‘almost all nostalgic reflection questions memory...’<sup>239</sup> A longing for coalmining, in particular, camaraderie, amongst my group of interviewees, usually prompted criticisms about mining work and its legacy on male bodies and health. Ben Jones, moreover, illustrates how ‘nostalgic writings’ in working-class autobiography for ‘older urban areas’ counters ‘dominant stigmatising representations of these neighbourhoods and their inhabitants.’<sup>240</sup>

A nostalgia for a past, then, can often tell us a great deal about ‘the experience of contemporary life.’<sup>241</sup> A tendency for ex-miners to find value and meaning in a mining past occurs against a backdrop of structural violence; a prolonged period of regeneration involving land reclamation,

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<sup>237</sup> Cowie and Heathcott, ‘The Meanings of Deindustrialisation,’ 14.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>239</sup> Tim Strangleman, “‘Smokestack Nostalgia’ “Ruin Porn” or Working-Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation,’ *International Labour and Working-Class History* 84 (2013) 28.

<sup>240</sup> Ben Jones, ‘The Uses of Nostalgia: Autobiography, Community Publishing and Working Class Neighbourhoods in Post-war England,’ *Cultural and Social History* 7 (2010) 356.

<sup>241</sup> Strangleman, ‘Work Identity in Crisis,’ 414.

competition over funding, failed development projects, capital investment and disinvestment, and the ongoing remaking of place identity; and, more recently, the last-deep mine closure followed by Brexit and the post-Brexit transition delay. Although individuals perceive these events differently, they signify major social, economic, and political ruptures in everyday life since industrial closures of the 1980s and 1990s.

Intersubjective exchanges between the interviewee and interviewer also affect personal recollections and representations conveyed by narrators. The oral history interview has been described by Portelli as a form of ‘dialogue,’ bringing together an ‘exchange of gazes’ in the fashioning of a ‘cocreated narrative.’<sup>242</sup> The ‘task’ of oral historians, Portelli insists, is also ‘to open up narrative spaces. Some of these spaces are generated by our very presence’ and ‘some are generated by the narrators’ own subjectivity and self-image creation.’<sup>243</sup> At specific moments, interviewees used the interview to counter stereotypes of miners as either adversaries, redundant and unintelligent, or nostalgic and fixated on the past.

A struggle over representation and memory interweaves with how ex-miners locate themselves in and make sense of the past and present. This chapter further illustrates the cultural and political tensions underlying discursive representations of coalmining in acts of remembrance. Self-representations were at once bound up with and counter-responses to externalised and internalised portrayals of coal miners as the ‘other.’ Emerging from men’s oral testimonies was not simply loss, for instance, a ‘mourning for the eclipse of their own structure of feeling,’ but also a struggle for respect and recognition in the present.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Portelli, ‘Living Voices,’ 239.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>244</sup> Strangleman, ‘Work Identity in Crisis,’ 422.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section shows how ex-miners highlighted their individual and collective labour as essential work. These self-portrayals were often expressed in tandem with representations of miners and mining settlements as adversarial and retrogressive. An effort by interviewees to illustrate the historical significance of work and workers can be understood in two ways. Firstly, as a counter response to demeaning representations, and secondly, as critical commentary on transformations of the importance and understanding of place and labour in the present.

The second section focuses on the ways in which ex-miners represent skills in the coal industry. Whilst familiar associations of the coal miner and coalmining with graft, toughness, and work ethic were still present, these popular representations were usually supplemented (or even sometimes overshadowed) by an emphasis on mining certificates, qualifications, and education in men's oral narratives. Analogous to self-representations of essential work, interviewees brought together self-portrayals of skilful and knowledgeable workers with unfavourable representations of coal miners as lacking intelligence in the past and present. It was not simply about illustrating their technical expertise, but rather the process involved in acquiring these skills and knowledge, from additional schooling to training in the coal industry. In turn, however, some interviewees found themselves producing a dualistic narrative of coal miners.

The third and final section bring us to popular representations of camaraderie. Although interviewees may have initially romanticised camaraderie when lamenting its loss with coalfield deindustrialisation, they simultaneously offered a scathing critique of dangerous work and its long-term effects. If there was a desire for ex-miners to return to a coalmining past it was usually underscored by a paradox: they yearned for a camaraderie in a work environment that they were

also critical of. This section ends by suggesting that camaraderie is worthy of its own historical investigation.

### From Indispensable to Disposable: The Coal Miner as an Essential Worker

As the first chapter illustrates, journalists and social commentators usually obscured coal miners when highlighting the historical importance of ‘King Coal.’ By contrast, ex-miners framed their individual and collective labour within a wider discourse of provision in their oral narratives. These self-portrayals, however, were often expressed in tandem with external—and usually degrading—representations of miners and mining settlements as enemies, backwards, or dilapidated. The efforts made by interviewees to illustrate the historical significance of labour and place were, in part, a counter-response to demeaning characterisations of mining and a critical commentary on shifting notions and experiences of dependency.

Contestations over the epithet the ‘enemy within’ was a reoccurring motif in men’s oral narratives. In 1984, Thatcher identified miners’ leaders with ‘external threats’ such as the Soviet Union and Argentina. Striking miners, writes Daryl Leeworthy, were seen as a ‘direct antagonism to British democracy and to the British way of life.’<sup>245</sup> The phrase the ‘enemy within,’ invoked by Thatcher, commonly featured in oral history interviews, especially at the beginning of my fieldwork, prompting inquiry in future interviews. This political utterance continues to have cultural purchase in storytelling, influencing how ex-miners compose narratives of conflict, the self and collective, and a sense of place.

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<sup>245</sup> Daryl Leeworthy, ‘The secret life of us: 1984, the miners’ strike and the place of biography in writing history “from below,”’ *European Review of History* 19 (2012) 829.

The legacy of the label the ‘enemy within’ is present in the ways it affects interviewees’ memories and perceptions of conflict—from warfare to industrial action. For instance, Jack indicated how portrayals of miners and mining towns as adversaries impacted how some men responded to other crises. He explained, in turn, how his mate used the epithet in protest against going to the reserves when the Falklands War began in 1982. According to Jack, his friend replied to a written request by stating: ‘I don’t think you require enemy within. She classed me as enemy within and I don’t see why I should defend any country.’<sup>246</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that the Falklands War occurred two years prior to the 1984-85 miners’ strike, Jack’s remark points to the emotional significance of the ‘enemy within’ more than 30 years afterwards. Its usage offers insight into how he (and others) felt they were perceived and how they responded to it, imaginatively or otherwise, by dissociation with place and country.

In another example, William situated the UK railway strikes (2016-2017) in the language of the ‘enemy within.’ He questioned whether the railway union and its workers were now national antagonists because they were on strike and had disrupted the travel of other workers. As a result, he was apprehensive when reflecting on past industrial conflicts: ‘I think now it is the rail men, railway union as the “enemy within” when they’re striking down...Your perspective changes. Maybe we [coal miners] thought we were more than what we were. [...] But then again in them days I didn’t.’<sup>247</sup> A portrayal of striking miners as ‘enemies’ not only framed how William broached the topic of industrial action, but also underscored tensions surrounding individual and collective memories of the 1984-85 miners’ strike. This point will be further explored in Chapter 4.

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<sup>246</sup> Jack Interview, August 24, 2016.

<sup>247</sup> William Interview, August 19, 2016.

For others, this epithet was viewed as a personal and collective stigmatisation. Some interviewees argued that its cultural relevance was specific to the 1984-85 strike, used to get the country to ‘turn their backs on us.’<sup>248</sup> Others suggested that it (re)produced perceptions of people and places as ‘enemies’ thereafter—imagined usually from the South. Nick was blunt: ‘Today. Still today.’<sup>249</sup> References to this cultural stigma often bled into critiques of other class stereotypes of miners as being thick and nostalgic, and mining towns as retrogressive. Whilst Liam stated that people were ‘renowned to knock us,’ Ryan saw harsh characterisations as ‘normal, just like water off a duck’s back.’<sup>250</sup>

At the same time, many interviewees challenged the name ‘enemy within’ in their oral narratives. Our interest herein lies with how ex-miners responded to this label and what it may tell us about shifts in meanings of labour and place in ex-coalfields. Interviewees adamantly defended that they were neither economic (avaricious) or political (anti-democratic) enemies in two ways. Firstly, some placed an emphasis on why they were on strike; they were ‘fighting’ for jobs. A desire to repeatedly point out strike action was not about money is evident in Ben’s oral testimony: ‘People didn’t understand that we weren’t fighting for a wage rise. Television [and] newspapers were all putting into people’s heads we were greedy miners fighting for a wage rise. We weren’t fighting for a wage rise.’<sup>251</sup>

These attempts by ex-miners to explain their reasoning behind strike action were accompanied by a second counter-argument. This usually involved constructing a history of coalmining labour in terms of provision, exploitation, and prosperity. Reflecting on the ‘hurtful’ nature of this remark,

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<sup>248</sup> Ben Interview, August 18, 2016.

<sup>249</sup> Nick Interview, September 1, 2016. In instances where a vast majority of research participants express a similar sentiment, tell a similar story, or share the same experience, I will include the footnote, ‘Many Interviewees.’

<sup>250</sup> Liam Interview, December 11, 2018; Ryan and Maureen Interview, August 15, 2016.

<sup>251</sup> Ben Interview.

Josh questioned how ‘they could come out with something...about people...miners, you know, who worked down there and died for decades and decades.’<sup>252</sup> ‘Them lads that gave their life to the mining industry,’ according to Luther, were ‘disrespected’ when they were identified as ‘enemies.’<sup>253</sup>

Oral testimonies of workplace tragedies, however, transcended stories of victimhood. In contrast to the media coverage on Kellingley Colliery’s closure, ex-miners highlighted their individual and collective labour as essential to British history. Liam stated that ‘miners were the backbone of the country during war and all the time they were the backbone to deliver energy.’<sup>254</sup> Likewise, Ernie emphasised that miners were ‘necessary’ for the country to function.<sup>255</sup> There was a tendency, moreover, for interviewees to bring up war when making a larger point about provision.<sup>256</sup> Charlie urged me to question how ‘they’ could accuse coal miners, whose fathers had fought in the world wars, as the ‘enemy within.’<sup>257</sup> In an effort to illustrate the importance of miners, Charlie referred to a more positive stereotype: ‘there ain’t a more honest person, an honest man, hard-working man than a miner.’<sup>258</sup>

Emerging from counter-responses to the ‘enemy within’ were collective representations of miners as essential workers, who risked their lives (at work and during war) whilst providing Britain with its energy needs. Dennis took this a step further by highlighting prosperity; to label miners as adversaries, he explained, was ‘disgusting’, since they provided the country with its ‘warmth and power and its general wealth.’<sup>259</sup> Interviewees commonly referred to the experiences and memories

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<sup>252</sup> Josh Interview, August 19, 2016.

<sup>253</sup> Luther Interview.

<sup>254</sup> Liam Interview.

<sup>255</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>256</sup> Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo illustrate a similar point through the songwriting of Bruce Springsteen. In his song ‘Youngstown,’ Springsteen writes, ‘These mills they built the tanks and bombs that won this country’s wars.’ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 145.

<sup>257</sup> Charlie Interview.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Dennis Interview, 2016.

of their mining ancestors when illustrating the significance of labour and class. This might be partly because many research participants worked in the coal industry during an accelerated period of decline. At the same time, it can be understood as a form of intergenerational criticism. By drawing on the ‘hidden voices’ of their mining ancestors, ex-miners made it a point to illustrate how the ‘enemy within’ was also an attack on previous generations of coal miners, including men, women, and children.<sup>260</sup>

An emphasis on provisions were not only tied to counter-cultural representations of the past, but also bound up with how interviewees perceived their labour and place(s). An understanding of miners and mining settlements being relied upon by the nation-state and its citizens affected how they constructed a sense of self and place. Duncan self-identified as a provider when talking about coalmining labour: ‘It were an important job...cos it kept, basically, it kept everybody going. Power. Everything. It were a job to be proud of.’<sup>261</sup> Ben insisted that coalmining ‘wasn’t just about supplying a product. You felt as though you were part of something.’<sup>262</sup> Men saw both their labour and localities as integral on multiple-spatial levels. This viewpoint was further supported by ex-miners’ claims that ‘Barnsley’ and ‘Britain’ were ‘built on coal’ through their labour.<sup>263</sup>

Ex-miners have made sense of coalfield deindustrialisation through shifting notions and experiences of dependency. For some, they saw pit closures, and subsequent struggles to effectively replace the coal industry with meaningful employment, as illustrative of the disposability of a group of workers. Locating himself alongside a multi-generational family of miners, Dennis

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<sup>260</sup> By ‘hidden voices’ I am referring to oral history as a practice of ‘rescuing the voices of labouring people.’ The point I am making here, however, is that there is effort made by interviewees to include silenced voices, in particular, of ex-miners from the past, who are now deceased, in illustrating the cultural marginalisation of miners and mining settlements. Lynne Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010) 4.

<sup>261</sup> Duncan Interview, July 28, 2016.

<sup>262</sup> Ben Interview.

<sup>263</sup> Matthew Interview, August 24, 2016; and Harry Interview, August 26, 2016.



posited a series of moral questions about the future prospects of well-paid work in ex-mining villages for older (and younger) men after pit closures: ‘What happens if you’re not highly educated? Where do they go? Have they lost? Are they losers?’<sup>264</sup> Returning to the theme of war, Jack raised a similar point: ‘At the end of the day they were quite happy with us to keep country going [...] quite happy to have coalminers, especially through the wars.’<sup>265</sup> Being tossed on the industrial scrapheap was viewed as a moment where a sense of dependency, however misguided, was also flipped on its head.

The heart—as a metaphor for the emotional state of ex-coalfields—was a useful way for men to illustrate the effects of this transformation. Christopher explained that his town is now ‘bereft of a proper heart and soul which is how I remember it when we had coal mines’; Oliver stated the ‘country is losing its heart. The working man was always the heart of the country. Even in the wars. Then at the pits.’<sup>266</sup> Oral narratives of pit closures fed into wider critiques about perceptions of UK’s diminishing sense of ‘independence.’ Whilst one interviewee asked, ‘What do we produce?’, another explained, ‘We are self-sufficient in nothing.’<sup>267</sup>

There is clearly a lot that one can unpack here. But what I would like to illustrate is how some interviewees situate their experiences of mining and pit closures in a discourse of dependency. It is tempting to explain this as simply reflective of political rhetoric, for instance, ‘We want our country back,’ espoused by those like Nigel Farage, who championed Brexit.<sup>268</sup> This is surely part of the equation. However, a lost sense of indispensability, real and mythical, is how ex-miners and mining settlements encountered deindustrialisation in material and cultural terms. Self-representations of

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<sup>264</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>265</sup> Jack Interview.

<sup>266</sup> Christopher Interview; Oliver Interview, August 26, 2019.

<sup>267</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview; Frank Interview, 2018.

<sup>268</sup> ‘UKIP leader Nigel Farage: “We want our country back,”’ *BBC News*, September 25, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-34356165>.

essential work, whilst in part a counter-response to cultural stigmatisation, are, perhaps, also reflective of a desire to reclaim, not overthrow, a more productive (economic) and meaningful (cultural) place in a capitalist economy. Rather than simply conceive of ‘We want our country back’ as ordering the attitudes and feelings of many Britons, it may be more fruitful to think of how deindustrialisation and its aftermath has helped to produce a space for this rhetoric to circulate and exist.

### Representing Skill: The Coal Miner as a Knowledgeable Worker

Analogous to scholars’ critique of the stereotype of the miner as an ‘archetypal proletarian,’ ex-miners were critical of a conception of the miner as a kind of ‘residual proletarian.’<sup>269</sup> It is a characterisation that helps consign (ex)coal miners to the past as merely nostalgic and/or redundant. As the last chapter indicates, nostalgia can have ‘disqualifactory implications’ for the collective memory and representations of coalmining.<sup>270</sup> Renderings of the figure of the coal miner as anachronistic in popular discourse interweaves with the ways my interviewees remember and represent coal miners and coalmining.

Although associations of the ‘coal miner’ with hard work, toughness, and a strong work ethic surface in oral testimonies, these depictions were supplemented—and sometimes surpassed—by an emphasis on education and training in the coal industry. Underlying representations of skilled and knowledgeable work were efforts by some ex-miners to counter perceptions of coalmining ‘in formal terms as a largely unskilled occupation’ and miners as lacking intelligence.<sup>271</sup> In making these distinctions, interviewees could produce a dualistic reading of coal miners. An uneasy tension

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<sup>269</sup> Arnold, ‘Like being on death row,’ 4.

<sup>270</sup> Jackie Clarke, ‘Closing Time: Deindustrialisation and Nostalgia in Contemporary France,’ *History Workshop Journal* 79 (2015) 119.

<sup>271</sup> Roberts, ‘Collective Representations,’ 5.1

often arose between the self and collective when they elucidated the material effects of coalfield deindustrialisation, with interviewees having to add reservations to their aforementioned remarks. Moments of critical self-reflection point us to a ‘structure of feeling,’ bringing us to ‘elements of impulse, restraint, and tone,’ which shape the ways ex-miners talked about other coal miners.<sup>272</sup>

Before and after recorded interviews, men frequently shared mining memorabilia they collected over the years. Notable items included mining lamps, photographs, videos, decorative plates, newspaper clippings, and even an underground pit map.<sup>273</sup> In one particular case, an interviewee introduced me to a coalmining shrine at his home.<sup>274</sup> For Arthur, these objects were also ‘memories’: ‘They’re flashbacks. Aren’t they? You’re there again. It’s a weird sensation.’<sup>275</sup> Material culture can ‘perform a dual function in the remembrance of an industrial past. It is a link with creative tangibility, the making of things, as well as a vehicle for a person or community’s link to that past.’<sup>276</sup>

In making this ‘link to the past,’ however, interviewees also represented a particular set of skills. Some men used photographs of mining machinery to demonstrate their proficiency at work. Whilst Oliver eagerly presented pictures of ‘the machines I used to drive,’ Ryan indicated that ‘I drove multi-million pound machines.’<sup>277</sup> Along with these memorabilia items, men would present their mining certifications and professional qualifications. As Lewis stated, ‘I thought they might be of interest to you.’<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

<sup>273</sup> Many Interviewees.

<sup>274</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>275</sup> Arthur Interview, November 12, 2018.

<sup>276</sup> Strangleman, ‘Smokestack Nostalgia, Ruin Porn, or Working-Class Obituary,’ 32.

<sup>277</sup> Oliver Interview; Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>278</sup> Lewis and Sophia Interview, August 24, 2019.

Upon meeting William, he presented an assortment of certificates for me to look through. From electrician to gas certificates, William proudly spoke of each mining document.<sup>279</sup> Ronald also brought his certificates to the interview: ‘that’s not all of them; it’s just a sample size,’ he remarked.<sup>280</sup> This ‘sample size’ included his City and Guilds certificate, deputy certificate, and higher national certificate in mining, to name but only a few. In another instance, Archie declared, in case if I did not believe him, ‘I’ve got my papers to prove I was a mechanical engineer!’<sup>281</sup>

These personal certificates also constitute coalmining memorabilia; they are historical items that interviewees shared with me because I was interested in the history of coalmining. Yet, these documents serve a supplementary purpose in the present, especially in the context of the interview. By using their certificates and qualifications, interviewees—intentionally or not—introduced themselves as trained and skilled workers. This was also apparent when interviewees referenced their CVs in the interview. For example, Frank stated, ‘When I read my CV, I think, how the fuck did I manage that? [laughter]. I’ll give you a copy of my CV if you want? I’ll sort it out for you.’<sup>282</sup> Liam also insisted that I take a look at his work resume: ‘I take pride in my CV. I will give you a copy of that. I want you to read it before you go.’<sup>283</sup>

After making this remark, Liam appeared to counter and reinforce a presupposition of miners as lacking intelligence.

I’ve got to say this is off me coming from off the shovel down pit. A miner? Who’d have thought it? Right? Although we were miners shovelling coal...Ah, there’s a lot of skills. There were a lot of skills. Alright, you’ve got to have skills and safety. But, people, they, they must have thought, cos we were miners, we were idiots, or whatever you want for a better word.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> William Interview.

<sup>280</sup> Ronald Interview.

<sup>281</sup> Archie Interview, August 22, 2016.

<sup>282</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

<sup>283</sup> Liam Interview.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

At once Liam composed his narrative around the stereotype of the coal miner as simpleminded, then challenged this by pointing to ‘a lot of skills’ underground. There seemed to be an internalised representation of miners as unintelligent or uneducated. As we will shortly see, other men also sought to counter—and in doing so also sometimes reinforced—work and class-based stereotypes when highlighting individual experiences of career progression and skills development in the coal industry.

Coalmining was remembered as offering clear progression routes for men. The most common example is that coal ‘guaranteed’ young men with a ‘job for life.’ Josh and Ben recalled this popular phrase being used by recruiters visiting their schools in the early 1970s. After leaving school at 16-years old, with very few qualifications, Josh saw an opportunity with the coal industry, despite not really wanting to work underground, to earn a secure job with a good wage.<sup>285</sup> Ben left school without any qualifications because he was usually absent. This was not his own doing. Ben’s step-father had him stay home ‘sick’ to hide the physical abuse he endured at home. This profoundly sad account of Ben’s childhood was not shared to evoke sympathy. Rather, he wanted to illustrate the importance of coalmining in his working life; it was in this industry where he earned and received his ‘qualifications,’ including his mechanical and electrical engineer papers.<sup>286</sup>

Archie and Ernie—although they started in the industry two decades apart—spoke of advancement through apprenticeships. After learning there was very little to be earned playing football in the late 1950s, Archie looked to a career in coalmining with one specific purpose: ‘I went into the mining industry to get an apprenticeship.’<sup>287</sup> In the early 1970s, Ernie sought a trade apprenticeship. If this was not a viable option after his pre-selection test, he would have looked

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<sup>285</sup> Josh Interview.

<sup>286</sup> Ben Interview.

<sup>287</sup> Archie Interview.

elsewhere for employment. Over the duration of nine years, Ernie attended technical college—usually through day releases—completing a craft apprenticeship scheme and a mechanical technician’s course. ‘If you were prepared to go to school,’ he insisted, ‘it [mining] were the best place to go, cos you’d get paid for doing it. There were all sorts of opportunities.’<sup>288</sup> These ‘opportunities’ were not limited to apprenticeships. As Charlie explained, ‘I could have gone an educated myself to university level if I wished to do so, and lads have done that through the pit.’<sup>289</sup>

A tendency for ex-miners to point out how coalmining was far from ‘a dead end job’ was accompanied by a propensity to ground representations of skill and knowledge around intelligence.<sup>290</sup> Ernie self-identified as the ‘black sheep’ of his family in his interview. He expressed that his father was disappointed in him becoming a miner, a job in which workers were perceived as ‘the lowest of the low.’<sup>291</sup> He countered this stereotype by arguing: ‘there were a lot of brainy people [...] They weren’t all nobodies who worked at pit. There were a lot of very intelligent people.’<sup>292</sup> After illustrating his and his co-workers’ qualifications, Ben also raised an unflattering portrait of miners: ‘People tend to think because we were miners and worked underground that we were thick. We’re not fools.’<sup>293</sup> Some felt this imagery primarily resonated with people outside of mining areas; yet, as Ernie’s remark illustrates, negative characterisations also surfaced nearby (or even within) mining localities.

Questions of intelligence were raised in other interviews. By contrast, though, ex-miners used coalmining to counter notions of lacking intelligence. Before leaving school, Christopher was told by a career advisor he was not ‘bright enough’ for university. Despite Christopher later earning a

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<sup>288</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>289</sup> Charlie Interview.

<sup>290</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>291</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ben Interview.

university degree, he acquiesced to this ostensible guidance: ‘You know, you listen to them, don’t ye? You are best suited to some sort of [job]...and so I fell into mining. It was on your doorstep.’<sup>294</sup> However, after an initial assessment at the pit, it was decided by his bosses that he ‘was clever enough, academic enough to be an electrician.’<sup>295</sup>

Skilled labour could inspire confidence after pit work. Matthew, who began his interview by foregrounding his experiences as a university student at the turn of the century, questioned whether he was smart enough to attend university in his 50s. At the same time, Matthew sought self-reassurance through his previous qualifications: ‘I can’t be that thick, I became an electrician,’ he remarked.<sup>296</sup> This was his first reference to coalmining in his interview. It was another instance where men also foregrounded their skills and knowledge. ‘What people forget,’ Ronald stated, ‘is just how well-trained our workforce was in the Coal Board. Lots of different disciplines.’<sup>297</sup>

It was also through different disciplines where distinctions of a work identity emerge. In a few cases, interviewees offered contrasting perspectives of themselves as miners. Whilst Matthew initially self-identified as an ‘electrician’ instead of a ‘miner,’ he later went on to assert, ‘I was a miner.’<sup>298</sup> In a similar fashion, Archie expressed, ‘I weren’t actually a miner. I were a mechanic,’ only to later claim, ‘I were an engineer but I were a miner.’<sup>299</sup> Archie’s understanding of what constituted an ‘authentic’ miner were those coalface workers who dug directly into the seam before mechanised production.

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<sup>294</sup> Christopher Interview.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Matthew Interview.

<sup>297</sup> Ronald Interview.

<sup>298</sup> Matthew Interview.

<sup>299</sup> Archie Interview.

Face workers, including Ellis and Ryan, also made distinctions between electricians and engineers, with the former stating how those who maintained machinery were a ‘bit upper level.’<sup>300</sup> Ben, on the other hand, spoke of a hierarchy underground where coalface and development workers were ranked above mechanics and electricians—as well as unskilled labourers—despite differences in qualifications. This was because popular imaginations of coalmining, predating new technology and mechanisation, garnered more cultural purchase. At the same time, Ben explained that ‘everyone was as important as each other’ in the extraction of coal, illustrating how mining jobs were interconnected underground.<sup>301</sup>

An inclination to qualify distinctions amongst miners is also evident after interviewees illustrated the effects of deindustrialisation. In their oral history interviews, ex-miners usually incorporated the experiences of fellow miners, locally and nationally. A propensity for men to include other miners supports Jim Phillips’ argument that deindustrialisation ‘has contributed to the construction of a new cross-coalfield community identity.’<sup>302</sup> Dennis argued, for instance, that pit closures snatched away steady work and decent wages in working-class communities: ‘You were replacing a secure job for working-class people with...perhaps jobs, that’s not, you know, don’t give thyself to the type of people that worked at pit. I don’t mean that bad. But it’s the reality of the situation.’<sup>303</sup>

Similarly, Nick emphasised how coalmining offered ‘all types’ of men a foundation from which they could build their lives around.

There were people that could look at a job, figure something out, and make it a lot easier. And then there were other types of people that were good at things, ah, but weren’t good at other things. And...ah, you’d initially...ah...not being disrespectful to people that worked at pit. [...] But if you could use a shovel; you got a job. That employment fetched you a wage. That wage got you out with lads. Then you start courting. You get married

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<sup>300</sup> Ellis Interview, November 28, 2018.

<sup>301</sup> Ben Interview.

<sup>302</sup> Jim Phillips, ‘The meanings of coal community in Britain since 1947,’ *Contemporary British History* 32 (2018) 53.

<sup>303</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.



and have kids and, initially, you had that income coming in all the time. It was the pretext to the situation.<sup>304</sup>

Alongside its socio-economic effects, some men, such as Henry, pointed out the ramifications of pit closures on working-class culture by drawing comparisons between the past and present.

I took a lot of pride in job satisfaction. I think this day nobody bothers. All they want to do is go to work, get paid, and come home. I know that a lot of miners took pride in what they did. Even the people, the normal miners that were, you know, and I don't want to sound awful, but a lot of people...not well-educated people, could only sweep up and shovel up.<sup>305</sup>

In each of these three excerpts, interviewees brought in—and distinguished from—other ex-miners when illustrating the material and cultural effects of deindustrialisation. There is surely an air of nostalgia permeating some accounts. There were, of course, miners who went to the pit to simply 'get paid and come home', because it was a dirty and dangerous job. Some interviewees, in fact, detested coalmining.

A dualistic reading of coal miners also materialised in men's oral testimonies. Similar to other interviewees, Dennis explained there was a 'vast amount of different [and] skilled people' in the coal industry.<sup>306</sup> But to illustrate the impact of pit closures, Dennis commented on a group of unskilled coal miners. This does not mean that those with specialised skills somehow eluded the socio-economic effects of deindustrialisation. There are many who never accessed stable work, nor similar wages, after leaving the industry. Dennis, like other interviewees, drew upon differences in skill to impress upon the magnitude of coalfield deindustrialisation.

In doing so, however, interviewees attempted to qualify what others might discern as disparaging remarks. This is present in Dennis' quote (see above) about the 'type of people' that worked in the

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<sup>304</sup> Nick Interview.

<sup>305</sup> Henry Interview, August 25, 2016.

<sup>306</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

coal industry. There were three distinct moments of hesitation. Firstly, there was a long pause before opening up his comment to conjecture by saying ‘perhaps.’ Secondly, filler words such as ‘you know’ offered him a moment to cultivate his thoughts. And lastly, he qualified this by stating ‘I don’t mean that bad.’

Other interviewees exhibited similar practices when and, if, they felt they were being overtly critical of coal miners in reflections of coalmining work. Nick scrambled to find the appropriate language when trying to distinguish between resourceful workers. He was reluctant to depict coalminers in an unfavourable light—as best illustrated by: ‘not trying to be disrespectful.’ Henry also added reservations to comments about unskilled miners. In this instance, he categorised this group of workers as ‘normal’ before stating ‘I don’t want to sound awful.’ This was less a case of Henry self-identifying as above-average than wanting to avoid insulting ex-miners.

Although many added reservations to representations of coal miners, there were others who abstained from anything that may be interpreted as disrespectful. One interviewee, whom I became particularly close with, meeting on five separate occasions, took issue with a question I posed. Prompted by the responses of other interviewees, who frequently included stories of people in their communities affected by shutdowns, I asked Frank how those people around him managed and coped with pit closures. The question not only upset him but provoked this response:

Let’s be totally honest now, Lee. I can introduce you to miners...that went on to become a bloody school teacher, a headmaster. I can point you to another one who just lives around corner who is a teacher at a primary school. I think the miners...I mean you’ve just looked at some drawings by a person. You wouldn’t have thought they done by a miner. Would ye? If you saw them on an easel or in a gallery, you wouldn’t have thought them done by a miner.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

Although it is not explicitly stated, it is implied by Frank that there is a stigma attached to miners, which he confronted by naming the academic and artistic achievements of ex-miners. In spite of my attempt to document coalfield deindustrialisation, and, in particular, how people understand and respond to its effects, there was a desire by Frank to combat a research question he felt perpetuated this notion of ex-miners as outdated in the present. Frank used the interview as a 'narrative space' to counter and re-represent (ex)coal miners as skilled and knowledgeable workers. But also embedded in his narrative was, in fact, a response: he countered cultural stigmatisations of coal miners and mining settlements.

Men's oral narratives were at once bound up with and counter-remarks to externalised and internalised representations of coal miners as either nostalgic, redundant, or lacking intelligence, which filtered through the home, school, media, politics, and perhaps, also the oral history interview. These self-representations are explanatory and evaluative. They have a social function; there is a concerted effort by men to foreground representations of skill. Yet, they were far from homogenous cultural interpretations; there was not an attempt by interviewees to construct an ideal type of miner. Interviewees also offered dualistic readings of miners without actually naming the counterpart to the 'normal' or 'ordinary' miner they put forward. It was usually left unsaid. This dualism was primarily the result of illustrating the socio-economic effects of deindustrialisation.

An uneasy tension, however, arose between self-representations of coal miners and coalmining and lived experiences of deindustrialisation. If men felt they were being disrespectful towards other men, many would add reservations to their renderings of coal miners when discussing the effects of industrial closures. The qualifications offered by men are illustrative of a 'structure of feeling'; men's misgivings, hesitations, and amendments in their oral testimonies are evidence of a pattern

of ‘impulses’ and ‘restraints’ of lived experience.<sup>308</sup> They can shape how miners talk about other miners, and how they talk about them to me; it plays an important role in how stories of coalmining together with deindustrialisation are told and remembered by ex-miners. Comments such as ‘I don’t want to sound awful,’ ‘I don’t mean that bad,’ or ‘I don’t want to be disrespectful,’ may also minimise feelings of betrayal or guilt, whether for themselves or the ‘normal’ miners they identified. It is unsurprising, then, that interviewees also highlighted camaraderie alongside essential work and skilled labour in their oral testimonies. We now shift our focus to camaraderie.

#### ‘Everybody Watched Each Other’s Back’: The Coal Miner as a Comrade

Camaraderie (sometimes used interchangeably with comradeship) was a central component of working life in the coal industry, especially for miners underground. Its cultural resonance in storytelling is remarkable; it featured, albeit in varying degrees, in every interview. It was directly referenced, as we will shortly see, when interviewees reflected on what they enjoyed and missed about coalmining. It was usually the companionship of their co-workers they highlighted in collective portrayals of coalmining.

Accompanying these general accounts of camaraderie, i.e., ‘everybody watched each other’s back,’ were also critical reflections of coalmining work. Whilst interviewees may have romanticised camaraderie when describing its decline and/or loss with coalfield deindustrialisation, they simultaneously offered a scathing critique of the dangers and short- and long-term health implications of working underground. If men desired to return to a coalmining past, it was not an uncritical one.

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<sup>308</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

An apparent longing for camaraderie also raises important insights into the relationship between nostalgia and camaraderie. Writing about the ‘uses of nostalgia’ in working-class autobiography, Ben Jones argues nostalgia for ‘older’ neighbourhoods should ‘be seen as a critique of contemporary representations of working class people, cultures and communities as deficient.’<sup>309</sup> Narratives of camaraderie could also be interpreted as a way to confront a stereotype of the figure of the coal miner as a “dinosaur,” ‘who embraced workplace attitudes, modes of sociability and states of consciousness that belonged to a bygone era...’<sup>310</sup> To put it another way, a nostalgia for camaraderie was useful in both the ‘articulation and valorisation’ of collective work experiences.<sup>311</sup>

On the anniversary of the Oaks Colliery disaster in 2018, Yorkshire Area NUM Chairman, Chris Skidmore, addressed a small crowd gathered at the memorial. Similar to other orators at the event, Skidmore honoured all of those who had lost their lives coalmining. As a former coal miner, Skidmore was aware of the dangers and hazards that many workers endured underground. Despite the short and long-term effects of coalmining, Skidmore went on to state—espousing a collective voice of the coal miner—that if the pits were open: ‘We’d all be right back tomorrow.’<sup>312</sup> This is, perhaps, in part, a response to socio-economic impact of pit closures in ex-coalfield areas. But it is likely, as illustrated by interviewees, also about the friendship and companionship shared between coal miners underground.

A close bond between coal miners was defined or described as camaraderie in men’s oral narratives. When initially and explicitly broached as a topic by interviewees—almost always unprompted— camaraderie was often talked about in a very general manner. Whilst Arthur stated

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<sup>309</sup> Jones, ‘The Uses of Nostalgia,’ 369.

<sup>310</sup> Arnold, ‘Like being on death row,’ 8.

<sup>311</sup> Jones, ‘The Uses of Nostalgia,’ 369.

<sup>312</sup> Fieldwork, December 12, 2018.

'I miss the lads underground. It's all the comradeship. Everybody looked out for one another,' Duncan asserted 'It were, like, good camaraderie. It were really good. Everybody watched each other's back.'<sup>313</sup> Some interviewees suggested that ex-miners who did not convey this sentiment about camaraderie were being untruthful. Henry argued, for example, 'If anyone said they didn't miss it, I'd call them a liar.'<sup>314</sup> According to Luther, 'Every miner will tell you that the best part of working down the mines was the camaraderie. Without a shadow of a doubt.'<sup>315</sup>

Descriptive accounts of camaraderie were substantiated through comparisons to sports teams or by contrasting it to other workplaces. For Christopher, the 'community underground' was like being on a football or rugby team.<sup>316</sup> As for Josh, being with coal miners, 'it's more of a camaraderie thing. They've become really good friends [...] Whereas in other [work] places, it's kind of, more, see to yourself. They kind of stick together, miners, more than any people I've ever met.'<sup>317</sup> As the next chapter illustrates, there was a tendency by ex-miners (as well as academics) to use camaraderie to register and critique transformations in working-class experience, culture, and identity in 'new' workplaces.

For our purposes here, I want to illustrate how nostalgic narratives of camaraderie were employed alongside damning critiques of the coal industry and its work environment. Identifications of camaraderie usually fed into narratives of poor work conditions and vice versa. On the one hand, memories of dirty and dangerous work prompted positive reflections of camaraderie; and on the other, favourable recollections of camaraderie helped facilitate important criticisms of coalmining work.

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<sup>313</sup> Arthur Interview; Duncan Interview.

<sup>314</sup> Henry Interview.

<sup>315</sup> Luther Interview.

<sup>316</sup> Christopher Interview.

<sup>317</sup> Josh Interview.

From the high humidity, hot temperatures, enclosed spaces, damp environment, dusty conditions, and, in particular, the unpredictable circumstances including collapsed roofs or flooded mines, the pit could be an unnerving and perilous workplace. A few miners admitted that they had, at one time or another, considered leaving mining to pursue another field of work because the conditions were that 'bad.'<sup>318</sup> In fact, Liam, who left the industry in the late 1970s, stated: 'I never liked the pit. Never liked it. I enjoyed working with all the colleagues.'<sup>319</sup> James was far more blunt in his assessment of life underground: 'I hated pit. If they were still open, I wouldn't be there. [...] The only thing I miss about it is the camaraderie. I don't miss the job. I don't miss pit. But I miss all me mates. I miss all them.'<sup>320</sup> A denouncement of the 'pit' in men's oral narratives was usually accompanied by more favourable illustrations of coalmining through remarks about camaraderie which foregrounded male friendship.

Memorable recollections of camaraderie were also followed by criticisms of working in the pits. According to Jack, 'I always liked the camaraderie' but 'I'm not saying they were good conditions.'<sup>321</sup> After stating that he 'missed camaraderie', Josh explained: 'I certainly don't miss the work. [...] The accidents I've seen over the years. You know, I've seen some really serious accidents. I certainly don't miss them. They leave a mark on you.'<sup>322</sup> William, who worked in the coal industry as a contractor well after the last pit closed in Barnsley, offered a disparaging account of coalmining after reminiscing about 'a way of life' and 'a lot of comradeship.'

I used to eat my snap and you couldn't see. There were no toilets. If I wanted to go to toilet, I'd get down. The conditions were horrendous down in pit. Make no doubt about it, and anybody who says they weren't, they're telling you lies like you can't believe. [...] And I love pits me. Now they're gone. I think it's a good thing. Well, I think it's a good thing but it's maybe horrible to say that. But health wise it weren't good. It were nasty.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>319</sup> Liam Interview.

<sup>320</sup> James Interview.

<sup>321</sup> Jack Interview.

<sup>322</sup> Josh Interview.

<sup>323</sup> William Interview.

Critical commentary on the ‘horrendous’ conditions of the pit were not simply restricted to the past, either. William also brought up the long-term health implications of coalmining in the present. As ‘I get older, as a reflection,’ he argued, ‘I think about [mining] when I’m coughing me guts up in the morning.’<sup>324</sup>

In addition to William, interviewees brought up the legacy of coalmining, with some men hinting at a sense of relief with pit closures whilst also lamenting the loss of camaraderie. Duncan, for example, questioned whether he ‘might have ended up with diseases which a lot did. A lot of men died from pit-related diseases.’<sup>325</sup> Moreover, Matthew placed an emphasis on his fitness and well-being since closures:

I’m healthy. I’m healthier than I would have been. If I retired [as a miner] I would have retired May this year. I would have been a broken man. I’m fit. I can remember when I worked down mine and blokes in their 50s were knackered. Knackered old men. They were only in their 50s. They looked like old men. I can see them in my mind’s eye, these shifting old men walking around pit.<sup>326</sup>

Although Matthew implied he avoided such a fate with pit closures, other miners, such as Ellis, feared the lingering effects of coalmining work as they got older because of the exposure to dust underground as coalface workers.<sup>327</sup>

There were, however, instances where men fantasised about coalmining. ‘I used to love going down. I never wanted to come out,’ remarked Harry.<sup>328</sup> Although this narration style was uncommon with men I spoke with, a few interviewees acknowledged these sentiments were not absent (nor prominent) in ex-mining villages. Some men, including James, confronted an uncritical longing for coalmining; he argued some ex-miners ‘try to romanticise it, which sometimes pisses

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<sup>324</sup> William Interview.

<sup>325</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>326</sup> Matthew Interview.

<sup>327</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>328</sup> Harry Interview.



me off, because there were no fucking romantic about it at all.’<sup>329</sup> Although Oliver ‘loved my time down the pit,’ he was critical of nostalgic narratives, insisting that ‘I have many an argument,’ since he saw ‘people lose arms, legs, hands, eyes. Carrying people out that’s dead is not nice.’<sup>330</sup>

What Oliver ‘loved’ and ‘missed’ was camaraderie. Again, we see a tendency with narratives of camaraderie to interweave with articulations of dangerous work. An emphasis on camaraderie, especially in terms of friendship or companionship, often structured collective criticisms of coalmining. Nostalgic narratives of camaraderie, I argue, were also useful for interviewees when countering, intentionally or not, portrayals of ex-miners as uncritical or nostalgic about coalmining work without necessarily devaluing their relationships, memories, and experiences of it. Any yearning for a coalmining past had less to do with the work itself than with pay, security, and a sense of camaraderie accompanying it.

This relationship between camaraderie and demanding work conditions was also reflected in men’s actual emotional experiences of work. After describing the pit as ‘hot,’ ‘dirty,’ ‘smelly,’ and ‘unhygienic,’ Christopher said: ‘the camaraderie. The friendships down there. The sense of humour. All the rest made it, in a perverse way, enjoyable.’<sup>331</sup> In a similar fashion, Dennis called the pit ‘a pig hole, basically,’ but ‘counteracted to that were the community of miners, the comradeship. The laughs, the jokes, and the pillocking...which made it a lot, lot more bearable.’<sup>332</sup> Here, camaraderie was discerned as also alleviating difficult work-related experiences.

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<sup>329</sup> James Interview.

<sup>330</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>331</sup> Christopher Interview.

<sup>332</sup> Dennis Interview, 2016.

These two illustrations of pit work are instructive: camaraderie is perhaps something more than merely descriptive, i.e., as friendship, or an effect, i.e., a by-product of an unsafe work environment, but rather an affective activity—discerned by men as essential and skilful—which could engender a range of pleasant (and unpleasant) work experiences underground. A closer look at men's everyday relationships, practices, and experiences of camaraderie can help us, on the one hand, better come to terms with a nostalgia for camaraderie; and, on the other hand, better illustrate the complex emotional experiences of camaraderie and changes and continuities of camaraderie after pit closures. This next chapter focuses on camaraderie as research topic worthy of its own investigation in historical and deindustrial scholarship.

### Conclusion

Drawing on the oral testimonies of ex-miners, this chapter can be read as part of a struggle against the cultural stigmatisation and erasure of working-class people. The self- and collective-representations communicated by ex-miners contradict—and sometimes reinforce—historical and contemporary representations circulating in media, political, and popular discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Individual portrayals of coalmining were relational, situational, and contextual. But, most importantly, they were also political. Ex-miners sought, whether consciously or unconsciously, to contest externalised and internalised representations which could be interpreted as an affront on personal and collective memory. These counter-representations afford insight into how ex-miners grapple with the legacy of coalmining and deindustrialisation.

By placing an emphasis on essential work, skilled labour, and camaraderie, interviewees combatted stereotypes of miners as adversarial, redundant and dependent, unintelligent, and/or simply nostalgic for coalmining. A coalmining identity was held together by both positive and negative readings. Illustrations of skilled and essential work, for instance, were at once bound up with and

responses to what interviewees perceived were negative characterisations of coal miners and mining settlements. These representations offer insight into particular meanings and experiences of coalmining. Whilst essential work pointed to the importance of a sense of dependency of labour and place(s), skilled labour highlighted how training and education in the coal industry were paramount to personal growth and development.

Arising from these representations were tensions when illustrating the consequences of coalfield deindustrialisation. Interviewees sometimes reproduced a dualistic reading of miners, which, in turn, they sought to minimise. These moments of critical-reflection, I argue, are also illustrative of a particular ‘kind of feeling and thinking,’ shaping how men speak about other men as ex-coal miners.<sup>333</sup> A propensity to safeguard a collective memory of coalmining is bound up with men’s memories and experiences of camaraderie. When initially broached in oral history interviews, camaraderie was underscored by a nostalgic tone. Nostalgic narratives of camaraderie also accompanied criticisms of coalmining as deadly and dangerous work. Yet, a closer look at interviewees’ experiences, social relationships, and everyday practices in the pits reveals an emotionally messy and complex picture of camaraderie. This thesis now turns its historical and analytical attention to camaraderie.

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<sup>333</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 131.

### Chapter 3

#### **Skilful Practices of Camaraderie: Subjectivity, Emotional Intimacy, and the Circulation of Feeling and Power in the Coal Mines**

A loss of camaraderie was expressed by most interviewees. Whilst similar expressions of loss feature in deindustrial scholarship, camaraderie as both a concept and experience is usually overlooked. Drawing upon the memories and experiences of men's working lives, this chapter illustrates that camaraderie was a skill men learnt and enacted in the coal mines; it constituted a set of workplace practices linked to embodied ways of being and feeling in (and outside of) the workplace. Approaching camaraderie as an 'emotional practice,' there are two main arguments put forward in this chapter. The first argues that the loss of camaraderie marks a more profound emotional rupture in men's working lives than previously understood. The second asserts that the decline of camaraderie is also part of a process of deskilling, disrupting the ways ex-miners interact at, navigate and negotiate, and carry out work.

We begin this chapter by exploring how camaraderie is approached in deindustrial literature. Although not without its critics, community continues to attract historical and analytical inquiry in coalmining studies.<sup>334</sup> Recent work by Jim Phillips explores three 'over-lapping meanings of coal community,' arguing that experiences of deindustrialisation have strengthened a community identity underscored by loss and resiliency.<sup>335</sup> It is the socio-spatial and cultural scope, along with its historical and comparative contexts, that gives community its empirical and analytical purchase in studies on coalmining and deindustrialisation. As a consequence, however, it has subsumed camaraderie/comradeship as a topic worthy of its own study. Insofar that camaraderie is usually concerned with male workers and the workplace (and other male spaces), its breadth in research is,

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<sup>334</sup> For a critique of community, see Joanna Bourke, *Working Class-Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994). See also, John C. Walsh and Steven High, 'Rethinking the Concept of Community,' *Social History* 32 (1999).

<sup>335</sup> Phillips, 'The meanings of coal community,' 39.

perhaps, viewed as limited in the study of working-class life. But if it is the words and actions of historical actors that guide our research, then surely we must approach camaraderie (sometimes used interchangeably with comradeship) more critically as a historical experience. An examination of the lived experiences of camaraderie can contribute to our conceptual understandings of camaraderie and vice versa.

In deindustrialisation scholarship, camaraderie and comradeship are popular terms used and cited by scholars to illustrate temporally-specific moments of working-class life, particularly in the workplace. An insistence on camaraderie (and its absence) is present in studies looking at the railway industry, coal mines, and steelworks, for example. In many instances, camaraderie is referred to only in passing, sometimes either in the introduction or conclusion of a study. Whilst Lucy Taksa, citing Barry Smith, tells us in ‘the steam days there was great comradeship between the men. We had to look after one another,’ Phillips ends his article by arguing that ex-miners confront an ‘absence of workplace esteem and comradeship that were lost with the collieries.’<sup>336</sup> As Sherry Lee Linkon and James Russo also illustrate, it is the ‘camaraderie that ex-steelworkers regularly say is one of the things they miss most about their work.’<sup>337</sup>

Its absence or decline is commonly referred to by workers when comparing work (and workplaces) before and after industrial closures or economic restructuring. Exploring the effects of and responses to pit closures in Easington, Durham, Tim Strangleman illustrates that ex-miners mourned a ‘lack of comradeship’ in new workplaces. Comradeship in the mines was juxtaposed with non-coalmining work by one of his interviewees: ‘Comradeship was unbelievable, in the collieries you all stuck together, very little going behind people’s back. [Now] People climbing the

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<sup>336</sup> Taksa, ‘Romance the Rails,’ Chapter 6, para 5, Kindle; Phillips, ‘The meanings of coal community,’ 53.

<sup>337</sup> Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 137.

ladder all the time, shopping you for the least thing you do wrong.’<sup>338</sup> With pit closures men lost ‘the quality of friendships and sense of trust’ which was built around a way of life in the coal industry.<sup>339</sup> A similar reading of comradeship is evident in research exploring the Turkish coalfields and coalmining. The authors question the role of ‘comradeship’ in the ‘formation of a placed-based class consciousness,’ arguing that the ‘significance and content of friendship varied according to the type of worker.’<sup>340</sup>

In their study focusing on redundant steelworkers, Robert MacKenzie et al. reveal that research participants also expressed feelings of loss surrounding camaraderie in the steelworks. ‘For many the loss of this camaraderie and the loss of the social side of daily employment were amongst the hardest things to come to terms with following redundancy.’<sup>341</sup> Camaraderie was understood as the outcome of a set of workplace ‘experiences’ and ‘values’ which were ‘further buoyed by socialising outside of the workplace and often living in close spatial proximity.’<sup>342</sup> As Andrew Perchard illustrates with coal miners, a particular kind of ‘companionship’ arose from the physical environment and workplace culture: ‘If I had my life over again,’ one interviewee explained, ‘I’d like to be a miner ‘cause as I say, you’ll get companionship amongst miners.’ Perchard goes on to explain that ‘camaraderie and identity’ were ‘tightly bound up with locality, occupational status, and masculinity.’<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Strangleman, ‘Networks, Place and Identities,’ 260.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> H. Tarik Şengül and E. Attila Aytekin, ‘Zonguldak Coalfield and the Past and Future of Turkish Coal-mining Communities’ in *Changing Work and Community Identities in European Regions: Perspectives on the Past and Present*, ed. John Kirk, Sylvie Contrepois, and Steve Jefferys (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 180.

<sup>341</sup> Robert MacKenzie et al., ‘“All that is Solid?”: Class, Identity and the Maintenance of a Collective Orientation amongst Redundant Steelworkers,’ *Sociology* 40 (2006) 839.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>343</sup> Perchard, ‘Broken Men and Thatcher’s Children,’ 88.

A special ‘bond’ between miners also finds expression in military metaphors.<sup>344</sup> Steven High, moreover, has shown how ‘home’ and ‘family’ were ‘metaphors’ invoked by factory and mill workers in their oral testimonies of industrial closures in the US. A reoccurring motif of ‘familial identification,’ High writes, ‘is an evocative symbol of their solidarity...’<sup>345</sup> These accounts of family were illustrative of the ‘close-knit’ relationships between co-workers.<sup>346</sup>

Jackie Clarke also illustrates how ‘family’ surfaces in the oral narratives of a group of women who worked for Moulinex domestic appliance company in France. According to Clarke, co-workers saw each other as part of a ‘family’ that was constituted out of a set of practices, relationships, and experiences. Factory workers, Clarke writes, assigned ‘significance’ to workplace activities, from gift giving and baking goods, to helping each other on the assembly line, all of which helped to assert ‘autonomy, humanity and solidarity.’<sup>347</sup> However, Clarke is less interested in exploring in greater detail the emotional experiences of these practices, as she herself acknowledges, ‘this may well be a simplified account of workplace relations,’ than in illustrating how their stories challenge ‘a certain conception of the movement of history.’<sup>348</sup>

Building on these understandings of camaraderie as fellowship, as spatially and culturally situated, and as symbolising solidarity, this study focuses on the emotional experiences of camaraderie as an embodied activity or practice. Deindustrialisation scholarship concerned with the affective dimensions of coalmining and steelwork has alluded to this, specifically by highlighting camaraderie as a coping mechanism for painful or difficult experiences. For instance, Jay Emery illustrates the

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<sup>344</sup> Perchard, ‘Broken Men and Thatcher’s Children,’ 88.

<sup>345</sup> High, *Industrial Sunset*, 52.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Clarke, ‘Closing Time,’ 117.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

performative nature of camaraderie, arguing that it was through banter and humour that men partly coped with dangerous work conditions in the coal mines.<sup>349</sup>

A treatment of camaraderie as a kind of coping mechanism features prominently in Valerie Walkerdine's and Luis Jimenez's study on gender, work, and community in an ex-steel town in Wales. It was the 'camaraderie,' according to several of their interviewees, which 'kept them going' in a physically-demanding and dangerous workplace.<sup>350</sup> Camaraderie was one of the many examples they used to illustrate how the community developed 'intergenerational modes of being,' producing a sense of 'containment' which held the community together.<sup>351</sup>

As an affective practice, however, it is unclear what else camaraderie may entail, how it works, or the complex emotional experiences, outside of requiring steelworkers to 'contain the harshness, humiliation and aggression for each other through the development of the group skin.'<sup>352</sup> Steelworkers, it is explained, primarily refrained from talking about the physical or emotional hardships of work. Notwithstanding the fact the authors are primarily concerned with the sphere of trauma and suffering and its intergenerational transmission, they raise a critical point for our purposes here: an approach to camaraderie as a 'strongly embodied sense of being.'<sup>353</sup>

Taking our cue from Graham Dawson, I argue that a more fruitful investigation of camaraderie should consider the history and memory of emotions.<sup>354</sup> Drawing on methodological tools from this literature, this chapter explores two over-lapping questions bringing a history of coalmining

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<sup>349</sup> Jay Emery, 'Geographies of Belonging in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield: Affect, Temporality and Deindustrialisation' (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2018) 147.

<sup>350</sup> Walkerdine and Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community After De-industrialisation*, 107.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>354</sup> Graham Dawson, 'The Meaning of "Moving On": From Trauma to the History and Memory of Emotions in "Post-Conflict" Northern Ireland,' *Irish University Review* 47 (2017) 89.



together with a history of deindustrialisation. What did camaraderie mean to men as an emotional experience, and what might a historical approach to camaraderie tell us about the meanings and experiences of coalfield deindustrialisation? An appeal to camaraderie should not be understood as dismissing community or class, nor gender or age, for example. Instead, a closer examination of camaraderie offers insight into, on the one hand, the history of work, feeling and power, and identity formation, and on the other, new ways of thinking about camaraderie as a skilful practice.

Understandings and experiences of camaraderie or comradeship, if broached explicitly in deindustrial scholarship, are usually articulated around its absence, with scholars investigating what its decline means and tells us about the present. Our principal perceptions and knowledge of camaraderie are informed by its scarcity in new forms of work, not necessarily through how it was felt and lived in previous workplaces. A focus on its absence, especially from the perspective of a 'lonely present,' can also produce romanticised and straightforward depictions of camaraderie.<sup>355</sup>

As Chapter 2 illustrates, a nostalgia for camaraderie is also political. But there is, perhaps, a tendency to sometimes 'avoid divisions' in men's oral testimonies.<sup>356</sup> This was the case when interviewees first broached the topic of camaraderie in my oral history interviews; to a certain extent, this almost seemed programmed. A closer exploration of the everyday interactions, relationships, and practices between men—sometimes prompted by follow up research questions about camaraderie—reveals a complex and nuanced emotional experience, illustrating the 'contested space between prescription and practice' in men's working lives underground.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> High, *Industrial Sunset*, 52.

<sup>356</sup> Perchard, 'Broken Men and Thatcher's Children,' 90.

<sup>357</sup> Langhamer, 'An Archive of Feeling,' 4.

Finally, the terms comradeship and camaraderie, whilst often used interchangeably (by both scholars and interviewees), are marked by social differences that need to be addressed. Camaraderie is, perhaps, more discernible with friendship, humour, and banter, whereas comradeship tends to be associated with fellowship, labour, and struggle. By approaching camaraderie and comradeship as ‘emotional practices,’ such distinctions, I argue, are increasingly blurred. For instance, our focus shifts away from both as simply outcomes of a dangerous work environment or a workplace culture, to a set of overlapping affective practices—bound up with place, time, and culture—shaping how men felt and behaved at work. The term adopted moving forward is camaraderie. It played a fundamental role in the circulation of power and feeling (some good, some maybe not so good), offering a way of knowing and intervening in the workplace.

This chapter argues that camaraderie was a learnt, embodied skill, inseparable from ways of feeling. Many men struggled to enact camaraderie in and outside of the coal industry after the wave of pit closures in the 1980s and 1990s in the Barnsley and Dearne Valley areas. Rather than conceive of an absence of camaraderie as a loss of culture and identity, or friendship and fellowship, it may be more valuable to think of it also as part of a process of deskilling—albeit with profound implications for embodied ways of being and feeling—brought on by deindustrialisation processes.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first part revisits the industrial workplace as a site of socialisation from which a moral order emerged amongst workers. It illustrates how a dominant set of emotional standards and expressions inflected a particular set of attitudes and behaviour in the coal mines. Camaraderie derived from an emotional culture in the pits. Whilst camaraderie cannot be understood outside of its cultural and spatial contexts, it also argues that a focus on

cultural codes and rules tends to overlook 'an adequate sense of the material' that brings us to the everyday practices and emotional relationships and embodied experiences of camaraderie.<sup>358</sup>

The second section turns our attention to emotional practices of camaraderie. A more in depth exploration of men's relations, interactions, and experiences of work reveals that camaraderie was comprised of a set of workplace practices. These included helping co-workers with dangerous and difficult work-related tasks, looking out for workplace dangers, coming to the aid of an injured worker, and exchanges of banter between men. It was something miners did. But camaraderie was more than a way of coping with pains, fears and anxieties of exploitative work. As we will shortly see, it could also generate and regulate ways of feeling, bringing together expressions and experiences of pride, respect, trust, and recognition together with anger, embarrassment, distress, and betrayal. In other words, camaraderie could modify and alter men's emotional states, which oscillated between integration and alienation, both alleviating and aggravating feelings at work.

Its decline and/or loss, then, was viewed as a profound emotional rupture in men's working lives. Informed by a historical approach that conceives of camaraderie as an emotional practice, this last section explores how ex-miners remember and articulate workplace transitions after pit closures in the 1980s and 1990s. It argues that men's lamentations over camaraderie should be understood as the diminution of an embodied, transferrable skill, which, on the one hand, men used to monitor, cultivate, and, in part, control collective experiences of work; and, on the other hand, was inextricably linked to emotional expressions and experiences at work. A rupture in camaraderie was also expressed by workers who remained in the coal industry after the closure of their local collieries. Interviewees described, for instance, social strife between miners over the strike, redundancy, and pit closures; tensions between management and mineworkers; and shifts in

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<sup>358</sup> Roper, 'Slipping out of View,' 62.

bodily knowledge and practices, all of which contributed to the reconfiguration of affective practices and experiences of camaraderie.

Although framed by most interviewees as omnipresent, it is argued that camaraderie was illustrative of particular moments of time and place; men usually located it in pre-strike activity and at intimate workplaces largely determined by both age and time spent there. A yearning, then, to return to the coal industry, based on camaraderie, was more often than not constructed around a selective set of workplace memories and experiences, which could be assembled at one pit and/or spread across a group of pits during a miner's career.

#### Section I: The Pit: An 'Emotional Community'

Industrial workplaces have been remembered and represented as sites where a 'moral order' emerged.<sup>359</sup> It was through a set of values, codes, and rules, often passed down through generations, which many young workers were socialised into new roles at work. This is particularly evident in occupational communities. Drawing on the oral testimonies of ex-miners, Perchard illustrates how there were 'rules you obeyed as part of a family,' whilst Strangleman highlights an 'atmosphere of 'self-discipline' and 'respect' in the coal mines.<sup>360</sup>

Building on this work, this section argues that emotions were deeply imbricated with a set of rules and codes, governing people's attitudes, feelings, and conduct at work. Valued emotions, such as pride, respect, and trust, were articulated in the conditioning of an appropriate set of attitudes and behaviour interwoven with camaraderie. In the pits, there was, to borrow from Medieval historian Barbara Rosenwein, an 'emotional community' featuring groups of men 'animated by common or

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<sup>359</sup> Strangleman, 'Work Identity in Crisis,' 423.

<sup>360</sup> Perchard, 'Broken Men and Thatcher's Children,' 89; Strangleman, 'Networks, Place and Identities,' 258.

similar interests, values, and emotional styles and valuations.<sup>361</sup> These ‘emotional styles,’ as Benno Gammerl illustrates, ‘prevail in distinct spatial settings. The supermarket calls for a different emotional repertoire compared to the beach or the office.’<sup>362</sup> Collieries called for an ‘emotional repertoire’ that encouraged the cultural formation of camaraderie between men underground.

Insofar that the pit posed a series of potential risks and hazards to workers’ (including some management’s) health and safety, men were instructed to ‘watch out’ for each other. An injury or death underground not only could halt or slow down production, but also have devastating emotional consequences (short- or long-term) on its workforce. Edward recalled, for instance, having to leave work upon seeing his brother stretchered out of the pit after being temporarily buried underground: ‘I just looked at him and he just looked at me. That were it.’<sup>363</sup> Edward described this as a moment where ‘I couldn’t work that shift’ and ‘I’m not going down there today.’<sup>364</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that a ‘gap had opened up between the social reality of health hazards in the industry’ and ‘popular representations’ by the 1970s, the coal mine was discerned by many interviewees in terms of life-or-death afterwards.<sup>365</sup> In a 1975 National Coal Board training film, workplace hazards were heavily foregrounded: ‘Mines contain dangers for which equipment and training is required. Hazards can include false floors, open shafts, low oxygen, poisonous gases, collapsing or rotten structures and bacterial infection.’<sup>366</sup> The following advice was offered to new

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<sup>361</sup> Plamper, ‘The History of Emotions,’ 253.

<sup>362</sup> Benno Gammerl, ‘Emotional styles – concepts and challenges,’ *Rethinking History. The Journal of Theory and Practice* 16 (2012) 164.

<sup>363</sup> Edward Interview.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Arnold, ‘The Death of Sympathy,’ 98. Major pit accidents, as Arnold illustrates, occurred in the 1970s, including one at Houghton Main Colliery in Barnsley.

<sup>366</sup> National Coal Board, *National Coal Board 1975 Training Film for New Miners*, accessed February 8, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0Ooakld0b0>.

miners: 'Never enter alone. Always thoroughly research your destination. Always alert a third party to your plans and timings. STAY OUT. STAY ALIVE.'<sup>367</sup>

Underlying this urgency of survival was also a dependency on fellow miners underground. As illustrated by a former NUM official, 'You are going in situations that could be marked differently, depending on where you are working in the mines' and 'you are totally reliant on each other as to the dangers...you look after each other.'<sup>368</sup> A particular kind of emotional behaviour was valued underground; an emphasis was placed on humility, respect, and stoicism in advancing and sustaining feeling rules such as 'you look after each other.' This section sets out two objectives. The first shows how emotional prescriptions influenced the cultural formation of camaraderie. The second opens up new ways of thinking about camaraderie as a set of socially and culturally conditioned workplace practices that men learnt and enacted through a 'knowing body.'<sup>369</sup>

### Feeling Rules: Humility, Respect, and Stoicism

Interviewees referred to a particular set of emotional norms in the pit. Firstly, humility was prescribed over self-adulation or excessive praise of one's own achievements. According to Dennis, a humble disposition was favoured since it was, in part, constitutive of 'camaraderie': 'that's where it [camaraderie] started really. Everybody together. Everybody pulling in the same direction. Nobody. No fancy. Nobody saying: Hey look, I've got a Ferrari. Or, look at this, I'm going on holiday.'<sup>370</sup> Whilst Dennis acknowledged people, of course, went on holidays, he noted that a lack of humility could be discerned as being too prideful, triggering potential social repercussions: 'If they got bit too big, their voices, they got shot down [laughter].'<sup>371</sup> Being 'shot

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<sup>367</sup> National Coal Board.

<sup>368</sup> Frank Interview, August 24, 2016.

<sup>369</sup> Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice,' 199.

<sup>370</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

down' usually meant being confronted by another coal miner, likely someone with more seniority, or even by a group of miners.

A self-effacing atmosphere mattered for the quality of the relationships and interactions unfolding amongst miners and between miners and management underground. According to Ernie, 'Everybody who worked in pit were equal. I know they weren't, but they were. You could talk to, like I could talk to gaffer just like I could talk to an engineer or anybody else as if he were my best mate. There'd be no, like, "Who do you think you are talking to?"' <sup>372</sup> If there was a slippage in humility, some miners said they would remind co-workers, usually on the coalface, that men's labour elsewhere in the pit was just as 'important' as theirs for coal extraction.<sup>373</sup> Boastful remarks, by contrast, seemed reserved for collective contexts. According to Arthur, men would tease each other about which coalface team 'stripped' the most coal.<sup>374</sup> Freddie also referred to a friendly 'rivalry' between different pits in the Dearne Valley: 'It were good and it were healthy. It were really deep and entrenched in the social structure of the area. It were just something that you felt.'<sup>375</sup>

Respect was also highly valued in the pits. It was understood by ex-miners as involving self- and social discipline; it was inculcated through a disciplinary code of conduct, usually enforced through generational relations. Interviewees highlighted a set of rules miners should abide by: men could be reprimanded for using another man's canteen without permission, bringing tobacco underground, reporting on a co-worker to the boss, slacking off consistently, scrounging, and, of course, strikebreaking.<sup>376</sup> Transgressions were viewed as an affront on a workplace culture. They would be

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<sup>372</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>373</sup> Archie Interview.

<sup>374</sup> Arthur Interview.

<sup>375</sup> Freddie Interview, August 24, 2016.

<sup>376</sup> Many Interviewees.

dealt with internally by the workers themselves; discipline included urinating in canteens, physical and verbal abuse, or social exclusion.

As Charlie observed, respect meant ‘looking out for one another’ even if it involved disciplining the attitudes and behaviours of other mineworkers, particularly young men: ‘it fetched that respect out of a person.’<sup>377</sup> Young (and older) miners, of course, still acted ‘teddy’ underground.<sup>378</sup> As a teenager, Dennis described the coal mine as a ‘fantastic play area’ before acknowledging that there were a set of codes ‘instilled into you. You couldn’t actually bugger, but it were also a different world.’<sup>379</sup> Despite the obvious tensions between prescription and practice, Ben framed pit closures around the unravelling of an emotional behaviour both reflecting and inculcating ‘comradeship’:

Where do we have a place now to teach, to train our children? Where do we have a place where we can gain respect for them? Where have we got a place where we can teach them discipline? Cos you get cheeky with a bloke down pit...just drops you one on your nose. You don’t get cheeky again. And you learnt that, you learnt that respect. Your learnt that discipline. We’ve actually lost the places where we could teach our children. Give them respect. Give them discipline. Give them a future. We’ve lost a massive, massive thing.<sup>380</sup>

Respect was not simply about following a code of conduct. As we will shortly see in section two, ex-miners valued the process of learning a set of skills and experiences from their peers, usually from more senior workers, when they expressed respect and admiration for their co-workers.

Alongside codes of respect and humility were prescriptions of emotional restraint and displays of stoicism. In my oral history interviews, several interviewees commented on their first bodily encounters underground. For instance, Josh identified the extreme temperatures: ‘It were unbelievably hot. I mean, shorts and a vest. You just stood there without doing any work. You just stood there sweating. And that was...nearly made me turn around and just say: No! That’s not for

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<sup>377</sup> Charlie Interview.

<sup>378</sup> William Interview.

<sup>379</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>380</sup> Ben Interview.



me.<sup>381</sup> Edward described a change in sensory experiences as ‘frightening.’ Hearing noises such as ‘Creek. Creek. Crack’; in conjunction with sheer darkness, ‘If your light went out you couldn’t see,’ could contribute to strenuous experiences.<sup>382</sup>

Another ex-miner, Stanley, a friend of Edward’s, who joined the interview, reaffirmed his apprehensions over mining work. He emphasised how his ‘heart were beating’ the first time he rode the cage down the shaft: ‘It’s not like going down a lift in a hotel or anything like that.’<sup>383</sup> The speed and depth of the decline, alongside the unfamiliar sounds, sights, and sensations, were discerned as unnerving experiences, requiring men to simply ‘stick it out.’ ‘It were something that I just went down and got used to. It were something I did. Thy were frightened. But you got used to it,’ remarked Edward.<sup>384</sup> Stanley nodded his head in agreement. ‘Sticking it out’, then, could involve emotional self-management.

The fact that not every person could do this was mentioned by some men. According to Ernie, ‘It were just something you got used to. Some people couldn’t hack it. Some people could.’<sup>385</sup> Harry alluded to emotional restraint before redirecting the conversation away from himself to tell a story about his brother-in-law, who ran out of the pit after reverberations of a collapsed roof. ‘The only thing I had to get used to [...] He were gone. He went out of the pit and he never came back down. And that chap, me brother-in-law, were built like a brick shithouse. You’d think nowt would scare him.’<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Josh Interview.

<sup>382</sup> Edward Interview.

<sup>383</sup> Stanley Interview, October 29, 2018.

<sup>384</sup> Edward Interview.

<sup>385</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>386</sup> Harry Interview.

It is possible that Harry used this anecdote as a way to avoid talking about his own experiences, as well as to demonstrate his adeptness to ‘stick it out’ under perilous work conditions. The suppression of fear could serve both individual and collective needs. Duncan, who started in the pits in his late twenties, stressed how important it was to block out the fear of getting injured or killed: ‘You couldn’t think about it or you wouldn’t go down. It could play on your mind.’<sup>387</sup> Expressions of fear could also ‘play on the minds’ of co-workers. Luther recalled how a group of men started to ‘show their weakness’ after being trapped in a mine shaft for over three hours. Alluding to a kind of emotional contagion, ‘once one starts panicking it mushrooms,’ Luther described how he and others sought to manage this group’s emotional state: ‘Ok, let’s stick together. We’ll get there. Don’t worry about it. We’ll get there.’<sup>388</sup> Those who were better equipped to manage fear and anxiety were identified as more ‘sensible’ and ‘logical,’ according to Luther.<sup>389</sup>

When I asked ex-miners, who brought up sensory experiences, if they spoke about them to their workmates, they usually stated that it was simply something you ‘got used to.’ It is tempting to interpret this response through a gendered discursive lens; working-class masculinities were forged around a ‘hard man.’<sup>390</sup> Men’s evasion of the question can be explained through masculine codes. But what happens if we take what they said literally? Working in the coal industry was something their bodies ‘got used to.’ Adjusting to the exposure of new sights, sounds, and sensations involved training the body how to respond to sensory and emotional experiences. Stoicism was seen here as an appropriate emotional response: hearing men complain about or seeing men display a mercurial temperament under strenuous work conditions could affect how miners viewed other miners as men, but *also* as reliable and dependent co-workers.

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<sup>387</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>388</sup> Luther Interview.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Ronnie Johnston and Arthur McIvor, ‘Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries, c. 1930-1970s,’ *Labour History Review* 69 (2004) 135.

Stoicism, respect, and humility were discerned by interviewees as valued emotions in the pits; they were framed as important in the cultivation of feeling rules, such as, ‘everybody looked out for everybody’ and ‘everybody watched each other’s back.’<sup>391</sup> These feeling rules, whilst they reflect and shape camaraderie, do not, however, adequately elucidate men’s emotional experiences of, nor the meanings they assign to camaraderie. An understanding of camaraderie, based on the enactment or transgression of a set of emotional conventions, conceives of it in terms of ideological codes, as well as simply treats it as an effect of its material and cultural contexts.

Nor does an adequate understanding of camaraderie surface from descriptions of friendship. Though most men saw their co-workers as mates, camaraderie could exist without it. Nick expressed mixed feelings towards co-workers he described as ‘backstabbers’ whilst also lamenting the loss of camaraderie: ‘It were a good camaraderie, you see. You learnt a lot of things.’<sup>392</sup> Other interviewees commented on tensions between men in and out of the coal mines. Whilst Edward indicated that miners ‘fell out over things,’ Liam noted some miners, who were neighbours, never spoke to each other after work in his village.<sup>393</sup>

Harry also stated that ‘you might have an argument or fight with somebody in club, or in pub, on pit top. But when you were underground you were a team and you stuck together. No matter how many times you might have argued up there you were a team down there.’<sup>394</sup> By contrast, Christopher illustrated that there were fights between men underground.<sup>395</sup> If animosity between men was rife, they were usually separated because of the potential ramifications on the rest of the

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<sup>391</sup> Many Interviewees.

<sup>392</sup> Nick Interview.

<sup>393</sup> Edward Interview; Liam Interview.

<sup>394</sup> Harry Interview.

<sup>395</sup> Christopher Interview.

workforce. Frank recalled, as an official, having to separate two men on different shifts because of a marital affair.<sup>396</sup>

By separating notions of male friendship from understandings and experiences of camaraderie, this impression that ‘everybody looked out for everybody’ may seem unusual. This was not lost on Archie, a coalmining fitter, who conceived of ‘comradeship’ as a peculiar emotional experience:

It’s a strange thing coalmining because you might not like a bloke but, if he’s on the face with you and he gets hurt, irrespective of what your disagreements were, you were all in it together. And that’s where your comradeship come in: if you were down pit and somebody got hurt you went and helped him. [...] I miss the comradeship. But that’s all I miss. You could be helping somebody, you know, you didn’t like. But you still get him out. Even if he were dead and you’d still get him out...because he were a comrade down pit.<sup>397</sup>

In this example, camaraderie can be understood as an affective relation and practice, for instance, coming to the aid of an injured worker. Mutual trust, as Archie explains, was not contingent on friendship, but rather was felt through acts of care between miners. In a similar vein, Lewis said ‘comradeship’ brought together ‘some people you liked’ and ‘some people you didn’t like.’<sup>398</sup>

Approaching camaraderie as a practice means thinking about it as a learnt and embodied skill enacted by men. Perchard has identified a relationship between embodiment and skill, illustrating that miners ‘knew the dangers and eliminated them with their skills’ involving their eyes, hands, and intuition.<sup>399</sup> I argue that it was, in part, through an embodied skillset in which men were able to enact camaraderie. Without having both cultural and bodily knowledge of the work environment, its potential hazards, or a style of humour, men were likely less capable of practising camaraderie. It is the everydayness of (most of) these acts that camaraderie itself became an embodied practice.

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<sup>396</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

<sup>397</sup> Archie Interview.

<sup>398</sup> Lewis and Sophia Interview.

<sup>399</sup> Perchard, ‘Broken Men and Thatcher’s Children,’ 88.

In addition, camaraderie can be viewed as a skill enacted by miners that could alter, modify, and generate ways of feeling about and at work. As Luther illustrates above, looking out for each other, for instance, by talking through a difficult situation, involved assuaging the fears of (as well as criticising) his co-workers. As we will shortly see, though, camaraderie was more than a kind of coping mechanism for fear, pain, and anxiety at work. It was significant in the formation of subjectivity, emotional intimacy between men, and the exercise of power cutting across dimensions of class, gender, and generation. We now turn our attention to the quality and character of what I identify as emotional practices of camaraderie.

## Section II: Emotional Practices of Camaraderie

Approaching camaraderie as an ‘emotional practice,’ to quote Monique Scheer, ‘things people do in *order* to have emotions,’ means taking seriously the role of culture, history, and the body in human relationships and experiences.<sup>400</sup> Rob Boddice has also encouraged historians to consider the ‘biocultural status of human beings’ in inquiries into historical actors’ emotional experiences.<sup>401</sup> As shown in the previous section, camaraderie cannot be understood outside of its material or cultural contexts. Feeling rules such as ‘everybody looked after everybody’ infused men’s attitudes, feelings, and behaviour.

Rather than think of camaraderie as simply reflecting the emotional styles of an emotional community, this section argues that camaraderie generated, sustained, and transformed emotional communities underground. By turning our attention to men’s relationships, interactions, and experiences, we can better elucidate the automatic nature of, emotional investments in, and the circulation of power and feeling through emotional practices of camaraderie.

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<sup>400</sup> Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice,’ 194.

<sup>401</sup> Rob Boddice, ‘The History of Emotions: Past, Present, Future’ *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 62 (2017) 10.

Emotional practices of camaraderie are understood as—but not limited to—looking out for workplace dangers, coming to the aid of an injured worker, helping co-workers with work-related tasks, and workplace banter. These are skilful acts men learnt and enacted in the workplace. This section is divided into two parts. The first demonstrates how camaraderie was socially conditioned into miners through the acquisition of cultural and bodily knowledge in and outside the mines. The second turns our attention to actual emotional practices, illustrating the emotional significance of camaraderie in men's working lives underground.

### Camaraderie: A Skilled and Embodied Practice

In order to do camaraderie one must have knowledge of a workplace culture, which, as I have already demonstrated, was composed of a set of socio-emotional codes and standards. In some instances, however, young men learnt about being underground before even working in the mines. For example, Dennis acknowledged that he 'knew a lot about pit work' by having conversations with his family and those in his local community: 'people talked about it on buses, talked about it in pubs, talked about it everywhere, cos it were a major part of people's lives.'<sup>402</sup>

Charlie highlighted an emotional bond that he shared with miners before becoming a miner himself. His 'first relationship to coal miners' was felt when two neighbours were killed in a pit disaster. It was a moment, Charlie explained, that 'registers in your head' and was the 'start of my mining [life]'.<sup>403</sup> Although he saw workplace fatalities as a 'a way of life,' Charlie pointed out how accidents were mitigated by men's 'skills' and 'experience':

What we see, with skills and experience, we can tell working underground, we're responsible for your own safety and safety of your colleagues that's with ye. And it's that experience that you gained, with respect, aye, with men that trained ye underground. That we can see dangerous situations before it occurs.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Dennis Interview, 2016.

<sup>403</sup> Charlie Interview.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

Stories of injured or killed miners could ‘register’ on ways of being at an early age. What ‘becomes a way of life’ for Charlie was not simply that men worked in a deadly workplace, but also that men were ‘responsible’ for each other’s safety. Looking out for one another was a learnt ‘skill’ and ‘experience’ Charlie drew on when identifying ‘dangerous situations’ before they occurred. This ‘skill’ was seen as an act of care that was taught and passed down and gained through practical-knowledge. It was through these acts in which Charlie felt respect from, and expressed respect to, other miners.

Many interviewees fondly remembered moments with those men who trained them and disseminated knowledge. Nick asserted that old colliers ‘learnt you a lot of things,’ including safety, awareness, and support.<sup>405</sup> During his underground training as an electrician, Henry explained how his supervisor ingrained into him integrity and reliability. ‘If I used to make something at pit for you...the guy who trained me used to say: have a look at it before you ring it up and tell him it’s ready. Have a look at it. Would you have that item you made in your house? If the answer were no, it went out the window.’<sup>406</sup>

Archie recalled a similar moment where he stripped mechanical parts inside a water pump and lined up each part accordingly. He was approached afterwards by his trainer who scooped up all the parts: ‘I know what you’re thinking. I don’t care whether it takes you today, tomorrow, or all week. You’ll figure out where all ‘em parts go and it’ll work.’ The ‘reason’ his supervisor rearranged the machine’s parts was because Archie would likely face a similar scenario where someone else had stripped the parts. Whilst he suggested this made him a ‘better person’ and ‘better fitter,’

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<sup>405</sup> Nick Interview.

<sup>406</sup> Henry Interview.

Archie hinted at a sense of mistrust, stating how he would have done ‘*almost* anything’ for ‘that man.’<sup>407</sup>

When I asked Archie why not ‘anything,’ he explained how he was asked to do a job that he felt, based on his experiences, was far too dangerous. This incident did not necessarily thwart respect but confronted Archie with certain misgivings, raising tensions between production and safety and its implications on men’s relationships underground.<sup>408</sup> Echoing a similar sentiment, Luther asserted: ‘They ran safety down your throat. But sometimes they can be a bit more rough because production is more important than safety.’<sup>409</sup> Emotional ambivalence could permeate younger miners’ social relationships with older men, some of whom they initially looked up to for guidance.

Oliver also spoke fondly of learning a set of ‘skills’ from older miners, especially those involving personal safety and the welfare of co-workers. According to Oliver, they would ‘give you the knicks and knacks: Don’t go that way. Watch for this and that type of thing. You looked up to them. You never stopped learning.’<sup>410</sup> At the same time, he suggested that guidance should not be misconstrued with instilling a strong work ethic into younger men. He was placed with a man, for instance, who taught him how to ‘shirk’ hard work tasks. Whilst Oliver was appreciative of the knowledge this man passed along to him, he insisted that he opted to be a ‘worker’ instead of a ‘shirker.’<sup>411</sup> Men’s individual personalities and their evaluations of work influenced what ‘skills’ they did or did not espouse into their daily working routines.

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<sup>407</sup> Archie Interview.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Luther Interview.

<sup>410</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.



Learning (and sometimes teaching) how to do the job safely was a focal point for interviewees.

Ben, for example, illustrated the generational nature of knowledge transmission: ‘you took them [lads] under your wing. I had that when I first started.’<sup>412</sup> It was often through male intergenerational relations where miners learned how to identify and respond to workplace hazards. A sense of self-worth and confidence arose from these social interactions. Ben framed the acquisition of knowledge around ‘manhood’ *and* ‘comradeship’: ‘It changed me from being a young lad from school. No experience. No knowledge of anything. And it changed me into becoming a man. A young man. And it totally changed by [my] attitudes towards men. Men’s attitudes towards me.’<sup>413</sup>

The knowledge men ‘gained’ from older miners extended beyond the workplace. According to Chester, ‘It learnt me a lot about life...growing up in that type of environment.’<sup>414</sup> Working with a ‘mixed group of men’ made Chester ‘stronger’ and ‘wiser,’ learning how to, for instance, save money and purchase a home.<sup>415</sup> Acts of care prompted men to describe their relations with co-workers in familial terms: ‘It were like good camaraderie. Everybody watched each other’s back. I suppose it were like a big family,’ Duncan recalled.<sup>416</sup>

This portrayal of ‘family’ in industrial workplaces is not new. But becoming ‘part of a family’ at work meant having to learn place-based practices of care. Frank indicated that a ‘great deal of respect’ derived from ‘most’ miners knowing how to enact camaraderie because of their knowledge of the physical environment, men’s behaviour and attitudes, and their own embodied experiences:

Most of the people you worked with throughout your working life started exactly the same as you did, so they knew what experiences you were having cos they had been there

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<sup>412</sup> Ben Interview.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Chester Interview, August 26, 2016.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Duncan Interview.

and done it and got the t-shirt. So, you, they knew, when you needed help and assistance, they knew when you needed encouragement, and they knew when you need discipline.<sup>417</sup>

A way of knowing was experienced via the body and physical arousals. According to Edward,

When you worked in the pit you knew your mates. You trusted them. Because down pit you had to help each other and to look after each other. You were watching your mates. And everybody had a seventh sense. You had a seventh sense when you were down that mine. You'd go, 'Something don't feel right here.' Hair on back of thy neck would stick up.<sup>418</sup>

Oliver also referred to miners having a 'seventh sense' when describing how men 'looked after each other.'<sup>419</sup> This is a 'sense', grounded in cultural contexts, that was constituted out of past work experiences stored in the body. It was by way of physical changes in the body, for instance, adrenaline activating muscles, which enabled Edward and other men to look out for dangers. Feelings of trust, respect, and pride were felt via practices of camaraderie. From this perspective, camaraderie was seemingly 'less about learning how to feel' than it was 'feeling through practice.'<sup>420</sup>

### 'Watching Each Other's Back'

Interviewees illustrated the habitual nature of camaraderie in both direct and indirect ways in their narratives about looking out for workplace dangers and coming to the aid of their co-workers. Dennis emphasised how 'camaraderie' was an activity that 'you needed to do all the time'; Ernie stated, whilst 'alien' to him at first, it 'gets into your blood'; and Frank explained that 'you pick it up.'<sup>421</sup> For many interviewees, it was discerned as an ordinary phenomenon in their working lives.

Arising from the pit, explained Matthew, were culturally and place-specific practices,

You made sure that you worked safe and, if you noticed a problem, you'd make somebody aware of it. You'd be walking down a gate, and me wife, I do it automatically, and if you saw a hazard, you'd be walking down, walking in a line, you'd be walking to your place of work. So you'd say watch this girder to people behind. I can walk through the woods with

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<sup>417</sup> Frank Interview, 2016.

<sup>418</sup> Edward Interview.

<sup>419</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>420</sup> Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, 'Feeling through Practice: Subjectivity and Emotion in Children's Writing,' *Journal of Social History* 51 (2017) 101.

<sup>421</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018; Ernie Interview; and Frank Interview, 2018.

me wife and she'll let branch come back and hit me in face [laughter]. But when I'm in front, I'll say 'Watch this branch.' It was something you learnt.<sup>422</sup>

Matthew framed watching out for hazards, albeit in a comedic context with a tree branch, as an 'automatic' reaction he 'learnt' whilst working in the pits. This reflexive practice is, of course, not regulated to coalmining; people could surely become proficient in it elsewhere. But miners, in particular, placed a premium on 'watching each other's back' because of the potential dangers they and their co-workers faced underground.<sup>423</sup>

Analogous to Matthew, Thomas referred to reflexive behaviour, albeit indirectly, when describing the 'dry' sense of humour at Barnburgh Main Colliery. According to Thomas, men would look out for and identify harmful objects when walking down the roadway to their worksite.

If there were a sleeper stuck up, you know, cos you were walking snake like. Watch your head. So you duck down, like. Somebody says 'That weren't there yesterday.' Somebody says 'That weren't there yesterday.' [Laughter]. So you passing this thing down. It might be a turd or something [laughter]. It were so dry [humour] because they never laughed.<sup>424</sup>

Notwithstanding the comical undertones of these two examples, James and Luther foregrounded the seriousness of being able to spot potential workplace hazards. When putting up girders to secure a roadway that had started to collapse, James indicated how there were signs, such as, a 'trickle of muck' from the rooftop, that you must look out for: 'A little trickle. If you saw that, you said "Get out!" You better have a good spotter, or somebody who knows what they are doing, cos if you don't spot for him, he's gonna get killed.'<sup>425</sup> Luther referred to a similar incident after coming across a massive cavity when advancing a coalface: 'You could feel these little trickles of drop, drop, drop.'<sup>426</sup> Describing this as the 'calm before the storm,' Luther explained how an older miner, a 'wise old owl,' told the group of workmen to 'stop where you are and do not move,' with

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<sup>422</sup> Matthew Interview.

<sup>423</sup> Many Interviewees.

<sup>424</sup> Thomas Interview, August 7, 2019.

<sup>425</sup> James Interview.

<sup>426</sup> Luther Interview.

tons of rock falling behind them.<sup>427</sup> Spatial awareness, especially in rough conditions, was ‘instilled into you...and that led to a camaraderie among miners that stuck together,’ according to Dennis.<sup>428</sup>

Ex-miners recognised looking out for dangers as practices of care that could alter and generate emotional states, from ‘terror’ to ‘trust’, since they could prevent someone from being injured or killed.<sup>429</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that many miners placed an emphasis on helping each other out underground. Assisting men with work-related tasks was, however, not limited to identifying potential hazards. Freddie happily recalled a moment early in his mining career when a group of men stopped on their way to a different worksite and unexpectedly helped him disassemble a ladder pump he had been struggling with.<sup>430</sup>

Helping out co-workers mattered a great deal to some ex-miners. Henry told a story where two men joined him and another man in digging up rock to fit a new crossing. He explained that they ‘stayed with us until it were finished. There were no need for [them] to do that. But that’s the way it was. If you saw somebody working you’d help them.’<sup>431</sup> According to Harry, ‘If you were ever stuck with anything there were always someone willing to get you out of it...You wouldn’t walk past. They’d come and help you. There was always somebody to help you if you were struggling. Willing hands.’<sup>432</sup> Additionally, Luther stated, ‘There’s always somebody there to watch your back and it’s something I’m really, really proud of. [...] It gives you a good feeling when you try to help them out.’<sup>433</sup> Helping one another out could be an emotionally intimate experience, engendering feelings of pride and respect.

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<sup>427</sup> Luther Interview.

<sup>428</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>429</sup> James Interview; Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>430</sup> Freddie Interview.

<sup>431</sup> Henry Interview.

<sup>432</sup> Harry Interview.

<sup>433</sup> Luther Interview.

Mutual respect was also expressed via labour stoppages involving injured workers. Upon seeing or hearing of a pit disaster, men routinely observed how miners would stop what they were doing and come to the aid of a fellow worker. ‘If somebody got hurt then the job stops,’ Ernie explained. ‘I carried them out of pits a few times. On a stretcher. For miles. You, we’d, just keep carrying.’<sup>434</sup> Harry also indicated how there were ‘that many men’ on location of a work-related accident: ‘You could see that everything stopped for that person. [...] When anything like that happens everything stops.’<sup>435</sup>

A temporary labour stoppage underground was also understood as an act of camaraderie. According to Charlie, ‘If anything unites a coal mine is, ah, a colleague’s death in industry. It really is. We used to have a 24-hour stoppage of respect for anybody with a fatal injury underground.’<sup>436</sup> Irrespective of how long or short a labour stoppage was, Charlie described how feelings of ‘sadness’ and ‘respect’ coexisted. These feelings also had a unifying power; men exercised agency when they stopped working by coming to the aid of an injured colleague. They described how they prioritised the health and well-being of co-workers, even if it was short-lived, over the production of coal.

Some men articulated more nuanced emotional experiences, bringing together exploitation with camaraderie in discussions of how miners assisted injured workers. Ryan identified two workplace accidents when reflecting on how men looked out for each other. They both involved him getting injured at work. The group of men he was working with ‘backed him up’ by both lying about and making his injury look worse.

I could see. But face overman says [on phone] ‘I’m coming up with some eyewash.’ But lads got to me first. They said, ‘Look, lift thy shirt up and we’re gonna kick ye in back,’

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<sup>434</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>435</sup> Harry Interview.

<sup>436</sup> Charlie Interview.

[Ryan laughs] to make it look as though its [hydraulic chalk] blown me into the back of these metal pillars. I say's 'You what? You not doing that.' They say's, 'We did it other day to...We kicked him to make it look more realistic.'<sup>437</sup>

Upon hearing this account, I was confused as to why his co-workers wanted to inflict further pain.

Ryan had no inclination to explain why, either, until his wife prompted him to: 'why are you saying you do things like that?'<sup>438</sup> Ryan explained that they made injuries appear worse—never to the extent that men were incapacitated—because they tried to get more compensation from an employer, they argued, was reluctant to offer a fair remuneration for injuries they suffered, especially if they were career-ending. Ryan's initial laughter over describing this event is not necessarily suggestive that he found it humorous. Rather, it points to the absurdity of the workplace conditions and exploitation, and how some men responded to them as a group. Nor were these enjoyable experiences. When having to compound an injury of a miner, Ryan insisted that 'it hurt me more than it hurt him.'<sup>439</sup>

James brought up a similar incident. After suffering an injury where he was visually impaired, he explained how some of his co-workers 'knocked' him when he was being carried out of the mine.

I were on stretcher and they were knocking the shit out of me and laughing. It hurt but there's nowt you could do. But they know, they know they're gonna hit you, but they're not gonna hit you that hard. You were laughing. That's sort of thing that...they're gonna look after ye. There's like 10 lads all taking their turns to carry that stretcher out. They care that much about ye. What they're also not gonna let you cry into your beer.<sup>440</sup>

Men's responses to his injury was characterised as an expression of 'care.' In this situation, looking after another miner could also mean altering one's emotional state. Although in pain, James saw this as useful in thwarting self-pity to mobilising laughter. Matthew also referred to humour as a 'response' to non-fatal injuries: 'Somebody gets injured the first response was "Has he had his

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<sup>437</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> James Interview.

snap?’ We weren’t being cruel. We were trying to make light of things.’<sup>441</sup> It is a mistake to characterise camaraderie as merely cruel in these contexts; acts of camaraderie were also driven by economic and emotional interests. Eliciting laughter may also have been just as important for those doing the ‘knocking.’ A chuckle from James, perhaps, signified that he was going to be okay, helping to assuage his co-workers’ emotional states after seeing him injured underground at work.

Camaraderie brought ordinary (looking out for dangers) and extraordinary (mining disasters) work experiences together. The everydayness of camaraderie is best evidenced in routine articulations, such as ‘everybody looked out for everybody.’ These expressions can come off as automatic. Like these verbal utterances, practices of camaraderie, including looking out for workplace dangers and coming to the aid of an injured worker, could be conceived of in a similar fashion. These activities created deep personal engagements and emotional investments; they were inextricably linked with ways of feeling toward self and others. The generation of feelings such as respect, trust, and confidence, for example, were also important in alleviating the risks, fears and uncertainty, and, sometimes paradoxically, pain involved in mining work. It is understood here that camaraderie was not merely a way to cope with individual and collective emotional states, but rather that emotions themselves activated bodily practices of camaraderie that could generate, modify, or transform ways of feeling. An inclination to do camaraderie was also about wanting to express and experience respect, for example. Men’s emotional states, as noted above, were also affected by humour and banter. We now turn our focus to the latter in our exploration of camaraderie.

### Humour and Banter

Humour was heavily foregrounded by ex-miners when talking about camaraderie. As Keith Gildart illustrates with the unpublished autobiographies of Welsh coal miners, humour was used by men to

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<sup>441</sup> Matthew Interview.

portray camaraderie. In particular, Gildart identifies ‘tales of mishaps and funny situations,’ including playful nicknames and mockery, and some less comedic, resulting in ‘hurt feelings.’ In doing so, Gildart illustrates that humour, akin to song, was a ‘bonding agent’ and a ‘coping strategy’ in the North Wales coalfield.<sup>442</sup>

This section seeks to build on this work by focusing on the interrelationship between humour, banter, and camaraderie. It begins by engaging with how men described humour, the types of examples they afforded, and its emotional relevance underground. Accompanying their recollections of ‘pit humour’ was also a strong emphasis on banter or pillocking between miners. Understood here as a distinct activity between two or more miners, banter was recognised for its affective qualities, modifying and altering men’s emotional states at work. Although Emery acknowledges the affective ties between camaraderie and banter, he conceptually separates the two, illustrating how ‘camaraderie performed through banter’ created ‘affective atmospheres’ for coping with a ‘hazardous’ work environment.<sup>443</sup> By contrast, I argue, banter was not simply a vehicle for, but rather *is* an act of camaraderie that could generate a wide range of emotional experiences.

Although banter could easily conceal bullying, it was a powerful activity that regulated men’s attitudes and behaviour in and outside of the workplace, and challenged power dynamics between workers and management. A closer examination of the interplay between banter and emotion offers perspective into how men make sense of generational discord in ex-mining localities, and why former miners continue to lament over the decline and/or loss of camaraderie accompanying coalfield deindustrialisation.

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<sup>442</sup> Keith Gildart, ‘Mining memories: reading coalfield autobiographies,’ *Labor History* 50 (2009), 149-150.

<sup>443</sup> Emery, ‘Geographies of Belonging in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield,’ 149.



### 'You Can't Beat the Crack'

Affectionate recollections of camaraderie were held together by shared experiences of laughter. When describing what he missed most about 'comradeship,' Dennis declared: 'The jokes. The laughs. The fun. It were hard. You can't beat the crack and the laugh.'<sup>444</sup> The coal mine was remembered as a place with a particular brand of humour. Whilst Archie stated, 'It were a good laugh at pit,' Matthew said 'I had some fantastic laughs, you know, rolling down on floor.'<sup>445</sup> This humour-rich environment was one of the first things Freddie noticed after leaving his job as a car mechanic to work in the pits: 'A lot of people laughing and having a joke. At garage, I mean, we had a laugh and a joke, but it were a lot more regimented. You weren't allowed to enjoy yourself too much.'<sup>446</sup>

But what was it that was so distinct about 'pit humour'? Underlying this unique style of humour was a silliness, dryness, and, sometimes, very dark undertones which played with the theme of death. Inane doings were commonly brought up by men when retelling humorous stories. As a teenager, William, and co-workers around his age, would often 'act teddy' by riding pit ponies, whipping each other with their belts, or throwing bits of sludge.<sup>447</sup> Whilst the first two of these practices were time- and age-specific, the latter surfaced in the working lives of adult miners.<sup>448</sup>

In addition to these jocular, yet sometimes harmful, physical interactions, interviewees referenced a series of amusing anecdotes about silly aspects of coalmining. Stories of miners sleeping underground predominated men's accounts; in fact, photographs of men sleeping at work continue to circulate as jokes on colliery Facebook groups.<sup>449</sup> In other instances, men referred to their own

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<sup>444</sup> Dennis Interview, 2016.

<sup>445</sup> Archie Interview; Matthew Interview.

<sup>446</sup> Freddie Interview.

<sup>447</sup> William Interview.

<sup>448</sup> James Interview; Edward Interview.

<sup>449</sup> Christopher Interview.

silliness. Whilst Harry remarked how he jokingly offered a pit ghost some of his snap, Ellis shared a story about a man who would complain to workmates about his snap, ‘cheese again?’, only to reveal that he made his own lunch.<sup>450</sup> These comedic exchanges between men could also be supplemented by comedy shows, according to Duncan. There was a collier who apparently carried around a set of props at work; when singing ‘Singing in the Rain’ he would ask men to throw water on him.<sup>451</sup>

Accompanying—and sometimes interweaving with—silliness was what Ellis described as a ‘very dry’ humour.<sup>452</sup> ‘Pit humour’ stood out as being distinctively expressionless at times. Take this one example given by Luther. Following an accident where no one was injured, but mining equipment and machinery were damaged, a manager openly criticised a miner’s intelligence in front of his co-workers. At the same time, the manager was ‘ranting and raving’ on the telephone: ‘Why won’t you talk to me? Why won’t you talk to me?’ The team of ‘stone-faced’ workmen watched him repeatedly try to connect with someone until one of the miners said: ‘Sam, there’s no wires on them.’ Unbeknownst to the manager, the accident had severed the lines of communication. The retelling of this story prompted Luther to break down laughing: ‘Oh, that’s the funniest thing I’ll ever remember. They just sat there and let him do it for a long time while he ranted and raved. He made himself look like a real idiot. But that’s how miners were, they were so funny.’<sup>453</sup>

Dry humour was also described as sometimes having dark undertones. Thomas recalled an incident about a fellow co-worker whose young son was suffering from nightmares of his father dying at work. The boy would sometimes call the pit to check in on his dad. In one instance, he asked,

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<sup>450</sup> Harry Interview; Ellis Interview.

<sup>451</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>452</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>453</sup> Luther Interview.

‘When’s daddy coming home?’ A miner on the other end of the call responded, ‘Oh, he won’t be home, today.’<sup>454</sup> Although the boy may not have understood the inference of death, the rest of the men, specifically the boy’s father, would have interpreted it this way. It was this combination of dryness and an unsafe work environment that made ‘pit humour’ unique, according to Arthur.<sup>455</sup>

This mixture of dryness, darkness, and silliness was seen by many men as a part of doing camaraderie and alleviating work-related anxieties. When highlighting the perilous work conditions, Frank likened a coalmining camaraderie to popular conceptions of military camaraderie.

You come across all sorts of laughs. I mean pit humour is something else. They’d never stop laughing. I don’t know if it is cos you are down there and you are in the dark. But it is similar, I suppose, to being in trenches. You know how people said the camaraderie in the trenches were great cos you are all together all the time and you are watching each other’s back. I think there is similarity there.<sup>456</sup>

Luther made a similar point whilst placing an emphasis on being ‘daft’ (outside of severe circumstances) as a compulsory component of working underground: ‘You got to be daft, ain’t ye. It’s, it’s, it’s the camaraderie that keeps you ticking over when you are down the coal mine, cos you all understand what a dangerous game it is.’<sup>457</sup>

Just like there was a time and place to be ‘daft,’ the pit signified a time and place where miners said it was acceptable to swear and curse. A particular kind of vulgarity, usually referred to as ‘pit language,’ also infused humour underground. William recalled, for instance, how he would pretend to check the phone lines for purposes of clarity, asking miners on the line to repeat after him: ‘I cannot hold a hot potato in my hand. They’d say it and then I’d say, well, drop it you silly old cunt’ [laughter].<sup>458</sup> What made pit work and humour more distinguishable were differences in linguistic

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<sup>454</sup> Thomas Interview.

<sup>455</sup> Arthur Interview.

<sup>456</sup> Frank Interview, 2016.

<sup>457</sup> Luther Interview.

<sup>458</sup> William Interview.

practices. Christopher was bemused after hearing his dad interact with other miners at work for the first time: 'What? My dad swears? It was a real shock to the system.'<sup>459</sup>

However, when ex-miners spoke of 'pit language' they subsequently reproduced a motif of two 'different worlds': a world of pit work and non-pit work, which were in part sustained by the gendering of space and place. As Oliver illustrated, if you used 'pit language' in front of another man's wife 'they [miners] would smack ye in the mouth.'<sup>460</sup> As Ben further illustrated, You didn't use bad language in front of women. Never. Respect them. [...] Now underground we did. It's where we talked...it's a dangerous place. It's banter that you're taking tension out of the air because, like, we are with each other. It relieves it; it takes a lot of relief.'<sup>461</sup> As far as it concerns working men's clubs, similar cultural practices were upheld in ex-mining areas in the present. During one of my many visits to a local club, a patron swore whilst playing a game of bingo in the entertainment wing of the club. The remark drew widespread disapproval from the rest of the members, prompting the man to become red in the face and apologise for cursing. This language was regulated to the 'tap oil,' the recreational wing of the club, which was largely populated by male members.<sup>462</sup>

Humour was also a way men slowed down or found reprieve from the daily grind of working. According to Duncan, laughter was essential to being 'human': 'You've got to have a laugh ain't ye. Wherever you work. Or else, you, you're not human. [...] We had a good laugh. But we worked hard as well.'<sup>463</sup> The pit could at once be understood as something men wanted to 'escape from' and were drawn to because of the humorous jokes, gags, and stories.<sup>464</sup> I argue here, however, that

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<sup>459</sup> Christopher Interview.

<sup>460</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>461</sup> Ben Interview.

<sup>462</sup> Fieldwork, December 14, 2019.

<sup>463</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>464</sup> Gildart, 'Mining memories,' 145.

an understanding of ‘pit humour’ must also consider the dynamics and effects of banter between men underground.

Banter, also referred to as pillocking, commonly featured in stories about ‘pit humour.’ Banter was described by ex-miners as a social interaction involving two or more men that included taunts, mockery, and ridicule; all of which, were described as useful mechanisms in generating ways of feeling, as well as affecting temporal experiences of the labour process. As we will shortly see, however, practices of banter could simultaneously produce social experiences of integration and alienation. Such acts were viewed by some as shameful and embarrassing experiences that could worsen if men chose not participate.

If banter often involved ‘taking the piss’ out of another miner, what topics were ripe for the picking? Ellis put in bluntly: ‘Anything. Just say something wrong.’<sup>465</sup> Men jeered at other miners about their appearances, wrong-doings, disabilities, identities, and injuries. Whilst Dennis explained that something as straightforward as a man having big ears could turn into the nickname ‘Wing Nut,’ Luther explained how he wound up with a particular nickname because he was short.<sup>466</sup> These nicknames would stick, especially if men objected to them. Also, for those men who got into any trouble outside of the pit, their problems were sometimes broadcast over the communication system. Lewis remembered how a co-worker was ridiculed by other men after failing to pay his television license, with one miner inquiring over the intercom if he had paid it this time, so ‘everybody on bloody face knew. That’s the kind of thing they’d do if you did anything wrong.’<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>466</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018; Luther Interview.

<sup>467</sup> Lewis and Sophia Interview.

Miners with any sort of distinctive characteristics were also singled out by men. After James found out another co-worker had a stutter, he exclaimed, ‘Fucking hell were having some of that. He’s getting some piss for that. [...] If you got something wrong with ye, they’re [miners] gonna pick up on it.’<sup>468</sup> ‘Wrong’ in this context usually meant difference. Contrasting social identities—when situated within the composition of the larger white, heterosexual, English labour force—such as, homosexuality and ethnicity, were brought up when miners made distinctions about other men.<sup>469</sup>

When juxtaposed with a culture of political correctness in the contemporary period, ‘pit humour’ and ‘pit language’ can appear anachronistic. Interviewees were aware of this. On a number of occasions, men refrained from going into detail after they brought up banter. In one instance, a research participant asked if he could speak ‘off the record’ before addressing this subject matter.<sup>470</sup> At one point in his interview, James openly questioned if I was perhaps offended by what he was telling me: ‘You might be horrified by me saying that. I don’t know?!’<sup>471</sup> Other research participants continued to talk about banter in a very general way, with Ellis, for instance, stating: ‘It’s not fair to mention any names’ when evading a follow-up question that requested empirical examples.<sup>472</sup>

What men were more comfortable talking about was the performative effects of banter. Besides ‘slow-timing’ at work and ‘taking stress out of being underground,’ the back and forth ‘crack’ between miners was characterised as a means of cultivating a sense of togetherness.<sup>473</sup> James suggested that ‘If you’re not getting piss taken out of you, you’re not part of the club.’<sup>474</sup> Winding

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<sup>468</sup> James Interview.

<sup>469</sup> Frank Interview, 2016; Ryan and Maureen Interview; James Interview; and Lewis and Sophia Interview.

<sup>470</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

<sup>471</sup> James Interview.

<sup>472</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>473</sup> Dennis Interview, 2016; Edward Interview.

<sup>474</sup> James Interview.

each other up was seen by many as a collective practice. Lewis insisted, 'You're all in it together. You could take piss out of one. He'd take piss out of you. You'd give it him back. If you couldn't do it, you might as well leave the pit.'<sup>475</sup> Some of those who refused to participate, however, could be identified as outsiders: 'You'd got to give it back. If you didn't give it back they'd just carry on all the more. In fact, they'd just treat you as an outcast [...] There's something wrong with him. He don't give it back,' remarked Dennis.<sup>476</sup>

To be clear, men made it evident in their interviews that the things they said and did to one another were done in jest. Despite most interviewees framing banter as a well-intended activity, it could produce unintended social and emotional effects. One interviewee revealed that he left coalmining as a teenager partly because of how men treated each other at work.<sup>477</sup> Thomas indicated, especially as a teenager, that banter could be upsetting: 'You got to give as much back. If you didn't, it would get you down. Really. If you felt it were aimed at you; people laughing at you, not with you.'<sup>478</sup> Banter was something men also 'became hardened' to when working in the pits.<sup>479</sup>

Both Duncan and James recalled incidents where the 'joke' had perhaps gone too far. In the case of Duncan, it involved his wife. During a night on the weekend his wife was pulled on stage by a male dancer at a local strip club. After his co-workers found out, they proceeded to draw and leave pictures of his wife with the male dancer in sexually compromised positions for roughly a week. Unlike the other stories of humour, he relayed, Duncan was less enamored by this story, arguing 'You couldn't let it get to you. If they knew they'd get you more. [Long pause]. You just have to laugh it off or give it back.'<sup>480</sup> James also spoke of how a co-worker, who was familiar with his fear

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<sup>475</sup> Lewis and Sophia Interview.

<sup>476</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>477</sup> Yvonne and Craig Interview, November 8, 2018.

<sup>478</sup> Thomas Interview.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Duncan Interview.

of riding down the mining shaft, manipulated the speed and descent of the cage. A group of miners had to hold James back from trying to fight his co-worker, repeatedly telling him: 'It's a joke. It's a joke.'<sup>481</sup> Despite his lack of appreciation for this particular prank, James explained, 'You had to live with it. You ain't got a choice.'<sup>482</sup>

It is too easy and simplistic, however, to tackle socio-cultural acts of banter as simply exercises in bullying and discriminating. Surely, these could be part of the equation at particular moments. When doing banter interviewees also foregrounded compassion, caring, and self-awareness. All too aware that it could go awry, Ellis argued you had recognise how far you could go with each co-worker without upsetting them.<sup>483</sup> There was a fine line that Ellis tried to manage between social rapport and antagonism. As illustrated in the last section, ex-miners engaged in banter after an injury as a way to manage and ease injured miners' emotional states. Whilst Ellis told a story where a miner responded to his inquiry about the state of his head injury with, 'I can fit me whole hand in it,' Arthur said that injured miners would also 'take the piss.'<sup>484</sup> A miner, who had broken his femur, led some of his co-workers astray as they continued to search for what they thought was also a missing finger. Upon visiting his mate in the medical centre, the injured man revealed that he had lost that finger 20 years earlier, eliciting laughter from Arthur.<sup>485</sup>

'Taking the piss' out of each other at work was not simply about managing men's emotional states, but rather discerned as significant in the (re)production of appropriate attitudes and behaviours outside of the coal mine, specifically in pit villages. Frank illustrated that the pit was both a site of work and discipline. If a young miner happened to get into mischief on the weekend he was

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<sup>481</sup> James Interview.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

<sup>483</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>484</sup> Ellis Interview; Arthur Interview.

<sup>485</sup> Arthur.



subsequently ‘ribbed’ for it at work. Frank described ribbing as a form of self-regulation by miners, helping to engender ‘self-respect.’<sup>486</sup> Charlie also touched on the generational dynamics of banter:

If we went down on weekend and got in any trouble you got to go then and meet up with your elders underground. And I’ll tell you, now, they’d put you straight...cos they made it embarrassing, so embarrassing that you’d think that I’m not going to get in that [trouble] anymore.<sup>487</sup>

These practices were not simply directed at a younger generation of miners. Freddie explained that miners were ridiculed at work if they violated cultural expectations in his village, including ‘pride’ in home caretaking. If someone’s garden was unkempt in the neighbourhood, men ‘ridiculed you till you got something done. You’d get ribbing about it and they were nasty sometimes to you. Not nasty physically, but verbally abuse you if you were letting street down.’<sup>488</sup> Self-regulatory acts could occur through practical jokes. In response to a miner who was scrounging other men’s chewing gum and tobacco, they gave him a laxative chewing gum, with the man later defecating himself at work. After finding out what triggered this incident, the miner, Duncan explained, was so ‘upset’ that he left this pit.<sup>489</sup>

Accompanying these stories of self-regulation were also articulations of generational discord in the present. Problems of anti-social behaviour, from drug use to criminal activities, were discerned as socio-economic issues that had its greatest impact on a younger generation of men in ex-coalfield areas.<sup>490</sup> Maureen suggested, ‘We’ve lost a lot of youth, good youth, strong young men that would have had something, because not everybody is cut out to be a doctor, a solicitor, or a policeman.’<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Frank Interview, 2016.

<sup>487</sup> Charlie Interview.

<sup>488</sup> Freddie Interview.

<sup>489</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>490</sup> Many interviewees.

<sup>491</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

It was not only the loss of stable and relatively well-paid work that interviewees referred to when drawing connections between the coal industry, deindustrialisation, and subsequent generations. Men also spoke of emotional values and behaviour. Edward insisted there was a loss of ‘pride that was instilled into you when you were brought up as a man’ in the industry; Charlie explained that a sense of ‘shame’ fetched on miners if they ‘did owt wrong’ dissipated with shutdowns; and Oliver lamented the decline of ‘intergenerational’ relations essential for building respect: ‘I’d like to see a lot of young’uns go down the pit, just, just for that. To learn respect. It comes down to respect and being taught respect.’<sup>492</sup>

This loss of ‘respect’ was experienced through isolating and fearful experiences. James, now in his 60s, still refers to his elders from the pit as ‘Mr.’ when he crosses their paths on the street. He said this form of ‘respect’ was not emulated by younger kids in his village; he described how a group of kids took an ex-miner’s mobility scooter for a joy ride and then yelled obscenities at him. This incident, according to James, ‘just ruined him [his ex-coworker] in one night.’<sup>493</sup> Attempts to deescalate situations between young men were now described by some as frightening experiences. According to William, ‘You look at it, now, you don’t want to get involved cos you think it’s all. Look, I’ll be a good Samaritan, I’ll be a good friend, and then you wake up next morning and all your car windows are put through.’<sup>494</sup>

Although practices of self-regulation in mining villages cut across other social institutions constitutive of the wider locality, interviewees honed in on the workplace as a site of social discipline. From this perspective, coalmining work was underpinned by a distinct form of emotional labour. Men discerned the pit as an institution where miners instilled a set of emotional

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<sup>492</sup> Edward Interview; Charlie Interview; and Oliver Interview.

<sup>493</sup> James Interview.

<sup>494</sup> William Interview.

attitudes and behaviour into young men either through comedic insults, sometimes verbal or physical abuse, and/or heartfelt discourse. What I want to emphasise here is that banter, as illustrated above, was conceived of as an emotional practice useful for disciplining young (and sometimes older) miners who transgressed cultural norms and standards in mining localities. A decline of workplace banter with pit closures, as most miners illustrated, was felt in and outside of the workplace.<sup>495</sup>

The circulation of feeling and power materialises through exchanges of banter, shaping ways of being. A workplace banter helped to (re)produce an emotional culture which transcended the workplace; neighbourhood and domestic life were sometimes also brought into the workplace. Banter could affect men's emotional states, which oscillated between integration and alienation, alleviating and aggravating feelings at work. Banter can also be conceived of as an emotional practice of camaraderie, affecting men's emotional expressions and experiences, and the circulation of power in coalfields.

This power was also exercised via the labour process. Banter shaped how work was carried out, specifically, by slowing it down. Miners frequently engaged in banter with management. Whilst Ernie described 'taking the piss' as a 'bit of back biting' to managerial rule, Oliver said some men would simply act daft by talking nonsensical when approached by a manager.<sup>496</sup> Duncan recalled, for instance, how a co-worker sometimes had bowel movements, prompting the manager to seek assistance elsewhere.<sup>497</sup> It was, perhaps, by 'taking the piss' that men also said 'no' to dangerous and harmful work without it being conceived of as an encroachment on a sense of masculinity and

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<sup>495</sup> Many Interviewees.

<sup>496</sup> Ernie Interview; Oliver Interview.

<sup>497</sup> Duncan Interview.

camaraderie.<sup>498</sup> Humour and banter were not merely ways to alleviate anxieties, but also how some men resisted exploitation at work.

In a lot of these stories, banter between rank-and-file miners and management took place with managers who were once 'pit men' themselves. As a manager, Lewis was familiar with many practices, such as sneaking out of the pit before the end of a shift, because he had once done it himself. In turn, he spoke fondly of 'drawing' miners in by either taunting or mocking them.<sup>499</sup> However, you could sense a feeling of exasperation accompanying these encounters in Ronald's oral testimony. When I asked him about banter, he cheerfully replied before shifting his tone and focus to something seemingly less memorable.

Unbelievable! You'd had got to be underground to know it. We'd be arguing and calling each other all day long. [Mutters under his breath] 'Do it.' 'Bloody.' You know. It didn't mean anything...that way. I, is, you know, you, you all got on with each other. You argued with each other.<sup>500</sup>

Memories of banter seemed to cut across two different work experiences of coalmining. As a manager, Ronald was sometimes faced with having to negotiate with miners to get them to 'get on' with work. William, who later worked in management, also brought up how this was a difficult position to navigate: 'They got to realise that I had a boss. But I weren't, I weren't silly. I'd never ask anybody to do owt I couldn't do.'<sup>501</sup> A manager's knowledge of workplace practices likely meant that miners could also get away with more at work. Those managers who had not worked their way up through the industry, as we will shortly see, were a point of contention for some interviewees when they commented on the fragmentation of camaraderie.

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<sup>498</sup> Walkerdine and Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community After De-Industrialisation*, 108.

<sup>499</sup> Lewis and Sophia Interview.

<sup>500</sup> Ronald Interview.

<sup>501</sup> William Interview.

Banter was not only about slowing down or evading work. Some men suggested that banter could facilitate the speed and pace of work. As Dennis illustrated, miners taunted each other over what they could accomplish: “I bet you can’t do this.” “Oh, I can do that.” It would be one of those things. Camaraderie it is, really. Camaraderie is just bouncing.<sup>502</sup> Slacking off at work could result in miners being called ‘idle bastards’, according to Liam.<sup>503</sup> This was more prominent if bonus pay was involved. Ryan recounted that ‘we all got to pull together to earn some money’ when the bonus system came in.<sup>504</sup> At the same time, he insisted how some miners did ‘absolutely nothing,’ some of whom he personally confronted.<sup>505</sup>

The usage of, performativity, and effects of workplace banter were complex. As a straightforward social practice banter was a way of eliciting ‘pit humour.’ This brand of humour was place and gender-specific, usually underscored by a vulgarity and, sometimes, deeply insensitive remarks. Many interviewees framed banter as also a coping mechanism of dealing with pains (literally), fears, and anxieties of working underground. A justification of banter because of hazardous work conditions could also mask bullying and discrimination, which produced divisions amongst coal miners. Paradoxically, workplace banter could produce feelings of attachment and alienation; it could involve cooperation and conflict, affecting the ways work was performed and experienced.

A focus geared solely towards internal conflict between miners over identity and difference can mask what miners discerned as more positive expressions and experiences of humour and banter. For instance, banter was viewed as an expression of care and compassion involving self-awareness of men’s emotional states. Jokes were seen as particularly useful in generating a sense of collective

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<sup>502</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>503</sup> Liam Interview.

<sup>504</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

reassurance through laughter. ‘Taking the piss,’ specifically after a workplace accident, could help ease the stress and worries that followed. In addition, banter could regulate the attitudes and behaviours of men in and outside of the workplace by generating or altering ways of feeling. Although Charlie described feelings of ‘embarrassment,’ he understood exchanges between his ‘elders’ as affective acts of caring. Miners were looking out for themselves, their co-workers, and their localities.

Finally, banter was understood as a practice that could influence men’s experiences of the labour process. It was useful in either slowing down or speeding up work. Whilst the former may involve managing an awful job and work environment, I argue, it was, perhaps, also useful in resisting what miners perceived was harmful or dangerous work. Taunting co-workers could also help pick up the pace of work, specifically, when men were motivated by bonuses. If we consider the social and emotional dynamics of workplace banter in the pits, it is my contention that ‘taking the piss,’ like ‘watching each other’s back’ by identifying workplace dangers or coming to the aid of workers, should be understood as an emotional practice of camaraderie. It is this conceptualisation of camaraderie that we now turn to in our exploration of how interviewees articulate its decline and loss in the context of coalfield deindustrialisation.

### Section III: Coalfield Deindustrialisation and The Decline of Camaraderie

By rethinking the concept of camaraderie as an emotional practice, the previous two sections elucidate how camaraderie was bound up with ways of being and feeling. This approach to camaraderie is critical if we are to better understand why and how men continue to confront its absence with pit closures. This section argues that its decline should not be conceived of merely as simple nostalgia for coalmining or the loss of a coping mechanism. Rather, the decline of camaraderie marks a more profound emotional rupture in men’s lives that involves doing, as much

as coping, with emotion. It was by way of camaraderie that men experienced pride in oneself, mutual trust and respect, and a sense of security and safety at work. As we will shortly see, interviewees felt camaraderie was devalued and discouraged in ‘new’ work environments. The implications of this loss are significant for how men understand, experience, and respond to processes of coalfield deindustrialisation.

It is first worth revisiting how camaraderie is conceptualised here. Whilst friendship was bound up with camaraderie it was not contingent on it. Also, camaraderie was not simply illustrative of culture or identity, i.e., a by-product of a ‘way of life,’ but rather was constitutive of a set of emotional practices that helped (re)produce a particular working-class cultural formation. I argue, moreover, that camaraderie was a learnt and embodied skill; it developed through the dissemination of experiential knowledge and the production of bodily knowledge in specific cultural and material contexts rooted in place and time. It was thus formed out of socio-cultural experiences, exploitative work conditions, and perceptions and sensations of workplace dangers.

As Walkerdine and Jimenez illustrate with community, I argue camaraderie was a way men coped with the anxieties, fears, and pains of coalmining work. At the same time, camaraderie could also generate and regulate ways of feeling and being. In this scenario, emotions themselves are also understood as guiding and motivating bodily practices of ‘watching each other’s back.’ To put it another way, camaraderie was how many men expressed and experienced pride, respect, and trust, sometimes alongside fear and pain or shame and anger. Camaraderie was important in producing ways of feeling that deeply mattered to how men felt about themselves as individuals and saw themselves as part of a larger collective of workers: coal miners. It was, moreover, through emotional practices of camaraderie in which men exercised agency, cutting across dimensions of class, generation, and masculinity (see the next chapter). A closer look at the relationship between

camaraderie and emotion offers insight into ruptures and continuities in notions and experiences of working-class culture and identity.

### The Decline and Deskilling of Camaraderie

Starting a new job after leaving the coal industry was remembered as an exceptional event in men's working lives. This was because they did not have a choice; the mines closed. Work, for many men, after coalmining usually paid less and was insecure, with bouts of unemployment arising in between workplace transitions. Graft had less to do with actual work than finding it. At the same time, interviewees illustrated shifts in experiences of work, emphasising a decline of camaraderie. This loss, I argue, should be approached as the diminishment of a transferrable skill, affecting the ways many men navigated and negotiated workplace transitions, communicated with their co-workers and to themselves who they are, and cultivated and resisted collective experiences of work.

Interviewees did not always refer to their work experiences after coalmining when highlighting differences in camaraderie. Jack contrasted mining work with previous jobs such as construction work: 'On buildings you worked for yourself. You earned your money and you couldn't care less about anyone else. It weren't like that a pit; it were all for one. Everyone.'<sup>506</sup> Freddie also acknowledged that 'I have never experienced anything since or before' when recounting camaraderie in the pits.<sup>507</sup> Coal miners, Freddie explained, 'would go out of their way to help, but primarily make sure that you were safe' at work.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Jack Interview.

<sup>507</sup> Freddie Interview.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.



Some men accounted for this difference by referring to miners as ‘a different breed of men.’<sup>509</sup> We should be wary of these sorts of self-invocations since they can also essentialise miners. At the same time, there is some truth to this observation of miners as a ‘different breed’ if we approach such a characterisation as not an innate quality, something born into you, but rather as part of a developmental process, bringing together material, cultural, and bodily experiences of work.

Everyday practices of camaraderie were bodily enactments, consciously and unconsciously, performed by men not only at the pit but also away from it. When the coal mines closed, men could also bring with them past embodied experiences of coalmining to ‘new’ workplaces. It is argued here that a decline in camaraderie does not merely signify a political (unionised) and cultural (moral order) shift in work and workplaces. Rather, the discouragement and prevention of camaraderie—as well as its ineffectiveness in other work environments—triggered biocultural changes in men’s lives, since camaraderie as an experience involved both ‘an expression of their cultural context *and* a manifestation of the way in which that context was embodied.’<sup>510</sup> Embodied ways of knowing, feeling, and doing were confronted with its decline, with subsequent effects on emotional expressions and experiences.

Interviewees often expressed confusion over their inability to practice camaraderie, including helping co-workers with work-related tasks. After leaving the pits, James got a job at a nearby factory where he quickly learned that some of his co-workers felt threatened by camaraderie. An attempt by James to complete what he saw as an incomplete task was described as ill-advised rather than helpful. He was told by another worker that it was not his but another man’s job: ““Oh you can’t do that!” I say’s “Why?” “That’s fitters job, he’s got to do that.” “I can get it done before he

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<sup>509</sup> Many Interviewees.

<sup>510</sup> Boddice, ‘The History of Emotions: Past, Present, Future,’ 14.

gets it.” “No, no, no.”<sup>511</sup> Part of the problem was his unfamiliarity with the cultural contexts; in this scenario, his actions were interpreted by his co-worker not as friendly but threatening. But, more importantly, this moment was felt as an affront on a way of being; James explained that he was not ‘allowed’ to be himself at work. This unfamiliar and difficult experience of self-restraint was registered through camaraderie: “There was nowhere else you could go with that camaraderie anymore,” remarked James.<sup>512</sup>

Ben reiterated a similar sentiment when he explained how management would prevent workers from helping each other in factory work. On a number of occasions, he felt inclined to help out co-workers struggling with work. These undertakings were often combatted, with him being told “That’s not your job. Leave it alone.”<sup>513</sup> Ben contrasted new work experiences with coalmining, elucidating how he enacted camaraderie: “Come here, mate, let me help you with that.”<sup>514</sup> His inability to practice camaraderie was described as a momentous change in his working life.

Analogous to Ben and James, Dennis identified a loss of camaraderie with having to ‘recalibrate’:

But I had lost a lot of comradeship. That’s a big loss if you lose fellow work mates all being in the same thing. I soon realised teaching weren’t the same as mining. [...] The way of working were different. It’s that way of working. So your whole life, and your whole, your whole nature of being in something has changed.<sup>515</sup>

Other ex-miners, such as Oliver, conveyed anger when recounting differences in work. He indicated how some people could watch their co-workers, in particular, young people, struggle with tasks in the railway industry. For instance, knocking a key out on the track could prove difficult for some people until they were shown how to do it properly. According to Oliver, it would ‘drive me nuts’ to see people sit back and laugh without helping them afterwards: ‘I keep

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<sup>511</sup> James Interview.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> Ben Interview.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

telling people, now, who's not passing it [knowledge] down, that they're first class bastards.'<sup>516</sup> This inactivity was framed as disrespectful, and strongly contrasted with expressions of respect via transferring knowledge or helping co-workers in the pits. Notwithstanding the fact that railways were the closest thing to 'pit language, banter, and that type of thing,' Oliver argued camaraderie was different with coal miners. After becoming a foreman, Oliver sought out ex-miners when assembling work teams, since they had a skillset conditioned into them that engendered 'trust' and 'respect' amongst workers.<sup>517</sup>

Henry also expressed frustration over what he felt was a sharp decline in camaraderie outside of the coal industry.

If you saw somebody working you'd help them. The five jobs that I've had, I've struggled and struggled and struggled, and there's four people being stuck talking, and not at any point have they come asked 'Can we help you?' 'What ye doing?' If I walked past somebody and they were struggling, I'd ask them what they were doing. Do you need a hand? And that way you built your friendships up with that individual as well. [...] The seventeen-and-a-half year I spent working at the pit were the best seventeen-and-a-half year of my life. Friends. Relationships that I had with people. Respect that people gave me and I gave them.<sup>518</sup>

There was, perhaps, also a tendency for interviewees to exaggerate similarities amongst coal miners, and differences between coal miners and other workers if, and when, they sought to demonstrate ruptures in camaraderie in new workplaces. Surely, not every worker refrained from assisting ex-miners with work-related tasks; nor did miners help out every miner in the pits. What is being identified as a fissure is rather the commonality of the inactivity of practices of camaraderie. The fact that camaraderie was not necessarily expected, nor paramount, could also be emotionally impactful. As Henry illustrates, camaraderie was a way he expressed and felt respect.

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<sup>516</sup> When making this distinction, Oliver explained that old miners still gave young workers a hard time by first allowing them to struggle with the task; however, they would, usually after a laugh, demonstrate how to do it properly afterwards.

<sup>517</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>518</sup> Henry Interview.

Camaraderie between workers was further undermined by co-workers' inactive responses to workplace injuries. If there was an accident at the factory, Ben remarked, 'you might get one or two' who would 'be there for me.'<sup>519</sup> Reflective of how this might negatively characterise his co-workers, Ben said there were 'some good lads' and it was the dangerous environment underground that helped explain for why men 'always bonded.'<sup>520</sup> Although Arthur retired because of ill-health, he still missed the pits because of this 'bond' he shared with miners at work: 'I'd go back tomorrow, to be honest. It's that, it were that, um, it's that bond! Especially if anybody got injured, everybody look after you.'<sup>521</sup>

Accounts about dangerous workplace incidents also featured in new workplaces. For instance, Matthew illustrated how a co-worker at a door manufacturing plant was trapped inside a machine, with management having to call the fire brigade. But it was not the emergency services that got his co-worker out. Matthew and a few ex-mining mechanics, who also worked at the plant, dismantled the machine, rescuing their co-worker from potential harm. In turn, Matthew explained that it was his and men's work experiences in the pits that made all the difference, from calmly managing the situation to later disassembling the machine.<sup>522</sup> This was a memorable workplace anecdote for him because these sorts of accidents were infrequent at the plant, and it displayed a skilfulness through coming to the aid of a co-worker. This was, for Matthew, a proud moment involving past embodied experiences of coalmining in the form of an explanation and as a practice.

Perceptions and sensations of dangerous work also mattered if, and when, camaraderie was enacted in new workplaces. Men described mind-numbing work experiences after working in the

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<sup>519</sup> Ben Interview.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> Arthur Interview.

<sup>522</sup> Matthew Interview.

pits. Whilst Duncan explained that he felt like a ‘zombie’ working on the factory line, Ernie said he was stuck on a single machine all day.<sup>523</sup> Stationary and tedious work tasks helped to restrict men’s mobility, as well as remove an element of danger they felt underground via uncertain and varying work conditions. A decline of camaraderie was not simply experienced by other’s supposed unwillingness and/or discouragement to help and aid co-workers, but by ex-miners becoming conscious that camaraderie in the pits was not always a viable practice in other work environments they discerned as less (if at all) dangerous.

Camaraderie was inseparable from a dangerous work environment. As illustrated by Dennis, a decline of camaraderie also brought with it existential and emotional challenges for many men.

You’ve lost that purpose of being in that environment in which it were a harsh environment. It were a terrible environment but one you sort of loved in [a] sick sort of way. Not loved. It’s wrong word to use that. You were in an unknown environment where you worked with mates that looked after you; you were safe and secure. Not literally. But it were an environment which you knew. Your future were mapped out in that. That’s all gone now. So you’re left to sail the seas by yourself in a rowing boat.<sup>524</sup>

Without camaraderie there really was no coalmining and vice versa. Nor could camaraderie be simply replicated outside of the coal mines because of the socio-spatial, material, and cultural contexts. Although coal miners were never ‘literally’ shielded from workplace hazards, camaraderie was remembered as making men feel ‘safe and secure.’ The metaphor of sailing the seas is further illustrative of how many miners felt when they were forced to leave the pits to pursue and work in other industries: vulnerable and forgotten.

### The Fragmentation of Camaraderie in the Coal Mines

Expressions of a lost sense of camaraderie were not restricted to men’s work experiences outside of the coal industry. As interviewees revealed, explicitly and implicitly, camaraderie also underwent

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<sup>523</sup> Duncan Interview; Archie Interview.

<sup>524</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

fundamental changes in the coal mines during and after pit closures in the Barnsley and Dearne Valley areas. Men, who continued to work as miners elsewhere in the country and/or abroad from the late 1980s onwards, also suggested the fragmentation of camaraderie in their oral testimonies. Leaving a local colliery usually meant that men no longer ‘knew everybody’ they worked with—or at the very least, the majority of the men.<sup>525</sup>

Camaraderie was affected by social tensions between workers over the strike and pit closures, reconfigurations in relations between miners and management, and transformations of bodily practices and knowledge in ‘new’ mines brought on by pit closures, transfers, and privatisation. Working at a different pit with a different group of men, Charlie explained, could be interlaced with social antagonisms.

When you go into another pit yard [voice quiets] you don’t know anybody. There might be a few lads dotted up and down from Barnsley. It is different. It is different. [...] I mean, at Maltby, there were lads that went back to work in strike. They wouldn’t always admit it, but they did. So, yeah, to go to and work in another pit, it’s different. A lot of animosity, it’s hard to explain. When you’ve worked at a pit for a big number of years and you see contractors coming, they [miners] look at it as danger. That you’re taking their jobs, and it created, it created that fear of contractors taking their jobs.<sup>526</sup>

Analogous to strike-breakers, as we will see in the next chapter, private contract workers were also discerned as a ‘threat’ by some miners. According to William, they were described as ‘scum of the earth’: ‘No one would talk to us. [We were] job sellers. [...] They were nasty. Breaking into lockers, pouring urine into lockers where our clean clothes were.’<sup>527</sup> He also pointed out, however, that ‘scabby’ job sellers were perceived as the ‘worst.’<sup>528</sup> Ill feelings towards coal miners over both the strike and pit closures was enough to inhibit miners from looking out for each other underground.

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<sup>525</sup> Charlie Interview.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

<sup>527</sup> William Interview.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid.

Acts of exclusion were not limited to contract workers, either. According to Thomas, miners refused to help him with work-related tasks and wash his back in the pit baths by walking past him, because they suspected he voted to close his pit before arriving at ‘their’ pit. Despite this being untrue, Thomas left the coal industry once he was offered a redundancy package at Maltby because of fundamental shifts in experiences of camaraderie.<sup>529</sup> Luther also made a qualification about camaraderie after illustrating a sentimental attachment to it in the present: ‘I’m contradicting meself now, but, um, I didn’t like Maltby colliery because, ugh, I just didn’t like the culture in which, which...basically, in my opinion, they used to encourage people to backstab each other.’<sup>530</sup> Luther indicated that men would betray co-workers to get on more profitable coalfaces, resulting, in one instance, with him being left off a particular work team.

In a similar vein, Ryan argued that miners at Daw Mill were not the ‘same’ as miners from Yorkshire. He accounted for this difference by pointing to a history of camaraderie: ‘They didn’t have no history behind them. They weren’t the same. They got no camaraderie, or owt like that.’<sup>531</sup> In contrast to Yorkshire men, Daw Mill miners were a ‘different breed’ because a lot were not conditioned the same way, being brought up in industries outside of coalmining.<sup>532</sup> In addition, Ryan also revealed tensions between management, specifically, those who were not ‘pit men.’ He explained that a deputy, who was often away at school, was unable to do some of the manual labour required of him when at work, with Ryan and others having to pick up the slack. Eventually Ryan exchanged words with him because he was ‘so fed up,’ arguing that ‘not many men had much respect of them cos they hadn’t worked their way through.’<sup>533</sup> Upon transferring to Selby several

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<sup>529</sup> Thomas Interview.

<sup>530</sup> Luther Interview.

<sup>531</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

years later, Ryan noted, albeit humorously, the same deputy was now a face overman, who left him off a work team.

Issues with what some ex-miners referred to as ‘college boys’ also surfaced in oral history interviews. Harry said a young mining official put his and his co-workers’ lives at risk because he ‘learnt all his mining at school.’<sup>534</sup> In this case, an under-manager instructed men to loosen a section of coal; its loosening, however, flooded the mine, killing a co-worker.<sup>535</sup> Oliver suggested the gradual replacement of older miners with young and less experienced men was a huge mistake: ‘people getting hurt because they didn’t know to look out for that, or you could do it this way cos it was safer. [...] You can’t instill knowledge into someone without people seeing it and doing it.’<sup>536</sup> It was an absence of knowledge, traditionally obtained through both ‘seeing’ and ‘doing’ that contributed to workplace injuries. It is also likely that some men found it challenging to practice banter with young mining officials, since they circumvented the ‘traditional’ life course trajectory of working underground.

Interviewees brought up the loss of bodily knowledge in stories about difficult workplace transitions within the coal industry. A sense of safety and security—bound up with knowledge of place, people, and culture—was not necessarily pre-established at what Frank called more ‘cosmopolitan’ pits in the wake of deindustrialisation in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>537</sup> Prior to Woolley Colliery’s closure, Joseph received a transfer to work at Kellingley Colliery. He described his initial work experiences at Kellingley as unpleasant for a number of years: ‘It were so strange. I didn’t like it for about 3 or 4 year. [...] You didn’t know who and where you were. It were like three different

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<sup>534</sup> Harry Interview.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>537</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.



pits, Kellingley. There were that many men it were unreal.<sup>538</sup> It was not until he nearly lost his job for absenteeism that Joseph committed to working at Kellingley until it closed in 2015. Like Joseph, Edward described how working at a new pit ‘didn’t feel right for the first 12-months because it weren’t same people. [...] No atmosphere. No nowt. I just hated it for 12-month. I got used to it.’<sup>539</sup>

Relocating to a different pit could engender uncertainty and insecurity in men’s working lives underground. Men were not working with the ‘same’ miners (or in the same pit) that they had, in many cases, grown up with, lived nearby, and/or socialised with outside of the coal mines. A ‘seventh sense,’ that is, embodied knowledge guiding practices of camaraderie, could also unravel with pit transfers because it was developed out of specific socio-spatial relations and material conditions. Unfamiliarity with a dangerous work environment, alongside new co-workers, could frustrate practices of camaraderie that helped to foster safety, security, and integration. Joseph’s reluctance to go to work, for instance, could have had as much to do with his own apprehensions over an adeptness to adjust to the unknown. Familiarity was a key motivating factor for some miners when relocating to another pit. Christopher declined a transfer to a colliery closer to his home; instead, he transferred to a pit further away because most of his co-workers were moving there.<sup>540</sup>

Despite the fact that some miners talked about themselves in homogenised ways as a ‘different breed,’ there was some trepidation when relocating to another local pit, as well as marked shifts in experiences of camaraderie at other pits. Interviewees made distinctions between local mines and

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<sup>538</sup> Joseph Interview, September 1, 2016.

<sup>539</sup> Edward Interview.

<sup>540</sup> Christopher Interview.

miners on the basis of family and kin, scale, size, and seams, and, of course, humour.<sup>541</sup> All of these factors, according to Ernie, contributed to ‘different ways of doing things’ which could seem completely foreign at first, requiring some time to ‘blend in.’<sup>542</sup> As for the latter, it may involve learning how to work in more enclosed coal seams that made some men anxious, or acclimatising to exchanges of banter involving homosexual humour that made some men uncomfortable.<sup>543</sup>

Previous illustrations of camaraderie should, as a result, be conceived of as generationally- and spatially-specific. Though most interviewees framed camaraderie as omnipresent, it was perhaps more illustrative of particular moments of time and place; men usually located it in pre-strike activity and at intimate workplaces largely determined by age and time-spent there. Even prior to the 1984-85 miners’ strike, camaraderie was not all-encompassing, producing integration and alienation in the workplace. A yearning to return to the coal industry based on camaraderie was constructed around a selective set of work memories and experiences, which could be assembled at one pit and/or spread across a group of pits during a miner’s career. Those who continued to work in the industry in the 2000s usually drew on earlier work experiences when recounting camaraderie.

I am not suggesting that camaraderie was absent after the wave of pit closures in 1980s and 1990s. Akin to other workplaces, camaraderie underwent contestation because of shifts in spaces and places of work, everyday practices and relationships between workers, and men’s emotional states and investments in camaraderie. For those that felt it was useful and viable they continued to enact it, albeit under different circumstances. Although William referred to conflict between himself and other miners, he also illustrated that whilst ‘different’, the ‘comradeship were there’ with some men

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<sup>541</sup> Many Interviewees.

<sup>542</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>543</sup> Ernie Interview; Duncan Interview.

and ‘we used to act teddy.’<sup>544</sup> Joseph clarified that he also encountered camaraderie at Kellingley, stating that ‘it were all there’ later with men he worked with.<sup>545</sup> It was just a matter of ‘getting to know’ one another, familiarising himself with men’s behaviours and attitudes, as well as the spatial environment.<sup>546</sup>

Taking this into consideration, I want to illustrate how a ‘new’ practice of camaraderie emerged amid processes of coalfield deindustrialisation: commuting to work. Pit closures meant many men had to travel to work outside of the Barnsley and Dearne Valley areas. This was a fundamental change in some men’s working lives. Duncan said a longer drive to work was a massive bodily adjustment because it could add almost two-hours, barring traffic, to his eight-hour workday: ‘It were a lot of getting used to. But eventually, it clicks and then, you like, shut off. You get used to it. You just shut off when you are driving.’<sup>547</sup> ‘Shutting off’ marked a moment where cognition was embodied; a longer workday and a new route to work meant training the body.

Working as private contractors in the mines also usually meant having to work longer shifts, including a 12-hour workday. A temporal shift, in conjunction with increased productivity, was explicitly framed in exploitative terms by Colin.

They treat you, as I recall it, a little bit like dogs. So, you had to go, for example, you had to do, compulsory, do a 12-hour night shift. If you didn’t, you not bother going. You were sacked. And that, I mean, overtime were always voluntary, where this, because we were contractors, we were told we had to.<sup>548</sup>

What sometimes accompanied these shifts in work experiences were fearful experiences involving imagined and actual car accidents when driving home from work. ‘I’d drop to sleep,’ Ryan stated,

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<sup>544</sup> William Interview.

<sup>545</sup> Joseph Interview.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>548</sup> Colin Interview, August 25, 2016.

occasionally driving home from Selby to Barnsley.<sup>549</sup> Memories of commuting often prompted recollections of other coal miners being killed whilst driving home from work by falling asleep.<sup>550</sup>

As a way to circumvent this work-related hazard, men explained how they started to carpool with co-workers. Carpooling was framed as a way to manage bodily states affected by sleep deprivation. Akin to watching out for the dangers underground, small groups of men looked out for each other by taking turns driving to work when they could (on the same shift). Whilst Ryan stated, ‘There were a lot of times I travelled on me own. But when I got to know them, we took turns driving,’ William explained, ‘We used to travel in twos or threes, if we could, and we used to say, whoever sits at side of driver try not to go to sleep. I used to try and drive different ways because I’d be driving to work and not remember going through villages.’<sup>551</sup>

The long-term effects of work travel and longer workdays on men’s physical and mental health cannot be overstated. Charlie was explicit about the toll it continues to have on him in the present,

I have nightmares about them now. I’ll say to wife, I look at clock, quarter-past four. I say’s ‘This time I were just getting ready to go to pit on a 12-hour shift.’ It were bloody hard.<sup>552</sup>

In a similar vein, William said he was prescribed medication after finishing working in the coal industry in the 2000s, because of the adverse effects of work: ‘I ended up going on nutcase tablets, cos my life had been...I ended up going on continental shifts and this, that, and the other. Then I’d be working me days off.’<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>550</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview; William Interview; Charlie Interview; and Henry Interview.

<sup>551</sup> William Interview.

<sup>552</sup> Charlie Interview.

<sup>553</sup> William Interview.

Comparable to—and interlaced with—exploitative experiences of work underground, long work commutes helped to produce camaraderie between miners by ‘watching each other’s back’ in the form of carpooling. But this practice of camaraderie was never a forgone conclusion. Culture clearly matters, but not in a deterministic way. Carpooling was not a collectively held activity with certain expectations and potential penalties if it was transgressed by men the same way as, for instance, failing to lookout for workplace dangers or participating in workplace banter. That does not mean, however, it could not have become a collective practice; if felt as both viable and useful, more men may have carried out this activity on a larger scale with it becoming a valued practice. The reduction in the number of coal miners, their spatial dispersal, and the increasing insecurity of coalmining under privatisation meant this was unlikely.

Yet, carpooling was also contingent on individual traits and social contexts, including where miners lived, whether they sensed or felt risks of work travel, their willingness to share private space, their work histories and relations with other miners, and the effective and affective nature of carpooling. If passengers fell asleep, drivers may have seen it as ineffective outside of (or alongside) economic costs. The latter is important since it is suggestive that some men could have practiced it for a number of reasons. Perhaps it had more to do with cultivating feelings of respect and trust than having to cope with fear or anxiety of falling asleep, because maybe they adjusted more easily to labour exploitation in the form of longer workdays. Also, this change could have been considered as part of a process of ‘getting on’ with work rather than something that needed to be combatted.

By rethinking carpooling as act of camaraderie, I hope to illustrate how men’s subjectivities, bound up with cultural formations, bodily knowledge, and labour (class) exploitation, matter in the enactment, repeal, or the remaking of camaraderie. Popular understandings of camaraderie in the pits have tended to overlook the agency of miners because camaraderie is usually viewed as an

outcome of a culture or the workplace; it is explained by a set of cultural codes imbued with emotion, and affective states of anxiety, fear, and pain of working in an exploitative workplace.

Although camaraderie arose out of a lived experience, it was, to quote E.P. Thompson, ‘never in *just* the same way.’<sup>554</sup> Its socio-cultural formation was contingent on place, history, emotions, identity, power, and, most importantly, work experiences that cut across (but are not limited to) class, age, and generation, and (as the next chapter shows) gender dimensions. Its decline or loss was experienced when interviewees felt it was no longer a useful activity in or outside of the coal industry. This matters because it was how workers communicated and connected to people through emotion, important in self-formation, generating, altering, and managing emotional states.

### Conclusion

A concerted focus on camaraderie has perhaps been overlooked in favour of community in studies on working-class life. When and, if, broached in deindustrial literature, camaraderie is usually considered as synonymous with friendship, illustrative of solidarity, and/or the by-product of a dangerous work environment. A closer examination of my oral testimonies reveals that camaraderie was a skilled act, activated through bodily practices that intended on ways of knowing, feeling, and being in (and outside of) the workplace. Its loss is understood as part of a process of deskilling (individually and collectively), impeding how interviewees navigated and understood workplace transitions, communicated and connected with co-workers, and resisted and managed exploitative experiences of work.

This chapter began by illustrating how camaraderie arose through cultural and material conditions. Drawing on methodological tools from the history of emotions, it explores how emotional norms

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<sup>554</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971) 10.

and codes contributed to the cultivation of feeling rules. Stoicism, respect, and humility were recognised as valued emotional standards; they were inculcated and expressed via expressions such as ‘watching each other’s back’ and ‘everybody looked after each other’ at work. If they were transgressed, there were potential consequences for those in the group, including verbal abuse and social exclusion. Yet, dominant feeling rules of ‘everybody looked after everybody’ do not adequately explain the meanings men assigned to or their emotional experiences of camaraderie.

A closer look at men’s interactions, relationships, and experiences of coalmining work reveals emotions were meaningful cultural activities triggering and activating camaraderie. Emotion ‘as a kind of practice’ was dependent and intertwined with camaraderie.<sup>555</sup> By rethinking the concept of camaraderie as an emotional practice, I argue camaraderie cultivated a range of feelings between co-workers; looking for workplace dangers, assisting workers, and exchanges of banter are habits that aided men in eliciting and communicating ways of feeling and being. Camaraderie involved not only coping with fears and anxieties of exploitative work, but also in generating and modifying emotional states, which oscillated between integration and alienation, alleviating and aggravating feelings at and about work. These practices were carried out in a particular environment, within a workplace culture and wider community, and under specific labour processes. Camaraderie, then, ‘is not just a behaviour but has performative effects on the constitution of feelings’ and a class identity.<sup>556</sup> It is how many interviewees understood, experienced, and responded to exploitation, vulnerability, and social domination at work. These things continue to exist (and have intensified) following pit closures.

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<sup>555</sup> Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice,’ 193.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 210.

The decline and loss of camaraderie is experienced as a profound emotional rupture in men's working lives. A longing for camaraderie is also about the diminution of a transferable skill which, on the one hand, men used to manage and cultivate collective experiences of work, and on the other hand, was inextricably linked to men's emotional expressions and experiences at work. This rupture was also felt by some workers within the coal industry. Social tensions between workers over pit closures, shifts in relations between miners and management, and shifts in bodily practices and knowledge contributed to reconfigurations of camaraderie. Some interviewees, in fact, continue to use camaraderie as a framework for making sense of fundamental shifts in workplace practices and experiences, but also generational relationships in ex-coalfields. A longing for camaraderie, whilst constructed around a selective set of memories and experiences, was also felt within coalmining at specific times and places.

Camaraderie was coloured by tensions and contradictions in the coal industry. There is, perhaps, a tendency in deindustrial literature to commonly identify camaraderie with cooperation and compassion rather than conflict and hostility. Less 'positive' social relations, experiences, and feelings permeated practices of camaraderie. Arising from men's oral testimonies are also illustrations of work experiences that could be pleasant and unpleasant, from the work itself to exchanges of banter. Interviewees recalled acts of abuse and alienation by some co-workers when they transferred to different pits.

Rather than see this in terms of a decline (or affront on) camaraderie, however, is it possible to conceive of these acts as also practices of camaraderie? As illustrated in the next chapter, verbal or physical abuse and social exclusion or alienation of 'scabs' were also valued cultural practices that helped individuals realise emotional states, from 'striving for a desired feeling as well as the



modifying of one that is not desirable.<sup>557</sup> By thinking about camaraderie dialectically, we widen our scope to not only what may or may not constitute practices of camaraderie, but also the emotional messiness of these experiences and their implications after pit closures. Such an approach, I argue, offers valuable perspective into the relationship between masculinity, camaraderie, and the figure of the ‘scab.’ We now shift our attention to the emotional purpose of the ‘scab’ in deindustrialised coalfields.

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<sup>557</sup> Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice,’ 209.

## Chapter 4

### The Emotional Purpose of the ‘Scab,’ Camaraderie, and Reconfigurations of Working-Class Masculinity in Deindustrialised Coalfields

More than 35 years have passed since the yearlong industrial dispute of 1984-85. For many ex-miners their animus towards those who crossed the picket line has withstood the passage of time. Hostility between strikers and strike-breakers has been foregrounded in local and national media outlets.<sup>558</sup> Vandalism on private property, volatile interactions on the picket line, and community divisions between families and friends became popular source material for journalists investigating the human and social costs of the strike. Its legacy continues to garner cultural purchase in the press.<sup>559</sup> In particular, the ‘break up’ of mining families, usually the result of a family member having returned to work, features prominently; those who returned would forever be known as ‘scabs’ in many ex-mining localities. Emotional wounds over strike-breaking are embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of ex-mining localities, affecting how people navigate both real and imagined encounters afterwards.

The fact that animosity still pervades the lives of mining families could easily appear nonsensical, especially as the strike becomes more temporally distant. Remarking on the social divisiveness in coalmining localities 20 years after the strike, Steve Brunt, a former miner at Arkwright colliery in Derbyshire, stated: ‘I am totally frustrated by the inability of the former mining communities to come to reconciliation over the strike...There is still this hatred and loathing of people. The world

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<sup>558</sup> In the case of the *Barnsley Chronicle*, see ‘Trying to Walk a Tightrope,’ *Barnsley Chronicle*, May 25, 1984; ‘Died in attempt to refute “scab” taunts,’ *Barnsley Chronicle*, August 17, 1984; ‘Violence erupts on picket lines at Woolley,’ *Barnsley Chronicle*, October 5, 1984; ‘Test of loyalty facing miners,’ *Barnsley Chronicle*, January 4, 1985; and ‘Strike Violence hits old couple,’ *Barnsley Chronicle*, February 8, 1985.

<sup>559</sup> See, for example, Audrey Gillan, ‘Strikers’ hatred and mistrust will never die,’ *Guardian*, March 1, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2004/mar/01/uk.tradeunions1>; Rachael Misstear, ‘Miners’ Strike: “Thirty years on and there are people here we still cross the road to avoid today,”’ *Wales Online*, March 12, 2014, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/memories-miners-strike-there-people-6802636>; and David Pittam, ‘Miners’ strike: The decades-old feud that still divides communities,’ *BBC News*, March 6, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-47401859>.

has moved on and changed considerably since 1984, but the bitterness is still there.<sup>560</sup> Brunt's remark about a 'world' having 'moved on' implies that sentiments towards strike-breakers are discerned, on the one hand, as anachronistic, and on the other hand, as particularly relevant even after pit closures.

This chapter explores the emotional legacy and purpose of the 'scab' in the present. A closer look at how the figure of the 'scab' interweaves in my oral history interviews can contribute to our understandings of identity and memory twofold. Firstly, strike-breakers inextricably are bound up with shifting meanings and experiences of masculinity and camaraderie. And secondly, they occupy a paradoxical place in the individual narratives and collective memory of coalmining. By foregrounding the figure of the 'scab,' this chapter weaves together threads in both the miners' strike and deindustrialisation literature.

The resolve, strength, and solidarity of miners, mining families, and mining villages has been well documented.<sup>561</sup> It was through growing apprehensions over the pit closure programme, that sought to restructure the coal industry and marginalise labour, which helped to engender and sustain the strike. This is best illustrated through the slogan: 'the closure of a pit means the closure of a community.'<sup>562</sup> Arising from and through this scholarship has also been a concerted focus on women's increasing social activism and political mobilisation.<sup>563</sup> Writers have illustrated how the

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<sup>560</sup> Gillian, 'Strikers' hatred and mistrust will never die.'

<sup>561</sup> For studies on the 1984-85 miners' strike, see, for example, Martin Adeney and John Lloyd, *The Miners' Strike, 1984-5: Loss Without Limit* (London: Routledge, 1986); Raphael Samuel, Barbara Bloomfield, and Guy Boanas, *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-85*, ed. Raphael Samuel, Barbara Bloomfield, and Guy Boanas (London: Coronet, 1985); Huw Beynon, *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike*, ed. Huw Beynon (London: Verso, 1985); Jonathan and Ruth Winterton, *Coal, Crisis and Conflict: the 1984-85 Miners' Strike in Yorkshire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Jim Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984-85* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

<sup>562</sup> Warwick and Littlejohn, *Coal, Capital, and Culture*, 167.

<sup>563</sup> See, for example, Susan Miller, "'The best thing that ever happened to us': Women's Role in the Coal Dispute,' *Journal of Law and Society* 12 (1985); Vicky Seddon, *The Cutting Edge: Women and the Pit Strike*, ed. Vicky Seddon (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986); Meg Allen, 'Carrying on the strike: the politics of Women Against Pit Closures,' (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2001); Monica Shaw and Mave Mundy, 'Complexities of class and gender relations:

labour dispute could disrupt gender relations and experiences across UK coalfield localities.

Monica Shaw and Mave Mundy, for instance, argue that ‘women were acutely aware that they had to confront the masculine culture of the trade unions during the strike.’<sup>564</sup> In doing so, they highlight the tensions and contradictions underlying women’s gendered experiences during and after the strike. According to Shaw and Mundy, ‘labour market changes’ have brought about significant shifts ‘to gender relations and domestic arrangements in the years since the strike...’<sup>565</sup>

What is, perhaps, overlooked in this work are the tensions and contradictions of the gendered experiences and emotional responses of working-class men. Two prevailing and place-specific constructions of working-class masculinity—embedded in the social institutions and cultural ‘traditions’ of coalmining localities—were also brought into conflict during the industrial dispute. A ‘breadwinner’ ideal rooted in the home and family clashed with a ‘brotherhood’ ideal rooted in the workplace and camaraderie.

Recent work by David Selway illustrates the interrelations between strike action, emotion, and masculinity during the 1926 lockout in South Wales. Selway shows how practices of naming and alienating blacklegs by women, and representations of skills and strengths by striking miners, threatened working men’s masculinity. Although he observes that by returning to work blacklegs may have called into question striking miners’ masculinity as male providers, he argues ‘during industrial disputes, masculinity was inverted and “heroic manhood” was associated with striking.’<sup>566</sup>

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Recollections of women active in the 1984-5 miner’s strike,’ *Capital and Class* 87 (2005); Katy Shaw, ‘Striking Women: (Re) Writing 1984-5,’ *Women’s Studies* 36 (2007); Jean Spence and Carol Stephenson, “‘Side by Side with Our Men?’ Women’s Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners’ Strike,’ *International Labour and Working-Class History* 75 (2009); and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, ‘National Women Against Pit Closures: gender, trade unionism and community activism in the miners’ strike, 1984-5,’ *Contemporary British History* 32 (2018).

<sup>564</sup> Shaw and Mundy, ‘Complexities of class and gender relations,’ 165.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>566</sup> David Selway, ‘Collective Memory in the Mining Communities of South Wales,’ (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2017) 184.

Rather than approach masculinity as ‘inverted’ during strike action, I am interested in exploring how miners navigated contradictory experiences of working-class masculinity embedded in a class politics of trade unionism. Whilst Selway is correct to point to a discursive shift in masculinity, it does not necessarily mean striking miners were less emotionally invested in earning a wage, especially if they were the primary provider. As Michael Roper argues, masculinity is not simply formed through ideological codes that are passed down; it is necessary to explore ‘what the relationship of the codes of masculinity is to actual men, to existential matters, to persons and to their psychic make up.’<sup>567</sup> How did men cope with the emotional intensity of lived experiences of class and masculinity amid the strike?

To cross a picket line was—and still is—seen as an affront on both community and camaraderie. Taking into consideration the ways masculinity was bound up with ‘brotherhood,’ this chapter is interested in exploring the social relations, interactions, and practices between striking and working miners. It argues that the figure of the ‘scab’ offers perspective into men’s emotional experiences of the strike, as well as how they navigate the loss of favoured forms of industrial work and threats to a ‘breadwinner’ identity.

Whether due to unemployment, low-wages, precarious forms of work, or ‘feminised’ labour, deindustrialisation has undermined ‘traditional’ notions of working-class masculinity. Arthur McIvor illustrates that the impact of job loss and men’s deteriorating health is ‘connected to deeply entrenched notions of masculinity and their threatened breadwinner status.’<sup>568</sup> A crisis of male identity is also identified by Valerie Walkerdine and Luis Jimenez in an ex-steeltown in South

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<sup>567</sup> Roper, ‘Slipping out of View,’ 58.

<sup>568</sup> McIvor, ‘Deindustrialisation Embodied,’ Chapter 1, para 10, Kindle.

Wales, specifically through the survival of a ‘proud, hard and dirty masculinity’ that is increasingly obsolete in the contemporary labour market.<sup>569</sup>

Allusions to the disintegration of a ‘breadwinner’ identity in deindustrialised coalfields are usually constructed around either the loss of work or advent of new forms of work.<sup>570</sup> Scholars interested in the reconfigurations of working-class masculinity have also usually foregrounded the everyday lives of young, white, working-class men.<sup>571</sup> What is underexplored is how older working-class men adapt to, amend, and negotiate wholly unfamiliar and complex gendered experiences in deindustrialising coalfields, and how emotion threads through motivations and practices when confronted with material hardships and fragmented cultures. A renewed and historical focus on men’s lived experiences from the miners’ strike to the present day offers a valuable contribution to how working-class masculinity was reconfigured through the real and imagined presence of ‘scabs’ in striking mining areas.

A focus on strike-breakers tends to be on how they remain socially ostracised and remembered in ‘moral terms.’<sup>572</sup> Though Jim Phillips remarks that characterisations of strike-breakers as a ‘wife-beater’ or ‘weak individual’ may be linked to processes of ‘composure,’ it is underexplored.<sup>573</sup> How and why these sentiments matter to men and/or remain the same and shift over time offers perspective into relations of power associated with men and masculinities. Issues continue to surface, for instance, with incorporating the oral testimonies of strike-breakers in militant mining

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<sup>569</sup> Walkerdine and Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community After De-Industrialisation*, 95.

<sup>570</sup> Waddington et al., *Out of the Ashes*, 212.

<sup>571</sup> See Linda McDowell, *Redundant Masculinities? Employment Change and White Working Class Youth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); Lois Weis, *Class Reunion: The Remaking of the American White Working Class* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Anoop Nayak, ‘Displaced Masculinities: Chavs, Youth and Class in the Post-Industrial City,’ *Sociology*, 40 (2006); and Michael Ward, *From Labour to Learning: Working-Class Masculinities, Education and De-Industrialisation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>572</sup> Phillips, ‘The meanings of coal community,’ 48. For characterisations of the ‘scab’ by North Wales striking miners, see Gildart, ‘Mining memories,’ 147.

<sup>573</sup> Phillips, ‘The meanings of coal community,’ 48.

localities in writing 'history from below.'<sup>574</sup> This is evident in this study. Though not singled out or remembered as a 'scab,' personal correspondence with a former mining deputy illustrates why those who worked during the miners' strike may be more reluctant to talk: 'Please don't think I'm unwilling to help but there are still ex-miners out there who would likely say, "What does he know? He was a deputy getting paid throughout the strike." I must add, though, that during this period and since I personally didn't have any trouble.'<sup>575</sup>

A few things are noteworthy here. Firstly, the above quotation points to a cultural legacy of coalmining and its effects on representations of the strike and thereafter. Some people's stories and memories are viewed as more valuable. When discussing the importance of oral history and the memory of coalmining, one of my interviewees explained there is also a danger that 'you could get a scab.'<sup>576</sup> This sentiment has implications for those who can come forward to share their memories and talk about experiences of coalfield deindustrialisation. Secondly, I did not speak directly to, nor seek out, men who broke strike. I felt (and still feel) that this was something that must develop organically, despite the restraints previously noted. My primary objective was to speak to ex-miners about their working lives, not if they were striking or working miners. Finally, although the unnamed deputy felt silenced, I interviewed other deputies, clerical workers, and managers, who like the deputy above, were not on strike.

By no means am I equating them with 'scabs' in the normative sense.<sup>577</sup> Rather, I illustrate the ways their stories and experiences afford insight into the relations between working and striking men. Despite there being a tendency for working men to emphasise that they did not have 'any trouble'

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<sup>574</sup> Strangleman, 'Mining a productive seam,' 27.

<sup>575</sup> Personal correspondence via Facebook, 2018.

<sup>576</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>577</sup> The term 'scab' could also be used against men who either voted to close their pits or worked as contract workers.

during the strike, they encountered emotionally taxing experiences on the picket line and elsewhere. Additionally, I draw on instances where interviewees comment on friends or family members who went back to work, rumours that they themselves had ‘scabbed,’ as well as theirs and others interactions with working miners, and an autobiography of a strike-breaker from North Derbyshire.

This chapter brings together a study of the figure of the ‘scab’ with the legacy of coalfield deindustrialisation. It is divided into three sections. The first section explores the miners’ strike, men’s fears of transgressing solidarity, and strategic performances of masculinity. It illustrates how men transgressed cultural norms whilst navigating contradictions of masculinity. Despite meanings of ‘brotherhood’ between men being largely confined to not crossing the picket line, the relationship between masculinity and camaraderie increased in socio-cultural importance because of the potential social ramifications of returning to work.

The second section revisits social practices of verbal or physical abuse and social exclusion or alienation directed towards strike-breakers after the strike in the workplace. It argues that these disparaging acts should be understood less as emotional responses to an affront on camaraderie than as emotional practices of camaraderie. Isolating or abusing strike-breakers was how many striking miners elicited ways of feeling important in managing and altering emotional states, including fear, mistrust, and betrayal. ‘Scabs’ were both targeted and isolated when practising camaraderie. The ‘scab’ was viewed by some as a ‘new’ hazard in the workplace. ‘Othering’ the ‘scab’ was also bound up with emasculation and reconfigurations of working-class masculinity. An identity of a male striking miner can be discerned as increasingly valuable (and problematic) with the undermining of a ‘traditional’ working-class masculinity constructed around industrial work and a ‘breadwinner’ ideal.



The final section turns its attention to the emotional legacy of the ‘scab’ in the present.

Contemporary perspectives of the ‘scab’ are largely contingent on temporal, social, and cultural factors, which bring the past and present together. Though feelings of betrayal and hatred are still strongly associated with the ‘scab,’ there was a noticeable shift in talking about the ‘scab’ as a subject of hate (they did something to others) to an object of exploitation (something was done to them). An emphasis on the latter, I argue, is important in repositioning the figure of the ‘scab’ within the context of class relations and exploitation. This section ends by illustrating how there is a desire to at once include and exclude the ‘scab’ from individual and collective representations of mining. This paradox has important implications for the memory, history, and legacy of coalmining and labour in deindustrialised coalfields.

#### Section I: ‘Crossing the Line’ and Working-Class Masculinity

The ‘scab’ was an important linguistic and political mechanism employed by the NUM and its members. Imbued with cultural meanings, ranging from ‘traitor’ to ‘untrustworthy’ to ‘scum,’ the application of the pejorative term was important—specifically in areas with a high volume of strike activity—in ordering thoughts and feelings in coalmining localities.<sup>578</sup> Knowledge of strike-breaking as a moral transgression in the Yorkshire area strengthened strike activity. To ‘not stick it out,’ as Chester explained, was ‘taboo.’<sup>579</sup> Observations of violence, verbal abuse, and/or alienation against strike-breakers commonly surfaced in interviewees’ oral testimonies of the yearlong strike.

Property damage was described as a common occurrence. Extraordinary instances from a house being burned down to more common cases of windows being broken were recalled by James.<sup>580</sup> According to Harry, ‘You used to get all these that knew where the scabs were. [...] They used to

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<sup>578</sup> Many Interviewees.

<sup>579</sup> Chester Interview.

<sup>580</sup> James Interview.

say “We’ve done Bob’s windows again. Tonight. Last night. He’ll not be hanging about long.”<sup>581</sup>

Although Jack was not necessarily in agreement with vandalising homes, he indicated: ‘One bloke had all his windows put through. But I’m not saying I agree with that. You can take it as not talk to them or ignore them on street.’<sup>582</sup>

Social exclusion was widely recalled by interviewees. Arthur and Henry said ‘scabs’ were ignored and told to go elsewhere if, and when, they visited local pubs and clubs. Whilst Arthur recalled telling a working miner, ‘You ought to walk through, back through that door’ after arriving at a local club, Henry said people would yell at strike-breakers: ‘Out. You’re not welcome.’<sup>583</sup> These men, according to Henry, were usually ‘loners anyway.’<sup>584</sup> A tendency to pathologise ‘scabs’ is present in some interviews. After stating that he refused to talk to a strike-breaker, Liam asserted that this ‘scab’ had abused his wife and that he was also a paedophile.<sup>585</sup>

Acts of self-restraint, however, did not always work. Henry said a miner was approached by the police after pouring a can of paint over a strike-breaker’s vehicle in his village.<sup>586</sup> Arguments also took place on the streets. Whilst Duncan criticised a man’s ‘willpower’ for returning to work, Ernie confronted a strike-breaker who claimed his wife was pregnant: ‘Well, my wife’s pregnant. But I’m not going back and I won’t go back,’ replied Ernie.<sup>587</sup> Although these accidental interactions could turn aggressive, picket lines were remembered as sites with the most volatile encounters. Andrew, who worked at the National Coal Board headquarters in Grimethorpe, stated how ‘scary’ crowds of men would yell ‘scab’ and ‘all sorts’ at him (and others) ‘slapping’ their hands on people’s cars.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> Harry Interview.

<sup>582</sup> Jack Interview.

<sup>583</sup> Arthur Interview; Henry Interview.

<sup>584</sup> Henry Interview.

<sup>585</sup> Liam Interview.

<sup>586</sup> Henry Interview.

<sup>587</sup> Duncan Interview; Ernie Interview.

<sup>588</sup> Andrew and Audrey Interview, August 17, 2019.

His wife, Audrey, recounted, 'I used to worry when he gone to work; wonder if he got there alright and if he could get home okay.'<sup>589</sup> Edward, a mining deputy at the time of the strike, also recalled tense moments on the picket lines, explaining how 'me heart was in thy mouth': 'They saying "You fucking bastards!"' The same as if a scab went [to work].'<sup>590</sup> Both Andrew and Edward were fearful of interactions with striking miners.

Yet, rather than conceive of verbal abuse, intimidation, or social exclusion as simply emotional responses to men returning to work, these actions can also be understood as regulatory practices designed to produce ways of feeling and being amongst striking miners. Most miners, for example, were already well-aware of the stigmatisation of the 'scab' before the 1984-85 miners' strike. Interviewees observed how men, who returned to work during the 1926 lockout, were alienated in particular coalmining villages.<sup>591</sup> For those men unfamiliar with this history, they were acutely aware of the mistreatment of 'scabs' and some working miners, as illustrated on television and in newspapers, and by men's own actions in and around their villages. A history of protest, trade union politics and ideology, and the mistreatment of 'scabs' were factors that shaped strike action.

My interest in the figure of the 'scab' should not be seen as an attempt to undermine, but rather supplement narratives of working-class solidarity. Strike action was also motivated by a fear of discipline and alienation by co-workers and neighbours. Threats, and actual instances, of violence and exclusion against prospective or real strike-breakers could evoke fear over what may happen if a miner returned to work and afterwards. Trepidation about returning to work could also overlap with a desire to remain on strike with fellow miners. According to Ernie,

A lot of people did go back and regretted going back. Because they knew they were going to get some right shoe [...] And with it being, like I said, family, you knew that if you went

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<sup>589</sup> Andrew and Audrey Interview.

<sup>590</sup> Edward Interview.

<sup>591</sup> Thomas Interview; Frank Interview, 2016.

back nobody would talk to you. You would be like, well, they used to call it, like sending you to 'Coventry.' Nobody would speak to ye. And it were like that. It were bad.<sup>592</sup>

Although Ernie never explicitly stated that either threats of violence or exclusion influenced his decision to remain on strike, other men did.

In instances where men recalled what may be described as unpopular memories of the 1984-85 miners' strike, they situated their individual experiences within a collective voice. Archie stated,

A lot more miners would have gone back, but because they were threatened they daren't go back. But then you were a scab you see? Then people wouldn't work with ye, which causes more trouble. If truth were known a lot of people wouldn't have come out on strike. But they were threatened you see. [...] There were a lot of us considering going back to work. I worked in the workshops on pit top. In this workshop there were blacksmiths, electricians, fitters, and they all, they all would have gone back. But if they had the inkling you were thinking of going back, they'd come knock on door, and they'd tell you not to go back or else.<sup>593</sup>

Archie made a concerted effort to demonstrate that it was not simply him who considered going back to work. Other men he worked with apparently felt how he did. However, the consequences of returning to work could be severe. Archie later suggested his mate committed suicide partly because of the abuse he endured after crossing the picket line. In turn, Archie made it clear that if his friend was still alive: 'we'd [Archie's family] still talk to him.'<sup>594</sup>

This potential threat of miners visiting the homes of prospective strike-breakers featured in another interview. William revealed that a rumour circulated that he returned to work. He was confronted by roughly 20 miners, who arrived at his home to 'put all me windows through.'<sup>595</sup> This brief, albeit frightening, encounter was interpreted by William as a collective act of physical intimidation; men were not there to find out if he returned to work, but rather to tell him not to

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<sup>592</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>593</sup> Archie Interview.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> William Interview.

return to work. Intimidation was practiced through rhetorical questions, such as, ‘Are thy working,

William?’<sup>596</sup> The role of place and fear were critical in preventing men from returning to work:

The only reason a lot didn’t is where you lived. It’s where you lived. [...] All your scabs didn’t live in main communities. A lot depended on where you lived. I think if they were truthful they would have gone back. It’s where you lived. Plus, me wife would have left me. [...] There was a fear factor. It were a fear of failure. It were fear of being an outcast. Who wants to be an outcast?<sup>597</sup>

Matthew called groups of miners showing up at people’s homes ‘mobs’ and practices of

‘bullying.’<sup>598</sup> Before locating himself within a collective voice, Matthew also revealed that he

...came close. Well, majority of men came close towards the last week. If it had gone another two or three week, I’ll tell you now. I’ll be honest. Majority of miners would say ‘No, I would still be out.’ They’re lying. They’re lying through their teeth cos I could sense the atmosphere. People were starting to talk: ‘It’s gone on too long.’<sup>599</sup>

Redirecting narratives away from the self to a collective voice was a strategy employed by

interviewees when revealing what they discerned was an undisclosed ‘truth.’ To think, let alone

openly talk, about going back to work as a lone individual could be interpreted as a character flaw.

By locating themselves within a larger group, these men raised questions about the popular

memory of the 1984-85 miners’ strike, whilst simultaneously illustrating their fears over discipline

or a loss of pride. According to Matthew, strike action was about: ‘Pride, I suppose. Not wanting

to let me friends down; my colleagues down. But it has caused immense problems in Barnsley.’<sup>600</sup>

Andrew, who was a member in the colliery officials and staff section (COSA) of the NUM, also

referred to a politics of fear and place. He suggested that he would not have crossed the picket line

if he worked in his own village. ‘If that had have happened at...the pit I lived in, then there was no

way I would have crossed that picket line’ because ‘well [long pause]. We know one lad that

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<sup>596</sup> William Interview.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> Matthew Interview.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

did...go back to work. He's been ostracised from village.'<sup>601</sup> James highlighted the role of place when disclosing that his dad returned to work. Although he never severed ties with his father after the strike, James still felt bitter towards him. Upon being asked how other people, for instance, his family and friends felt about it, James indicated they were unaware his dad returned to work since he lived and worked in separate villages: 'He didn't live there so they never saw him. If he hadn't have told me I'd never have known.'<sup>602</sup> This is striking insofar that James alludes to both the insularity of place (the pit village) and a sense of anonymity of the wider mining community in the Barnsley area.

There were concerns of being branded a 'scab' by the larger locality, specifically by coal miners, because of the potential social repercussions. Expressions of anger and hatred directed against strike-breakers were also a means of exchange between striking miners. Although Christopher no longer harboured ill-feelings towards strike-breakers, he did during the strike: 'Because I was young and a little bit naïve, I listened to everyone else and there was hatred and obvious animosity, because they were breaking something that was important to us. At that time, the feeling as a community was exceptionally intense and there was hatred.'<sup>603</sup>

As Monique Scheer elucidates, conceptual 'knowledge can be transformed into bodily knowledge and thus be buttressed by reading or hearing of concrete details...discussing with others in shared outrage, marching and chanting at demonstrations, or watching others do so.'<sup>604</sup> Knowledge of the 'scab,' in conjunction with abusive practices carried out against men, could regulate and mobilise emotional behaviour. As we will shortly see, social practices of abuse and exclusion were not

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<sup>601</sup> Andrew and Audrey Interview.

<sup>602</sup> James Interview.

<sup>603</sup> Christopher Interview.

<sup>604</sup> Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice,' 210.

restricted to the miners' strike; they became inextricably bound up with ways of working and feeling afterwards. What I want to point out here, however, is how men's desire to strike with, alongside their compassion for their fellow miners, could also coexist with fear of their fellow workers. From this perspective, men's decisions to remain on strike need to be understood as a practical decision—rather than simply an indicator of political or class consciousness—steeped in feeling, which at once could strengthen and undermine working-class solidarity and working-class masculinity.

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For some men, the yearlong strike was a momentous political moment important in the constitution of self. Whilst Dennis described being on strike as the 'best education that I've ever received,' Oliver suggested that 'If you never got involved in strike you missed out on something. I was involved all the way through.'<sup>605</sup> The strike was a focal point for Thomas. He began his interview by recalling his experiences at the Battle of Orgreave, illustrating his involvement in the campaign for truth and justice in the present: 'it's the most important thing that's ever happened to me in my life.'<sup>606</sup>

At the same time, being on strike for over a year could challenge a sense of self, particularly notions and experiences of male independence. Not everyone endured the same kinds of material hardship of a yearlong strike. Some men lived at home as young adults, or their partners held jobs during the strike, minimising the economic effects of lost wages and debt from being out on strike. Unsurprisingly, more favourable recollections of the miners' strike tended to surface amongst this group of interviewees. For instance, Joseph, who lived at home, reminisced about being on strike, particularly on the picket line: 'I was on the picket line quite a lot...a lot of fun. A lot of crack.'<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>605</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018; Oliver Interview.

<sup>606</sup> Thomas Interview.

<sup>607</sup> Joseph Interview.

Ernie, whose wife worked until giving birth, revealed that ‘I enjoyed every last minute. A year off work.’<sup>608</sup> However, he was reflective of how his experiences strongly contrasted with some other men and their families. In turn, he suggested that financial difficulties could persuade miners to return to work: ‘They didn’t want to go back. But 12-month were a long time, especially if they were only breadwinner. It were a long, long time, and it’d take years and years to re-establish and pay your debts off.’<sup>609</sup> This suggestion that men ‘didn’t want to go back’ reflects his and others awareness of the social ramifications of crossing the picket line even if it was to provide for their families.

Dominant ideas associated with working-class masculinity were brought into conflict during the strike in coalmining localities. A breadwinner ideal was challenged when miners stopped working and refused to cross the picket line; a brotherhood ideal was undermined when miners returned to work to earn a wage and provide for themselves and their families—if they had them. Whilst breaking strike was understood as a moral transgression, striking miners’ inability to earn a secure wage also featured prominently in many men’s oral history interviews.

Take this conversation between Ryan and Maureen, for example. Although adamant there was not a reversal in gender roles, she argues that a ‘traditional’ working-class masculinity was undermined.

When the basics of your very life is taken away, so you haven’t got the heating. You haven’t got the electricity, and all the bills are there and they’re piling up, that’s the fear for him. He is a provider. He keeps the home ticking over financially. I don’t have to worry. I am the homemaker. He doesn’t become a homemaker. He becomes someone who is fretful because he cannot provide to make that home run.

Ryan described this moment as a ‘battle’ that you just have to ‘overcome.’<sup>610</sup> This experience of hardship was framed by William through a lens of male provision: ‘It were hard. I remember I got

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<sup>608</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid.

<sup>610</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.



a ring and pawned it [...] I managed to work six or seven days a week to provide for me family, and then all at once I couldn't.'<sup>611</sup> A diminishing sense of the role of male provider prompted William to tell two stories involving his son and daughter. Whilst he expressed shame over being unable to buy football shoes for his son, he felt guilty when his daughter gave him her babysitting money to buy groceries. 'That weren't nice for anybody', William explained. 'Anybody tell you being on strike was great. It's not. It's not fun at all. It were horrible.'<sup>612</sup>

Arthur also foregrounded feelings of helplessness through his inability to provide something as inexpensive as 'sweets' for his daughter: 'It were heartbreaking. You couldn't buy her sweets. [...] It were, I mean, times were hard. She probably didn't know. It did [matter] to me. It's terrible. Terrible.'<sup>613</sup> These small, yet significant, interactions based around the exchange of money questioned a sense of male independence, which was always held together by financial dependents, including children and women. Surely, children had been told before 'You can't have it.'<sup>614</sup> But these circumstances were different. Whether or not kids understood this was of little consolation.

Henry also indicated that the strike impacted how he saw and felt about himself as a male 'breadwinner.' In doing so, he implied a broader shift in men's gender roles and experiences:

I wanted to be, my pride, I wanted to be breadwinner in my house. And I dare say a lot of miners...stubbornness, I suppose. Back in day, you were breadwinner. You were breadwinner. You know? End of. And if you didn't provide, I think it were a bit degrading. So to get back to work after 12-months, right, I can, I can start earning money.'<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> William Interview.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid.

<sup>613</sup> Arthur Interview.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> Henry Interview.

Notwithstanding this ‘inverted’ shift in masculinity associated with strike activity in mining villages, Henry acknowledged how being off work still felt ‘degrading.’ In a similar fashion, Josh stated: ‘It were really tough but I would have never considered going back.’<sup>616</sup>

Men’s experiences of the yearlong strike often interweaved with a desire to—and sometimes a desire for them to—espouse a ‘breadwinner’ role. But this was not at the expense of being classed as a ‘scab’ for the rest of their lives. Duncan, for instance, said that he felt pressure to go back to work from his then wife: ‘I can remember her saying, “When are you going back to work?” No, no, no. I’m not going to be a scab. I’m sticking it out. You had principles, you know.’<sup>617</sup> The decision to remain on strike should not be interpreted as an indication that they were somehow less emotionally invested in male provision. In the words of Matthew, ‘[I] had three kids. So my priorities, first and foremost, were me family. Pit came second. [...] I wouldn’t even go picketing. One of the reasons were I were totally focused on me family. I had to provide for them.’<sup>618</sup>

Matthew was explicit that his primary interests lied with his immediate family; not his workmates. In turn, Matthew demonstrated how he navigated contradictory expectations—personal and collective—of working-class masculinity: ‘I knew where to get wood [...] I knew where everything were. I knew how to catch a rabbit. I knew where to get eggs from. Well, just thieving ain’t you when you are pinching off somebody else. But needs must.’<sup>619</sup> Practices of male provision during the strike could be understood as ‘strategic accomplishments’ of masculinity.<sup>620</sup> Matthew’s supposed knowledge of place, alongside his craftiness and perseverance, enabled him to manage and achieve a personal desire to provide for himself and his family, and maintain the collective

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<sup>616</sup> Josh Interview.

<sup>617</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>618</sup> Matthew Interview.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> Andrew Gorman-Murray and Peter Hopkins, ‘Introduction: Masculinities and Place,’ in *Masculinities and Place*, ed. Andrew Gorman-Murray and Peter Hopkins (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2014) 8-9.

expectation of community and camaraderie. Apparently, the latter was sustained by simply not crossing the picket line.

Other interviewees also foregrounded skilful pursuits of provision over the yearlong strike.

Duncan said he bred and sold dogs; Colin emphasised how he sustained a fuel supply; and Ben explained that he pinched potatoes and vegetables from farmers' fields.<sup>621</sup> Ben characterised methods of provision, albeit scarce, in terms of survival: 'I had nothing coming in. Nothing to help me...You were just surviving.'<sup>622</sup> Charlie conceived of male provision in terms of achievement and survival: 'We never went cold. We never went...because we used to go digging for coal in woods and different places. We used to go pinching coal. I'm not ashamed to tell anyone that I've pinched coal to keep me family warm. That's how we survived.'<sup>623</sup> Acts of 'survival' were sometimes specifically framed in individualistic terms. Nick explained how he was reluctant to tell other miners where you could dig coal because of his concerns over its limited supply: 'You had to be a bit hush you see in that respect.'<sup>624</sup>

Accompanying skilful acts of provision were justifications of moral transgressions. Whilst Nick explained that he kept certain coal picking locations discrete from other miners to help sustain his family's well-being, Matthew excused 'thieving' and Charlie defended 'pinching coal' as a means of survival. Under different circumstances, as alluded to by Charlie, stealing was perceived as a shameful undertaking. Akin to Charlie's remark, 'I'm not ashamed,' Matthew illustrated how his family's material 'needs' legitimised his behaviour. This is, in part, of course, because men likely

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<sup>621</sup> Duncan Interview; Colin Interview; and Ben Interview.

<sup>622</sup> Ben Interview.

<sup>623</sup> Charlie Interview.

<sup>624</sup> Nick Interview.

perceived their shifting behaviours as temporary and contingent with being unemployed during the strike.

Nevertheless, some men kept certain acts of provision from their partners. Much to the surprise of his wife, Ryan told a story where him and his mate killed a duck for sustenance. ‘There are things like that that you had to do,’ Ryan explained. Hearing about this story for the first time, Maureen was unsure how to process this information,

See that sounds strange that, don’t it, because it’s something you [Lee] wouldn’t find...How do you find that? Do you find that acceptable that somebody would do that? Go out and do that. [...] It’s like don’t hurt the quack quack. Keep the quack quack safe. Or do you feed the family? [...] I’ve not heard that story before. I’m sitting here listening to it for the first time. Do I think that’s wrong? Would I had thought it were wrong then if you told me? I don’t know.<sup>625</sup>

Although Maureen brought me, as the researcher, directly into her understanding of the incident, pointing to the ways class as culture inflects people’s oral responses, I think it would be a mistake to privilege the positionality of the researcher in our analysis. Maureen, shortly after, attempted to primarily make sense of this event from her lived experiences of culture from the past and the present. She, like other interviewees, raises the issue of moral transgressions. In this case, she questioned if killing wildlife was an appropriate or inappropriate act. At the same time, she points to a reoccurring motif of survival as a potential explanatory device: ‘Or do you feed the family?’<sup>626</sup>

Henry viewed a breach of a code of conduct, for instance, stealing, as a survival mechanism. As opposed to other research participants, he saw these acts as signifying, rather than as a temporary reprieve from, a different ‘way of life’ forming in coalmining localities: ‘Me friends...you know, it [crime] started then when they were shoplifting to provide for their families.’<sup>627</sup> Whilst Henry, perhaps, offers a nostalgic view of mining villages as crime-free spaces before the strike, he

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<sup>625</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Henry Interview.

suggests that experiences of material hardship engendered shifts in attitudes and behaviour. The miners' strike was discerned as part of a longer trajectory of survival for working-class families.

Despite many interviewees offering sombre expressions of male provision, there were some ex-miners who proudly celebrated their individualistic achievements as providers. Harry stated that 'it were survival of the fittest. [...] I'm going to earn some money and look after [my] family. So during strike I were out getting money, pinching coal, and getting owt I could to keep house happy.'<sup>628</sup> The above quotation is shaped by an element of composure. Harry wanted to make it clear that neither he, nor his family, suffered during the strike; in doing so, he foregrounded his adaptability by pointing to the phrase 'survival of the fittest.' At the same time, he approached the strike less as a period of collectivity than as an interval of time where he was focused on himself, a few friends, and his family.

A closer look at men's memories and experiences of the 1984-85 miners' strike reveals that many miners were concerned with being providers for their families. In order to do so, men willingly transgressed certain moral values. What they were not prepared to do, however, was return to work because of, on the one hand, politics and ideology, and on the other, fear of discipline and alienation from their co-workers. Despite men placing a greater emphasis on 'breadwinning,' whilst simultaneously managing expectations of 'brotherhood' by remaining on strike, the latter strengthened as a locus of emotional experience in men's lives both during and following the strike. This entrenchment of 'brotherhood' was inflected by cultural meanings and expectations, men's memories and experiences of the strike, and practices of everyday life inside and outside of the pit thereafter.

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<sup>628</sup> Harry Interview.

Firstly, the simplicity of 'brotherhood' has contributed to its significance. As long as a miner did not cross the picket line, they were usually discerned as 'normal' by fellow miners, regardless of how they managed throughout the strike. All of those men who returned to work, however, were categorised as 'scabs' and deemed pariahs. Why someone returned to work (at the time of the strike) was indefensible behaviour and, as a result, most striking miners were (and some still are) uninterested in men's motivations for returning to work. Emerging from this perspective is a dichotomy: the striker and strike-breaker. Striking miners could (and have) embraced the identity of the 'striker,' which is culturally valued through the 'othering' of the 'scab.' Both self- and collective identifications of miners are supported by the figure of the 'scab': the 'scab' is what I am/we are not.

This brings us to a second point. As illustrated above, a vast majority of ex-miners encountered material and emotional hardship during the strike. To suspect, let alone see, other men, who broke strike, as somehow immune to hardship caused deep-seated feelings of anger, hatred, and betrayal. These feelings are not simply built in and through imagination, but are also formulated around striking miners' personal experiences of the yearlong strike. Striker-breakers were seen as evading collective experiences of misery, distress, and poverty that many men and their families had to endure. Interviewees expressed exasperation over why fellow miners were unable to 'stick it out' like they did. Miners' reluctance, moreover, to converse with or understand why men broke strike has only intensified their memories and experiences of the strike, and their imaginations of strikers' and strike-breakers' experiences. Men's experiences, real and imagined, of 'sticking it out' have contributed to the hardening of a 'brotherhood' ideal, especially for those who associate their strike efforts with survival and masculine accomplishment.

Finally, the strengthening of notions and experiences of 'brotherhood' also occurred through social encounters and interactions at work (and elsewhere) between strikers and strike-breakers following the strike. Prior to their so-called disappearance, 'scabs' worked and lived in the wards, villages, and/or towns with striking miners and their families; they could be neighbours, family members, and/or even friends from local clubs or pubs. The material presence of strike-breakers, especially at work, enabled the formation of more powerful emotional investments in brotherhood' through emotional practices of camaraderie which stretched across place and time. We now shift our attention to these social interactions and cultural practices between strikers and strike-breakers.

## Section II: The Exploitation of the 'Scab' and Emotional Practices of Camaraderie

The intense emotional experiences of the miners' strike and pit closures manifest in disparaging utterances directed at those they assign as partly, or wholly, responsible for the demise of the coal industry. It would be a difficult task to deny that the most infamous figure remains Thatcher. This long-standing animosity expressed towards Thatcher was also present in respondents' remarks about the 'scab.' As expressed by Dennis, "They were up there with Thatcher and Hitler. They're just scum of the earth...Scabby bastards."<sup>629</sup> Unlike Thatcher, and other commonly recognised enemies, like National Coal Board Chairman, Ian MacGregor, strike-breakers were visible in the mines and mining villages in South Yorkshire after the strike.

One could only imagine what they might say, what they might do, or how they might feel if they ever encountered Thatcher, for example. This was not the case with strike-breakers. The real (and imagined) presence of 'scabs' was infused with intense feelings of hatred, anger, betrayal, and despair of the yearlong strike. The emotional and economic wounds of an industrial conflict were

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<sup>629</sup> Dennis Interview, 2016.

still fresh for many men. ‘Scabs’ not only were targeted as explanations for the failure of the miners’ strike, but also as workplace dangers and physical objects of ridicule underground.

Our interest herein lies with the social relationships and interactions between strike-breakers and strikers at work. The oral testimonies of ex-miners reveal that they verbally (and sometimes physically) abused, as well as socially isolated and alienated strike-breakers in and outside of the workplace. It is common to conceive of such practices as hostile responses to the betrayal of camaraderie and community. Such a perspective, however, overlooks how these practices became a locus of emotional experience, attaining a special significance in men’s lives moving forward. This section argues that the ‘othering’ of the ‘scab’ through social practices, including nicknaming, violence, and isolation, mobilised ways of feelings and being that helped strengthen experiences of ‘brotherhood.’

Interviewees expressed mixed reactions about returning to work after the strike. Some men were pleased to be earning a wage again despite seeing the strike as a failure, whereas other men, including Josh, were devastated by its collapse: ‘I felt terrible. I knew we’d lost.’<sup>630</sup> A sense of defeat, combined with hardship over the duration of the strike, contributed to a distinct mood underground. According to Harry, there was a ‘strange atmosphere’ after returning to work:

Before the strike, you used to go down in the morning; there were like chitty chatty banter...in canteen, having a slice of toast or bacon sandwich and cup of tea. Then them coming out after their [shift] would be pork pie and there’d be chatter. But then you went down and it were silent, like it weren’t rowdy. It were just like silent chatter. It weren’t same as like a normal working day.<sup>631</sup>

This ‘normalcy’ of work was further upended by the real and imagined presence of strike-breakers. A sense of disappointment in returning to work was accompanied by work experiences marred by suspicions, tensions, regulations, and separations.

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<sup>630</sup> Josh Interview.

<sup>631</sup> Harry Interview.



Some of the mineworkers I spoke with from the Barnsley and Dearne Valley areas did not live in the same village they worked in during the 1984-85 miners' strike. This separation of workplace and locality could be met with suspicions, especially if men were not in contact with each other during the strike. Ben explained that 'You got more suspicious because you didn't, a hundred per cent, know who'd gone back to work. So you were very, very wary until you know.'<sup>632</sup> How Ben came to 'know' who broke strike was left unclear. William, on the other hand, explained that men sussed out strike-breakers via practices of storytelling; a striking miner could glean information about a person's strike activity by telling stories about the strike. A refusal to talk about or share memories, for instance, by either walking away or remaining silent, was interpreted as suspicious.<sup>633</sup>

'Knowing' who broke strike was also difficult for miners who transferred to 'new' pits after the strike. Edward stated that he was working with a lot of men from different collieries scattered across the Barnsley and Doncaster coalfields. A degree of anonymity could accompany pit transfers. Striking miners, as Matthew illustrates, still made an effort to 'find out' who strike-breakers were.<sup>634</sup> Strike-breakers' identities were uncovered by miners drawing on wider social networks and having conversations with striking miners from other pits: 'they'd say so and so working in pit...he came from our pit. He scabbed. Next day they go back to the pit following day and say "Fuckin' scab that cunt." Then that's when they wouldn't talk to 'em then. They wouldn't talk to them. Simple as that.'<sup>635</sup>

Suspicious over breaking strike contributed to and exacerbated tensions between miners at work.

Whilst Luther asserted that 'scabs' were treated like 'pariahs,' Ryan stated there were significant

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<sup>632</sup> Ben Interview.

<sup>633</sup> William Interview.

<sup>634</sup> Edward Interview.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

'tensions' leftover between striking miners and strike-breakers.<sup>636</sup> Ill-tempered social interactions between men contributed to suspicions that another strike was likely to unfold. According to Ernie, 'We'd only just [been back]. We're going to be on strike again. We went into fitting shop, and in fitting shop there were an office and all the scabs were in this office. One of the lads says, "What about all them scabby bastards up there?!" I thought, right, it's gonna kick off here.'<sup>637</sup>

There were, however, efforts by management to quell industrial unrest by introducing new workplace regulations. Practices of naming the 'scab' were prohibited at work. As Nick recalled, 'If you called anybody a scab you were sacked.'<sup>638</sup> Colin discerned this managerial directive as a way to regulate men's attitudes and behaviour: '[I] actually couldn't take, couldn't take own stand against them at all because we'd been, we were threatened by engineer [his boss] that we would have been sacked.'<sup>639</sup> As for Charlie, he saw regulatory measures as having less to do with the well-being of strike-breakers than as a strategy to remove miners from the industry. 'I'll tell you what manager said when we went back to work: "I'm going to take full advantage of the situation." And believe me, you, he did. If scabs were being abused, then he'd threaten them with the sack.'<sup>640</sup>

This regulation of men's emotional behaviour towards strike-breakers can also be understood as a kind of infringement on the self-regulatory practices miners brought up when recounting camaraderie. Managerial directives from above called into question a sense of power, real or otherwise, miners shared when governing workplace attitudes and behaviours. It is striking that Dennis compared the prohibition of linguistic practices to childhood experiences: 'So now we couldn't use the word scab. Anyone caught using the word...you were sacked. It's sort of like

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<sup>636</sup> Luther Interview; Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>637</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>638</sup> Nick Interview.

<sup>639</sup> Colin Interview.

<sup>640</sup> Charlie Interview.

school, isn't it?'<sup>641</sup> For many miners, this was, perhaps, the first time 'pit language' was closely monitored, outside of conversations with management, between working men underground.

An attempt to prohibit the naming of 'scabs' matters twofold. Firstly, it likely intensified animosity towards strike-breakers. Most striking miners were already incensed over men's decisions to return to work. Being told what they could not say and how they could act towards strike-breakers exacerbated tensions, especially for those striking miners who held 'scabs' responsible for defeat. Secondly, it contributed to the reconfigurations of emotional practices of camaraderie. Ex-miners illustrated how they circumvented regulations by nicknaming and alienating the 'scab.' As we will shortly see, this mistreatment of the 'scab' was important in mobilising trust and respect between striking miners, and thwarting feelings of fear and shame of having to work with strike-breakers. Some interviewees yearned for the removal of the strike-breaker at work, not simply because they disliked them, but also because they were fearful of them; they were fearful of what they may do to 'scabs' and what 'scabs' may not do for them in a work environment which placed a value on 'watching each other's back.' It was through abusive and alienating practices, I argue, that the relationship between 'brotherhood' and masculinity was also strengthened in men's working lives.

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After the strike, interviewees indicated that 'scabs' were increasingly separated from 'normal' miners.<sup>642</sup> This occurred usually through pit transfers or by 'scabs' being separated in different

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<sup>641</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>642</sup> Duncan Interview.

work teams underground. Denby Grange, a colliery located in the Barnsley Coalfield, was prominently remembered as a ‘scab pit.’ Interviewees from neighbouring pits in and around Barnsley explained that ‘all the scabs’ went there after their pits closed or by personal requests.<sup>643</sup>

Strike-breakers were also sometimes segregated from miners of established work groups. Management placed them, according to James, ‘out of the way, miles away from anybody else.’<sup>644</sup> According to Ellis, ‘they wouldn’t put him [a strike-breaker] on face with all us cos we won’t work, so he never got put anywhere we’re gonna be.’<sup>645</sup> In addition to preventing potential work stoppages, some men interpreted separation as a safeguard for strike-breakers. Duncan suggested that ‘there would have been some fatalities. Because it got nasty. There would have been that much trouble and fighting. Oh, it would have been like putting a bulldog with a couple of cats.’<sup>646</sup> Oliver also made a similar distinction when emasculating ‘scabs’: ‘It wouldn’t have been a fight, they would have got massacred.’<sup>647</sup>

A desire to enact retribution could also coexist with a desire to be separated from strike-breakers. For instance, Nick explained that they caused ‘a lot of anger, a lot of anxiety.’<sup>648</sup> Oliver described his initial return to work as ‘very, very difficult. They [strike-breakers] were down in the Barnsley seam more or less on their own...away from everyone. Cos I don’t think a miner could trust ‘em, or trust someone didn’t do something silly.’<sup>649</sup> Frank, who was forced into retirement because of ill-health, insisted it was almost unthinkable that men had to work with strike-breakers due to issues of mistrust: ‘Some people had to work with them when they went back. I couldn’t have

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<sup>643</sup> Many Interviewees.

<sup>644</sup> James Interview.

<sup>645</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>646</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>647</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>648</sup> Nick Interview.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid.

done that. I could never trust one.’<sup>650</sup> As Ryan illustrated, if ‘you have people you don’t feel safe working with, men that they feel should look out for their interests underground, then you have a problem.’<sup>651</sup>

The success of men’s refusals to work with ‘scabs’, however, likely relied on quantitative and qualitative factors. Firstly, it could depend on how many strike-breakers worked at the pit. Any refusal to work with a ‘scab’ at a pit with a higher volume of men who returned to work, as we will shortly see, would be ineffective. Secondly, it could also be contingent on miners’ relationships with the over- and undermanager at work. Those former workmen, as opposed to ‘college boys,’ may have been more sympathetic with miners’ fears of trusting ‘scabs,’ or their own concerns over productivity may have prompted them to comply with the dismissal of strike-breakers through acts of segregation.

What is important to illustrate, here, is how interviewees viewed the displacement of ‘scabs’ as an act steeped in feeling. Activities such as nicknaming, alienation, and verbal or physical abuse were discerned by striking miners as useful because they could prompt strike-breakers to leave their pits and relocate elsewhere. Whilst these unfriendly acts could easily be perceived as undermining camaraderie, miners, such as Ben, suggested that camaraderie became ‘stronger’ after the strike until pit closures in the 1990s.<sup>652</sup>

Alienation occurred through the nicknaming of strike-breakers. Many interviewees illustrated how they defied regulatory measures by employing other disparaging labels, which sought to stigmatise strike-breakers. In some instances, men drew on popular culture and place when ‘othering’ the

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<sup>650</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

<sup>651</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>652</sup> Ben Interview.

strike-breaker. Men from (and around) Barnsley identified strike-breakers as ‘Henrys.’ This popular term was derived, in part, from the television show *Coronation Street*, and the site of relocation for many strike-breakers, Denby Grange Colliery in Wakefield. During the miners’ strike, the television programme ran a story about an unemployed ‘scab’ called Henry Wakefield, who returned to work whilst working for British Rail in another town.<sup>653</sup>

This proverbial name found popularity in working mines scattered across the Barnsley area.

Duncan, for instance, stated: ‘They’re Henrys. That were a nickname for a scab at our pit.’<sup>654</sup>

William also indicated that they would call strike-breakers ‘Henrys.’ In doing so, however, he illustrated how alienating practices prompted ‘scabs’ to seek work elsewhere: ‘You weren’t allowed to call them scabs. We had to call them Henrys. They were Henrys. [...] Four-week after the strike finished all scabs had gone. They transferred to Denby Grange.’<sup>655</sup> For Ernie, Denby Grange was now forever known as ‘Henry Grange.’<sup>656</sup>

Stories about nicknaming almost always provoked stories of humour and banter. Whilst Dennis chuckled to himself over calling strike-breakers ‘Henrys,’ Thomas laughed at the arbitrariness behind assigning ‘scabs’ with a nickname: ‘We used to call them Eric. “Oh, there’s an Eric here.” It was just a name [laughter].’<sup>657</sup> It was not simply a name, though; nicknaming the ‘scab’ also interweaved with practices of banter between striking miners, everyday acts in which the ‘scab’ was not a mutual participant. Nicknaming was recognised as a way to demean, stigmatise, and exclude strike-breakers. Acts of humour, at the ‘scab’s’ expense, strengthened emotive bonds between men.

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<sup>653</sup> Rosalind Brunt, ‘Crossing The Picket Line,’ *Marxism Today*, June 1985, 35-37.

<sup>654</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>655</sup> William Interview.

<sup>656</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>657</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018; Thomas Interview.

Take these two examples. Firstly, Matthew happily recalled how he and his workmates creatively branded strike-breakers without calling them ‘scabs,’ referring to them instead as ‘Sausage, Chips, And Beans (SCABS).’ Matthew described this nickname as a ‘code’ he shared with another group of men, one which they would also revise: ‘[We] used to say there’s “bacon and tomatoes,” if you know what I mean [laughter].’<sup>658</sup> Also drawing on the phrase ‘Sausage, Chips, And Beans,’ Thomas recalled how some men would accidentally jumble the words around by saying: ‘You, you, you, egg, bacon, and chips’ [laughter].<sup>659</sup> Nicknaming was not simply remembered as an exclusionary act; rather, it was discerned as involving memorable moments, built around pleasurable and humorous experiences, albeit through the ‘othering’ of strike-breakers. The nickname itself was not always the focal point in these narratives; men also reflected fondly on the creativity behind these nicknames, the mistakes co-workers made when they employed them wrongly, and how it evolved into other nicknames over time and place.

This brings us to a second example. Dennis stated, with a smile, that he had ‘a million stories’ about ‘Henrys’ when talking about coalmining after the strike. Two accounts, in particular, stood out; they brought together unpleasant and pleasant experiences working with ‘scabs.’ Dennis explained that he was forced to, likely because of his young age and lack of seniority, work with a strike-breaker: ‘They sent me up a gate with a scab. Ugh, I did talk to him because I had to. But it broke me. Terrible.’<sup>660</sup>

On the other side, they did send a scab with me and a few other lads, and we poured stone dust in his flask [laughter]. So, he were drinking this, and then he got to bottom of his flask and [Dennis impersonates him swallowing stone dust]. And believe it or not, he took it to manager. Rumour has it that manager sent it off to be analysed to see if it were poison! [laughter]<sup>661</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> Matthew Interview.

<sup>659</sup> Thomas Interview.

<sup>660</sup> Dennis Interview, 2016.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

There are a few points worth noting here. Firstly, amusing jokes and stories grew from this anecdote. It was clearly a tale men talked about, added to, and later revised, as illustrated by the ‘rumour’ of how the strike-breaker and management supposedly handled the incident. These sorts of stories also obtain an emotional significance in oral history interviews. They bring to mind how men collectively opposed the presence of the ‘scab,’ and they bring the past and present together with humour in unique ways. Funny memories may be supplemented by forgotten stories of the past and amended by wittier commentaries in the present. For many men, sharing stories about coalmining are still meaningful as conversational pieces and humorous devices in the present.<sup>662</sup>

Secondly, Dennis’ initial reaction of having to work with a strike-breaker was anything but a pleasurable experience; he indicated it was a painful moment being forced to interact with a man he had contempt for. He did not trust, nor did he respect strike-breakers. It is noteworthy that he offered an immediate rebuttal to an unforgivable interaction by pointing out how he/they assaulted a strike-breaker by pouring stone-dust in his flask. On the one hand, this abusive act elicited a favourable, humorous mood, which Dennis experienced with his workmates. On the other hand, pouring stone dust in a flask helped to mitigate feelings of being ‘broke[n].’ The mistreatment of ‘scabs’ could have as much to do with concerns over trust as with how men saw and felt about themselves.

Although pouring stone dust into a flask was likely understood as a severely less significant form of assault (if at all), inflicting physical harm on strike-breakers featured in men’s oral testimonies. Ellis and Oliver suggested that violent acts marked unbearable situations for both strike-breakers and striking miners. There was only so much abuse a ‘scab’ could take when ‘people are throwing stuff

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<sup>662</sup> Many Interviewees.



on top of ye when they're going by them,' said Ellis.<sup>663</sup> The extent of violent practices were sometimes contingent on the demeanour of strike-breakers. Oliver described how a strike-breaker was being 'clever' on the paddy train, claiming 'I get on with anyone' and 'No one stops me.'<sup>664</sup> When the group of miners arrived at their work site the strike-breaker was laying on the floor; they had beaten the man, telling him: 'You're not getting off.'<sup>665</sup> Threats of reoccurring violence, as noted by Oliver, coerced some strike-breakers to relocate. Notwithstanding the threat of 'being sacked' over verbal or physical abuse, Ernie suggested it sometimes 'didn't work.'<sup>666</sup> Informing on co-workers to management about abusive practices would have likely exacerbated how strike-breakers were treated, or perhaps, how they felt about themselves, since they would have violated a code of conduct by 'running to the boss.'<sup>667</sup>

Research participants also described the pit baths as a place of violent encounters between men. According to Thomas, 'If you were a scab in the shower; if there were somebody else knocking about, you daren't wash your face.'<sup>668</sup> Oliver reiterated this sentiment: 'They used to wash one eye at a time, so they'd keep their eye open. Because when you washed both eyes you'd get hit with something.'<sup>669</sup> James also remembered how some men placed their boots in a washing bag before running into the showers to hit strike-breakers when they were getting washed.<sup>670</sup>

But James, as well as others, usually illustrated how their co-workers, not themselves per se—perhaps out of worry over how they may be perceived—perpetrated violent acts against strike-breakers. When I asked him about his interactions, he first evaded the question, only to later

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<sup>663</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>664</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>667</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>668</sup> Thomas Interview.

<sup>669</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>670</sup> James Interview.

illustrate how he ostracised some ‘scabs’ by not speaking to them at work. In doing so, James shared a memory of estrangement which brought forth a mixture of feelings, including happiness, sadness, anger, and betrayal.

I knew one bloke. He used to come and talk when I were on conveyor belts. Don’t matter where he worked, he’d come sit and have half an hour with me. He were like me pit dad. He were a lot older than me and he were right, fantastic. But he went back to work, and I thought world of him. I’ve seen him after. No [deep breath]. Can’t. I don’t know if he’s dead now or not. No. [...] Never would spit on him if I got the chance. No. Cos he didn’t care about us, did he?<sup>671</sup>

James’ unwillingness to speak to someone, who he described as a ‘pit dad,’ was far from an uncomplicated decision. Verbal utterances of ‘[I] can’t’ point to the emotional struggles behind decisions to sever ties with a close co-worker. It is also instructive of how men make sense of ongoing acts of social estrangement from the ‘scab’ in the present. For instance, it is still framed by James in terms of ‘us’ versus ‘them,’ with strike-breakers discerned as failing to enact camaraderie by ‘sticking it out.’

Most men described ignoring the ‘scab’ after the strike as a common practice. Whilst Josh stated ‘I wouldn’t acknowledge anybody that I really knew had broken strike,’ Chester revealed that ‘Words would be said behind their back. You don’t speak to them.’<sup>672</sup> In addition to nicknaming and physical abuse, ignoring strike-breakers was understood as an act that could compel ‘scabs’ to leave the mines. As Ryan noted, ‘If a man weren’t getting spoken to at pit, [he] would have gone to management and asked to be transferred.’<sup>673</sup> Alienating practices, as Harry recalled, contributed to men leaving the pit and coalmining villages: ‘All the scabs tried coming back to work. But nobody would have owt to do with ‘em. So a lot of them moved out of the area.’<sup>674</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> James Interview.

<sup>672</sup> Josh Interview; Chester Interview.

<sup>673</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>674</sup> Harry Interview.

Ignoring strike-breakers may not have been a decision men came to make on their own, however. As one interviewee pointed out, there was a ‘very powerful guy’ who walked ‘brazenly into the baths,’ saying “I scabbed. Does anyone have anything to say?” [...] So nobody said owt to him.<sup>675</sup> In his autobiography, Stephen Whyles, a strike-breaker from Whitwell in North Derbyshire, illustrates how volatile exchanges of mockery could backfire on striking miners if they met a more formidable and wittier opponent. At the same time, Whyles explained that he partly understood the ‘betrayal’ miners felt towards him and other strike-breakers.

The working environment underground meant that you had to have a strong bond and a sense of trust, your life depended very much on the man next to you watching your back and vice versa. The camaraderie was strong it had to be the pit couldn’t function without it. You had to work together as one. It was a brotherhood in a way. It was a way of life rather than just a job.<sup>676</sup>

A similar sentiment was expressed by Andrew when reflecting on tensions between miners.

I can understand why. Because, I worked in offices, so there were not danger of a roof collapsing on me. But this bloke that had gone back to work, were working at side of me, down pit, I wouldn’t be able to really trust him, would I? To look after me back. To watch out. Any risk...if something’s gonna fall in or owt. Would he help me going to work? He didn’t back me up then, would he back me up now?<sup>677</sup>

Akin to striking miners, Andrew and Whyles foreground how mistrust between coal miners could be a focal point in men’s working lives underground.

For striking miners, who continued to work in the industry after the wave of pit closures in the 1980s and 1990s, their relations and interactions with strike-breakers usually underwent transformation. Lewis referred to a mine he worked at as ‘scab pit’ because of how many men from Nottingham worked there.<sup>678</sup> Luther, likewise, commented on the presence of ‘scabs’ at Maltby; he noted that abusive practices, besides sometimes naming the ‘scab,’ diminished

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<sup>675</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>676</sup> Stephen Whyles, *A Scab is no Son of Mine* (US: Xlibris Publishing, 2014) 14.

<sup>677</sup> Andrew and Audrey Interview.

<sup>678</sup> Lewis and Sophia Interview.

significantly.<sup>679</sup> What seemed to persist, as illustrated by interviewees, was men's refusal to talk to strike-breakers. For example, Dennis shared a story of a miner from his village who allegedly brought two signs to work: one read 'yes' and the other 'no.'<sup>680</sup> Apparently, this was done so the miner could prevent himself from talking to 'scabs.' Surely, as Dennis notes, this could not have lasted for long, if it, in fact, even occurred. But what it signified was how prominent the stigma of strike-breaking was for some miners. A strike-breaker was a person to be avoided—even at work.

The actuality of doing so was, however, very difficult, if not impossible, especially at work sites where interviewees suggested they were later outnumbered by 'scabs.'<sup>681</sup> A change in workplace composition affected Oliver's desire to work in the industry; he now found himself alone in the pit baths at Daw Mill Colliery in Warwickshire: 'They worked [during strike]. So when I was getting in showers, nobody wanted to get near me. They'd ignore me or not talk to me.'<sup>682</sup> Oliver left before the pit closed, in part, because he felt alienated from his co-workers, stating that 'coalmining wasn't the same with the scabs.'<sup>683</sup> A sense of alienation at 'new' pits was also understood as a loss of collective power shared between workers. Charlie, for instance, expressed: 'You ain't got that one voice' at Maltby.<sup>684</sup>

Masculinity and emotion are powerful frameworks through which some men have come to understand their real and imagined interactions and experiences with strike-breakers after the 1984-85 miners' strike. Some men discern men's silence about strike activity as an indication of shame. According to Oliver, 'I have never met people from Nottingham on holiday that wasn't on strike.

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<sup>679</sup> Luther Interview.

<sup>680</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>681</sup> William Interview.

<sup>682</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid.

<sup>684</sup> Charlie Interview.

They are ashamed to say “I worked.” They can’t hold their head up.’<sup>685</sup> This gesture (or the inability to perform this gesture) was framed by interviewees as a sign of emasculation. Referring specifically to Nottingham miners, Luther insisted: ‘We know who wears the frilly knickers and it’s not the girls!’<sup>686</sup>

Interviewees still place emotional investment in the phrase ‘holding your head high’; it is an expression of pride which brings together the ‘scab,’ class and masculinity, and camaraderie. As Charlie explained, ‘I’ve shown a lot of anger towards lads that went back to work. But I show a lot of remorse, cos I can walk into any pit yard, any miners’ welfare, any colliery village, and hold my head up high. They can’t.’<sup>687</sup> The ‘scab’ as a point of social distinction is important. Strike activity enables Charlie to ‘hold his head up high,’ a gesture associated with working-class masculinity. The real and/or imagined presence of ‘scabs’ is increasingly tied with ways of doing masculinity after pit closures. Strike-breakers offered a way for men to communicate to themselves who they are whilst connecting to larger collectives of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’

This ‘othering’ of the ‘scab’ is, perhaps, of particular relevance for working-class men who have experienced the impact of coalfield deindustrialisation on their ‘breadwinner’ status associated with ‘traditional’ forms of industrial work. Present day work circumstances—from low wages, precarity, unemployment, and even a decline in workplace camaraderie—have contributed to feelings of betrayal and hatred towards strike-breakers in militant ex-mining localities. What I would like to emphasise is that it was not simply the miners’ strike, but also men’s workplace relations, interactions, and practices after the strike, which further helped to strengthen interrelations

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<sup>685</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>686</sup> Luther Interview.

<sup>687</sup> Charlie Interview.

between ‘brotherhood,’ masculinity, and camaraderie through practices of abuse, alienation, and exclusion.

By thinking about camaraderie in a counterintuitive way—as also characterised by abusive practices—I argue that strike-breakers were also understood by many interviewees as objects of mistrust that could threaten men’s safety and welfare. From this perspective, verbal and physical abuse should not simply be approached as hostile responses of anger or betrayal, but also as emotional acts that could modify or alter men’s emotional states—from fear over mistrust, shame of association, or pride in oneself—by socially alienating ‘scabs.’ Abusive acts were also cultural practices that were valued and carried out by a group of co-workers, inflecting how they felt about themselves and identified with a collective.

What was also valued during this period was the relationship between ‘brotherhood’ and working-class masculinity. Whilst masculinity was shaped in a work environment underscored by risks and dangers, I argue that the actual presence of ‘scabs,’ specifically constructed as emasculated ‘others,’ could undermine this dominant portrayal of working-class masculinity. The ‘othering’ of strike-breakers should also be thought of as a way to reassert a masculine disposition that was, perhaps, no longer simply sustained by a hazardous work environment. A particular form of ‘brotherhood’ was embodied by men, enacted through practices of camaraderie, which were also important in reconfigurations of working-class masculinity amid and after coalfield deindustrialisation.

There is certainly an element of composure when it comes to the ways actors interweave the figure of the ‘scab’ in their oral testimonies. Some men differentiated themselves from ‘scabs’ by identifying strike-breakers as either abusive, outsiders, or effeminate. I suspect this was also done to justify theirs, and/or others, past behaviour towards strike-breakers. Men (and women) are less

likely to feel judged, or judge themselves, if they mistreat groups of people who are discerned as culturally defunct (see Chapter 1). It would be a mistake, however, to conceive of these practices simply through a cultural lens. How men thought of and felt towards ‘scabs’ was also shaped by embodied experiences and material conditions in the mines; verbal and physical abuse was driven by and steeped in feelings about and at work. Similar to other practices of camaraderie, the alienation of ‘scabs’ could become an everyday practice for many miners. It is important to keep this in mind if we are to better elucidate how and why ‘scabs’ are still vilified in South Yorkshire ex-coalfields in the present.

### Section III: The ‘Scab’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

This section begins by illustrating how expressions of hatred and betrayal continue to circulate within political and popular discourse in ex-coalfields. References to ‘scabs,’ whether to signify a person or place, are increasingly seen as antiquated forms of expression by those unaffected (and some affected) by the legacy of 1984-85 miners’ strike. Despite pleas for ex-miners to ‘move on’ from this hatred towards ‘scabs,’ many men are reluctant to overlook past grievances, with some men holding ambivalent attitudes, contingent on temporal, social, and economic factors, bringing the miners’ strike together with coalfield deindustrialisation.

Our focus here lies with how and why sentiments towards strike-breakers have shifted and remained the same. This section argues that ‘moving on’ or ‘letting go’ of this animosity is far from a straightforward process. It illustrates how embodied emotional experiences of work and camaraderie and the popular memory of coalmining inflect interviewees’ attitudes and feelings towards strike-breakers in the present. Important ways of being and feeling are still bound up with ignoring or avoiding the ‘scab.’ Notwithstanding the fact that these practices produce different social and emotional effects outside of familiar socio-spatial settings, a departure from them was

conceived of by some ex-miners as more emotionally disruptive. The ‘scab’ is increasingly discerned as an emotional threat to a sense of self and a collective identity. Whilst most interviewees avoided talking to or being seen with strike-breakers, other men made qualifications.

An ambivalence towards strike-breakers opens up different ways of framing ‘scabs’ in oral history interviews. There was a shift in focus on ‘scabs’ from a subject of hatred to an object of exploitation. Although this reinforced ‘scabs’ as passive ‘others,’ it signifies, on the one hand, an effort to situate the ‘scab’ within the wider context of class relations and class conflict. On the other hand, it encourages us to rethink how the ‘scab’ is conceptualised and remembered. An emphasis on situation and context with regards to how and why strike-breakers returned to work in more militant coalmining communities can afford insight into the ways in which workers were divided. At the same time, this may have implications for the popular memory and representations of camaraderie and community. This section ends by illustrating that there is a paradoxical desire to at once include and exclude the ‘scab’ in individual and collective memories of British coalmining.

Expressions of betrayal and hatred towards ‘scabs’ are still prominent in the present. In the media coverage of the march that marked the end of Kellingley Colliery in 2015, demonstrators were captured burning the banners of the Nottinghamshire-based breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers. As Jörg Arnold argues, this ‘was done not so much, it seemed, to bury past division, but to underline the charge of “betrayal” and to cast blame on those who they considered responsible.’<sup>688</sup> This lasting sense of ‘betrayal’ is also evident with certain Facebook groups such as ‘The true Yorkshire miners’ appreciation association, no scabs allowed.’ For those miners, or members of mining families, interested in joining the group, they must first prove to administrators

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<sup>688</sup> Arnold, ‘Like being on death row,’ 7.



that they have not worked during ‘any’ industrial conflict by informing the group of their ‘working history.’<sup>689</sup>

Football matches have also become popular sites of protest against ‘scabs,’ particularly games involving non-striking and striking areas. In her study exploring football chants, place, and identity, Joanne Luhrs illustrates how ‘scab’ songs proliferated at a match between Barnsley F.C. and Notts County F.C. in 2004. Barnsley supporters yelled ‘Scabs until you die, You’re scabs until you die, We know you are, we’re sure you are, You’re scabs until you die.’<sup>690</sup> If opposing fans or players somehow failed to grasp the vitriol underlying this football chant, a small group of supporters doubled-down with ‘I’d rather be a Paki than a Scab,’ putting their racism on display with their hatred of scabs.<sup>691</sup>

These racist chants were not only condemned by other supporters, but also by Barnsley supporters on online football forums. Some people brought up how those in attendance chanting ‘scabs’ were likely born after the 1984-85 strike. Social commentators, as Luhrs reveals, raised concerns with this strike epithet more broadly; it was considered by many as anachronistic, since the 1984-85 miners’ strike had occurred roughly two decades ago.<sup>692</sup>

More than 10 years later similar arguments feature on football forums. A reoccurring motif of ‘move on’ also dominated debates on a Barnsley football forum called ‘Scabs Until They Die.’ Whilst one writer argued, ‘It just seems entrenched, bitter and shows the town in larger parts hasn’t moved on,’ another poster stated, ‘You can’t expect people especially the ones who lived through

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<sup>689</sup> ‘The true Yorkshire miners’ appreciation association, no scabs allowed,’ accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/428674903954135>.

<sup>690</sup> Joanne Luhrs, ‘Football Chants: A Living Legacy of the 1984-85 Miners’ Strike,’ *The International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 3 (2007), 106.

<sup>691</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

the strike and were part of it to move on they won't.'<sup>693</sup> A discourse of whether people have or have not 'moved on' from the 1984-85 miners' strike predominates discussions surrounding the long-lasting animosities towards strike-breakers. By shifting our focus from 'moving on' to how interviewees talk about and feel towards strike-breakers, we can better elucidate the legacy and memory of coalfield deindustrialisation.

### An Emotional Legacy of Betrayal and Hatred

Most of the ex-miners I spoke with still resent strike-breakers. Whilst Frank called them 'deplorable,' Jack asserted that he 'can't bring myself to talk to 'em' in the present day.'<sup>694</sup> These sentiments also proliferate within some ex-mining villages. According to Nick, 'There's still people in our village that went back to work and they still don't talk today. They don't acknowledge 'em. They're still scabs.'<sup>695</sup>

The stigma of strike-breaking plays a critical role in how people think, feel, and see themselves, particularly when the present intersects with memories of coalmining and past embodied experiences of work. For instance, Oliver began his interview by showing me a list of the names of 'scabs' who went back to work at his pit. He subsequently pointed out on the list where each man worked, below or on surface, whilst offering some additional commentary about one man, in particular, who apparently was well-off during the strike.<sup>696</sup> Despite Oliver claiming that he had 'no time for them,' now or then, the 'scab' was an important narrative device; a means of introducing himself to me as a striking miner. He had a strike tattoo to prove it, too.

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<sup>693</sup> 'Scabs until they die,' *Barnsley FC BBS Fans Forum*, August 15, 2017, <http://barnsleyfc.org.uk/threads/scabs-until-they-die.258438/>.

<sup>694</sup> Frank Interview, 2016; Jack Interview.

<sup>695</sup> Nick Interview.

<sup>696</sup> Oliver Interview.

Whilst Oliver may have had the 1984-85 miners' strike inked on his physical body, many men continued to carry out practices of alienation of 'scabs' after pit closures. Ben was so adamant that he would 'never talk' to 'scabs' again that he distanced himself from any potential encounters with men from Nottingham.

Oh, I'll never, never talk, I will never talk to them. And, I never, I go on holiday, and if I, if there's someone there from Nottingham, I don't associate with them. Not everyone from Nottingham were a miner. Not everyone from Nottingham went back to work. But as far as I'm concerned I'm not taking that risk. If I thought [raises voice] I was stood there talking to someone who had been a scab and had gone back to work, as far as I'm concerned, I would be disgusted in myself, and I will never let that happen.<sup>697</sup>

Whether real or imagined, interactions with 'scabs' were discerned as 'risky' insofar that they could engender shame and guilt, bordering on self-disgust in the contemporary period. A long-standing sense of betrayal and hatred, typically expressed through practices of socio-spatial distancing, can produce self-displacement, however. Clearly, the place-specificity of this encounter matters. In striking mining localities, specifically in the past, it likely would have been the other way around. Nevertheless, Ben illustrates how, in this case, social distancing has as much to do with how he views 'scabs' as with how he feels about himself. The two, for Ben, are inseparable.

Other interviewees also acknowledged that they distanced themselves from 'scabs,' specifically when they were on holidays. Accidentally befriending a 'scab' could exacerbate feelings of betrayal, according to Frank, who shared two personal stories. Firstly, he spoke of how a friend found out, only after showing pictures from his holiday to mates, that he had socialised with a strike-breaker. Upon being confronted with this news, his mate gathered all the photographs and left. He was 'so angry,' explained Frank.<sup>698</sup> Shortly afterwards, Frank shared a story about his own struggles. Whilst vacationing in Tenerife he removed himself from a social event because of worries over a potential encounter with a 'scab': 'I won't go. I thought he were a scab. But when somebody else tell me

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<sup>697</sup> Ben Interview.

<sup>698</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

later on he were one of striking Notts miners [laughter]. He were a union official. I bump into him regularly now [laughter]. I won't tell him I kept out of his company now cos I thought he were a scab.<sup>769</sup> Although Frank expressed embarrassment over the incident, it was clear that an interaction could engender an unwanted emotional response: 'I'd crack. I couldn't promise I wouldn't commit a crime.'<sup>700</sup>

Arthur also conveyed feelings of 'bitterness' towards strike-breakers, avoiding contact with those he knew or feared may have broken strike. Whilst away at a holiday park there was another group of people vacationing from Nottingham. Arthur avoided them during his holiday, stating 'I'd never talk to a scab to this day. [...] I wish I could get away with murder. That's how bitter I felt. I'd never talk to one.'<sup>701</sup> At the same time, he disclosed that this approach to potential 'scabs' produced isolating experiences, when, in fact, he did not know the people he distanced himself from. In doing so, Arthur seemed to wonder off in the interview, muttering to himself, 'You sad, sick fuckin' bastard.'<sup>702</sup> Feelings of shame, guilt, or disgust, that men sought to thwart by avoiding social encounters with 'scabs,' were also sometimes felt when they abstained from what they saw as emotionally risky situations.

What is particularly striking about these imaginary encounters is the extent to which understandings of an emotional self are still bound up with the 'scab.' This is influenced by a wider culture, particularly in striking mining localities, that continue to demonise strike-breakers. Yet, it also has, I argue, to do with camaraderie. As illustrated in the last section, ways of feelings were inseparable from acts that targeted strike-breakers; they were important in regulating, modifying,

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<sup>699</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> Arthur Interview.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

and altering emotional states. Actions, such as, ignoring strike-breakers, locally and regionally, were carried out long after the strike in real and imaginative ways. These acts have an emotional significance for many ex-miners, since they were ‘deeply-rooted expectations,’ but also because they became a ‘locus of emotional experience’; an experience that carries itself into the present and still matters greatly in how some interviewees recognise themselves as individuals and remember themselves as part of a collective.<sup>703</sup>

Abstaining from social contact with ‘scabs’ should be understood less as some sort of trivial or outdated activity. It is a cultural and embodied legacy of coalmining and class conflict, bringing together the miners’ strike, workplace relations and practices, and coalfield deindustrialisation. It is, however, noteworthy that the usefulness of such practices have come under question. As illustrated above, alienating practices towards ‘scabs’ do not produce the same outcomes. The real or imagined strike-breaker is not the one who endures estrangement between himself and the social group. Rather, it is the striking miner, in these examples, who isolates himself from socio-spatial encounters, because of fear over how he might feel about himself and ‘scabs’ if, and when, he comes into contact with a strike-breaker; in particular, if he finds himself out of ‘place.’

This sense of the unknown is critical for why and how some men avoid communication with strike-breakers. Although Oliver supplied me with an actual list of the names of strike-breakers, Ellis brought up a situation involving an imaginary list of the names of strike-breakers.

I’ve never been, I’ve never been nasty towards anybody, but I felt strongly about it. Even now, if somebody...I don’t even want to know. If somebody said to me, ‘I’ve got a list here of everybody who went back to work.’ ‘Have ye?’ I don’t want to know. That’s me, today. I’m not interested. It’s just...I don’t want to be surprised by who went back. If I didn’t know and somebody’s name come up on that list, I’d just, I don’t know what I’d do. I wouldn’t do anything silly, but I just couldn’t believe...that’s why I don’t want to know.<sup>704</sup>

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<sup>703</sup> Roper, ‘Slipping Out of View,’ 64.

<sup>704</sup> Ellis Interview.

His lack of interest in an imagined list of the names of strike-breakers should not be mistaken for a shift in feelings towards them. As Ellis later put it, 'I couldn't talk to 'em. That's how strongly I felt, I feel about it, now.'<sup>705</sup> There is instead a reluctance to know the identities of strike-breakers because of a fear of the unknown: that is, of an emotional response that may or may not come with knowing. There is a very real emotional threat surrounding the memory and identity of the 'scab' in men's lives. But I would argue, however, that feelings of trepidation have as much to do with anger as compassion. For instance, might it hurt some men less to continue to hate the 'scab' than for them to uncover that they no longer harbour hatred, but instead, something entirely different, perhaps, even empathy? Might a rupture in ways of feeling towards 'scabs' be seen or felt as a form of self- and/or collective betrayal?

### A Shift in Feeling?

A shift in sentiments towards strike-breakers was usually accompanied by a qualification, especially by those men who still felt animosity towards 'scabs.' Although Charlie could not 'deny there was hatred,' he could empathise with some men who returned to work during the strike.<sup>706</sup>

I'm going to try and tell you a story without breaking down. I find this extremely difficult. I can always remember one morning in miners' welfare. [...] This big lad come in and he'd got his little son. 'Can I have a word with you, Charlie?' And he broke down in tears. Now, if a woman, you can comfort a woman or a little kid, but a big powerful lad, what do you do? I say's 'Sit down, what's up?' And he had said that he had walked the streets, walked the streets of Barnsley because his wife had turned him out of his house because he wouldn't go back to work. And he walked the streets of Barnsley with his son. I mean it were... [Charlie breaks down crying].<sup>707</sup>

Charlie was unable to finish the rest of his story; he was still affected by the incident, from his inability to afford emotional support, to the circumstances that prompted the miner to eventually return to work. Everybody was faced with different conditions, some clearly worse than others.

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<sup>705</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>706</sup> Charlie Interview.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

Although he did not agree with him, he understood the sorrow underlying this man's decision to break strike.

Dennis, who adamantly 'hates' strike-breakers, brought up a similar story about a man who had given 'everything' to the strike:

How can I call, look at him in face and call him a scab? He lost far more than I ever lost. I didn't lose a house. I didn't lose a wife. I didn't lose me kids. [...] How can you call him a scab? [...] He went back to work which were wrong. If you take it literally he's a scab. But for going and putting a brick through his window and stuff like... Well, he ain't got a window to put it through, has he?<sup>708</sup>

Changes in feeling, however slight they were, towards strike-breakers were contingent on what these men gave up in the process. It was, in other words, a matter of personal circumstances. The 'personal' has as much to do with the strike-breaker as the striking-miner. If the latter was unfamiliar with the former, it likely mattered less, if at all, how strike-breakers were impacted by the strike.

It is important to note, however, that very few striking miners were interested in the reasons why men returned to work during the strike. Henry indicated that he and others expressed a lot of 'hate,' because 'we didn't know the full facts at the time. We just thought they were going back for blood money sort of thing. Had they offered them more money? What have they offered them? Why have they gone back?'<sup>709</sup> A more reflective approach to individual strike-breakers' personal circumstances has occurred with the passage of time and the sharing of strike stories, affecting how some men feel. According to Henry, strike-breakers, who struggled financially, had 'their reasons why they went back to work but...I'm not one of these that, like, has any hatred toward the people who went back.'<sup>710</sup>

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<sup>708</sup> Dennis Interview, 2016.

<sup>709</sup> Henry Interview.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid.

For those interviewees who later recognised material hardship during the miners' strike as a somewhat more compelling reason for returning to work, there was a temporal component that usually had to be met. Ex-miners were particularly upset with men who broke strike before winter. Ryan stated that he felt 'animosity' towards this group of strike-breakers.<sup>711</sup> This was, in large part, because this period was understood to be the most taxing, particularly around Christmas. Whilst Josh described some of them as 'silly' for returning to work when rumours were widely circulating in villages that strike action was coming to an end, Duncan portrayed his mate's decision to return to work only one-week before the strike as a mistake.<sup>712</sup> Returning to work near the end of the strike, according to Freddie, must have 'took a lot of swallowing. I felt sorry for some lads.'<sup>713</sup>

Present circumstances also mattered if, and when, men expressed ambivalence towards strike-breakers. The socio-economic legacy of coalfield deindustrialisation shaped how interviewees perceived 'scabs.' A shift in attitudes and feelings towards strike-breakers could have less to do with when they went back than with material suffering brought on by the miners' strike and pit closures afterwards. 'There is no, I went two-week before the end of the strike. No. A scab were a scab,' explained Ernie. 'But then there's others, who I talk to that went back. But they've lost everything, them. They lost their wives, houses, everything.'<sup>714</sup>

The long-term effects of coalfield deindustrialisation were not limited to discussions around strike-breakers. Although Josh expressed that he did not think 'falling out' with his mates was worth it for the rest of his life, he understood why some ex-miners might continue to detest strike-breakers:

Cos it affected them in a big way. They had a marriage, a house, and...they blame them for it. You can't really blame them for it, I suppose, really. They've got to blame something, haven't they? You would have blamed government or people that went back

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<sup>711</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>712</sup> Duncan Interview; Josh Interview.

<sup>713</sup> Freddie Interview.

<sup>714</sup> Ernie Interview.



to work. [...] There's still some, I know, I spoke to 'em. They still say 'I'd never speak to a scab.' And they probably will as long as they live.<sup>715</sup>

Two points are noteworthy here. Firstly, how some men felt towards strike-breakers was bound up with how strike-breakers and striking miners managed and coped with coalfield deindustrialisation. Secondly, a shift in feelings towards strike-breakers could come into conflict with a wider emotional culture. William explained that sympathetic feelings over the work-related death of a strike-breaker were disapproved of by his wife and mates. After telling his wife he felt a 'bit sorry,' she responded: "No you aren't. He were a fucking scab."<sup>716</sup> 'Sometimes it's hard, hard to forgive,' William explained.<sup>717</sup>

This difficulty involved in forgiving strike-breakers is experienced on a personal and collective level. Forgiveness can, on the one hand, disrupt how men see and feel about themselves, and on the other, undermine entrenched cultural practices remaining after coalfield deindustrialisation in militant ex-mining villages. This matters a great deal for how some men locate themselves in a present where a mood of betrayal continues to affect ex-coalfields. The qualifications men made when talking about strike-breakers not only were ways to manage, but also justify, shifts in ways of feeling about strike-breakers.

A change in ways of thinking and feeling about strike-breakers marked a shift in ways of conceptualising strike-breakers as an object of exploitation. In these cases, the 'scab' featured as an exploitable target, alongside striking miners, that was confronted by external forces. Andrew argued that "The NCB were up to all kinds of tricks to get them [strike-breakers] to go back. A lot

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<sup>715</sup> Josh Interview.

<sup>716</sup> William Interview.

<sup>717</sup> Ibid.

of promises made: move you somewhere else, they won't know you've gone in. It didn't work like that. They [promises] couldn't be kept.'<sup>718</sup>

Many men referred to these 'tricks' in the context of manipulation. Matthew explained that management tried to persuade miners to go back to work by calling them during the strike: "So and so has gone back to work, why don't you come through?" He tried manipulating us and I said "No." I got a phone call from others that said, "Have you had a phone call?"<sup>719</sup> According to Matthew, this tactic worked on some men, asserting how a 'great deal' of electricians and fitters returned to work.<sup>720</sup> Freddie brought up a similar story. His boss phoned him, asking 'Why don't you come back to work? You don't have to come back here. You can go to any pit you want in the country.' Freddie then explained: 'That's how, firsthand, I knew you could go to any pit you wanted.'<sup>721</sup> Adopting the voice of his bosses, Josh facetiously stated: 'We'll look after you. We'll do this for you and that for you.'<sup>722</sup>

Interviewees also underscored how more vulnerable miners were exploited by management. As Frank pointed out, the 'ruthless bastards' took advantage of men with learning disabilities: 'they tended to focus on them to get them to go into work just to play a numbers game. Not that they were fit enough to do anything' [on their own].<sup>723</sup> Age could also play a factor. According to Jack, his son, who started in the coal industry in January 1984, was falsely told he could not come out on strike. Management 'tried to wear it on with young'uns, like, tried to get 'em to go back to work.'<sup>724</sup> Despite his son remaining on strike, young coal miners, specifically those from non-mining

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<sup>718</sup> Andrew and Audrey Interview.

<sup>719</sup> Matthew Interview.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> Freddie Interview.

<sup>722</sup> Josh Interview.

<sup>723</sup> Frank Interview, 2016.

<sup>724</sup> Jack Interview.

families, were, perhaps, more susceptible to these threats. Ernie, a first generation coal miner, explained that during the 1972 strike his father told him to return to work or find another job, if he wanted to live at home. Luckily, as Ernie illustrated, the 1972 strike was not nearly as long, thereby minimising conflict at home.<sup>725</sup>

Older men were also considered vulnerable to strike-breaking. Ernie suggested that a lot of men who returned to work were over 50-years old. These mineworkers were supposedly offered favourable redundancy packages: ‘They’d get in touch with them and tell them that if they went back to work, break strike, if they went back to work, soon as strike was over they’d get their redundancy.’<sup>726</sup> The toll on miners’ bodies from exploitative work for three or more decades could have prompted men to accept these packages and, in turn, return to work. Popular stories of men retiring from the coal industry only to die a year later from industrial-related diseases likely weighed on the decision-making process.<sup>727</sup>

The threat of taking older men’s pensions away by sacking them made miners vulnerable to returning to work. Near the end of the strike, Henry explained, his dad was arrested after getting caught pinching coal. The manager from his pit visited his dad in the police station and told him if he did not come back to work he would be sacked. After speaking to his union representative, Henry’s dad was advised to return to work because the strike was nearly over. His dad’s decision to return, however, was criticised harshly by some men. Apparently, context did not matter; Henry explained that his dad was called a ‘scab’ afterwards, resulting in confrontations in his village.<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>725</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>726</sup> Ibid.

<sup>727</sup> Interviewees sometimes relayed storied of men dying shortly after retiring. Ellis Interview; Matthew Interview; William Interview; and Arthur Interview.

<sup>728</sup> Henry Interview.

There is a certain absurdity, as Henry indicates, of characterisations of the ‘scab’ that avoid context. This was also brought up by others mineworkers, but not questioned. James told a story about almost being labelled a ‘scab’ on the last day of the strike. When everyone walked down to the pit he opted to go in the pit to sort out his cheques. Prior to doing so, he was told by two different mates that if he went in and stayed he would be known as a ‘scab’:

So I put them back and went out. But three or four blokes did. Went back and got their cheques. Stayed in full-shift. They were scabs. Nobody talks to ‘em. One day, 6 March they went back. It is because they didn’t turn around and come back. They’re scabs all their life.<sup>729</sup>

Ben also illustrated how he had to counter rumours that he ‘scabbed’ on the last day of the strike at an union meeting.

I say’s ‘They’ve got a rumour around that I scabbed.’ ‘Ben, we know you wouldn’t have scabbed. We know you wouldn’t have done.’ I say’s ‘I’m telling you now, at this meeting, you make sure all [his voice raises] my mates know in here. You make sure they all get it right, because next time if anyone ever comes to me and say I scabbed, then I’ll knock his head off, and you’ll be fighting for my job.’ I say’s ‘So you put it straight now!’<sup>730</sup>

It is through this homogenisation of the localised ‘scab,’ in particular, that exploitative practices—underlying industrial conflict—carried out by management against striking miners become blurred, or at worst, erased. By ignoring or removing the context of how and why men returned to work, specifically during strike, the figure of the ‘scab’ helps to obfuscate, rather than elucidate, class-related relations and experiences, and how those same men responded to those experiences (besides, of course, returning to work). At the same time, the obfuscation of context strengthens a rigid dichotomy between the striker and the strike-breaker. We will return to this in a moment.

It is important to note, first, that those interviewees who reframed the discussion around the ‘scab’ as an object of exploitation, usually reinforced the ‘scab’s’ passivity, whilst also distinguishing themselves and (sometimes others) as withstanding financial and emotional hardship that depleted

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<sup>729</sup> James Interview.

<sup>730</sup> Ben Interview.

other men's resolve and resilience. These fixed and absolute stances on strike-breakers were, however, viewed as problematic by some interviewees. Although far from being apologists, some people questioned if popular resentment towards some strike-breakers, particularly those who struggled materially, was perhaps misdirected. In doing so, they shifted a focus from 'scabs' to some striking miners, who they knew, or heavily suspected, had comfortably 'got by' during the yearlong dispute. Whilst William indicated that he and some others felt bitter against men who 'got by easier,' in particular, union officials, Archie was critical of what he described as the unequal distribution of goods by his local NUM branch: 'If you were in, you were in. But if you weren't, you didn't get owt.'<sup>731</sup>

Signs of social discord were present between fellow rank-and-file miners in oral testimonies. Ellis told a story about a co-worker who never went picketing, working instead for a relative who owned a small-business. Although he was not angry over his mate's fortunate circumstances, Ellis expressed a sort of repressed anger by stating 'I had to bite me tongue' and 'I thought don't say that' when his co-worker spoke about his own supposed contributions: 'I never went to claim money off anybody, and I didn't go picketing to get any money, I were letting you have money.'<sup>732</sup> His friend's remark, however well-intended it might have been, signified a complete detachment from the realities that Ellis and other families endured for roughly 12-months. Ryan and Maureen also observed how another family in their neighbourhood chose to have their windows double glazed during the strike. This decision was discerned as insensitive since it demonstrated a lack of awareness to their and others hardships.<sup>733</sup>

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<sup>731</sup> William Interview; Archie Interview.

<sup>732</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>733</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

These interviewees also raise a similar question that ex-miners pointed out earlier when making qualifications for strike-breakers: what did some striking miners have to give up? Whilst Ellis does this implicitly, Ryan and Maureen, who remained on strike for 12-months, were explicit about it. A long passage is worth quoting here.

There were observations made within the communities. Some people were struggling more than others. Why are they not in the same position that I'm in? What's the difference between me and them? [...] We were witnessing people throw money around, who should not be throwing money around, and then we are witnessing people who are desperate for money. Desperate for food. Desperate to keep a roof over their heads. They have to take a desperate decision to go back to work. So, do you want to hold that against them? Or, do you want to hold it against the people that are sailing through? So how do you judge it? How do you judge it? Do you want us to say, yeah, we'll cast, you know, ostracise the ones that have gone back? Or, we'll applaud the ones that have done really well for themselves?<sup>734</sup>

Judgment has clearly come down harder on the side of strike-breakers in ex-militant mining localities. Despite a shift in sentiments accompanying efforts by some interviewees to contextualise how and why some miners broke strike in their surrounding areas, forgiveness is not necessarily a realistic alternative for a vast majority of ex-miners. This has as much to do with the personal as it does with the collective. Even if men, perhaps, desired to no longer harbour ill-feelings towards strike-breakers, this is not an emotional state that they can merely 'move on' from unproblematically. Culturally embodied experiences and expectations of the past still remain in the present. They have not disappeared with coalfield deindustrialisation. In some cases, if anything, they are more strongly embedded. As I have shown, they are still present through exclusionary practices, albeit with different social and emotional consequences in particular spatial settings.

Finally, the 'scab' cannot easily be forgotten despite some men's wishes for them to be 'left in the dustbin of history.'<sup>735</sup> There is a complicated relationship between the 'scab' and memory and representations of coalmining. For example, there is a paradoxical desire amongst some of those

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<sup>734</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>735</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

interviewed to exclude and include the ‘scab’ in individual and popular memories. At an individual level, ‘scabs’ are often excluded because striking miners feel betrayed; they are not worth mentioning since they betrayed a sense of community and camaraderie by crossing the picket line. In the process, many strike-breakers are pathologised as the ‘wife-beater,’ the ‘paedophile,’ the ‘traitor,’ and the ‘effeminate,’ as a way to both justify and reinforce exclusion. At the same time, it is, in part, as a result of these same assertions, that they have been included in individual narratives. The ‘scab’ is bound up with processes of ‘othering’ important in the formation of self and the collective; they are what I am/we are not. For those that have struggled with deindustrialisation, this sense of self is particularly important.

At a collective level, there is also a desire to exclude ‘scabs’ since they can signify social discord in coalmining communities, typically framed as a bedrock of working-class solidarity. An understanding of the latter has gained increasing cultural purchase with the decline of community narratives in popular discourse. From this perspective, ‘scabs’ can problematise straightforward narratives that ‘everyone stuck together’ and, more importantly, as I illustrate in the first section, why some men also remained on strike. The figure of the ‘scab,’ as a source of fear, I argue, was useful in preventing people from returning to work during the strike.

At the same time, there is also a desire to include ‘scabs’ because they can redirect us away from, blur, and/or mask other experiences of internal strife amongst those who did not cross the picket line. The erasure of communal discord—particularly around why some families were managing better than others—from the popular memory of the strike is critical insofar that it helps to forge and sustain representations of solidarity. To be clear: I am by no means suggesting that solidarity by other means was absent during the 1984-85 miners’ strike. It was always present in interviewees’

recollections of soup kitchens, picketing, protest marches, and neighbourhood collections, to name but a few examples.

Rather, what I want to emphasise is that memories of other people easing through the strike prompted some interviewees to question why they, as a collective group, do not hold those same people to a more rigorous critique. These individual and, unquestionably, less popular recollections can, however, fracture a picture of working-class solidarity in striking coalfields that still resonates in popular culture of the 1984-85 miners' strike. By including the 'scab' in popular memories of coalmining, other critiques can be obscured and rendered invisible. Despite being discerned as a threat to undermining narratives of solidarity, or worse, a source of blame for pit closures, the 'scab' was constructive not only in maintaining displays of solidarity during the strike, but also in the (re)production of cultural representations and popular memory of community and camaraderie in the contemporary period.

### Conclusion

This chapter explores how the 'scab' interweaves in men's oral history interviewees over three distinct periods: the 1984-85 miners' strike, the post-strike workplace, and the present. The first section demonstrates how the figure of the 'scab' evoked a sense of fear, hatred, and pride during the strike. Some interviewees said they feared physical and social retribution from other coal miners if they returned to work. Threats, or acts, of violence towards prospective or actual strike-breakers were framed as powerful practices of emotional regulation. A closer look at men's emotional experiences of the yearlong strike reveals tensions around a 'brotherhood' and a 'breadwinner' ideal. Many striking miners managed these tensions by transgressing other cultural norms, enabling them to enact the role of male provider. Despite the concept of 'brotherhood'



being largely constructed around not returning to work, its socio-cultural importance intensified afterwards through emotional practices of camaraderie.

The second section focuses on social practices of verbal or physical abuse and social alienation directed against strike-breakers after the strike in the coal mines. It argues that the 'scab' was seen by some men as a 'new' workplace hazard. Approached here as emotional practices of camaraderie, I argue abusive practices were not simply emotional responses of hatred or betrayal. Rather, they were also valued emotional acts that could modify or alter emotional states, including a fear of mistrust of a 'scab,' shame over working with a 'scab,' and/or pride in oneself for remaining on strike. A 'brotherhood' identity was further strengthened and embodied through these practices. 'Othering' the 'scab' often involved emasculation, contributing to reconfigurations of working-class masculinity. With the threat to a 'breadwinner' status brought on by deindustrialisation, the identity of the male striking miner is discerned as increasingly valuable for some ex-miners.

The final section looks at the emotional relevance of the 'scab' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is still a deep-seated betrayal and hatred towards 'scabs' in ex-coalfields. Many ex-miners continue to ignore or avoid the strike-breaker in the present, with unintended social and emotional outcomes, from feelings of isolation to guilt. For others, they are fearful of how these encounters may make them feel. The 'scab' is discerned by some as an emotional threat that may or may not affect how individuals self-identify or feel about themselves. This was, perhaps, also evident when interviewees expressed ambivalence towards strike-breakers by drawing on various qualifications to justify a shift in feelings.

In terms of the latter, there was a noticeable shift in talking about the 'scab' as an object of exploitation. This has important implications for how we conceptualise and remember strike-

breakers alongside the emotional legacy of coalfield deindustrialisation and the popular memory of community and camaraderie. Despite straightforward suggestions by some people to ‘move on’ from the ‘scab,’ this chapter argues there is a paradoxical desire to include and exclude the figure of the ‘scab’ in individual and collective memories. Whether people have or have not ‘moved on’ is also a prominent theme in popular and political discourse on deindustrialisation and regeneration. It is this matter of ‘moving on’ that we now turn to in the last chapter exploring the structural violence and embodied legacies of coalfield deindustrialisation.

## Chapter 5

### **‘Moving On’ or ‘Getting On’? The Politics of Temporality, Embodied Legacies, and the Structural Violence of Coalfield Deindustrialisation**

Drawing upon the insights on representation and embodiment covered in the previous chapters, this last chapter explores the structural violence of coalfield deindustrialisation. It does so by bringing together an analysis of the politics of ‘moving on’ pervading neoliberal and regeneration discourse with how expressions of ‘move on’ and ‘get on’ interweave in ex-miners’ testimonies about the loss of work and industry. In doing so, this chapter illustrates how utterances of ‘move on’ and ‘get on,’ understood as ‘the everyday language of forward motion,’ intersect with notions and experiences of temporality, emotion and embodiment, and class-based violence.<sup>736</sup>

A closer look at the way ‘move on’ and ‘get on’ circulate in oral history interviews reveals that they are not simply a means of downplaying the effects of deindustrialisation. Rather, they are also meaningful ways ex-miners respond to, experience, and make sense of pit closures and its long-term effects. On the one hand, they are employed when countering symbolic violence accompanying negative characterisations of being ‘stuck in the past.’ On the other hand, they are embodied practices, i.e., self-instructions, useful in adjusting to the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation,’ specifically seen ‘in internalised uncertainties, as people try to adapt to economic and social changes.’<sup>737</sup> However, when these emotive utterances take on an aura of inevitability in the present, they can affect how people construct memory and narrate experience in ways that unwittingly accommodates the structural violence of capitalism. This chapter ends by pointing to a second kind of temporality associated with the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation,’ raising the political implications by situating itself within moral economy arguments in current deindustrial scholarship.

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<sup>736</sup> Clarke, ‘Closing Time,’ 107.

<sup>737</sup> Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation*, 6.

Sentiments of ‘moving on’ from an industrial past infuse political, media, and academic discourse on the inevitability and ‘creative destruction’ of deindustrialisation, nostalgia for work and industry, and the associated trauma and loss of closures and its legacy. As both Steven High and Jackie Clarke illustrate, some commentators have treated deindustrialisation as an apolitical process. Closures, restructuring, and jobs losses are framed as ‘natural’ or part of an organic ‘cycle of life,’ reflecting ‘the pervasive sense of the inevitability of industrial decline’ in North America and Europe.<sup>738</sup> These kinds of explanations, as suggested in Chapter 1, may be supplemented in the context of climate change: pit closures are seen either as a natural or inevitable course of history.

Apolitical engagements with industrial closures have significant implications for the collective memory of deindustrialisation, specifically in the context of class and class struggle. As Steven High and David Lewis illustrate, middle-class urban exploration of industrial ruins contributes to the further displacement of the industrial worker.<sup>739</sup> This form of class erasure is also present in the aestheticisation and commodification of industrial ruins.<sup>740</sup> Citing the work of post-colonial scholar Ann Laura Stoler, High argues ‘ruination’ is a ‘political project that lays waste to certain people and places, relations and things.’<sup>741</sup> Inherent in this violence is the history and logic of capital. By treating economic growth under capitalism as simply progress or inevitable, oppositional voices are often rendered backwards, especially through public and political appeals for workers to ‘move on’. As a BBC journalist explained in 2015 with Kellingley Colliery’s closure, ‘The cold truth is that the way our economy works made the closure of our last coal mines inevitable...market forces are the main axe wielder here.’<sup>742</sup>

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<sup>738</sup> High, *Industrial Sunset*, 25; Clarke, ‘Closing Time,’ 118.

<sup>739</sup> High and Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland*.

<sup>740</sup> High, ‘Beyond Aesthetics,’ 141.

<sup>741</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination,’ 2008, quoted in High, ‘Wounds of Class,’ 998.

<sup>742</sup> ‘Closure of Kellingley pit brings deep coal mining to an end’, *BBC News*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-35124077>.

This aura of inevitability surrounding industrial closures has overlapped with and given way to promises of economic opportunity by authors, politicians, economic agents, and residents in deindustrialising places. In some academic circles, global economic change is approached as a capitalist process of ‘creative destruction’ through which new industries displace and destroy old industries. This has provoked the ire of some scholars, such as, Robert Storey. In illustrating the effects of deindustrialisation in Hamilton, Ontario, Storey argues that people and places are treated as ‘casualties of an “industrial age” that no one wants to talk about anymore because what is happening is part of the processes of “creative destruction,” or because these jobs were not good jobs in any event, or because in neoliberal versions of social Darwinism these people are responsible for their own fates.’<sup>743</sup>

It is often through measures and initiatives of economic and cultural regeneration that (ex)industrial workers, their families, and communities are urged to stop dwelling on the past and to move forward. Take these two examples in North America. In Youngstown, Ohio, Rufus Hudson, of YSU’s Cushwa Center for Entrepreneurship (and later city councilman), insisted that the town has ‘been on a twenty-year pity party. As long as we keep looking backward, we’ll never keep going forward.’<sup>744</sup> A similar pronouncement was made by the mayor of Sturgeon Falls, Ontario. Commenting on the closure of a century-old corrugated paper mill, he asserted: ‘Poor Sturgeon Falls. Boo, hoo, hoo. That was never my attitude. And I encouraged council: “let’s move on,” “let’s move forward.” “We can’t stall here.” This is our wake up call. And we have to get on with things. And that’s what’s happening.’<sup>745</sup>

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<sup>743</sup> High, MacKinnon, and Perchard, ‘Introduction,’ para 18, Kindle.

<sup>744</sup> Rhodes, ‘Youngstown’s Ghost,’ 58.

<sup>745</sup> Steven High, ‘Deindustrialisation on the Industrial Frontier: The Rise and Fall of Mill Colonialism in Northern Ontario’ in *The Deindustrialised World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, ed. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017) Chapter 12, para 38, Kindle.

‘Getting on with things’ has been publically applauded in Barnsley. Grimethorpe, for example, has been identified as the ‘mining village that hit rock bottom’ but ‘bounced back,’ and the town of Barnsley is heralded for its ‘proud resilience’ and ‘is used to hard knocks.’<sup>746</sup> These are people and places that have survived, fought, and risen above economic hardship in the face of deindustrialisation and austerity measures. However, this same ‘forward-looking emphasis’, circulating in media and political discourse, can also function as an explanatory framework for the *failures* of regeneration.<sup>747</sup> As illustrated by Tim Strangleman and his colleagues (see Chapter 1), local economic agents identified the need for cultural change in former coalfields. This same argument was present nearly two decades after pit closures in Barnsley when Steven Houghton, Barnsley Council Leader, asserted: ‘But we’ve got to regenerate the people. We’ve got to change attitudes and make the town more progressive, more self-reliant and less benefit-dependent.’<sup>748</sup>

This ‘language of forward motion’ underlying regeneration, however well-intended, can place responsibility heavily on the individual to keep up with political-economic ruptures, whilst simultaneously obscuring the structural violence inherent in ‘creative destruction.’ Accompanying the neoliberal restructuring of capitalist economies has been the economic displacement of workers. The consequences inflicted on them and subsequent generations are felt in terms of unemployment and poverty, low wages and low-skilled work, loss of benefits and pensions, as well as physical diseases, including alcohol and drugs, and depression and suicide. As Linkon argues, ‘deindustrialisation is not an event of the past. It remains an active and significant part of the present’ and ‘it cannot simply be forgotten or ignored.’<sup>749</sup> For Linkon, the past continues to haunt

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<sup>746</sup> McVeigh, ‘Grimethorpe, the mining village that hit rock bottom’; Butler, ‘Desperation and despair.’

<sup>747</sup> Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 189.

<sup>748</sup> Branson, ‘Tough Lover.’

<sup>749</sup> Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation*, 2.

the present: the ‘half-life’ is present in the ‘continuing economic and social effects of deindustrialisation’ and ‘in the slow and physical decline of working-class communities...’<sup>750</sup>

A supposed nostalgia for industrial work has further contributed to conceptions of an industrial working class who is reluctant to ‘move on’ after deindustrialisation. As Chapter 2 illustrates, my group of interviewees conveyed ambivalent attitudes towards coalmining, critically reflecting on the hazards and diseases associated with the coal industry. Nevertheless, to render a person, let alone a community, as nostalgic, is an act imbued with power. As Clarke demonstrates with factory closures in France, the national press portrayed Moulinex workers as ‘stuck in the past.’ Nostalgic renderings of people and places can prompt and justify statements, such as, ‘stop grieving and move on’ by employment advisors.<sup>751</sup> A similar point has been raised by Linkon. She illustrates that people are told by local development agencies to ‘just get over it’ or ‘stop being obsessed with the past.’<sup>752</sup>

There is an assumption that if people do so, they will somehow be better equipped in ‘embracing new opportunities’ and ‘accepting new realities.’<sup>753</sup> This line of reasoning has implications for the ways in which people recall memories and interpret experiences of deindustrialisation. As Strangleman explains, there is a body of popular literature produced from within coalfields that could be interpreted simply as ““smokestack nostalgia,” symptomatic of coalfield communities stuck in their past, unable to “just get over it.””<sup>754</sup> At the same time, he argues, this same literature could also be understood as ‘evidence of collective trauma, a loss not yet come to terms with.’<sup>755</sup>

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<sup>750</sup> Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation*, 5-6.

<sup>751</sup> Clarke, ‘Closing Time,’ 118.

<sup>752</sup> Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation*, 1.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>754</sup> Strangleman, ‘Mining a productive seam,’ 32.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid.

Whether or not a person or a group has ‘moved on’ from the loss of work and industry is a popular framework for approaching and understanding the effects of deindustrialisation. A year after Kellingley closed, the *BBC* caught up with a small group of ex-miners in a piece called ‘Kellingley Colliery: How have its miners moved on?’<sup>756</sup> This theme of ‘moving on’ interweaves with concerns of loss and trauma in deindustrial scholarship. For instance, Walkerdine and Jimenez argue that for ‘trauma to be reached, to be spoken, able to be borne and therefore to be transformed’ is ‘central to being able to move on, to change and not to get stuck within the site of trauma.’<sup>757</sup> At the same time, scholars have used this rhetoric of onward motion, often by drawing on the excerpts of their interviewees, as a way to frame workplace transitions in the context of deindustrialisation.<sup>758</sup> In one striking example, we are told by an automotive worker: ‘You go through a shutdown like anything else in life. You either accept it and move on, or not accept it and die. It was mental.’<sup>759</sup>

There is a tendency, however, for scholars to approach ‘move on’ or ‘get on’ as merely illustrative of a period of transition; as descriptive prose of acclimation, sometimes in terms of life-or-death. Their focus, and rightfully so, has been on the ways workers have resisted and responded to closures, from political protests to waves of demonstrations, or by drawing on place-based social networks in either accessing work or managing its loss. By contrast, I argue that expressions of ‘move on’ and ‘get on’ can be understood as embodied practices rooted in cultural and material contexts. In other words, these emotive utterances are not simply representative of a moment of adaptation or adjustment, but rather play an active role in how interviewees navigate and make

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<sup>756</sup> ‘Kellingley Colliery: How have its miners moved on?’, *BBC News*, December 19, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-38345709>.

<sup>757</sup> Walkerdine and Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community After De-Industrialisation*, 185-186.

<sup>758</sup> Strangleman, ‘Networks, Place and Identities,’ 257. Here, Strangleman uses the sub-heading ‘getting on’ to frame the ‘experience of the younger miners’ after pit closures.

<sup>759</sup> Steven High, ‘The Emotional Fallout of Deindustrialisation in Detroit,’ *Labour Studies in Working-Class History* 16 (2019) 138.



sense of their experiences and memories of coalfield deindustrialisation. They are, in many instances, self-instructive acts useful in adapting to the injustices and inequalities of deindustrialisation and its ‘half-life.’

Taking into consideration a politics of ‘moving on’, in conjunction with Linkon’s concept of the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation,’ this chapter explores the ways ‘move on’ and ‘get on’ interweave in the oral narratives of men’s working lives. Drawing upon the oral testimonies of ex-miners, I argue these two expressions are not simply stoic emotional responses, or ways of downplaying the effects of pit closures. Rather, they are valued practices of working-class resistance and resiliency. Firstly, they can counter the symbolic violence accompanying externalised and internalised representations of being ‘stuck in the past.’ Secondly, they are practical ways of managing the ‘internalised uncertainties’ of work and its loss. They are, at the same time, marked by important distinctions. Whilst ‘move on’ was usually expressed by interviewees when demonstrating how they overcame hardship, ‘get on’ signified an ongoing struggle of survival. Their enactment, especially when it takes on an air of inevitability, can have significant temporal, political-economic, and cultural implications.

#### ‘Moving On’ or ‘Getting On’ from Pit Closures

Notwithstanding the fact that some interviewees had worked others jobs before becoming coal miners, or that some men temporally left the coal industry during their careers as coal miners, the closure of the mines are remembered as a difficult period involving both the loss of work and workplace transitions. A miner’s eventual departure from the coal industry could be a confusing and prolonged experience. Hearing rumours about a pit closing, deciding whether to take redundancy, or transferring to another pit, fed into the messiness of ‘moving on’ from coalfield deindustrialisation.

Although men's experiences varied significantly, certain themes also surface. Many ex-miners spoke of an atmosphere of uncertainty, insisting that it was not clear if, and when, they should leave the coal industry. This sense of precariousness intensified as men sought and worked new jobs. On the one hand, cooperation coexisted alongside competition in job searches; and, on the other hand, redundancies were common in men's working lives after coalmining. Whilst stories of finding rewarding work were present, specifically with regards to social work, teaching, and childrearing, many interviewees were beset by social and economic woes after losing their mining jobs.

Stories of personal hardship were accompanied by attempts to downplay the effects of deindustrialisation in my oral history interviews. Although Harry was off work for over six-months, he said pit closures 'didn't affect me because I knew it were coming. So, you basically, prepare for it.'<sup>760</sup> After Andrew highlighted the effects of minimum pay and unemployment, both for him and his son, he also suggested 'it didn't really affect me.'<sup>761</sup> It was well over two years before Andrew worked again; he explained that it was his decision to remain unemployed. Even though both men indicated that they were not 'affected' by pit closures, they noted significant changes in their working lives that mattered insofar that they either drew on or considered drawing on dole. As Josh pointed out in his interview, 'I've had a few spells on dole [...] If all you ever got was dole, you're not going to have a good life on that.'<sup>762</sup>

A tendency for workers to minimise the individual effects of industrial closures is present in deindustrialisation literature. Steve May and Laura Morrison have argued that workers accommodated downsizing by structuring their narratives around themselves as agents rather than

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<sup>760</sup> Harry Interview.

<sup>761</sup> Andrew and Audrey Interview.

<sup>762</sup> Josh Interview.

passive victims of deindustrialisation. It is through, for instance, acts of re-identification, espousing the role of decision-maker, or approaching the future as a 'second opportunity' that they 'subtly resist' economic change and restructuring.<sup>763</sup> In a similar vein, Joy Hart and Tracy K'Meyer argue workers 'downplayed the hurtful consequences of deindustrialisation' by merging stories of loss together with more 'positive assertions and conclusions,' or by expressing concerns for their co-workers who were more susceptible to the economic effects of deindustrialisation.<sup>764</sup> Hart and K'Meyer explain how interviewees 'acknowledged the impact of the plant closings while drawing attention to their own lack of victimization.'<sup>765</sup>

Some ex-miners also indicated that their co-workers (and subsequent generations) were affected more than they were by pit closures. In some cases, they pointed to geography, as well as their own skills and qualifications. According to Dennis, 'the impact of closures hasn't been as severe as if you're living up at the end of Rhondda Valley and the pits shut.'<sup>766</sup> Duncan also said it was 'a lot worse for a lot more people' than himself, since he had a welding trade: '[I was] very, very lucky, in a way, for that trade to drop back onto...which a lot of people didn't you see.'<sup>767</sup> Moreover, Christopher 'didn't feel bound by the pit because I'd got this apprenticeship. I'd got my documents of an electrician. I'd got transferable skills. So I wouldn't be stuck with I can't do any work once I left pit cos there's nothing I can do.'<sup>768</sup>

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<sup>763</sup> Steve May and Laura Morrison, 'Making Sense of Restructuring: Narratives of Accommodation among Downsized Workers,' in *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialisation*, ed. Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott (London: Cornell University Press, 2003) 261.

<sup>764</sup> Joy L. Hart and Tracy E. K' Meyer, 'Worker Memory and Narrative: Personal Stories of Deindustrialisation in Louisville, Kentucky,' in *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialisation*, ed. Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott (London: Cornell University Press, 2003) 298.

<sup>765</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>766</sup> Dennis Interview, 2018.

<sup>767</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>768</sup> Christopher Interview.

It is plausible that Christopher and Duncan portrayed themselves as active agents, who were able to better manage workplace closures and transitions by drawing on their qualifications. It is also important to recognise that there is an element of truthfulness here. Some interviewees felt that they had to endure less hardship. This same collective consideration was prominent when interviewees reflected on the impact of the 1984-85 miners' strike. As illustrated in Chapter 4, men framed their experiences of the strike around if, for instance, their wives worked or they lived at home with their parents. From this perspective, some ex-miners may have downplayed their 'own victimization' because they saw other men and their families as having it 'a lot worse' indeed.<sup>769</sup>

There was also another way that men downplayed the individual effects of deindustrialisation without mentioning their co-workers. They did this by referring to themselves as somehow 'lucky.' For instance, Freddie explained that 'I've always, touch on wood, been alright. Luckily, if you'd like, it has not affected me in any way, shape or form.'<sup>770</sup> Oliver also referred to his advancement in the railway industry in terms of good fortune: 'I got lucky being in the right place, at the right time, with the right people.'<sup>771</sup> It was usually after assertions of 'luck' that interviewees then placed an emphasis on work ethic or skill. Whilst Luther illustrated that his job longevity in coalmining had a lot do with 'luck' and 'skill,' Ellis framed two workplace transitions around being 'lucky' before illustrating how his strong work ethic also accounted for his upward mobility in different careers.<sup>772</sup>

Whether interviewees considered themselves 'lucky' or not, there is a potential danger in conceiving of and talking about the loss of work and workplace transitions in this way, specifically in the context of the structural violence of capitalism. A discourse of good fortune can affect the

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<sup>769</sup> Josh Interview; Ernie Interview; Harry Interview; Jack Interview; and Frank Interview, 2018.

<sup>770</sup> Freddie Interview.

<sup>771</sup> Oliver Interview.

<sup>772</sup> Luther Interview; Ellis Interview.

ways workers remember, understand, and respond to deindustrialisation and its long-term effects. For instance, it can help to disguise, pardon, or normalise economic hardship and exploitation.

Similar concerns are also present in expressions of ‘moving on.’ This next section introduces and illustrates three types of narrative analysis of ‘moving on’ in my set of oral history interviews.

Firstly, a supposed preoccupation with the past is framed as constraining personal and collective development. Secondly, by contrast, transcending past hardship is used to exemplify how people or places reinvent themselves. And thirdly, the utterance itself is viewed as suffering from a contradiction, since it overlooks how those same people or places have been ‘left behind.’ These are meaningful expressions for how workers come to make sense of and cope with their memories and experiences of coalfield deindustrialisation.

### ‘Moving On’

In contrast to previous interviewees, some men framed accessing and securing work as a personality trait. When emphasising their individuality, especially by way of ‘forward thinking,’ they reinvented themselves as adaptable and flexible workers. In doing so, however, there was also a tendency for them to condemn former co-workers. Harry, for instance, distinguished himself from other men through adaptability and adjustment:

There’s people like that, that didn’t prepare themselves for anything after. They thought once pit is done they’d done. [...] But I’ve always had a head on me [refers to being a union man]. You’ve got to be forward thinking. Prepare yourself. Prepare yourself for the inevitable. Adjust and move on. And that’s my outlook on life has been: adjust, adapt, and move on.<sup>773</sup>

There is a strong element of Harry selling himself. This notion of ‘moving on’ is presented as a personal attribute, deemed necessary in managing the ‘inevitability’ of pit closures. Echoing earlier arguments put forward by councillors and economic agents, Harry points to a link between

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<sup>773</sup> Harry Interview.

inevitability and ‘moving on.’ Unlike some other men, Harry insists that he was ‘prepared’ for the future. He felt the onus, moreover, was on the individual to sort themselves out, irrespective of the political-economic processes behind coalfield deindustrialisation.

A reading of inevitability pervades Ronald’s account of pit closures. Change, whilst perhaps something he was reluctant to ‘accept’ at first, was also something he came to make sense of by insisting on the need to ‘look forward’ and ‘move on’:

Things change, so I have, so I accept that one. People don’t think you should ever change. But, yes, life is about changing. Things happen. Things then have to change and will change afterwards. So accept it and look forward...rather than living on, keep them memories, but don’t live on them. Move on.<sup>774</sup>

Memories of an industrial past were seen as important. But they were also identified as potentially restrictive in terms of personal or collective growth. It was not that Ronald was at all advocating for their dismissal. Far from it. Rather, he was critical of how the past could—or may have—a stranglehold on people’s ability to adjust and make sense of the present, since coalmining was not coming back. It was easier to come to terms with a present, albeit one in constant flux, by conceiving of coalfield deindustrialisation as an unavoidable event. There was very little that he, or anyone else, could do about it now, so it was in people’s best interest to ‘move on.’

This reoccurring motif of ‘move on’ was alluded to by Lewis and his daughter, Sophia, who later joined the interview. They both suggested that ex-miners and future generations of men and women were ‘stuck in the past’ in ex-coalfield areas.<sup>775</sup> For instance, Lewis expressed irritation with some co-workers: ‘I’m a miner and I can’t do anything else. There’s a lot like that. Some people, they can’t adjust. They just can’t adjust. Right, you’re a miner and that’s all you’re gonna be all your life. No, it don’t work like that.’<sup>776</sup>

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<sup>774</sup> Ronald Interview.

<sup>775</sup> Lewis and Sophia Interview.

<sup>776</sup> Ibid.

Despite pointing out that a ‘system had failed’ them and the ‘absolute soul had been ripped out’ of their community with pit closures, Sophia, now in her 60s, agreed with her father, insisting that it was up to people to not ‘look back[wards]’ even if there were marginal work opportunities. When I asked her what needed improvement, she insisted: ‘Attitude. The mentality. It is attitude. Well, you know, okay, so jobs are short. What are you going to do about it, then? What are *you* gonna do about it?’<sup>777</sup> There was an understanding that it was a matter of personal responsibility in overcoming a ‘failed system.’ In turn, Lewis and Sophia pointed to the ways they had done so, respectively, by Lewis moving to South Africa to work in the mines, and by Sophia returning to night school as a mature student and later working as a teacher. As Sophia illustrates, ‘We’re workers. We’re doers. We’re creators. [...] Everything has been a challenge and it’s been an opportunity. [...] That’s how we were brought up. That’s what we’ve always done. That’s always been our work ethic.’<sup>778</sup> Although there is a tendency to absolve systemic problems, whilst also laying the blame on individuals and culture, it is important to note that a sense of anger and frustration over closures not only has intensified, but has also shifted in orientation to residents.

Drawing on the term ‘diversify,’ Nick argued that his transition from working in the mines was straightforward. Apparently, this was not the case with other men. According to Nick, ‘There’s some people in our village after pit shut, after strike, after pit shut, they couldn’t diversify. They never got a job. They couldn’t diversify. [...] I don’t know if it was a mental disability effect?’<sup>779</sup> These readings appear to contradict a more collective-oriented narrative that exists in Chapter 2. For example, Nick did not qualify this remark; he previously did when he suggested he was not trying to be ‘disrespectful’ to miners upon illustrating differences in their intelligence. This may be illustrative of the tensions surrounding a dominant ideology of ‘moving on’ built on notions of

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<sup>777</sup> Lewis and Sophia Interview.

<sup>778</sup> Ibid.

<sup>779</sup> Nick Interview.

adaptability and inevitability, and flexibility and individuality. Nick was also now talking about these men *as* ex-miners rather than coal miners, signifying, perhaps, the undermining of a collective work identity. Similar criticisms fed into his perception of Barnsley: ‘who would want to invest here?’<sup>780</sup>

By contrast, some interviewees appealed to forward progress when attempting to speak more positively about Barnsley. Although he suggested that Barnsley was once ‘behind the times sort of thing,’ Chester claimed that Barnsley had ‘moved on.’<sup>781</sup> This statement was followed by a critical revaluation. For instance, Chester explained that ‘You’d always get that, you know, they wanted to work there [pit] not there [away from pit]. [...] People did not want to do that work; they wanted to do mining.’<sup>782</sup> In a striking example, Matthew aligned his own adaptability with the town’s regeneration. Juxtaposing his experiences with fellow ex-miners, he insisted: ‘It didn’t bother me when pit closed. When I left mine I just walked away. I never looked back. I didn’t even empty me locker.’<sup>783</sup> Although there was mourning in ex-coalfields, what Matthew referred to as ‘Diana syndrome,’ he explained how Barnsley, much like himself, had changed for the better: ‘Many people thought...Barnsley would become a broken town. That it would be lost. But it didn’t. It is like the Phoenix rising through the ashes.’<sup>784</sup>

Accompanying and interweaving through this rhetoric of forward progress were attempts by people to downplay and/or demonstrate how they overcame economic struggles. A paradox, however, also emerges. Whilst testimonials of adaptability and adjustment were useful in countering notions that interviewees were best by nostalgia in the present, they were simultaneously held together by stories of how other people failed to ‘diversify,’ ‘adjust,’ and/or

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<sup>780</sup> Nick Interview.

<sup>781</sup> Chester Interview.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid.

<sup>783</sup> Matthew Interview.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid.



‘prepare’ for the future. In doing so, research participants pointed to their individual qualities or mentalities, which, in turn, fed into narratives of overcoming the destruction of the coal industry. Understandably so. This kind of adversity is celebrated in media and political discourse. ‘It is incredible that the people of Grimethorpe,’ Houghton argues, ‘have stuck it out and worked their way through it.’<sup>785</sup>

Emotive utterances of ‘move on’ can either obscure or normalise the structural violence of coalfield deindustrialisation. I want to be clear here: the point is not to criticise those who espouse this ‘mentality.’ There are many workers who experience the loss of employment in terms of life-or-death: that is, literally (wages used to buy food, shelter, clothing etc.) and figuratively (as a resource of identity and belonging). Rather, my interest is to illustrate how this way of framing work and its loss further contributes to the ‘hidden injuries of class’ that many interviewees are struggling to combat during and after coalmining.<sup>786</sup>

It is also noteworthy that some ex-miners called into question a discourse of ‘moving on’ circulating in popular and political discourse. For some men, feelings of despair still resonate when they reflect on the industry that has replaced coalmining in and around the Dearne Valley. Whilst acknowledging the massive amount of work and cost put into infrastructure and land reclamation projects, Frank, who became a councillor in the area, was adamant that similar ‘skills’ and ‘wages’ have not accompanied new industries, specifically call centres, warehouses, and retail trade. He declared, in turn, that ‘time’ had not so much moved forward, but rather ‘things have gone

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<sup>785</sup> McVeigh, ‘Grimethorpe, the mining village that hit rock bottom’; Butler, ‘Desperation and despair.’

<sup>786</sup> Richard Sennett and Johnathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1972).

backwards.<sup>787</sup> In the words of Ellis, ‘it’s got to the point where you’ve got to work to live. Instead of being: you go to work to earn a bit of money to enhance your life.’<sup>788</sup>

Echoing a similar sentiment, Christopher felt his ex-mining village had been ‘forgotten’ and that the coal industry ‘had been replaced with something that can’t do the job.’<sup>789</sup> He went on to state: ‘I’m upset about it. I know it’s not just this area. You got places in the North-East that are like this. [...] It all just seems to be like, I don’t know, clockwork, winding down, and it’s almost stopped.’<sup>790</sup> For many, it seemed as though they were stuck in a time loop since coalfield deindustrialisation: ‘There was progression to be had for people that wanted it in the coal mine. I don’t see that much now,’ Christopher observed.<sup>791</sup>

Referring to zero-hour contracts, part-time, and low-paid work, Dennis argued that ‘We’re [ex-coalfield areas] still getting shit on. It’s just that nobody knows what to do about it.’<sup>792</sup> Dennis, who, like Christopher, became a teacher after coalmining, saw some ex-mining villages as suffering from a contradiction of being ‘left behind.’ He argued for the need ‘to move forward as a society, where everyone is moving forward together. Not one or two and the rest being left behind. To sit in a soup of bloody drugs and anti-social behaviour.’<sup>793</sup> These disparities, Luther indicated, had also produced ‘a rotten, rotten world.’<sup>794</sup>

In one form or another, these criticisms challenge this notion that historical change corresponds with progress. It could be argued here, as Clarke points out with ‘nostalgia for industry,’ that there

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<sup>787</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

<sup>788</sup> Ellis Interview.

<sup>789</sup> Christopher Interview.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid.

<sup>792</sup> Dennis Interview, 2016.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid.

<sup>794</sup> Luther Interview.

is a ‘rebellion against a particular manifestation of...time.’ This ‘neo-liberal time,’ Clarke argues, ‘recasts ideological differences and social conflict as temporal lag.’<sup>795</sup> What is striking, in the case of my group of interviewees, is that these critiques came from people who likely would have been identified by the public as having ‘moved on’ in the narrowest sense of the term. They had, for example, ‘reinvented’ themselves as a local councillor, a headmaster, and a special education teacher. The fact that these criticisms resonate amongst this group is, perhaps, telling of those who feel they can or cannot speak out without being labelled as ‘stuck in the past.’ Yet, there was also another means through which interviewees attempted to undercut notions of ‘moving on.’ We now turn our attention to utterances of ‘get on.’

### ‘Getting On’

In addition to these overt criticisms, interviewees subtly challenged a discourse of ‘moving on’ by referring to ‘getting on’ in their working lives after coalmining. There is certainly some overlap between these two expressions, especially when conceived of as a stoic emotional response, or as a way to counter demeaning cultural representations of ex-miners. Interviewees usage of ‘get on’ should not, however, be mistaken with a ‘new popular politics of plebeian prosperity’ of ‘getting on’ in political discourse present in the 1980s.<sup>796</sup> The fundamental tenets of this ‘new’ politics—espoused by the likes of Margaret Thatcher and by Labour Party leaders Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair—were individualism, social mobility, and aspiration. These same principles also underscore a neoliberal ideology.

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<sup>795</sup> Clarke, ‘Closing Time,’ 123.

<sup>796</sup> Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, ‘Margaret Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics,’ in *Making Thatcher’s Britain*, ed. Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 212) 138.

Inextricably linked to this politics of ‘getting on’ was also the decline of class as discourse. For instance, Thatcher argued that ‘divisions into class are outmoded and meaningless.’<sup>797</sup> Moreover, it was also argued that class as an identity had changed. In 1987, Kinnock claimed there was a ‘new working class’ of ‘ordinary people getting on.’<sup>798</sup> Here, ‘getting on’ was linked to individual aspirations and responsibility, sometimes explained through orientations of ownership. As David Harvey argues, Thatcher ‘wanted to transform peoples’ way of thinking and the whole economic culture’: ‘If we got into poverty, it was our fault. It was not the system’s fault; it was our fault. If we lost our houses to foreclosure, it was not the system’s fault, it was our fault.’<sup>799</sup>

A very different reading of ‘getting on’ is present in British historian Selina Todd’s work. In her article on class and experience, Todd argues that ‘getting on in life’ can also be understood as a fight ‘for survival, in a world where the wealth of the few appeared to depend more than ever on the exploitation of the many.’<sup>800</sup> Irrespective if people self-identify with a ‘class,’ class exists as a relationship of exploitation, constituted by and constitutive of the unequal distribution of wealth and power in society. Drawing on my set of oral history interviews, I argue that the utterance of ‘get on’ is not merely illustrative of, but rather is part of the activity/process of adapting to class-based violence. For many interviewees, ‘getting on’ was less about upward mobility or reinventing oneself, than a means through which they came to understand and experience deindustrialisation.

Interlaced with utterances of ‘get on’ were past experiences and emotional responses to those experiences. For instance, Ryan summed up his prolonged experience of pit transfers in the 1980s and 1990s by telling me: ‘you just get on with things.’<sup>801</sup> This was not a moment of resignation,

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<sup>797</sup> Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, ‘Discourses of “class” in Britain in “New Times,”’ *Contemporary British History* 31 (2017) 295.

<sup>798</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>799</sup> David Harvey, *The Anti-Capitalist Chronicles*, ed. Jordan T. Camp and Chris Caruso (London: Pluto Press, 2020) 17.

<sup>800</sup> Todd, ‘Class, experience and Britain’s twentieth century,’ 503.

<sup>801</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

either; rather, it was stated as a matter-of-fact. Over the course of this period, Ryan had moved from Barnsley to South Africa to Selby as a coal miner. This ongoing experience of adaptation was explicitly framed as being (not transcending) ‘working class’: ‘to go to work, earn a wage’ and ‘just get on with life.’<sup>802</sup>

Interviewees usually employed ‘get on’ when recounting periods of economic insecurity and vulnerability. In three separate instances, Duncan expressed ‘get on’ in his narrative about pit closures and work afterwards. Any desire to still work in the mines was repeatedly curbed by the realisation that you ‘just had to put up with it and get on with life. Get on with it. So you had to just look forward, didn’t ye? [...] You just had to get on with it.’<sup>803</sup> ‘Putting up with it’ contrasts with earlier remarks that approached deindustrialisation as a prideful experience of overcoming adversity. There was also hesitation in Duncan’s voice, a point further reinforced when he looked to me for reassurance by asking: ‘didn’t ye?’ By telling me (and himself) repeatedly to ‘get on with it’ was also a way Duncan navigated moments of uncertainty and hardship in his working life.

A sense of having to manage and survive pit closures is present in James’ and Christopher’s oral testimonies. James explained that it was tough to see ex-miners who struggled with pit closures; he described these men as ‘not the same people’ and that ‘there’s no life in them [now].’<sup>804</sup> In turn, James illustrated that it was personally hard to ‘get on’ afterwards: ‘But you got to get on with things, ain’t ye? Make best of what you can. Them that’d been there long. Think, I did 15 years and I found it hard. Think of them that’d been there like 30 years. How hard it must have been for them to adapt.’<sup>805</sup> In a similar vein, Christopher said ‘people are just about managing around here’

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<sup>802</sup> Ryan and Maureen Interview.

<sup>803</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>804</sup> James Interview.

<sup>805</sup> Ibid.

and, 'like a lot of mining communities, I think that we've got a lot of potential with regards to a workforce that is ready and willing.'<sup>806</sup>

Although a far more sympathetic tone infuses these two accounts, an evaluative judgement could accompany expressions of 'get on'. In the words of Ernie,

Some people might have just said that's end of that and just give up...and never work again. Whereas it just depends on, like, how your head is screwed on. I couldn't do that. I had to get on. I got to keep carrying on. I couldn't sit back. Got to carry on. Always had a job. Always paper round. Used to go shooting. Beating. Working on market, carpet stall. I always earned a coin.<sup>807</sup>

In the simplest sense of the term, 'getting on' simply meant finding another job to 'earn a coin.' According to Ernie, some people were better equipped in withstanding longer bouts of economic displacement. Yet, the self-explanatory nature of 'get on,' similar to 'move on,' is also striking twofold. First, they can use it without further explanation. It is an effective way to summarise (and avoid talking about) their work experiences. And second, it is self-explanatory, in the sense, that this is also something they told/tell themselves repeatedly if, and when, recounting their memories and experiences of material and emotional hardship.

As Ernie later illustrates, 'getting on' could involve silencing the self. When he finally found employment, he felt that he could not talk about how his new job was taking a toll on his body from travel, boredom, and physical work. If one was to do so, Ernie explained, they would likely hear: 'I don't know what's up with him?' 'What do you mean you don't like it?' 'He's got a job hasn't he?'<sup>808</sup> In turn, Ernie explained that this was a period in his working life where: 'I just got to go up and down and just get on with it because it were a bad time for everybody.'<sup>809</sup>

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<sup>806</sup> Christopher Interview.

<sup>807</sup> Ernie Interview.

<sup>808</sup> Ibid.

<sup>809</sup> Ibid.

Whilst this could be interpreted as a moment where men were ‘wary of disclosing their circumstances for fear that they would be resented or denigrated by others,’ it is also illustrative of how men managed difficult moments in their working lives.<sup>810</sup> Ex-miners responded to and made sense of hardship, involving the loss of work, by telling themselves to ‘get on,’ that is, push forward and grind it out. Here, we are also presented with a similar narrative of an inevitable movement forward. But this is propelled by a sense of resiliency and powerlessness. Interviewees appeared less ‘stuck in the past’ than trapped in an ongoing process, marked by ebbs and flows, of adaptation and adjustment to the immediate and long-term effects of coalfield deindustrialisation.

There were, for instance, some men who took pride in their ability to cope with the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation.’<sup>811</sup> Luther ‘proudly’ asserted that ‘I’m one of life’s survivors,’ because ‘we today are the sufferers of that [deindustrialisation] situation.’<sup>812</sup> When illustrating how Barnsley and its surrounding areas had been affected by, for example, drugs and crime, despair and anger, and low-skilled and low-wage work, Luther doubled down on a collective sense of resiliency: ‘At the end of the day, the majority of Barnsley people are quite gritty, and, which, which I’m proud of that. [...] We’ve dragged ourselves out of the swamp.’<sup>813</sup>

For other interviewees, however, people in the area, especially a younger generation of workers, were identified as lacking resiliency. Akin to other ex-miners, Edward offered a matter-of-fact response to the closure of the industry: ‘It’s just, that’s life, things change, and you getting on and everything.’<sup>814</sup> Edward respected people’s ability to manage difficult work conditions. Although

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<sup>810</sup> Chas Critcher, Bella Dicks, and David Waddington, ‘Portrait of Despair,’ *New Statesman and Society*, October 23, 1992, 16.

<sup>811</sup> Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation*, 1.

<sup>812</sup> Luther Interview.

<sup>813</sup> Ibid.

<sup>814</sup> Edward Interview.

Edward was critical of the work opportunities, specifically in terms of pay, available to young men, he criticised their supposed inability to ‘get on’ with work:

You get young lads now that come in here [working men’s club] and owt like that, they won’t, they won’t stick that work like we did. They just wouldn’t have it. They always go in factories, warehouses now: ‘I’m not fucking wearing that.’ A couple hours, they’ll pack it in. Because they just don’t want to work, for me. Simple as that. There’s no pride in thyself. When we were young if you didn’t have a job, they used to say thy were an idle bastard. And they used to stick it out.<sup>815</sup>

‘Getting on’ or ‘sticking it out,’ in this specific example, was imbued with a sense of pride.<sup>816</sup> It was, in part, also how some men responded to and, ultimately, made sense of dangerous and deadly work in the pits. If they did not, as Duncan previously indicated, ‘it could play on your mind.’<sup>817</sup> As illustrated in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, camaraderie was a way men managed, generated, and altered emotional states. At the same time, interviewees still recalled moments of coalmining where they had to ‘get on’ with difficult work conditions that may or may not have involved camaraderie.<sup>818</sup> From this perspective, ‘getting on’ did not begin or end with coalfield deindustrialisation. An embodied legacy of exploitative work infuses the way interviewees make sense of and how they respond to their past experiences and memories of deindustrialisation.

‘Getting on’ with life, particularly in the context of work, is inextricably linked to a class and gender identity, which usually coalesced around men having to work ‘for a living’ and ‘provide’ for their families.<sup>819</sup> It is this cultural identity that has been exploited by local councils and economic agents in an effort to attract capital investment in ex-coalfield localities: ‘The *tradition* here is to get on with the job...’<sup>820</sup> This can be read, as Strangleman et al. illustrate, as complementary of a culture of

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<sup>815</sup> Edward Interview.

<sup>816</sup> Many Interviewees.

<sup>817</sup> Duncan Interview.

<sup>818</sup> Ellis Interview; Ben Interview; and Freddie Interview.

<sup>819</sup> Many Interviewees.

<sup>820</sup> Strangleman et al., ‘Heritage Work,’ 5.4.



‘resiliency’ and ‘adaptability.’<sup>821</sup> There is also a much darker reading if we take into consideration interviewees’ experiences of ‘getting on.’ What is, perhaps, also being advertised, inadvertently or not, is that deindustrialised coalfields were ripe for exploiting workers’ vulnerabilities and suffering, because of their history of withstanding tough and harmful work. They are, then, to quote Dennis, perfect areas to ‘shit on’ with low-wage or low-skilled work. If people are reluctant to work these jobs, or regeneration efforts are unsuccessful, they can always be labelled as ‘stuck in the past’ and unable to ‘move on.’

Similar to utterances of ‘move on,’ expressions of ‘get on’ can be interpreted as stoic emotional responses to men’s experiences and memories of pit closures, workplace transitions, and the legacy of deindustrialisation. Unlike ‘move on,’ however, ‘get on’ was usually framed as an ongoing activity, rather than a single moment or thing of achievement. It was more about living through than overcoming economic insecurity, vulnerability, and violence. When interviewees pointed this out they subtly resisted notions of ‘moving on.’ This chapter concludes by thinking about the temporal, social and cultural, and political effects of ‘moving on’ and ‘getting on’ in the context of the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation’ and its implications for moral economy arguments.

### Conclusion

This chapter examines the uses and meanings of ‘move on’ and ‘get on’ in oral history interviews with former miners and their family members. Whilst these emotive utterances usually thread through stories about pit closures and its long-term effects, it would be a mistake, I argue, to approach them as narrative conventions that simply summarise stories of resiliency and adaptability. On the contrary, these utterances can also be understood as self-instructive activities that are part of the process of adaptation and adjustment to class-based injustices and inequalities.

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<sup>821</sup> Strangleman et al., ‘Heritage Work,’ 5.4.

In many cases, ‘get on’ or ‘move on’ is what displaced workers tell themselves and other people, because of its self-explanatory nature, with the more detailed accounts of oppression and exploitation falling by the wayside. It is important to remember that the interview is the unique part of this interaction. For instance, ‘get on’ was a popular utterance invoked by men whom I spoke with prior to doing interviews. I heard it in the working men’s club, town centre, and/or in taxi rides. ‘Getting on’ or ‘moving on’ is how many interviewees get their heads around their memories and experiences of economic insecurity, exploitation, and violence. This may be useful in either avoiding the topic, retaining a sense of pride in the face of hardship, or managing their emotional encounters with the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation.’

At the same time, it is through these utterances that people’s memories of deindustrialisation and their experiences of its long-term effects *can* also become engrossed in a sense of inevitability, paralleling the emotional prescriptions of ‘moving on’ circulating in political and media discourse on ‘post-industrial’ transformations. If, and when, these emotive utterances manifest signs of an inevitable movement forward, they can affect the ways in which people construct memory and narrate past experiences in the present in ways that unwittingly accommodate structural violence. It is my contention that the present ‘half-life of deindustrialisation’ is not simply evident through the lasting effects of deindustrialisation, but it is also ‘active’ in the formation and reproduction of narratives, memories, and experiences of ‘moving on’ or ‘getting on.’ In this scenario, the ‘half-life’ can also be thought of as being a consequential part of the *past*, because it can haunt how people remember and narrate stories of pit closures in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.<sup>822</sup>

This is evident in two ways, for example. Firstly, this rhetoric of ‘moving on,’ employed by politicians, economists, and journalists, is a useful political tool: on the one hand, it masks or blurs

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<sup>822</sup> Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation*, 2.

the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation,’ and on the other hand, it demarcates what *is* or is *not* the past. It not only seeks to establish temporal boundaries for deindustrialisation, but also suggests that the past is only active in the present because of people’s preoccupation with it. The material and embodied legacies of deindustrialisation are rendered silent with a primary emphasis on cultural and psychological factors. This matters insofar that it can affect the ways interviewees understand and articulate socio-economic change. There was a tendency for a group of my interviewees to cite their ‘mentalities’ when accounting for why they (and not others) were better equipped to cope with the consequences of deindustrialisation. Part of coping often meant conceiving of industrial closures as unavoidable events that ex-miners and their families simply needed to ‘move on’ from.

This powerful (and exploitative) discourse of ‘moving on’ together with inevitability supports capitalist development. Although this political rhetoric and ideology can influence how interviewees make sense of and narrate their past experiences, they are not merely subjects, as Michael Roper reminds us, ‘onto which cultural processes are then inscribed.’<sup>823</sup> In other words, ex-miners have not simply come to think of deindustrialisation as inevitable because they have been told so by ‘experts’ and authoritative figures in political, cultural, and economic spheres.

This brings us to a second point that concerns the dynamic relationship between the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation,’ emotion and embodiment, and a sense of inevitability. My interviewees’ experiences of deindustrialisation did not cease when the pits closed in the 1980s and 1990s. They were felt and present ‘in internalised uncertainties,’ as many tried to ‘diversify,’ ‘adapt,’ and ‘adjust’ to unemployment and poverty, job insecurities and redundancies, or workplace transitions and loss at work, from wages to mobility to camaraderie, long after the pits closed in South Yorkshire.<sup>824</sup>

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<sup>823</sup> Roper, ‘Slipping Out of View’, 58.

<sup>824</sup> Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation*, 6.

Emotive utterances of ‘move on’ and ‘get on’ are part of an active (ongoing) experience of adaptation to the aftermath of deindustrialisation. People not only instruct themselves to think and act this way, but it is also how they come to remember, understand, and feel through its effects. Underlying emotional responses of ‘moving on’ and ‘getting on’ is an embodied subjectivity and feelings of, on the one hand, resiliency and recovery, and on the other hand, powerlessness and inevitability. It is through these ‘lived experiences and the emotional responses to those experiences,’ however, that deindustrialisation becomes remembered and constructed as inevitable.<sup>825</sup> A prevailing sense and feeling of inevitability in the present can (and does) permeate people’s recollections of the past. Here, I argue, that time can also flow backwards from the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation,’ influencing the ways in which people construct memory and narrate their experiences of industrial closures as moments of ‘getting on’ and ‘moving on.’ The ‘half-life,’ as a result, can be understood according to a second kind of temporality where so-called inevitable experiences in the present mediate people’s memories and interpretations of the past.

Conceiving of the past, in this case, deindustrialisation, as inevitable has an emotional significance for some ex-miners in the present. For example, inevitability can make the ‘loss’ of work more tolerable or feel less intense; it can mitigate feelings of guilt or shame over taking early redundancies; or it can motivate people to ‘reinvent’ themselves or help them survive through ongoing suffering and struggle. To put it simply, ‘moving on’ and ‘getting on’ are organising concepts that shape (and are shaped by) lived experiences. At the same time, however, conceiving of deindustrialisation as inevitable is politically dangerous, since it can mask, confine, or erase hardships and dislocations brought on by political-economic processes. How interviewees then manage the embodied effects and emotional experiences of the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation’ has

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<sup>825</sup> Roper, ‘Slipping Out of View,’ 65-66.

the paradoxical effect of normalising and accommodating the structural violence of deindustrialisation (capitalism) that workers are trying to overcome and survive in the first place.

It is my contention that ‘just get on with it’ is a far more prevailing response—especially after political defeat in the form of the 1984-85 miners’ strike—than collective forms of organisation or mobilisation. Whilst protests and demonstrations over pit closures continued into the 1990s, in particular, through Women Against Pit Closures, very few of the men whom I spoke with mentioned being involved in combatting pit closures after the strike.<sup>826</sup> As High puts it, ‘One might even say that the emotional fallout of deindustrialisation made collective resistance all the more unlikely...as it led to cynicism and disillusionment.’<sup>827</sup> A similar reading can be applied to ex-miners because of their prolonged experiences of coalfield deindustrialisation, and an emotional legacy of betrayal and anger, feeding into growing disillusionment with parliamentary politics and the European Union.

But, perhaps, more importantly, memories and experiences of deindustrialisation are also being mediated now through the prisms of ‘move on’ and ‘get on.’ This can coexist and conflict with previous moral economy arguments. Citing the work of Andrew Sayer, a moral economy ‘embodies norms and sentiments regarding the responsibilities and the rights of individuals and institutions with respect to others.’<sup>828</sup> As Jim Phillips illustrates with coalfield deindustrialisation in 1970s Scotland, the ‘withdrawal of industry was a major transgression of communal expectations, breaching the moral economy rules’ that brought together economic security, stable employment, and consultation rights of workers.<sup>829</sup> Whilst a moral outrage over a sense of abandonment and

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<sup>826</sup> See David Waddington, Bella Dicks, and Chas Critcher, ‘Community Responses to Pit Closure in the Post-strike Era,’ *Community Development Journal* 29 (1994).

<sup>827</sup> High, ‘The Emotional Fallout,’ 146.

<sup>828</sup> Andrew Sayer, ‘Moral Economy and Political Economy,’ quoted in High, Lachlan, and Perchard, para 4, Kindle.

<sup>829</sup> Phillips, ‘The Moral Economy of Deindustrialization in Post-1945 Scotland,’ last para, Kindle.

betrayal proliferates ex-coalfields, it is also interlaced with what can be called ‘moral sentiments’ of ‘moving on’ or ‘getting on.’<sup>830</sup> This cannot simply be explained by the ‘moral economic values’ that feature in the ‘types of classical political economy expressed by Thatcherites and other twentieth century neoliberals.’<sup>831</sup> These sentiments are also practiced and embodied in the ways workers remember, understand, and resist the ‘internalised uncertainties’ of deindustrialisation and its aftermath.

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<sup>830</sup> See Andrew Sayer, *The Moral Significance of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Chapter 6: ‘Moral and immoral sentiments and class.’

<sup>831</sup> Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard, ‘Afterword: Debating Deindustrialisation,’ *The Deindustrialised World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, ed. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017) para 12, Kindle.

## Conclusion

### **Understanding Social and Cultural Change: Historical Notes on Camaraderie and Deindustrialisation**

This thesis uses life and oral history as the primary body of evidence to examine the socio-cultural history of coalmining and coalfield deindustrialisation. Using an oral and life history approach, in conjunction with drawing on the methodological tools and insights from the history of emotions, this study offers a contribution to understanding the emotional experience and legacy of deindustrialisation. It makes two specific interventions in the field of historical and deindustrial scholarship. The first approaches camaraderie as a historical topic worthy of its own study and puts the term camaraderie to use conceptually rather than merely descriptively. The second illustrates that the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation’ can be considered according to a second kind of temporality, in which time flows backwards from so-called inevitable experiences in the present into the memory and narration of deindustrialisation.

Our objective in this conclusion is to restate and think through some of the key arguments and concepts raised in this thesis. It is divided into two sections. The first unpacks the implications of camaraderie for future work on the history of coalmining and research on labour in the humanities and social sciences more generally. The second locates the concept of deindustrialisation and its ‘half-life’ within the context of Brexit. It concludes by using the example of the Brexit vote to reflect on connecting themes such as emotion and deindustrialisation, and class and representation.

### Camaraderie: An Analytical Tool for Exploring Social and Cultural Change

There is an inextricable link between camaraderie, emotion, and labour in men’s oral history interviews. It can be thought of in three ways. Firstly, camaraderie can be likened to a discourse or a feeling rule. In the pits, there were emotional norms and standards that were imbricated with a set of social rules and moral codes, governing people’s attitudes, feelings, and behaviour at work.

Sayings such as ‘everybody looked out for one another’ and ‘everybody watched each other’s back’ can be understood as emotional prescriptions. These feeling rules, whilst they reflect and constitute camaraderie, do not, however, adequately capture men’s emotional experiences of camaraderie.

Secondly, camaraderie can be understood as an emotional response to dangerous and deadly work conditions. Working underground in the coal mines engendered extraordinary sensory experiences, involving a combination of fear, anxiety, and pain over being injured or killed. Camaraderie, then, was framed as an activity or practice through which workers managed and coped with the emotional effects of mining work. It was an affective practice insofar that it was a way workers survived, physically and mentally, exploitative work. Yet, arising from these practices were a wide range of emotional experiences of pride, mutual respect and trust, and intimacy in men’s working lives.

This brings us to the third point. This thesis argues that camaraderie can also be considered as an ‘emotional practice’ that was important in mobilising, communicating, and regulating ways of feeling and being. In this scenario, emotions do not simply follow, but also activate ‘habits’ or ‘rituals’ of camaraderie.<sup>832</sup> To put it simply, emotions should also be thought of as causes of camaraderie. A closer look at the ways ex-miners talk about camaraderie as an affective workplace practice reveals that it was more than a way of coping with pains, fears, and anxieties at work. What is motivating camaraderie brings us to a history of experience/expression of, on the one hand, pride, respect, and trust, and on the other, anger, betrayal, and shame. It was an affective practice that could induce and alter men’s emotional states, which oscillated between integration and alienation, sometimes alleviating and other times aggravating feelings at and about work.

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<sup>832</sup> Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice,’ 193.



Camaraderie is conceptualised as a social process constituted by repeated affective workplace activities, including—though not limited to—looking out for workplace hazards, coming to the aid or assistance of co-workers, and exchanges of banter between workers. Re-thinking camaraderie as an ‘emotional practice’ means taking seriously the role of culture, history, and the body in human relationships and experiences. For instance, miners learnt how to do camaraderie through both the dissemination of experiential knowledge and the production of bodily knowledge; it was contingent on the material environment (the coal mine), social context (relations, interactions, and identities), cultural expectations (traditions and customs), and performance (expression and experience). Insofar that it was constitutive of cultural and bodily knowledge, camaraderie could become an automatic or reflexive practice.

By turning our attention to these skilful, embodied workplace practices, this thesis draws out intersections between camaraderie and emotion, masculinity, and class in men’s lived experiences of work. Camaraderie made lasting changes in men’s minds/bodies that did not simply vanish with industrial closures. It is through this framework that we later came to understand the decline and/or loss of camaraderie as part of a class experience of deskilling that was accompanied by changes in emotion and emotionality. What pride felt like, what respect felt like, what male intimacy felt like, for example, changed when practices of camaraderie were opposed, ineffective, or transformed inside or outside of the coal industry. As Monique Scheer reminds us, emotions can change ‘because the practices in which they are embodied, and bodies themselves, undergo transformation.’<sup>833</sup>

Expressions of sorrow over the loss of camaraderie should be located within the context of deskilling and deindustrialisation. The decline of camaraderie affected the ways interviewees

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<sup>833</sup> Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice,’ 220.

navigated and negotiated workplace transitions, communicated with their co-workers and to themselves who they are, and cultivated and resisted collective work experiences underscored by intimacy, security, and mutuality, and exploitation, insecurity, and domination. A historical analysis of camaraderie reveals its importance as a skilful practice that could produce and modify ways of feeling that were discerned as vital in the constitution of self and a sense of collective identity.

An examination of men's lived experiences of coalmining camaraderie has contributed to our conceptual understanding of camaraderie and vice versa. Might, then, an analytical approach to camaraderie afford perspective into labour history and the history of emotions? A closer look at the role of camaraderie, with a focus on emotions or emotional practices, can offer novel ways of thinking about labour alongside identity, experience, and change.

Firstly, camaraderie can provide a framework for analysing the relationship between the individual and the collective. For example, it can help us understand the ways collectivities are instituted and maintained. Affective workplace relations and practices not only arose from common work experiences of insecurity, disaffection, and exploitation, but they also helped cultivate collective experiences of security, fulfilment, and mutuality. But how a sense of mutuality and/or security was encountered and experienced could also vary according to the individual. A closer look at workers' own motivations and evaluations, and their emotional experiences and the investments they made in camaraderie can help us better understand subjectivity formation. As this study illustrates, collective integration could involve contentious and alienating experiences at work.

Identity and difference has been foregrounded in recent scholarship on deindustrialisation. Whilst studies have drawn attention to the tensions between a set of 'shared moral values' and 'occupational divisions' along the lines of race, gender, and ethnicity, camaraderie is overlooked in

‘the exclusion of those who did not conform to traditions and values.’<sup>834</sup> This is, in large part, because of the tendency to conceive of camaraderie in terms of cooperation and fellowship rather than with conflict and antagonism. There is a propensity for nostalgic and simplistic renderings of camaraderie, with less positive relations and experiences falling by the wayside, in both storytelling and scholarship.

Rather than look outward to address this hurdle, I argue that camaraderie may be an important tool for thinking through how identity and difference emerge historically. By conceiving of camaraderie dialectically, with both positive and negative qualities, we can better confront the ‘apparent construction of occupational cohesiveness’ in workers’ memories and experiences of industrial work and the loss of work.<sup>835</sup>

Camaraderie is, for example, coloured by tensions and contradictions. Cohesiveness is usually, if not always, entwined with real or, at the very least, potential conflict. On the one hand, collaboration in the coal mines rested on and was forged through the ways workers were dominated and exploited at work. And on the other hand, cohesiveness was often built by and through establishing divisions between workers, sometimes in a jocular manner, and other times through alienation and exclusion. The latter has major implications for how workers handle and confront the former and vice versa.

Camaraderie can accommodate academic interest in identity and difference, together with a class analysis of the collective working experience that takes into consideration the labour process, the ways capital control and dominate labour, and how workers resist, adapt, and acquiesce to an

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<sup>834</sup> High, MacKinnon, and Perchard, ‘Afterword,’ para 13, Kindle.

<sup>835</sup> Ibid.

exploitative and coercive labour process. It is important to remember that many interviewees did not yearn to extract coal, but rather missed the ways in which they tackled and handled their class situations.

This brings us to a second and final point. Deindustrialisation, as Jim Tomlinson argues, has 'brought about such a range of profound changes, that it provides the best underpinning narrative for understanding late twentieth-century Britain.'<sup>836</sup> Camaraderie may be a useful tool for understanding social and cultural change over the *longue durée* of deindustrialisation. It is worth considering two potential avenues of research.

The first concerns the history of coalmining and industry. This study examines changes and continuities of camaraderie from the 1980s onwards, situating itself within the context of the 1984-85 miners' strike and the privatisation of the coal industry in the 1990s. Although it attends to the ways culture, location, and history intersect with emotional practices of camaraderie, it does not address the ways in which camaraderie changed (and remained the same) dating back to the 1950s. It is, perhaps, susceptible to criticisms that it treats camaraderie as an unchanging phenomenon up to the yearlong strike. I have tried to manage this by illustrating how any desire to return to coalmining, based on camaraderie, was often constructed around a selective set of memories and experiences, which could be assembled at one pit or spread across a group of pits during a coal miner's working life.

Nonetheless, questions remain regarding the history of camaraderie. For example, how might have shifts in the labour process brought on by mechanisation, or pit transfers through the rationalisation of the coal industry affect the ways miners expressed/experienced camaraderie from

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<sup>836</sup> Tomlinson, 'De-industrialisation Not Decline,' 76.

the 1950s to 1970s? This would, of course, require us to investigate how miners talk about their emotional experiences and investments they made in camaraderie by looking at life history evidence or reading official sources against the grain. Did motivations of camaraderie change? Did workers evaluate camaraderie differently? Did the meanings, uses, and acts of camaraderie change and, if so, in what ways and with what emotional effects? Is it possible that some miners felt there was *also* a decline of camaraderie with socio-economic and cultural change during this period? These questions matter insofar that they further challenge us to take seriously historical practices and experiences of camaraderie.

The second potential avenue of research concerns examining the loss and continuity of camaraderie, that further integrates the history of emotions, in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Notwithstanding the fact that notions of a 'lost' camaraderie help support arguments that it is an end product of deindustrialisation, thereby presenting challenges to continuities, it is a useful way for understanding social and cultural change. In particular, it is useful in thinking through the specific character of work and emotionality at a specific time and place. The decay of camaraderie was not only felt through structural shifts in British industry, but also when a 'gut feeling' or 'intuition' felt out of place in and outside of the coal industry.<sup>837</sup> For many miners, moral reasoning was justified on the grounds that practices of camaraderie felt appropriate.

What is being left behind, for many interviewees, are particular ways of doing emotions that are bound together by the body and culture and time and place. The absence of camaraderie is often associated with emotional experiences at work that no longer exist. For historians of emotions, camaraderie, on the one hand, may be a useful tool for reconstructing 'lost' feelings 'comprised of

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<sup>837</sup> Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) Chapter 4, Para 10, Kindle.

cognition, sensation, experience and emotion.<sup>838</sup> Ways of knowing the meanings and expressions, and the causes and effects, of emotion change with deindustrialisation. And on the other hand, paradoxically, camaraderie may be a useful tool for examining how the past has a lasting effect on the body. Part of the enduring impact of deindustrialisation is the embodied and emotional legacy of camaraderie. A closer look at not only the absent-presence of camaraderie, but also changes and continuities in affective workplace practices (discursively and materially) is ripe for historical investigation into the relationship between labour and emotion from the late twentieth century to the present.

### Deindustrialisation, Brexit, and the Working Class

There remains in the present, to quote Sherry Lee Linkon, a ‘half-life of deindustrialisation.’<sup>839</sup> As this thesis illustrates, many ex-miners and their family members make sense of and respond to pit closures and its long-term effects through notions and practices of ‘moving on’ and getting on.’ Part of doing so has involved talking about or conceiving of deindustrialisation as an inevitable event in British history. Notwithstanding the historical and political implications of this, there are practical reasons for doing so that involve evaluative aspects of their emotional life and material existence. A sense of inevitability can help thwart or mitigate ways of being that are deemed detrimental in overcoming and/or surviving the structural violence of coalfield deindustrialisation and its aftermath.

At the same time, feelings of inevitability and powerlessness can exacerbate a mood of working-class anger and betrayal that manifests itself through the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation.’ This study ends by using the example of the Brexit vote to reflect on this legacy of deindustrialisation

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<sup>838</sup> Boddice, *The History of Emotions*, Chapter 4, Para 10, Kindle.

<sup>839</sup> Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation*, 2.

alongside themes of emotion, representation, and class that are raised in this thesis. It shows two ways in which the legacy of deindustrialisation intersects with Brexit and its emotional fallout. On the one hand, it argues that feelings of betrayal and of being 'left-behind' are exploited by those who promulgated a political campaign to leave the EU. And on the other, it argues that Brexit has led to similar characterisations of 'backwardness' of (white) working-class people, and similar attempts by those accused of it to counter misrepresentations. It was within this context of Brexit that issues of race and ethnicity featured and intersected with the language of class in my set of oral history interviews.

In 2019, Nigel Farage, Brexit Party Leader, visited the Highstone Road working men's club in an ex-mining community in Barnsley, who had the largest turnout rate at 69.9 per cent and second highest leave rate at 68.3 per cent in South Yorkshire.<sup>840</sup> At his campaign rally, Farage capitalised on a familiar rhetoric of 'betrayal' and a legacy of denigration that permeates many deindustrialised areas. In doing so, he framed this persuasive language through a lens of party politics, border control (immigration), and a second referendum, telling people in attendance that Labour 'betrayed communities like this' and regards them as 'stupid little people.'<sup>841</sup>

A similar (and connecting) trend is evident in the popular discourse of being 'left behind.' Both the Brexit and Trump campaigns, writes Gurinder K Bhambra, exploited 'conceptions of the past as the basis for political claims in the present.'<sup>842</sup> They did so by establishing 'the past as constituted by nations that were represented as "white" into which racialised others had insinuated themselves

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<sup>840</sup> 'EU referendum: South Yorkshire backs Brexit campaign,' *BBC News*, June 24, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-36617899>.

<sup>841</sup> Paul Whitehouse, 'Brexit Party leader Nigel Farage tells Barnsley constituents: "Labour has betrayed communities like this,"' *Yorkshire Post*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/politics/brexit-party-leader-nigel-farage-tells-barnsley-constituents-labour-has-betrayed-communities-1746817>.

<sup>842</sup> Gurinder K Bhambra, 'Brexit, Trump, and "Methodological Whiteness": On the Misrecognition of Race and Class,' *The British Journal of Sociology* 68 (2017) 214.

and gained disproportionate advantage.<sup>843</sup> The structural violence of capitalism, in this case, unequal access to social, economic, and cultural resources, was explained as ‘unjust’ competition between ethnic groups: the ‘white’ working class and racialised others.<sup>844</sup> Attempts to bring ‘class’ into the picture often signified a process of racialisation; class was turned into a ‘white identity’ that was also jockeying for position in the sphere of identity politics.

A mood of betrayal and abandonment stemming from deindustrialisation and its aftermath has been exploited by politicians, media, and other commentators for political (and economic) purposes. Whilst racism is unquestionably present amongst some Leave voters in ex-mining areas (as we will see below), issues over immigration and sovereignty were the prominent frameworks available for the working class to express their frustrations. As Costas Lapavistas argues, people’s anger ‘is rarely expressed simply or directly in social affairs. It is almost always a mediated process, and it is impossible to predict the spill-over point.’<sup>845</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the history of neoliberal capitalism was unavailable as a popular framework of explanation. Nor were the cultural factors surrounding identity and place somehow separate from class-based experiences of precarious work, stagnating wages and disposable incomes, an increasing inequality in the wealth gap since the 1970s, sustained austerity measures and strains on welfare provision, and the unaccountability of political and economic elites. The rejection of the EU also brought together material factors, highlighting the interrelationship between processes of deindustrialisation, neoliberalism, and Brexit.

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<sup>843</sup> Bhambra, ‘Brexit, Trump, and Methodological Whiteness,’ 214.

<sup>844</sup> In the Runnymede volume, ‘Who Cares about the White Working Class?’, the contributors argue that whilst the ‘white’ working class are discriminated against, it is not because of their race. See Kjartan Páll Sveinsson, ‘Who Cares about the White Working Class?’ *Runnymede*, ed. Kjartan Páll Sveinsson, January 2009.

<sup>845</sup> Costas Lapavistas, ‘Why They Left,’ *Jacobin*, July 7, 2016, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/07/brexit-eu-uk-referendum-leave-remain-labour-corbyn-immigration-ukip-tory-sovereignty>.



Yet, the power of culturally-based frameworks (identity and place) in shaping voter patterns were foregrounded by members of the media and public. They usually drew severe contempt towards (white) working-class people who voted to leave the EU. According to many ‘remain’ political commentators, these were men and women who had been duped by the lies of Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, and Farage.<sup>846</sup> Calls to hold this group accountable were often accompanied and superseded by inclinations to denigrate working-class communities identified as ‘strong’ leavers.

Despite the fact that the white middle-class, primarily based in southern England, played a prominent role in the vote to leave the EU, the predominantly working-class district of Barnsley, for example, was seen as a promising place to field news reports, quickly transforming into a post-Brexit laboratory.<sup>847</sup> In an attempt to ‘understand’ why and how people voted to leave, Channel 4 News enlisted reporters to Barnsley.<sup>848</sup> The first result was infamous. An interviewee featured in this news item was filmed telling a reporter: ‘It’s all about immigration. It’s about stopping Muslims coming into this country. Simple as that. To stop immigration. The movement of people in Europe fair enough. But not from Africa, Syria, Iraq, everywhere else, it’s all wrong.’<sup>849</sup>

This xenophobic remark, in conjunction with a tweet by the reporter that read ‘Been standing here five minutes. Three different people have shouted “send them home,”’ was later picked up by news outlets globally.<sup>850</sup> Whilst the *Washington Post* and *Huffington Post* each ran a story on the

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<sup>846</sup> Nick Cohen, ‘There are liars and then there’s Boris Johnson and Michael Gove,’ *Guardian*, June 25, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/25/boris-johnson-michael-gove-eu-liars>.

<sup>847</sup> Danny Dorling, ‘Brexit: The decision of a divided country,’ Danny Dorling’s Website, accessed June 25, 2021, <http://www.dannydorling.org/?p=5568>.

<sup>848</sup> ‘Barnsley voters explain why they voted to leave,’ *Channel 4 News*, June 24, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/Channel4News/videos/10153842562976939>; ‘Barnsley voted overwhelmingly to leave the European Union,’ *Channel 4 News*, October 20, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/Channel4News/videos/1454239284654010>; and Liz Bates, ‘What do voters in Leave-leaning Barnsley make of Johnson’s election plan?’ *Channel 4 News*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.channel4.com/news/what-do-voters-in-leave-leaning-barnsley-make-of-johnsons-election-plan>.

<sup>849</sup> ‘Barnsley voters explain why they voted to leave.’

<sup>850</sup> Ciaran Jenkins (@C4Ciaran), ‘Been standing here five minutes. Three different people have shouted “send them home,”’ Twitter, June 24, 2016, 6.59 a.m., ET, <https://twitter.com/C4Ciaran/status/746296567838216192>.

exchange, *Time Magazine* featured the tweet in an article entitled ‘Surge in Hate Crimes in the U.K. Following U.K.’s Brexit Vote.’<sup>851</sup> Although the news item featured only four interviewees who voted to leave—one, who felt the EU affected democratic mechanisms of the nation-state, and another two people, who invoked ‘authentic’ Britishness—it was viewed by many as representative of the cultural backwardness of working-class people and places, particularly those areas suffocated by their industrial and colonial histories.

Accompanying the 2016 (and 2017) news piece by Channel 4 was fury and vitriol by social commentators. Vote leavers were characterised as ‘stupid,’ ‘fools,’ ‘retards,’ and ‘uneducated’; as ‘shameful,’ ‘horrible,’ and ‘uncivilised’; as ‘poor,’ ‘sweat-pant wearers,’ ‘druggies,’ ‘the lost and fallen,’ and most prominently, ‘bigots’ and ‘racists.’<sup>852</sup> These class-infused characterisations of people and places prompted some commentators to call for democratic sterilisation, as well as to condemn leave voters as ‘colonisers.’ Although ‘implicated in colonial structures,’ such attacks were further illustrative of the ways ‘white or male privilege is recognised only in working-class white men located on the geographic or social periphery rather than in the central corridors of power.’<sup>853</sup>

Similar portrayals of backwardness were reinforced by people who objected to the news item as misrepresentative. Although not necessarily in disagreement with these depictions, Barnsley residents were upset with the location of interviews in the town centre and the sample-size of interviewees. One person remarked, ‘Oh Channel 4, why did you pick Barnsley? As if we’re not

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<sup>851</sup> Melissa Etehad, ‘This video shows what some Brexit supporters are fearful of: Muslim immigration,’ *Washington Post*, June 27, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/27/this-video-shows-what-some-brexit-supporters-are-fearful-of-muslim-immigration/?variant=116ae929826d1fd3>;

Chris York, ‘Leave Voter Admits He Voted to “Stop Muslims Coming into The UK,”’ *Huffington Post*, June 25, 2016, [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/eu-referendum-muslims\\_uk\\_576e558ce4b08d2c563937ff](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/eu-referendum-muslims_uk_576e558ce4b08d2c563937ff); and Tara John, ‘Surge in Hate Crimes in the U.K. Following U.K.’s Brexit Vote,’ *Time Magazine*, June 27, 2016, <https://time.com/4383404/brexit-hate-crime-uk-racism>.

<sup>852</sup> ‘Barnsley voters explain why the voted to leave’; ‘Barnsley voted overwhelmingly to leave the European Union’; and Jenkins, ‘Been standing here five minutes.’

<sup>853</sup> High, ‘Deindustrialisation on the Industrial Frontier,’ Chapter 12, para 43-44, Kindle.

laughed at enough. We're not all ignorant here you know. Some of us are culturally aware and welcome all nationalities...<sup>854</sup> Other people that were critical of the news coverage saw it as part of a wider problem with representations.

This behaviour is typical of how the media portray people from Barnsley (the Mining community) where the 'story' requires some northern/working class people. Not agreeing with anything that residents said in this video but WHY select these types of residents only? Why hang around the bus station? The town's budget cafes? And the pubs on regent street?<sup>855</sup>

This sentiment was echoed by another poster. 'So you think they do this kind of thing to make small towns look backwards and uneducated – shame on you 4 news not a good representation of the people is it?'<sup>856</sup>

There was a tendency for numerous commentators to denigrate working-class people when they challenged real (and imagined) factors of racism and xenophobia motivating people's withdrawal vote from the EU.<sup>857</sup> Herein lies one of the legacies of deindustrialisation and its aftermath.

Discourses of cultural backwardness (or its intensification at the very least) are useful mechanisms for journalists, politicians, academics, and the public, in ordering and making sense of groups of people and places, whilst reinforcing notions of class as a socio-economic position or identity.

For instance, Chanel 4's news item not only revealed signs of backwardness by illustrating discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes, but the story itself was shaped by a discursive lens of backwardness. The questions asked by the reporter, the people interviewed, and how the footage was later edited were influenced by popular ways of thinking and talking of working-class people

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<sup>854</sup> 'Barnsley voters explain why the voted to leave.'

<sup>855</sup> Ibid.

<sup>856</sup> Ibid.

<sup>857</sup> For a remarkably condescending piece of journalism on Brexit in Barnsley, see Colin Drury, "I can't stop smiling": Booze, bingo and bunting at Barnsley Brexit celebrations,' *Independent*, February 1, 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/brexit-day-celebration-barnsley-yorkshire-nigel-farage-parliament-square-eu-a9312586.html>.

and communities. The number of views the video might conjure—11 million as of right now on Facebook—surely played a role, too. As pointed out by John Harris from *The Guardian*, ‘from a more enlightened perspective, it might be more instructive to understand a lot of support for leave as the climax of years of decline, neglect, condescension—and something that is hardly going to be abandoned in a hurry.’<sup>858</sup> If the onus was on the individual to ‘move on,’ this notion likely garnered little traction amongst an outraged public.

There is also a danger, as Bhambra illustrates, in legitimising socio-economic hardship for why ‘white’ working-class people voted to leave the EU, because it can mask racism and xenophobia. The topic of Brexit, albeit unprompted, was raised in my oral history interviews by some ex-miners. Although they foregrounded hardship with deindustrialisation, it was evident that some voted to leave the EU primarily because of issues of immigration and sovereignty that were both overtly and covertly xenophobic. Whilst Ben explained, ‘I don’t like going to Barnsley because...all you’re hearing is Polish, Czech, all different immigrants that’s come in, and it’s just *for* them,’ Harry followed up his initial criticisms of racial and ethnic minorities by explaining how he and his family were also friends with an Asian neighbour.<sup>859</sup>

The most striking remark emerged in William’s oral testimony. For William, the cultural identity of England was threatened by migrants’ supposed inability, locally and nationally, to integrate into society. A discussion of class gave way to issues regarding ethnicity and race. As William put it,

There’s a lot of good working-class people but they’re just...they’ve been outnumbered. I were a big believer...there’s nobody more Brexit than me. People say to me, ‘How can you? Your dad was Polish and come here!’ I say’s, ‘Aye, but you didn’t see my dad walking around the street with a Cossack fuckin’ outfit on.’ We talked English. We’re English. We were working class.<sup>860</sup>

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<sup>858</sup> John Harris, ‘They voted for Brexit in a cry of pain – what happened to the left-behind?’ *Guardian*, November 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/05/brexit-theresa-may-economic-austerity-leave-voting>.

<sup>859</sup> Ben Interview; Harry Interview.

<sup>860</sup> William Interview.

A motif of immigrants ‘taking over’ not only propelled William to ethnicise class identity, but also emphasise its decline. For William, class identity was inextricably bound up with a particular sense of Englishness.

Amid these xenophobic remarks, racial and ethnic minorities can become an explanatory tool for socio-economic conditions. Some interviewees were aware of this because they countered this assertion as problematic. As Frank pointed out with some people in the area, ‘they blame immigration which is ridiculous.’<sup>861</sup> In turn, Frank indicated that misdirected ‘blame’ masked issues of outsourcing, as call centre workers he was in contact with in the area were being sent to South Africa to train workers. This was interpreted by Frank as an upcoming round of deindustrialisation.

Dennis also offered a scathing critique of scapegoating immigrants for socio-economic injustices.

There’s an undercurrent of racism. I suppose it’s everywhere. But you hear a lot of people saying it’s their [immigrants] fault and there’s too many of ‘em and things like that. [...] People use immigration to blame for a lot of the mistakes of government. They used to be taking jobs. ‘Immigrants are coming in and taking our jobs.’ There ain’t no jobs now, so what are they taking? ‘They’re taking our houses, now.’ Barring in mind that there are no chuffing houses to take. Everybody’s on benefits. A lot of percentage of people in Barnsley on benefits due to the pit closure programme. It is a very, very deprived area.<sup>862</sup>

The focal point here lies with the scarcity of material resources in the forms of work (secure, well-paid, and mobility), housing, and social security in the region. The source of critique, for Dennis, is not why one group might have more than the other, but why is there not enough for all.

Immiseration harms the white, black, and Asian working class as a whole; however, how people experience class as ‘a lived relationship defined by inequalities of power’ is contingent on axes of social difference that cut across gender, ethnicity, and, of course, race.<sup>863</sup> It is usually racial and ethnic minorities who feel the brunt of class processes, irrespective if they self-identify as working

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<sup>861</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

<sup>862</sup> Dennis Interview, 2016.

<sup>863</sup> Todd, ‘Class, experience and Britain’s twentieth century,’ 501.

class or not.<sup>864</sup> Whilst it is important to problematise the racialisation of a ‘white’ working-class identity, it is also imperative to recognise and illustrate that racial and ethnic minorities are part of the working class.

The legacy of deindustrialisation is linked to Brexit through the exploitation of its emotional fallout by politicians, and through its ordering of thoughts and feelings towards people and places, affecting the ways in which we think and talk about class. On the one hand, class as identity has been exploited, turned into a ‘white’ identity used to organise and mobilise politically around. On the other hand, class as identity (usually white) has also been exploited, used to justify the cultural stigmatisation of people and places. What has, perhaps, been lost in this picture are other ways of thinking and talking about class as exploitation and antagonistic. Whilst there are multiple reasons why people voted to leave or stay, a sole focus on class as either identity or ‘gradational’ removes class as struggle, specifically ‘from above,’ i.e., attack on wages and standards of living, capital flight, and austerity measures, from the picture.<sup>865</sup> Although this is rarely articulated as class-based violence, it is felt and present in the lives of working people long after deindustrialisation. In the words of Frank, ‘I know people say “we’ll survive.” You know, we survived two world wars. But there’s a difference between survival and enjoyment ain’t there? People can get used to poverty.’<sup>866</sup>

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<sup>864</sup> For a seminal text that explores the interrelationship between deindustrialisation and racism in post-war Detroit, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1996).

<sup>865</sup> Raju Das, *Marxist Class Theory for a Skeptical World* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2017) 9.

<sup>866</sup> Frank Interview, 2018.

## Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

**Main Contact: Lee Waddington (PhD Researcher)**

**Email:** [L.Waddington@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:L.Waddington@sussex.ac.uk)

**Mobile Number:** 07378565533

**Supervisors: Professor Hester Barron**  
[\(H.Barron@sussex.ac.uk\)](mailto:H.Barron@sussex.ac.uk)  
**Professor Lucy Robinson**  
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### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET:**

#### **Coalfield Deindustrialisation and Regeneration in the UK, 1985 to the Present**

##### The purpose of the study

This research explores how pit closures and regeneration schemes changed the everyday lives of former coal miners, their families, and more broadly, a sense of place and community in South Yorkshire, England from 1985 to the present.

I am specifically interested in how former miners and their families felt about, experienced, and remembered the wave of mining closures and subsequent redevelopment projects designed to regenerate the area. I hope to interview both men and women previously tied to the pit, either directly or indirectly, as well as children of former miners, in an effort to better illustrate the long-term impacts of industrial decline on former coal mining regions. These interviews will be used as part of the overall project, along with material collected at the local archive at Barnsley town hall.

The purpose of this study is to add to our understanding of the recent histories on industrial decline and regeneration schemes. By foregrounding the voices of research participants, this project aims to highlight the legacies of coalmining and deindustrialisation in ex-coalfield areas. It is through the lived experiences of research participants that this project may draw a number of policy implications.

##### Why have I been invited to participate?

Within the project, which is currently funded until 2020, I intend to speak to roughly 40 to 50 people from the area about their experiences of pit closures and the ongoing regeneration schemes in the area.

I am interviewing participants formerly linked to the coalmining industry, either directly as workers or indirectly as family members. I am particularly interested in speaking with those participants connected to the coal industry and its related activities prior to and after the miners' strike of 1984-85. Due to the time period involved, a majority of these participants should be approximately 55

years and older. Additionally, I am also interested in speaking with the children of former coal miners. In this case, participants should be 25 years or older.

#### Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this project. It is entirely up to you whether or not you decide to participate in this study. If you do decide to participate in this study you will be given this information sheet and be asked to sign an informed consent form. Of note, if you at any time want to withdraw from this study you are free to do so without giving any reason as to why up until the point of publication in 2020-21. *Your decision not to participate will not influence the relationship you may have with the researcher or the nature of your relationship with Sussex University either now, or in the future.* Finally, consenting to participate in this study does not mean that you are required to address every topic or question brought up during the interview.

#### What will happen to me if I take part?

Your participation in this study will involve one interview lasting between 1 to 1.5 hours. Interviews could take place either at the researcher's home office, a public area like a coffee shop, or at your house; in other words, in whichever environment meets your needs and comfort. Questions will be open-ended and topics will touch on particular experiences, perceptions, and memories pertaining to:

- The nature of work (both paid and unpaid), workplace relationships, and the workplace itself amid and after the wave of pit closures.
- Family life both in and outside of the home before, during, and after pit closures.
- How the closure of mines affected everyday life, ordinary routines, and daily mobility.
- The 1984-85 miners' strike.
- Feelings about the major differences in the area before and after pit closures.
- How you feel towards the changes brought about by regeneration initiatives following pit closures.
- In what ways has redevelopment affected former mining villages and communities.
- Personal or communal involvement in regeneration plans and/or projects.
- What do you think are some of the important issues or problems that still need to be addressed through regeneration schemes.

The interviews will be audio recorded. On the day of the interview, you will be asked to sign an informed consent form if you agree to participate in this study. A personal copy will be provided for you on the day of the interview.

#### What are the possible disadvantages and risks?

First, there is a cost of your time by participating in an interview for this study. Second, a potential risk may surface over the nature of discussions surrounding pit closures since you may perhaps be drawing on emotional experiences. To mitigate any unease that might arise through remembering, I have attached the contact to Samaritans, an agency that offers free confidential support for people. You may contact them at 116 123 or via email at [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org). It is important to note, however, that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time without explanation.

#### What are the possible benefits of taking part?



You will be contributing to the production of knowledge of the history of coalmining and deindustrialisation. This research study has the potential to empower research participants by sharing personal knowledge and experiences of an event in a particular place and at a particular moment of time. This research study allows for unrecorded voices to be documented, which, in turn, can complement, supplement, and/or alter narratives about pit closures and regeneration schemes. The retelling of stories has the potential to uncover and uphold histories of cultures and communities.

#### Will my information in this study be kept confidential?

Yes, your identity will remain anonymous in this research study. Only one copy of key identifying participants will be retained for my collection. Data will be collected through hand-written notes and audio tapes. I will assign an alphanumeric code to the data. For instance, research participants will be identified as CM1, CM 2, etc. Personal data will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations) and no one else besides myself will have access to recordings or to personal contact information. Any additional written notes taken during the interview will be locked in a cabinet.

In addition, every participant's interview will be anonymised in that personal names, street names, etc., will be removed from the transcript of the interview and a pseudonym will be used in any published or formal work arising from this study. You will have the option on the informed consent form as to whether or not you would like a copy of the transcript moving forward. Any other potential information that may identify research participants will also be removed. However, due to the importance of place and community, larger areas such as towns, wards, and villages within the area will be included with your consent.

If you have any further questions about confidentiality regarding this research study, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

#### What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to participate in this research study, you may contact me via my email address at [L.Waddington@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:L.Waddington@sussex.ac.uk) or on my mobile phone number at 07378565533. Upon initial contact further arrangements will be made to organise a suitable time and date for an interview.

#### What will happen to the results of the research study?

Knowledge obtained from these oral history interviews will contribute to the completion of my doctoral thesis. The interviews will be used in conjunction with archive material to illustrate the long-term effects of deindustrialisation on everyday life, a sense of self, and community belonging. Anonymised quotes from oral history interviews will be used in the thesis and any accompanying publications. The doctoral thesis will be completed by 2020-2021 and held by the University of Sussex library from then onwards. Moreover, there is the potential that this research study may result in either published journal article(s) or a monograph in the near future. Participants may contact the researcher via email or mobile phone number (see first page) regarding how they can obtain a copy of the published research.

#### Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting this research as a doctoral student at the University of Sussex in the School of History, Art History, and Philosophy (HAHP). My doctoral research is funded through the Chancellor's International Research Scholarship (CIRS) at the University of Sussex.

Who has approved this study?

This research has been approved by the Social Sciences & Art Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (C-REC) at the University of Sussex. (Application Number: ER/LW369/1)

Contact for Further Information

For any further information or details please contact Lee Waddington ([L.Waddington@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:L.Waddington@sussex.ac.uk)). If you have any additional questions or concerns about the nature of the study, you may contact my academic supervisors, Hester Barron ([H.Barron@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:H.Barron@sussex.ac.uk)) and/or Lucy Robison ([L.Robinson@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:L.Robinson@sussex.ac.uk)).

**Insurance**

The University of Sussex has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect to this study.

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet. I hope to speak with you in the near future.

## Appendix 2: Consent Form

## CONSENT FORM FOR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Project Title: Coalfield Deindustrialisation and Regeneration in the UK, 1985 to the Present

Researcher: Lee Waddington

School: University of Sussex

Project Reference Number: ER/LW369/1

I consent to participate in 'Coalfield Deindustrialisation and Regeneration in the UK, 1985 to the Present' conducted by Lee Waddington. I have read the information sheet, had the opportunity to ask questions, and understand the possible risks and benefits involved in this research project. I am fully aware of the nature of the project and that the interview will be audio recorded.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that I disclose will lead to the identification of any individual in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party. Personal names, street names, institutional names, etc., will be removed from the transcript, and in any future published work pseudonyms will be used. I have given my permission to use the local place names of wards, villages, and towns for the doctoral thesis and in any further publications. Furthermore, I consent for quotations from the interview to be used in the final report and in any related published work involving this research study.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary; that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any time up until the point of publication in 2021 without being disadvantaged in any way and/or providing a reason.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Legal rights and signatures,

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in 'Coalfield Deindustrialisation and Regeneration in the UK, 1985 to the Present' conducted by Lee Waddington. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Would you like a copy of the transcript:

Yes	No
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Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

Date:

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

Date:

### **Appendix 3: Prepared Research Questions**

#### Background Information

Where were you born? When were you born? Where do you live now?  
 Do you come from a family of miners?  
 How did you get involved in coalmining?  
 What mines did you work at?  
 Can you describe the job and conditions under which you worked?  
 Can you describe your experiences living/working in a mining village?  
 What were your relationships like with your co-workers?  
 How did you spend your time away from work?  
 What are your thoughts on social class?

#### Miners' Strike and Pit Closures

What do you remember about the miners' strike?  
 What stands out most about pit closures after the miners' strike?  
 How did you feel towards strike-breakers?  
 What were the effects of pit closures on everyday life?  
 How did everyday routines change at work and at home?  
 How did you feel about these changes?  
 How long did you continue to work in the mines amid the wave of pit closures?  
 Can you describe your work experiences after coalmining?  
 What is the major difference between workplace relationships?  
 What are the major differences from the strike and now? How do you feel about those changes?

#### Regeneration

What are your feelings about redevelopment in the area?  
 How have changes brought on by redevelopment affected former mining villages?  
 Have you participated in any consultation projects associated with redevelopment in the area?  
 What do you think are some important issues that still need to be addressed?  
 What are your hopes for the future?

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