



# THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1989

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## NEWSLETTER FOR AUTUMN 2022.

### Chairman's Message.

Welcome to your Autumn Newsletter.

Well we have done our first AGM on Zoom! Six of us including one Bevin Boy attended the AGM. It was lovely to see old friends again.

The good news is that we intend to keep the area reunions going whilst we can and we are determined to keep the newsletters, website and Remembrance books going as well. We still have a full management committee and next year plan a virtual AGM on Zoom again. There will also be a Social meeting before Christmas – again via Zoom on **Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December at 11am**. All welcome! Please ask friends and family if you are unsure, so hopefully lots of you will be able to join us and see everyone, even if just on a computer screen! **Contact me for the contact details and passcode for Zoom meetings**, which will then be sent two days prior to the meeting.

I wish you all a Happy, Prosperous and Healthy 2023,

Anne. (Lane)

### MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY.

The death was reported of Lady Finsberg on the 15<sup>th</sup> July, she was 82 years old. Doris Risdon in Norfolk rang to offer books; two helmets, a snap tin and knee pads from William Ardent, Margaret Rose agreed to collect these, which she still has in her possession.

Jennifer Herriot wrote she had books from an old 'boy friend' Margaret was prepared to collect these, but nothing further has been heard from her.

Maureen Kennedy from Cowden Beath, Fife, rang to say that all her research on mining in the area, plus Bevin Boy hostels, had been stolen.

Jon Everett had produced an audio track of the Bevin Boys; Denigh, to be released in September.

Another Newsletter had been received from the Pony Sanctuary.

A phone call from Professor Yora Dimitriadi at Reading University, told of whilst researching old grave stones, came across a Bevin Boy, Sidney Charles Quick Date of Death 1945, who died down the mines. It was unusual for the fact it was recorded on the tombstone that he was a Bevin Boy.

Finally Emrys and Pauline Hughes inquired about volunteers from the Indian sub-

Continent to come to work as Bevin Boys, one of whom was called Raja Ram who sadly died in 1980. Les Raymond, father of our Treasurer Barbara Mc Elroy, remembers one, Ram Dam (?) cutting other Bevin Boys hair in the hostel. Let us hope we have a mild winter, for all sorts of reasons.

With Every good wish,

D. Elizabeth Todd (Liz)

## **Treasurer's Report.**

I have circulated the end of year accounts to all committee and Bevin boy attendees at the AGM as is our protocol. However if any Bevin Boy would like a copy of the audited end of year accounts please let me know and I will post you one.

As might be expected our income has dropped although not by a large amount. This is mainly due to falling membership and thus donations, but also for some reason we did not receive the Bigbury Mint annual donation which was sent but never received. I am currently following this up.

Expenditure was up by over £1000 but this is because of the cost of meeting up in an annual AGM/reunion. We did not meet the previous year because of Covid and the decision was made last year not to hold Annual reunions in person as travelling long distances was difficult for many of our members. We will not have this large expenditure again.

We do have a deficit of this year, however we have had a planned deficit for the last three years as we have enough in our budget to keep going for the foreseeable future. We also continue to receive donations and recently (in the current year) had a substantial donation in memory of one of our members. We are always very grateful for all of these as it allows us to function healthily without any fund raising and allows us to spend what we need to carry on as we are. It also allows us to continue to subsidise area reunions where they are still going ahead.

Barbara McElroy.

## **Archivist's Report.**

As usual we have had a few enquiries from relatives trying to find out about their own Bevin Boy. As always, we are unable to give specific information unless that Bevin Boy has been a member and given us details themselves. However, we can give general information about the Bevin Boys and in some cases that is enough. It is frustrating however that so many records in the past were destroyed.

One notable piece of work was with Jon Everett, a Bevin Boy's son who contacted the Association asking for help with images to go with a video production of a song he had written. The song is 'rock' style, so modern and takes the story to a new generation. If any Bevin Boy or the family would like to hear this, I do have the links to it online so if you email me I can send the link. The video does acknowledge the role of the Association and the song itself was premiered on Voodoo radio at the end of September, which is apparently an online radio and was very well received.

I was sent some Bevin Boy books recently and I will contact the Imperial War Museum to see whether they hold copies of them all.

I know all the committee work hard at furthering the Bevin Boy story where they can and I am still doing several talks a year locally. 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.**

### 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 details for all the Committee, and also the Newsletters, 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)

### Membership and Newsletters.

We are asking all Bevin Boys to ask their son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter or nearest friend to **contact us** with **their** contact details. We are getting quite a few returned Newsletters with no explanation! If the Bevin Boy has sadly died we would like to know, so that we can add their name to The Book of Remembrance. This eventually will be placed with our memorabilia at the Museum of Coal for England at Wakefield. Would you please be sure to advise us of any changes of address. Could you ask wives, partners, sons and daughters to inform us.

### Our Lodgings.

The majority of Bevin Boys stayed at specially built hostels which comprised several 'huts' for accommodation purposes (12 beds to a dormitory), reception, games room, library, lounge, restaurant, concert room and sick bay. The manager and his family were also accommodated within the complex.

I lodged at Hightown Miner's Hostel at Castleford in West Yorkshire where the manager and staff looked after us. On occasions the local colliery Brass Band would entertain us. In my dormitory six of us spent some weekends exploring the countryside staying at hostels. We also formed a Drama Group and entertained miners and their families at their social clubs. One charming lady who helped in the canteen was 'getting on a bit' but was always helpful in so many ways. We composed a poem about her which was as follows "My name is Mrs Ball, I try to please you all, but I could smack you on your 'seat' when you ask for a second sweet". Bless her!

After 'leaving the pits' I kept in touch with some of my dormitory pals for some years, either visiting them or they would come to Winchester. I had a correspondence with one of

them for over fifty years until he died and I still keep in touch with his brother – a long association – and it all started with Charlie who slept in the bed opposite me in the dormitory at Hightown.

Phil Yates.

### **The Bevin Boys in Wartime Britain 1943 - 48**

The Bevin Boys were named after Ernest Bevin who was instrumental in creating the Transport and General Workers Union whose General Secretary he became in 1922. He was appointed Minister of Labour in the wartime Coalition Government, by Winston Churchill. By 1943 there was a crisis in coal production in the United Kingdom with only three weeks coal stock left. This seriously jeopardised Britain's ability to win the war against Germany.

Bevin, as Minister of Labour and National Service, was told by Churchill to increase coal production, so of all 18 to 24 year old men conscripts drafted into service in the armed forces, one tenth, drawn by ballot were to be directed, on pain of imprisonment and irrespective of background or ability, to work underground in Britain's coal mines. Approximately 48,000 Bevin Boys undertook unskilled manual jobs to release more experienced miners to move on to the coal production at the coal face. Included in the Bevin Boys were 'optants' who volunteered for the mines rather than serve in the Armed Forces. The latter were not very popular with the conscripts!

#### **My Life as a Bevin Boy.**

I was eighteen years old when I was conscripted, by ballot, to become a Bevin Boy. I had first hand experience of the devastating effects Wartime had on civilian life, having been brought up initially in Wallasey which was so heavily bombed, along with Liverpool, that I had to be evacuated, at the age of thirteen to Nantwich. There I continued my education at the Nantwich and Acton Grammar School. At the age of eighteen I knew I would be called up for military service. After a medical and an interview, I was accepted for air crew training which was my preferred choice.

However, I received a letter which instructed me to report to the local Labour Exchange. There I was given a one-way ticket to Newcastle-upon-Tyne. That was the end of my hopes to go for air-crew training! My name had come up by ballot to be a Bevin Boy. I was supposed to be met at Newcastle Central Station but there was nobody there, so I made my own way to Annfield Plain, near Stanley, County Durham. There I was put into a Miners' Hostel and did six weeks training to be a miner at Morrison Busty Training Pit. On completion of training we were allocated to different collieries and I was sent to Pelton Fell Colliery, Chester-le-Street and billeted at South Pelaw Miner's Hostel.

#### **Living at South Pelaw Miner's Hostel.**

The housing was a collection of Nissan huts and each hut had twelve occupants from all over the country, there were hundreds of us. Within the conscripts there were distinctions of class, upbringing and education as well as geographical locations. These disparities inevitably led to cliques, formed for example by the Glasgow set and the Liverpool set and

their attendant minions. All were conscripts often dissatisfied with their situation: nor was there any attempt at discipline.

This was where I was billeted and paid twenty-five old shillings a week for board and lodgings out of my wage of about £2 a week. There were twelve conscripts to each hut which had only basic necessities, for example the bed had wooden slats, the central heating was by pipes in the ceiling. Meals were provided in a canteen, the food itself was awful! The highlight of the week was either a dance in the communal dance hall on a Saturday night, which lots of Geordie girls attended, or alternatively there was a cinema in Chester-le-Street.

### **Working at the Coal Face – the Miners.**

As the camp was two miles from the colliery, we boys had to walk that distance each shift. I remember the winter of 1947, trudging through the heavy snow there and back after our shift without the benefit of any pithead baths. I worked at Pelton Fell Colliery at Chester-le-Street alongside the colliers and, like everyone else needed a translator to understand them, their accent and their colloquialisms. Life for the colliers was down the pit, then at the end of the shift with no pit head baths, trudging home and looking for their relaxation in the local club. They never went very far except for the Durham Miner's Gala and occasional outings. One guy I worked with had not been to Newcastle for thirteen years despite it only being some twelve miles away. We Bevin Boys were completely alien to them with our different backgrounds, accents, upbringing and class. For example in my hut there was a Cambridge undergraduate, an old Harrovian, a couple of Eastenders from London, a lad from Northern Scotland and one from the Isle of Wight. At Pelton Fell we were working a coal seam some two feet, and three inches thick. It was a high quality 'steam' coal and I understood that it was used by the Royal Navy.

### **Working at the coal face – as an unskilled conscript.**

I was a shift worker at the pit. We conscripts trugged the two miles to where I worked, sometimes, with a pit pony called Nipper. He was a terror because he would only do so much work on one shift, but Nipper saved my life. It happened when we were working an exploratory working which had only one way in and the same way back out. At the end of the shift the colliers headed out. Nipper, being on a loose harness, had to be led out. I was at the back of Nipper who stopped short and would not move. I pushed and shoved him but what I did not realise was that in front of Nipper stones started falling. Quite simply Nipper, by stopping, had saved my life. The men who had already left returned because they heard the sounds of the fall. When the debris was cleared I did not leave Nipper, but he left me! Nipper, in fact shot off back to the stables and when I joined him he was munching away.

### **My later life as a Conscript.**

I was sent to work in the mines in 1943 and after two years of this life I asked to be moved nearer home. I was, in fact sent to Haydock, to Wood Colliery. There I became a haulage hand, a loader 'lashing on' at the bottom of the drift, the tubs on the track. Meanwhile

others who would not work in the pits were sent into the armed forces. Their service in the mines was not recognised and they had to start from scratch again.

### **Demobilisation and After.**

By the time I was 'demobbed', in Group 63 in November 1947, the pits had been nationalised and the war was over. The National Coal Board was looking to train mining engineers, officials and surveyors. I was approached by the colliery management and I chose to study mine surveying for my career. Therefore I enrolled at Wigan Mining College which, together with Cambourne Mining College, had an international reputation. I qualified in 1953 as a Mine Surveyor and became chief surveyor at Wood and Lyme collieries. I also worked at Clockface and Golbourne collieries. In 1968 I became an Associate of Wigan and District Mining College, having gained a Diploma in Diagnostic geology. When Wood closed in 1971, I was transferred to North Wales.

### **Overview of my Life as a Bevin Boy.**

It was by chance my number came up to serve as a Bevin Boy, but it laid out my future path in life for me. There are many incidents I remember, like lying down on the conveyor belt for a ride with my theodolite and stand. The times when visitors were surprised unexpectedly to see a naked man, naked because he had fallen into water and his trousers were saturated, so he had taken them off. Or visiting ladies having to lie on the conveyor belt, keeping very still with the roof inches away from them when taking them as well as coal up to the surface. Then there was the very hot, 90 degree temperature at the coal face in Parsonage Colliery at Leigh. There the miners were given salt tablets to help them cope with the heat. I do remember that the miners were very versatile and brilliant at improvisation. They always had a great sense of camaraderie and looking out for each other, just as Nipper had done for me.

We were demobbed on army group numbers, with no monetary recompense .....and no demob suit!

### **In Conclusion.**

Many said that the Bevin Boys experiment was a failure, but Churchill said that they cut the coal.... And we did win the war!!!

In May 2013 at the National Arboretum a Memorial was unveiled to 'The Bevin Boys'.

As told by Phil Robinson in March 2017. With thanks recorded by Maureen Draper.

**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 2023 to Anne Lane. We ask you to pay by BACS please, details from Anne.**