



# THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1989

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## NEWSLETTER FOR AUTUMN 2016.

### Chairman's Message.

Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter.

We have just returned from another very successful AGM and Reunion in Blackheath, London, this time visiting Buckingham Palace for our day trip.

I would like to welcome members Eric Crowch – from near Chepstow, and Phil Robinson - from near Warrington, who join our committee after their election at the AGM., following a motion from Harry Parkes to minimise the possibility of the committee becoming inquorate, which would have affected the future of our Association.

Wishing you all a Very Happy Christmas and a Healthy 2017.

Anne. (Lane)

### Stop Press

An hour long programme entitled 'Ian Lavender's Home Front Heroes' will be broadcast on More 4 (Freeview channel 14, Sky 138, Virgin 147, and Freesat 124) on **Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> November at 9 pm.** Ian Lavender is Pike of Dad's Army fame. The Bevin Boys are featured, including our Treasurer Harry Parkes. I hope you all can watch it !

### MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY.

#### Where Are You Now?

It has been another milestone year with many Bevin Boys celebrating their 90th birthdays. Although many of the first ballotees were 90 years old last year. In fact I have sent out 37 birthday cards so far and have 15 more to be sent before year end, with 6 more to be celebrated in 2017. We would be happy to receive any other birthday dates if you have not already told us. Thank you again to those who have written or rung with thanks for the card. I understand that the wishes from the committee have been much appreciated.

There is a further update from Judy Caine on the P.L.U.T.O., project (see Spring Newsletter) 12 short video podcasts have been produced for use in schools, see [www.ourcorby.org.uk](http://www.ourcorby.org.uk) The B.B.C. in the East Anglia region is featuring the P.L.U.T.O. project on an 'Inside Out' program in the Autumn.

Channel 4 is also showing a film called 'Home Front Heroes'. Bevin Boys are featured including our Treasurer Harry Parkes. Ian Lavender of Dad's Army fame is presenting. Unfortunately we have not a date for screening of that at the moment, but two items to look out for in the Autumn.

Dr Joel Morley has now completed 25 interviews with former Bevin Boys He will eventually produce C.D.'s to be sent to those who were involved. The final research will be placed with the archive in the Imperial War Museum. Dr Morley has asked me to pass on the following 'I feel very grateful an privileged to have had the opportunity to do these interviews which is providing interesting and historical material which will eventually progress into the production of a book.'

We have had very positive feed back from many who were interviewed, stressing the care and time taken by Joel Morley during the interviews.

In August Gerard Tubb a journalist from Sky News television inquired about the validity of Jimmy Savile's claim to being a Bevin Boy. He is writing a book hoping finally to prove or disprove this claim. The following information was sent by e mail to members, if anyone can help please let me know. Jimmy Savile said he worked at the following pits, Prince of Wales Pontefract, South Kirby Emsworth and Waterloo Pit, Temple Newsom. Also he said he had spent time at Crayke Castle near York for Rest & Recuperation?, We have not heard of this facility being offered to any Bevin Boy. Can anyone throw any light on these claims?

We have had some response from members with details of their war-time experiences. These will go into our Archive at the Imperial War Museum. As we have limited space for their full accounts I have included two excerpts as follows.

Cyril Hey was called up in January 1945 and sent to Askern Training centre near Doncaster. Unfortunately he got his arm trapped between two tubs of stone (apparently tubs of stone were used instead of coal during training), resulting in a green stick fracture of the wrist and after treatment at Doncaster Royal Infirmary was sent home In May he was considered fit for work and sent to The Prince of Wales Colliery at Pontefract where he met up and became friends with a local lad, that friendship was life-long and he is still in touch with family members A familiar story to some of you, one that I have heard over the years, showing how important those times were to individuals.

Phil Robinson writes of his time as a pony 'putter' or driver. He tells of Nipper a small feisty pony who would steal your 'bait', sandwich out of your pocket. One day at the end of the shift following the stonemen out, who were perhaps 100 yards ahead, Nipper stopped and would not move. Suddenly some of the roadway supports sprang out and there was a fall of rock. Dust and debris everywhere. Nipper and Phil trapped behind the rock, he had heard the strata moving, had they gone on they would have been buried. The men came back and urged Phil to come through the gap over the fall, which he refused to do until they had made the gap big enough for Nipper to get through as well. As Phil says he will never forget that little pony. Quite right too!

Enjoy the Autumn sunshine, 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' !

Remember I am always here to help with any queries or inquiries.

Best wishes for the year ahead,

Elizabeth Todd. A K A ( Liz)

### **MESSAGE from the TREASURER.**

Despite falling membership figures I am happy to show an increase of donations this year against 2014/15. Thank you for your generosity. Bigbury Mint, who produce the Bevin Boys silver medal, have donated £117.00 from sales of the medal.

Our Bank balance will ensure funding for the foreseeable future, including our twice yearly Newsletter so ably edited by our Chair, Anne Lane. The £5 subscription underpins much of the production and postage cost.

I am happy to report that Heroes Square at the National Arboretum, Alrewas is finally completed. My design for the Bevin Boys slab has been accepted and will join 190 engraved slabs representing the Royal Navy, the British Army, the Royal Air Force and many Livery Companies and Clubs associated with the Armed Forces. The slab engraved with our government issue Badge with the words, 'Bevin Boys National Service Conscripts' and another slab donated by The Coal Trade Benevolent Association to remember those Bevin Boys killed while working underground. This is the final stone in the National Bevin Boys Memorial which I began in June 2008. The committee released the ring fenced donation to

the total cost. The balance provided by monies left over from the National Memorial Fund to and private donations I have collected since 2013.

I thank our committee and you the members, your families and friends, for your continued support.

*Harry P.*

**MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT.**

We have again received a great many letters of support and saying how much you all look forward to reading the Newsletter. Please would you write, telephone or e-mail me, to notify me of Change of Address and/or Telephone numbers and if you hear of any Bevin Boys, members or not, who have sadly passed away. My address and Telephone number is at the top of this Newsletter, e-mail address is [alananne2749@gmail.com](mailto:alananne2749@gmail.com)

Best wishes,  
Anne.

**ARCHIVIST**

It was lovely to meet up with those of you who were able to make the re-union in September at Blackheath in London. It was very hot weather that week, a bit of a surprise, but as always it was good to catch up with everyone and hear more of your stories. I had some photos and drawings of hostel life given to me by Ron Holloway which I was grateful to receive as I know there is not a lot of material on this aspect of Bevin Boy history in the archives .I can always copy photographs if you wish to retain the originals as I did for Ron.

I have also heard from several of you following the last newsletter and would like to thank you for your interesting phone calls and letters. I have now donated all of those items sent to the Imperial War Museum. Some of the stories you shared were quite harrowing so thank you for ensuring those stories live on. If any of you have any interesting anecdotes or stories to tell please get in touch. I received fascinating letters written from one Bevin Boy to another- he certainly hated his time down under!

In August I spent a whole day at the Imperial war Museum as I am starting to make an inventory of items held there as well as noting names and mines mentioned in memoirs as we do get enquiries from families. The memoirs are particularly interesting.

I also hope to be producing some podcasts (digital audio resources) for schoolchildren with someone next year. It is good to ensure the story of the Bevin Boys lives on. Thank you for your support.

Barbara McElroy.

**Sales.**

Total Sales in 2016 are £33.20p. For all Sales, please apply to Mrs A. Lane, address above. All cheques to be made payable to **THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION**. Please add £1 for the lighter items & £2 for the book, as it is expensive to post.

Blazer Badge	@ £7.50	New Blue Enamel Badge	@ £2.00
Miners Lamp Keyring	@ £4.00	Digging Up the Past	@ £10.00

Bevin Boy Banner Postcard, 2 different Black & White postcards of prints from A Bevin Boy Remembers & 2 colour & 2 black & white prints of A4 size from A Bevin Boy Remembers  
**ALL POSTCARDS & A4 PRINTS @ £0.20 each**

*Many Thanks to all our 'customers', as always!*

*Anne.*

## AREA REUNION's in 2016.

If any Area Representatives would like to send in their accounts of any Reunions or Activities- I would be happy to publish them in the Newsletter.

You may not know, but Eric Johnson has not been so well lately and has asked for someone else to take over as the Area Representative, although he was able to organise his Reunion lunch as usual.

### ESSEX & NE LONDON:

Reunion at Mersea Vineyard 12<sup>th</sup> July.

Ten people, five Bevin Boys, partners and friends including ourselves, enjoyed our reunion. Meeting about 11 am we were able to chat outside in the warm sunshine over coffee or the locally brewed beer. This was followed by lunch. Unfortunately the afternoon clouded over with a cool breeze, but there was no hurry to leave the warmth of the restaurant, until it was time to go home.

Eric Johnson.

### EAST ANGLIA:

East Anglia Bevin Boys met at the Old Rectory, Crostwick, Norfolk for Sunday lunch on June 12<sup>th</sup>. We were a group of twenty four. A delicious meal served by pleasant, helpful staff.

After lunch there was time to chat outside in the garden and an excerpt from Treasurer's Harry Parkes Bevin Boy diary was shared. It illustrated just how busy he had been with talks and interviews on behalf of the Association. We were all grateful for the time he spends on our behalf.

The meeting closed at tea time after a question time had taken place, leading to an assurance that the Association was operating in a proper manner and would continue to do so as long as it was requested by the members.

There will be a Sunday lunch in 2017 and the date will be in the Spring Newsletter.

Margaret Rose.

## National Reunion & AGM

Our annual meeting and AGM took place in September. Thirty- seven attended the AGM, and thirty- four were in Blackheath at the Clarendon Hotel, Monday to Friday.

Arrival on Monday followed by a free day on Tuesday and the morning of Wednesday, gave members a chance to enjoy river trips and to generally explore the area. Tuesday evening finished with Mrs Doreen Golding, the Pearly Queen of the Old Kent Road and Bow Bells, telling us about the social work carried out by their society. Just over £80 was collected as a donation towards the Pearlies work. Mrs Golding came to us at her own expense and Mr K Milton took her to the train station for her return journey.

The AGM took place on the Wednesday afternoon and was well attended. We were pleased to hear from Barbara about her progress working with the Imperial War Museum staff, where she is experiencing great co operation.

On Thursday, our day out took us to see the State Rooms at Buckingham Palace. It was very crowded and, dare I say it, spoiled by the air temperature and the seemingly daily changes to the Security arrangements, - we survived!

It was a very special day because after dinner, we were wonderfully entertained by 'The Bevin Boys Band', who are a professional trio playing music from the 1940's. Even the Double Bass and the drum set, were of that era. Their dress was also of the 40's, as was their hairstyles. Friday was quite a challenge, when we learned that after the heavy rains of Thursday, there had

been a land slide, train service disruptions and the many road delays and jams – all had to be overcome. With difficulty members arrived home, safe but weary.

We wish to thank all the hotel staff for their caring and friendly way they went about their business. We must say a special thanks to the hotel's General Manager, Mr Ken Milton who, as always went beyond the first mile. His friendly, caring attitude was very noticeable even to the point of making our departure special by issuing a paper to each member and all hotel guests so that together we had the words to sing – 'We'll Meet Again'.

Thank you for the support that you give to your Association and all it stands for.

Till we meet again,  
Don't know where, don't know when.

With Best wishes to you all,  
*Margaret.*

### Bevin Boys Association Website.

Just to remind you all that we have an **Official** Bevin Boys Association website. This contains information about the Association, pictures of the Bevin Boys plot at Alrewas, the contact details for all the Committee. Also the Newsletter, Rules and Regulations which are password protected and only accessible to Bevin Boy members who have paid their yearly subs. Please go to:- <http://www.bevinboysassociation.co.uk> or to email the committee [bevinboys1943@gmail.com](mailto:bevinboys1943@gmail.com) Thank you to everyone who has submitted items for the Newsletter.

If you prefer to have access to the Newsletter online or email or have any input or news items for publication please contact me on Tel: 01275 463703 or e-mail: [alananne2749@gmail.com](mailto:alananne2749@gmail.com)

Anne.

### Les Raymond's memories of being a Bevin Boy Part 2

There were many young conscripts who not only did not want to be there, but were not suited at all to the life. It was a scary claustrophobic job as Les himself admits. He remembers after lights out in training, that some of the Bevin Boys would lie in bed crying. In some cases this led to bullying and ridicule as well, to compound the poor lad's miseries. Remember that here was a complete cross section of life, from heavy drinkers and fighting men to artists and others with more gentle pursuits.

A lot would go to work just to get enough to live and then call in sick, a fortunate few had parents who would send money so they did not have to go down. However this was stopped by an essential works order which meant that you had to go to work or go before a judge. Les recalls police cars on more than one occasion collecting lads to take them off to Lincoln Prison. Many of the boys did everything they could to get into the forces and occasionally this would happen as Les had one mining friend who ended up in Palestine. Even before this essential work order rules were very strict about absenteeism and it was common to be in big trouble even for being late. In the first year of the Bevin Boys scheme 500 were prosecuted and 147 sent to prison.

It is a little known fact that when the Bevin Boys were called up that if they refused to go, then they were put in prison for three months to 'think ' about it. Upon release if they then continued to refuse to go, they were imprisoned indefinitely.

Like virtually all fellow Bevin Boys Les stayed long after the war- not being de-mobbed until 1948. He had enquired in March 1946 as to the de-mob date, but none was given. Like so many he has vivid memories of the winter of 1947. Everywhere was gripped in an icy and snowy winter. Les and his mate came out of the pit to return to the hostel only to find that the buses had been taken off. It was snowing hard but a lorry with a tank pulled up. He was going to Mansfield where

the hostel was located and said the two young miners could stand on the running board at the back. They half lay on the tank clinging on for dear life, going through open country where two bulldozers were working solidly to keep the road open. Les recalls he has never felt colder in his life.

They couldn't get the coal out as transport was not working and at 3.30 it was starting to get dark, but still the miners were expected to report at the pit although they were more often or not sent back. If you did this you got paid even if sent back. However in a week of stoppages if you missed the last day you got nothing even if you had faithfully reported the rest of the week. Les remembers one last day he overslept, had to miss breakfast and ran through the allotments to get to the transport, but he made it!

Finally at the end of January 1948, Les was de-mobbed. No job to go home to, no de-mob clothes and no thanks.

### **John Smillie's Memories.**

The photo of Cadeby Main was the first sign I got after getting off the trolley bus prior to starting my shift. I had to walk up a flight of steps, across a bridge and down to a small office where I collected my disc and lamp, and then to the pit top where the cage awaited.

Initially the miners would hold our legs in the cage as we dropped like a stone, very fast indeed, slowing as we neared the bottom. They would remark 'he has forgotten to put the brake on etc. They were a great bunch of men, we did learn a lot from them.

The Barnsley Set was the main seam, five foot high and it stretched for miles. It was eight hundred and twenty yards down and seven miles out from the pit bottom to the coalface, which was under Doncaster. We walked from the pit bottom quite a way, and soon learned it was better to be in the front gang of men, because of the dust storm created by the men in front, to the Paddy Mail, a series of tubs drawn by a small engine for several miles to the coalface, followed by a further walk, which took about forty five minutes, could have been longer - it was so long ago!

I was a Haulage Hand, my first job was operating a Main Tail engine which pulled the full tubs from the face to the Main Road en route to the pit bottom. Early on I brought them up too fast - derailing quite often. Well, the miners came up, not all that pleased to say the least. I was amazed to watch one man who was able to put a tub back on the rails by getting down, a quick jolt and there it was back on the rails.

On the job, on the face with my pick ensuring that the conveyor belt was kept running, no blockages and other duties. There was one consolation, even in the dead of winter, freezing on the surface it was very warm down below, So much so that all men worked in their shorts. In no time I was covered in coal dust and was as black as the Ace of Spades.

There was another seam, The Parngate Seam (920 yards deep) closed just before the outbreak of World War 1, because of a major disaster with over a hundred miners killed. I had the opportunity of working in that seam on night shift reclaiming anything of value, it was quite eerie. One night shift, I remember, dust trickled down from the roof and I had

been warned that this was a sign of probable roof collapse. This could happen straight away or be delayed for as long as a couple of months. I decided to err on the side of caution and tucked myself away in a corner. Some two hours later part of the roof did come down where I had been working.

Another memory, end of shift, walking back to the pit bottom, tired and very thirsty, my Dudley (a water bottle which held 6 pints of water) had been empty for some time and I would meet the new shift coming in and watched for my friend, Bevin Boy Tom May (now deceased) and got a drink from his full Dudley. It was nectar of the gods!

### **Robert McKenzie's Memories as a Bevin Boy Part 1**

In August 1944 I was seventeen and a half, which was the earliest moment for volunteering for RAF aircrew. I presented myself complete with Air Training Corps and School Certificate background. However, by then we were well on the way to winning the war and both the RAF and the Navy were up to complement. So though I sat and passed the written exams, I was not called for medical or further interview as flying personnel were now beginning to be in surplus.

So then I volunteered for Royal Artillery, Survey Branch, which you were able to do – as I thought – before the age of seventeen and three quarters. The thinking of Pete Winfield, who also volunteered, and myself was that Survey might be helpful to us career-wise. However, it was enrolment that had to be complete as opposed to application before seventeen and three quarters and there was insufficient time for the tests and interviews. Pete being three months younger got in and spent most of his war in India.

So there was nothing for it but to await conscription call-up at the age of eighteen. I frankly did not fancy being a squaddie in the Infantry and, encouraged by Dad, who was quite pleased at the out turn of events so far, not wanting to see another son in the Forces, I opted for coal mining. To run the war the country needed acceleration in the energy supply; before the advent of North Sea oil and gas and before nuclear fusion, coal was the sole provider of gas and electricity. Coal mining was arduous, dirty and dangerous, not well paid, because pre-war there were coal surpluses and at the outbreak of war many miners had taken the opportunity to get out and into the Services. Confronted with a labour shortage the wartime Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin, devised the Bevin Boy Scheme for a proportion of the eighteen year old call-up to be offered and then drafted into the mines.

My eighteenth birthday was on a Sunday and on the following afternoon at dusk I was standing on the cobbles outside Midland Station, Sheffield in a thin drizzle waiting for the tram to Woodhouse Training Centre (East Birley Pit). Sheffield was then Steel City, very industrial and looking at the slag heaps and smoking foundry chimneys all around, I felt far away from my Chelsea habitat and Peter Jones Square S.W.1.

The Bevin Boy Scheme may have been only moderately successful in practical terms, but as a social shake up it was a considerable success. The was about six weeks training at East Birley Pit before allocation to Maltby Main Colliery, about six miles east of Rotherham and at the south east extremity of the Barnsley seam, which at that point was about seven hundred yards below ground. This was pre- Nationalisation, (which came about in 1947) and miners were obliged to be deferential to the owners since not only did they work for the colliery but also lived in colliery-owned houses. Of several books about the period, "Bevin Boy" by David Day is a very well written

account that compares start to finish with my own experiences in all respects although, unlike his experience of Staffordshire folk, I found the Yorkshire people welcoming and very agreeable. So we were very well received, particularly by the girls who were unused to such male sophistication as collars and ties – the pit lads social gear was still a union flannel shirt with front stud, but no collar let alone a tie, and wearing maybe a cap as well. So we were found an interesting and relatively sophisticated lot but there remained a considerable style gulf separating my new and immediate past life.

Together with friends Charlie Stevens (who was aggrieved at having been decreed surplus to RAF aircrew training and transferred to mining) and Sid Spiegelman, who I had met at Birley – I was put into the Miners Hostel at Maltby. The hostels built to accommodate Bevin Boys were uniformly blocks of half round corrugated iron huts, ten to a block with washrooms etc. at the end twelve beds to a hut and a central administration block housing canteen, lounge, quiet room, etc. They were fairly Spartan, but comfortable enough and the food was good.

All collieries worked eight hour shifts from 6 am - 2 pm / 2pm – 10pm / 10pm – 6am. The custom was to be at the place of work underground by the beginning of the shift, but at the surface at the end. That is the travel underground out to the coal face was in your time, but the walking back to the pit bottom to be wound up to the surface was in the company's time. The cage windings at shift change were continuous and at pit bottom men dispersed in all directions to stations and coalfaces. Thus you might well be walking alone for anything up to a mile, or even more, to your particular location and generally in the hot and dusty return air passages, i.e. the return passages carried the foul air that had been all around the coalfaces back to an enclosed up-shaft, that had a huge extract fan at its head. It was however preferable to walking in the main haulage roadways on account of not having to dodge traffic or be exposed to the uninterrupted fresh but very cold intake of air drawn down the twin unenclosed winding shaft and circulated out to the workings. Leaving the well lit pit bottom you became engulfed in total blackness and entirely reliant on your lamp – fortunately the lamps were entirely reliable.

There was a good deal of absenteeism. It required willpower to get up at circa 4am on a freezing winter morning (the 1947 winter was unique as one of the longest, coldest and snowiest on record in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century), ride in a dimly – lit, cold bus to the pit, change into filthy, stiff with sweat and coal dust, pit clothes and be dropped down a seven hundred metre hole – although there was the compensation of it being warm down below. Similarly, to leave the surface on a sunny spring or summer afternoon for eight hours of heat, dirt, and darkness was unattractive and even the blandishment of six days' pay, if you completed five working shifts, did not prevent absenteeism.

To be continued in the 2017 Spring Newsletter.

### **Editors comment.**

Please note that we do not edit contributions and as some are based on recollections, there may be alternative views and information.

### **PLEASE NOTE!!**

**Please don't forget to send your £5 subscription to continue receiving your twice yearly Newsletter in 2017 to Anne Lane.**

**Cheques payable to The Bevin Boys Association.**

Any amount over £5, please indicate if balance is a donation.