



THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1989

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NEWSLETTER FOR AUTUMN 2020.

Chairman's Message.

Welcome to your Autumn Newsletter. We sadly had to postpone our 32nd AGM and Reunion due to the Coronavirus. The Accounts will be presented at the next AGM in April at the Swan Hotel in Bedford as previously planned. See dates at end of newsletter. We sincerely hope all of you and your families have kept well.

I was talking to a Bevin Boy's son recently and mentioned a white feather, which he hadn't heard of before. Tom Hickman mentions it in his book 'Called Up, Sent Down' (Page 175 to 176) I know Alan, previous Chairman, was given a white feather when he came home on leave. The lady said to him 'Why aren't you in uniform and fighting for his country like my son?' Very hurtful for someone who had appealed against being sent down the mines, like many other Bevin Boys!

Would you please be sure to advise us of any changes of address. Could you ask wives, partners, sons and daughters to inform us, when you sadly pass please?

I wish you all a Happy, Prosperous and Healthy 2021,

Anne. (Lane)

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY.

What a strange year and weird times we are in. Nevertheless this like others will pass. The lovely summer helped to keep us cheerful.

We continue to respond to requests for interviews with members for their service experiences or this year we have been involved with the BBC 's production of programs for V.E.& V.J. commemorative events. If anyone is happy to be interviewed for such items, let me know we never give out contact names or numbers without your permission. In April Jess Dawson from BBC events interviewed Gordon Waterhouse and Phil Robinson for the V.E. 75th Anniversary program also Barbara McElroy our Archivist and her father Les Raymond appeared on the news, successfully by by(Zoom) Facetime. All good publicity for the Bevin Boys.

Lloyd Boardman a volunteer activist at Chatterly Mining centre, now owned by the City Council has access to a shipping container full of 75 boxes of mining information from 1930 onwards. It may contain relevant information on Bevin Boys. We will be kept informed of any results.

Harry Parkes, ex treasurer, has been in contact with his local M.P., Ruth Edwards with the aim of allowing any family member to claim the Bevin Boy badge on behalf of the member of that family who had been a Bevin Boy. This attempt is ongoing. Also you may have seen Harry take part in a program in September about B.B.C. presenter Sophie Raworth's grandfather who was a surgeon in Nottingham dealing with mining injuries. Anne put out the information by email or telephone.

Inquiries about past B Boy members still arrive, one recent one in a letter from Geoff Breach in Las Vegas U.S.A. wanting to know the whereabouts of Robin Gosheron, or if he was still alive? Anne, membership's secretary's research revealed he had died in 2011.

Does anyone remember the name Robbin Stanley Gosheron, an unusual name, and perhaps which mine he worked at?

Phil Yates (see later in the newsletter) sent photocopies of his part in the celebrations for V.J. day in Winchester. He regularly keeps in touch, which is appreciated. Finally Gary Bridson Daley has written a new book 'The Last Stand', about WW2 Veterans their service and background. In it he has written about the Bevin Boys, it will be published later in the year. His previous book is called 'A Debt of Gratitude to the Last Heroes' publisher History Press, paper back £12.99. Either book could make interesting Christmas presents. It is good that the Bevin Boy's story is still being recorded. We are in strange times but as usual I am here to help and always enjoy hearing from members. Take care keep well.

Every good wish,

D. Elizabeth Todd (Liz)

Treasurer's Report.

I am pleased to report that having completed the accounts for Year Ending July 31st 2020 our bank balance is very healthy and will certainly enable us to continue for the foreseeable future. We do have an in- year deficit where we have spent more than we have received as income, but this was planned. We have had a heavy- duty plastic banner made as our banner is now at Caphouse Mining Museum and we now have three Remembrance books with our badge embossed in gold on the front so there was extra expenditure on those. Additionally, we have purchased an attractive glass disc at Caphouse to be put in their wall of remembrance on site. We do spend more on supporting our AGM's and area reunions as we are so small now, we can no longer get such favourable rates but the committee now meets only once a year which keeps costs down.

I will not be able to present the accounts until next year as because of Covid-19 we have had to postpone our AGM but they are being audited and the committee will have oversight of them. If you have any queries I am happy respond by letter, email or telephone.

Barbara McElroy.

Archivist's Report.

Well what a strange world we are living in at present. I hope that you have managed to stay well?

Whilst my more usual activities in this role, such as working on the archives at the Imperial War Museum and giving talks, have come to an abrupt halt other areas have come to the fore.

We have certainly had more media interest of late. My moment of 'fame' came on VE Day in May when along with my father Les Raymond we were interviewed on BBC News channel about the Bevin Boys. We had to do this apart as we were still in lockdown and technology let my father down a bit but it was an interesting if nerve wracking experience to be live on the BBC!

Harry Parkes has also recently been on the BBC being interviewed by Sophie Raworth. We have at the very least raised some more awareness of the Bevin Boy story. I think the lockdown has given many people more time at home and as an organisation we have had several enquiries where relatives are finding out about the Bevin Boys. In a couple of cases these have been former members and we have been able to give specific details to their relatives.

I am still trying to compile a list of places where Bevin Boy memorabilia and paper archive material have been placed. Obviously most are either with the Imperial War

Museum or Caphouse National Mining Museum but have you lodged your papers/artefacts anywhere else or do you know of any displays etc elsewhere? If so please let me know.

Finally this week I have been approached by a film producer who is hoping to make a film which will be a drama rather than a documentary centred around a teenage lad who is called up to be a Bevin Boy. I gather however this is likely to be a long-term project but it is good to keep the Bevin Boy story going.

Keep smiling and keep safe,

Barbara McElroy.

Sales.

Please note we have the Lapel badge back in stock. For all Sales, please apply to Mrs A. Lane, Snipelands, Bourton Combe, Flax Bourton, Bristol. BS48 3QL. Tel: 01275 463703. All cheques to be made payable to **THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION**. **Please add £1 for the lighter items & £2 for the books, as they are expensive to post.**

Blazer Badge	@ £10.00	Digging Up the Past	@ £10.00
Miners Lamp Keyring	@ £6.00	Bevin Boy Lapel Badge	@ £5.00p
Bevin Boy Banner Postcard, 2 Black & White postcards, 2 colour & 2 black & white prints of A4 size from A Bevin Boy Remembers ALL POSTCARDS & A4 PRINTS @ £0.20 each.			

Anne.

AGM & Reunion 2020

It has been proposed that this should take place next year in April, (this may be changed) arriving **Monday April 19th leaving Thursday 22nd April 2021**. The AGM will be held in the afternoon of Wednesday 21st April promptly at **14.00 hours 2 pm** with a free day on the Tuesday, although we may be able to arrange a mini bus outing, circumstances permitting.

The Reunion will consist of three nights bed and breakfast only at The Swan Hotel in Bedford at a cost of £372 for double room occupancy, and £312 for a single. All rooms are accessible via a lift. This hotel is only 1.1 miles from the railway station (10 minutes by taxi) and 200 metres from the centre of the town.

Please express your interest in attending including how many rooms are required and the number of people and their names in your party by February 27th 2021 to Anne Lane. We will send you more details. Please do not send money or book direct with the hotel.

This does not commit you to attending, we just need an idea of numbers and rooms required.

There were no Area Reunions in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

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 Boy's plot at Alrewas, the contact detail for all the Committee, and also the Newsletters, Please go to:-

<http://www.bevinboysassociation.co.uk> or to email the committee 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

Anne.

First Days as a Bevin Boy.

On reading Jack Stoddart's account in the Newsletter memories came flooding back of a time I spent in Annfield Plain and the New KYO Hostel.

I was conscripted in August 1944 and told to report to the Labour Exchange, where I was given a one way railway ticket to Newcastle-on-Tyne along with the necessary documents. My, then, girlfriend waved me off at Liverpool Lime Street station on or about my 18th birthday. I was supposed to be met at Newcastle by someone who would escort me to Annfield Plain. But nobody was there to meet me, so I hopped on a bus and alighted at New Kyo Hostel. The place was manic with a few hundred 18 year olds who didn't want to be there. There was nobody to enforce any discipline. I was allocated a bed and a locker in a Nissen hut which I think held 12 people. My fellow 'guests' were a cross section of the UK., a Cambridge undergraduate, an ice hockey player, a lad from the Orkneys, another from the Isle of Wight, etc. We were issued with a helmet, boots and boiler suit and put to work in a training centre. To toughen us up we shovelled some heavy material, lifted iron girders and had two Army PE instructors, seconded, to get us fit. There were lectures on mining, safety matters and underground training at Morrison Busty pit.

Having come from Wallasey on the Wirral and straight from Grammar School I found the area and the people quite different to back home. I grew to like and respect the Geordies, but I think we were alien to them! The nearest town was Stanley, which was quite a place at the weekend with pubs, clubs dance halls and cinemas, etc. I tended to patronise the latter!

After 4 to 6 weeks training we were allocated to different collieries. I was sent to Pelton Fell Colliery, near Chester-le-Street and housed in South Pelaw Mines Hostel. I worked at Pelton Fell for two years, as a loader, pony driver etc. Then I managed to get a transfer nearer home and was sent to Wood Colliery in Haydock. My demob (Group 63) came in late 1947.

I was approached by the management (now the National Coal Board) to take up a career in mine surveying, which I duly did and qualified from Wigan Mining College and completed 40 years in the industry.

Phil Robinson.

The Other Side

In past Newsletters Bevin Boys have written about the 'jobs' assigned to them down the pits, but I have yet to see an article relating to their 'relationship' working with 'the other side' i.e. the miners themselves. It depends on which part of the country the Bevin Boys were assigned to; I have heard reports that working with miners proved difficult but I must say that I got on very well with them; as did other Bevin Boys working in the West Yorkshire coalfields.

I was 'based' at two pits between early April 1945 and end of March 1948 (Yes, I was in one of the last ballots!). The first pit was The Prince of Wales, Pontefract and the other was Ackton Hall, Featherstone. At the Prince, the deputy in charge of 'Pit Bottom' was Bill Harling, well built with a broad Yorkshire accent. He 'ruled' that area like a 'rod of iron'. Any mishaps, and there were quite a few, then an 'inquest' was held to sort out the problems. On occasions I was invited to his home for a Sunday lunch. His wife, Mary, a gentle soul, was chief cook at our hostel so one of her 'specials' was served on those occasions. The other side of Bill came out with laughter and joking. A sort of 'Jekyll and Hyde' character. One of the 'onsetters' was Cliff, quiet spoken, in contrast, who was quite intellectual. I said to him "You are too

good for this job” to which he replied “Oh well, it runs in the family”. His wife was a schoolteacher and her father had just been elected in the 1948 Labour Government as Member of Parliament for Pontefract.

Over to Ackton Hall now where the main onsetter was Frank, a fatherly figure, who was coming up for retirement, having worked down the pit for over 40 years. I said “What are you going to do in retirement, Frank?” he replied “Fishing by day - drinking by night”. Finally, out of all the miners I worked with was ‘Splash’ a 20 year old jovial character with a damaged right hand and arm. I assumed he met this accident down the pit; I said “What part of the pit did you have the accident?” He replied jokingly “I didn’t get it down the pit, but in a car accident - typical, isn’t it?”

Well, there were many more I could relate, but this goes to show what the Yorkshire miners were like to work with - bless them!

Phil Yates.

Recollections of a Bevin Boy

When invited to write some memories of life as a Bevin Boy, I was doubtful that I’d be able to write even a paragraph as that period of my life was over seventy years ago and, I thought, long buried in the mists of time. However, once I started, in reality I could probably have written a book as memories came cascading back like a waterfall. Consequently, the recollections below are no more than a brief snapshot of that period of my life but I hope it is sufficient to give you an insight into the life of a Bevin Boy.

Towards the end of 1943 – when I was seventeen years old – I was employed as an apprentice electrician at the linoleum works in Appley Bridge, next to the Leeds and Liverpool canal, but now long since demolished. That was until I received my call up papers late that year to join the Forces. As a result of that, I found myself in Manchester on the 13th January 1944 for my medical with the firm intention of joining the Royal Navy. Having sailed through my medical – if you’ll forgive the pun – I passed A1 and returned home to await my joining instructions. But on the 8th February that year those plans changed dramatically when I received the letter from the Ministry of Labour informing me that I had been balloted to go down the mines – my immediate future was therefore going to be as a Bevin Boy. My initial reaction was one of total dismay as I had set my sights on serving my country in the Royal Navy. However, that was no longer an option and not subject to negotiation. The only alternative, should I have declined, was a stiff fine of £100 or three months...and probably more in jail...or both! This was clearly not a viable alternative, as I wanted to serve my country in some way....even if in one not of my choosing.

So it was that on the 17th April 1944, I – together with many others – found myself reporting for underground training at Newton Colliery’s training centre at Swinton Rugby League Club’s ground which, incidentally, was also as close as I ever came to my ambition to play for Wigan !!!! Training involved lectures on all issues relating to life underground. At the completion of training in May 1944, I and several others were posted to the Old Boston Colliery at Haydock. The pithead was about half a mile west of what is now the junction of the M6 and East Lancashire Road at Haydock. I, and my fellow Bevin Boys were to be paid the sum of sixty shillings a week....before deductions. There were three shifts: 7.00am – 3.00pm; 3.00pm – 11.00pm; and the night shift 11.00pm – 7.00am. We were

employed to work five and a half days a week. The journey from my home in Roby Mill to the pithead was approximately a sixteen mile round trip on my pushbike. This meant leaving home about an hour and a half before shift started to make sure I was at the pit bottom in time for the start of the shift. The return journey home took about the same time, dependent on the weather.

The first two weeks were spent working on the surface learning different jobs and, after that it was time to experience the realities of life ‘ down t’pit ‘ for the first time.....and what a tremendous shock to the system that was ! That first trip down the mine was quite simply like something out of a horror film.....and the beginning of what was to be our working life for the foreseeable future.

Being a village lad from Roby Mill and used to spending endless hours outdoors in the fresh air and beautiful countryside – I got my first real dose of reality and the shock of my life. But, if it was tough for me, the Lord only knows what it was like for some of my other colleagues who were totally unused to the new environment they found themselves in. One was a trainee solicitor; one a trainee accountant; another a butcher; and yet another a dentist! If it was a shock to me, it must have been like hell on earth for them.

However, if we felt bad and sorry for ourselves, imagine how it must have been for Glyn, our colleague from North Wales. Glyn had sadly lost both his father and his uncle in a dreadful mining accident at Gresford Colliery in North Wales. To make things ‘ easier ‘ on him, the powers that be posted him to the Old Boston Colliery in Lancashire, rather than Gresford. The last place the lad wanted or needed to be was down a mine. He was beyond terrified and after a couple of days he was in a dreadful state and could take no more and left for home. None of us blamed him and we never heard from him again. I only hope that his later life was kinder to him than the cards he had been dealt with up to that point. Life lesson in perspective learned though....no matter how bad you may feel personally, sadly there is always someone worse off than you.

So, back to that first day underground. On arrival at the pithead we were issued with a hard hat, safety boots and a safety lamp, complete with a tally disc which had to be returned at the end of each shift to ensure that everyone was accounted for. And then it was time to enter the cage beneath the winding gear for our first descent into the mine.

The cage had three compartments – bottom, middle and top – and we were in the bottom one. Once on board, the cage was lowered in short steps until the other two decks were full and then the banksman and winder man exchanged signals and then the descent into the darkness commenced and we began to drop like a stone. We must have been half way down when the cage came to a juddering halt and we bounced gently up and down as the cable flexed and stretched. I was scared witless but not as frightened as one lad who panicked and started to try to get out. ‘ Tha really doesn’t want to be doin’ that, lad ‘ said one of the old miners standing near the cage gate. ‘ If tha gets out here, tha’ll get t’bottom a seet quicker than t’reast of us as tha’ll drop straight down six hundred yards ! ‘. The pit was, in fact, about 1200 yards deep in total – that’s about the height of Mount Snowdon in North Wales ! Slowly we were hauled back up the shaft, only to find that the abrupt stop and bouncing happened another couple of times. Welcome to the miners’ sense of humour ! It turns out that this was an initiation rite for all the Bevin Boys on their first descent. The pit bottom was the only part of the mine with electric light. Everywhere else you had to rely on your safety

lamp. Only the mine deputies had hat lamps and they also carried the special lamps for testing for the much dreaded gas. From the pit bottom we had to walk about one and a half miles to the coalface and in places the walkway roof was as low as three feet. About half way – just about directly below the current M6 / East Lancashire Road junction – we had a short breather and then continued to the coalface which was virtually immediately beneath Haydock Park racecourse.

Lunch was eaten from our own ‘Tommy’ tins and ‘Billy’ cans full of water. There was no tea or coffee as you weren’t allowed to prepare hot drinks below ground at that time. Toilet facilities were as basic as they come – it was almost totally dark with the only light coming from our safety lamps – so it was a case of ‘when you had to go’ – you went – in the nearest available secluded spot !

For obvious safety reasons, smoking was totally prohibited underground. One chap was caught one day having a quiet drag in a manhole until he was discovered by a regular miner. The old guy went ballistic, put the lad to rights with some crude and extremely colourful Lancashire vernacular and extinguished the cigarette by dropping it in the lad’s water can. Believe me, he didn’t do it again !

Whilst health and safety measures were nowhere near as rigorous as today’s standards, most of the regular miners kept an eye on and looked out for us Bevin Boys. However, this was by no means simply an act of kindness on their part but one of absolute necessity as any mistake we might have made could have had catastrophic consequences for everyone in the mine.

Even so, accidents did inevitably happen on a regular basis – some serious, others less so. I, myself, once burst two fingers when trapping them between two heavy tubs. Once bandaged up, I was put on a different job until they had healed. Minor, but very painful injuries like this, were commonplace but you got them patched up and carried on working. I also vividly remember one occasion when on our way to the coalface we were met by colleagues running in our direction shouting at us to turn round and get out as quickly as possible. I can still recall running blind, hearing the pit props and roof creaking and then the tremendous noise and clouds of dust chasing us up the walkway. Fortunately everyone escaped and it transpired that 150 yards of the coalface had collapsed. This part of the face that was originally about six feet high was now only two feet high !

As with any other occupation, regular ‘leg-pulling’ – particularly of us Bevin Boys was commonplace. But one day, things went too far with an incident instigated by a surly chap who made it clear he had no time for Bevin Boys. On this occasion he collared me and three other lads and ordered us to carry a guy who had hurt his back badly on a stretcher on the one and a half mile trek back to the bottom of the mineshaft. Needless to say, we took great care and it was a truly lung-bursting exercise, especially when negotiating the very low roof in parts of the walkway and the steep 100 yard incline to the pit bottom and the cage. Imagine our reaction when – exhausted – we eventually arrived there only to see the chap climb off the stretcher, smile at us and walk to the cage ! Other regular miners got wind of this incident and, suffice to say, the surly guy and his ‘injured’ friend were disciplined and moved to another district of the mine.....probably for their own safety !

But there were also some amusing moments. One old miner complained of bad toothache and the Bevin Boy’ who was a dentist who joined at the same time as me, told him to meet him at the mine half an hour before shift started and he’d have a look at it for him.

Within a matter of seconds the tooth was removed – without anaesthetic, of course. The old guy smiled, rinsed out his mouth with water from his can, said ‘Its aw reet nah, lad – ta very much ‘....and wandered off to start his shift!

During my time in the mine, I did a whole range of diverse jobs – too many to describe in detail here. What I can say, though, is that the work was relentless; the conditions extremely harsh; and for the majority of the time back-breakingly hard. At the end of each shift it was an absolute relief to walk into the pithead showers but, even then, the regular miners’ wicked sense of humour continued unabashed with wags regularly turning the water valve in the other direction and dousing us in freezing cold water. I think they called it ‘ character building ‘ !

With the exception of a few, the regular miners were very supportive and looked after us Bevin Boys and there were some real characters amongst them such as the aptly named Tommy ‘ Two-a-Time ‘! Tommy was a small, wiry chap but was immensely strong and his job was to push one ton tubs of coal over 100 yards to the engines which then took them away to be unloaded. Tommy’s party trick was to push two such tubs at the same time – his logic being that it saved him both time and 200 yards of walking each time he did it !

As I’ve said, a handful of regular miners didn’t have much time for us Bevin Boys but my worst experience during this time was – believe it or not – on a local bus. Two women took it upon themselves to deride me for being a Bevin Boy and demanded to know why I hadn’t joined one of the armed services. My attempts to explain how I came to be a Bevin Boy, however, fell on deaf ears. To add extra insult to the injury of their words, one of them then proceeded to present me with a white feather. Never, ever, in my ninety years has anyone ever hurt me so badly. Their ignorance – in the dictionary sense of ‘ not knowing or understanding ‘ – scarred me deeply. The circumstances of me becoming a Bevin Boy, rather than serving in the Royal Navy, were totally out of my control.

When preparing these thoughts, my son asked me to try to summarise in a few words my overriding memories of my time in the mines. I think the following words best cover the downside of life in the mines: intense darkness; dirt and dust; heat; overpowering smells from innumerable sources; claustrophobic; the ceaseless noise of the machinery, equipment and blasting; in the quiet moments the creaking of pit props and the eerie groaning from the rocks themselves; and the ever present fear nagging away at the back of your mind.

On the upside, however, my time in the mine as a Bevin Boy gave me a lifelong respect for miners everywhere. They are a tough breed and extremely hard-working. I will never forget the humour, comradeship and simple humanity of the majority of the chaps I worked with. They may have been rough diamonds and their language colourful but they had hearts of gold and amazing courage in the face of the day-to-day adversity. It was a privilege to work with them and I will never forget them.

As a footnote and in one of life’s amazing coincidences, I only discovered recently when chatting with my next door neighbour – a native of St Helens – that his Dad – a regular miner – also worked at the Old Boston colliery at the same time as me. Talk about a small world !

In closing, even though it was not the path I planned or chose, I am immensely proud to have done my duty and to have served my country as a Bevin Boy. I proudly salute all my fellow surviving Bevin Boys and also all those former colleagues now sadly departed.

By Ian Halliwell.