



THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1989

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NEWSLETTER FOR SPRING 2018.

Chairman's Message.

Welcome to Spring 2018! Thank you to everyone who returned their Voting Slips. I expect you are all waiting to hear about the result of the Voting on whether we continue with the Association. **We had 63 votes to continue and only 10 votes to close**, your committee is very heartened with this overwhelming result!

Did any of you see the article in the Telegraph on Friday 23rd March entitled 'Forgotten Heroes of the wartime mines'. We are very disappointed that no mention was made of The Association after we had helped them with contact details and information. A letter was sent to the Editor.

Under the Data Protection Act we do not reveal or pass on your details, without your permission to other agencies.

I wish you all a Happy and Healthy 2018,

Anne. (Lane)

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY.

Daffodils and crocus have heralded the arrival of Spring, and we now look forward to the warmer longer days.

I am delighted that now the vote to continue has been confirmed. We will be able to continue with the Newsletter, the contents enable members to keep in touch, as well as give information on local area reunions and the AGM.

Derek Hollows of Altrincham wishes me to thank those who responded to his request for stories for his latest book. He has been unwell and is now house-bound, but hopes to complete the book for publishing later this year.

As I mentioned in the last Newsletter, the Pit Pony Sanctuary in Pontypridd CF37 1PS, is still anxious to receive donations or used stamps, all of which go to help provide loving care to needy horses and ponies. Many of you I know, remember with affection, pit ponies you encountered during your service. The last surviving ones came from 'drift mines'. Gordon my late husband had happy memories and stories to tell of his pony 'Jake'. In fact, I am going to include in this edition, part of his account of his time down the mines. He prepared notes for his interview, many years ago with Dr Conrad Wood, from the Imperial War Museum, where his tapes and photographs are now held. Remember it is not too late for you to record some or part of your war-time experiences. Younger members of the family or friends, I am sure would help and be interested.

Phil Robinson has recently visited the Astley Green Colliery Site and Museum off the East Lancs road in Lancashire, and is keen to pass on the following.

The colliery was started in 1908 finally closing in 1970. The headgear and engine house were saved and the headgear is the last surviving example in the Lancashire Coalfield and listed as Grade 2 by English Heritage and on its 'At Risk Register'.

Also the site has the largest surviving Steam Engine in Europe. The engine has been lovingly

restored over the last 30 years by volunteer members of the Red Rose Steam Society, but they need help to keep the museum going so DONATIONS are urgently needed. The guides are all volunteers, some of them sons of ex-miners. If you 'Google' the site you will find it was used for an episode of 'Peaky Blinders'; One of the B.B.C. set men has become a volunteer and is helping convert part of a miners cottage into a tea-room. I have photographs of Gordon and I visiting the site in, September 1999, when we used to visit mining sites in the North West and North Wales delivering posters advertising the existence of the Bevin Boys Association.

Please help with donations if you can, every penny will go to restoration of the site. For information see <http://lancashireminingmuseum.org> or send donations to Mr Shardlow, The Secretary, Red Rose Steam Society, Astley Green Colliery Museum, Higher Green Lane, Astley, Manchester M29 7JB. Cheques made payable to:- Red Rose Steam Society LTD, contact telephone 01772 431937.

Is there an ex- Bevin Boy who worked there or remembers any one who did? Mr Shardlow would be pleased to hear from them with any reminiscences of that time.

With every good wish,

D. Elizabeth Todd (Liz)

MESSAGE from the TREASURER.

Following the resignation of Margaret Rose from her role in organising the reunion, it has been decided to close the Bevin Boys Social account that she administered and move the balance into the main Bevin Boy Account as we will no longer need to deal with large amounts of money. This will bolster the main account as we are seeing a slowly declining balance but there are still sufficient funds to keep the Association going for the foreseeable future. The committee is not meeting during the year until October, so this will be a saving over the expenditure of last year when we had to put considerable time and effort into exploring options for the future of the Association.

Barbara McElroy.

ARCHIVIST

We continue to receive regular queries from the families of Bevin boys. Sadly, often these relatives know nothing of their loved one's time in the mines- in some cases they were not even aware that they were a Bevin Boy until documents are discovered. One of the great disappointments is often that there are hardly any official records left, so we cannot tell where Bevin Boys served or give any personal details unless they have lodged something in the archives.

Your stories are so important to those who follow, so please make sure you tell someone your story if you haven't already done so. I am always happy to oblige if that helps. In particular it is the anecdotes, funny or sad that stick in your minds and also mean most to those who are trying to find out what it was like to be a Bevin Boy. You don't need to remember dates, it is the things that happened to you that hold the interest.

Thank you to all who have already passed their documents and memories to the Imperial War Museum. I am off to meet Phil Yates at the beginning of April at the Museum to see his own archives before he hands them over to the museum. I am looking forward to seeing them.

The Imperial War Museum now insists on Original Documents and DO NOT accept copies.

I am hoping to work on an information leaflet this year to send out to those who make general enquiries. If you have anything of interest to include please let me know.

If you have friends or relatives who would like to view the Bevin Boy archives then please be aware that you have to make an appointment with the London Research Room and

this should be done via the Imperial War Museum website.

www.iwm.org.uk/research/research-facilities.

The particular reference number for the Bevin Boy Association collection is **Documents 6335** but due to the size of the collection, the first couple of boxes are likely to be retrieved initially.

There are sadly no Bevin Boy documents on display, which is why it is important to support the Caphouse initiative.

Best Wishes,

Barbara McElroy.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT.

It is lovely to receive so many letters of support for the Association and saying how much you all look forward to reading the Newsletters. With, of course, your subscription of £5 to continue receiving the twice yearly Newsletter! I would also like to thank so many of you who have also enclosed a little extra for the general funds!

If any Bevin Boys wives, partners, sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, nephews or nieces would like to receive the Newsletters do let me know.

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 as above.

Anne.

Sales.

Total Sales for the year 2017 were £8.40p. 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	Blue Enamel Badge	@ £2.00
Miners Lamp Keyring	@ £5.00	Digging Up the Past	@ £10.00
Forgotten Conscript (1 only)	@ £10.00		

Bevin Boy Banner Postcard, 2 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.

National Reunion & AGM

As you are aware from the last newsletter Margaret Rose stood down from her role in organising the re-union after giving sterling service for many years. As you will see elsewhere in the newsletter we are continuing with the Association, but do not have a person to organise the re-union so it has been decided to go for a simpler and shorter get together.

The Reunion will consist of two nights dinner, bed and breakfast at The Mecure Shakespeare Hotel in Stratford Upon Avon on Tuesday 16th October and Wednesday 17th October This hotel is only 1.1 miles from the railway station (10 minutes by taxi) and 200 metres from the centre of the town.

The cost of two nights DBB will be £230 for a single person and £280 for a couple.

The AGM will be on the afternoon of the 17th October.

You will be required to make your own booking but it will be at the reduced rate negotiated above and you will need further details to achieve this. **Please express your interest in**

attending including how many rooms required and the number of people in your party by April 22nd to Anne Lane. We will then send you details of how to book* Please do not send money or book with the hotel until you have received further details.

This does not commit you to attending until you have actually booked. Please take out Insurance.

AREA REUNION's for 2018.

If any Area Representatives would like to send in news of their Reunions or Activities - I would be pleased to publish them in the Newsletter. I would also like to thank the Area Reps, past and present, for all their hard work in arranging reunions, etc.

Cheshire, Lancs & North Wales. Wednesday June 6th - A lunch at 12 for 12.30.at the Red Fox, in Thornton Hough, Wirral CH 64 7TL Please ring **Liz Todd 0151 342 3703** for details.

EAST ANGLIA - Sunday July 1st meeting at 12 noon followed by a lunch at 12.30 - please ring **Margaret Rose 07796 125227** for details. Bevin Boys family and friends, **all** are welcome.

SOUTH WEST. - Monday 14th June a reunion lunch at 12 noon at The Star, with bus stops outside! Hope to see everyone again. Please ring **Anne Lane 01275 463703** if you wish to attend.

ESSEX & NE LONDON : Thursday 19th July, this has been arranged at the tea rooms at West Mersea Vineyard starting with coffee at 10.30 am and then having lunch. I have booked a table this time (sorry for the mix up last year!) but as usual you will order and pay for your meals individually on the day. I will need to know numbers, so please could you express interest **by April 22nd** and then if you are unable to attend later on just let me know before the day. We are always pleased to welcome friends and relatives. Contact Barbara McElroy on 01728 724533 or 07824516279.

Please note Mr Milton has offered that if any two or more Bevin Boys want a Get together in London, they are welcome to go to the Clarendon on a reduced rate.

Caphouse Museum.

Harry Parkes has asked us to let you know that funding has been found to create a permanent Bevin Boy Archive at Caphouse. They already have some records, objects and photographs but would like to do more to create a lasting legacy for the Bevin Boys. They would like to film the stories of the Bevin Boys with their permission and record their story alongside excerpts from We Also Served.

The Museum is very keen to get as many Bevin Boy voices recorded as they can. If you feel able to help with this, please ring Harry Parkes BEM on 0115 846 5354 as soon as possible.

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. 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 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.

Eric Crowch's Memories.

The background to my wartime story is that following the start of the second world war Britain was no longer able to export the quantity of coal that had taken place previously and

as a consequence coal mining was not classified as a reserved occupation. However by 1943 with wartime production and a demand for coal at a peak the ruling was reversed and the following is quoted from the engraving on the Bevin Boys Memorial in the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas in Staffordshire – “ In 1943 this country faced a crisis in coal production as there was only three weeks of coal stock available. This put the country's ability to win the Second World War in jeopardy. The then Prime Minister, Winston Churchill charged Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour and National Service, to increase coal production. Mr Bevin decided that from all 18 to 24 year old men conscripts drafted to serve in the armed forces one in ten were to be directed - on pain of imprisonment and irrespective of background or ability - to work underground in British coal mines. Approximately 48,000 Bevin Boys (as they became known) undertook unskilled manual jobs to release more experienced miners to move to coal production on the coal face. The role played by Bevin Boys should not be lost to history.”

I had been studying for an engineering degree which meant that I was granted deferment so long as I passed exams along the way. One was required also to be active in Civil Defence and at the height of the flying bomb activity in London with all night duty every third night, sleep and also study were in short supply. I subsequently failed my Part 1 B.Sc. exam, was automatically subject to call up and my number came out of the hat for the mines!

On the 10th. January 1945 I was on the train to Newcastle and thence to a Training Colliery and hostel for 'Bevin Boys' at Annfield Plain in Co. Durham. After a month of intense physical training and instruction both above and below ground we were posted to a colliery – mine being Ryhope Colliery three miles south of Sunderland on the coast. The main areas of activity and coal production were at a depth of either 1500 or 1900 feet down and anything up to three miles out from the shaft under the North Sea. My first job was general labouring but mainly lugging lengths of iron pipe up to the face to provide compressed air for the miners' jackhammers. Eventually with my engineering background I managed to persuade the foreman that I could be better employed doing mechanical maintenance and was transferred up to what was known as the five/quarter seam at 1500 feet down. (The coal seam was 3'9" thick – hence five/quarter!). Here I was on the day shift for five days keeping the conveyor belts, pumps, coal cutters etc. in working order and on weekends doing early morning maintenance shifts in preparation for the next week. The daily output of 400 tons from this one 200 yard long face was geared to a strict cycle of work for five 24 hour days involving coal cutters, drillers, shot firers and a team of loaders shovelling the coal onto conveyors with the face advancing 4'6" every night. Woe betide the poor fitter if he didn't keep everything running so that the targets could be achieved!

After many months, on one Sunday morning together with the senior fitter we were doing maintenance on the main conveyor with the protective guards removed and I inadvertently got my hand caught between the moving belt and the rollers. The damage to my first two fingers meant that I couldn't properly grip my tools even after physiotherapy

and after being re-graded by a Medical Board I was released from the mines as there was no suitable 'light work'! Even though the war was over I was still subject to call-up but fortunately obtained a post as a junior engineer with McAlpines in Cardiff at the GKB steelworks – and there started my happy association with Wales and the Welsh.

ALBERT JAMES BIBBY 1925-2017
(AN EARLY BEVIN BOY)

Albert Bibby was born and raised in Liverpool and with a father in the Merchant Navy he always assumed when he turned 18 on 18th December 1943 he would enlist in the Royal Navy. Ernest Bevin's announcement to the House of Commons on 2nd December 1943 changed all that. But Albert did not take his direction to coal mining lying down and appealed immediately. Despite the support of the firm of solicitors, for whom he worked, and his Army Cadet Commander, who insisted in his letter that Albert "will never make a coalminer", Albert's appeal was unsuccessful. He reported to Swinton's Rugby League Ground on 7th February 1944 to commence his basic training at Newtown Colliery, Clifton, Manchester.

When the first four weeks were up he was sent to Chanters Pit in Atherton near Wigan. He started there on Monday 6th March at 6.45am earning 44 shillings a week and facing two huge challenges. Firstly, how to adapt to working underground in such inhospitable conditions and secondly, as a scouser, how to come to terms with an unintelligible local accent. It is a measure of Albert's character that he successfully mastered both. Albert's lodgings in Atherton were with a Mr and Mrs Whittaker and he was referred to generally around the town as 'Whittaker's Bevin Boy'. He was fortunate to be able to visit his Liverpool home regularly during his first year in the pits but his life changed dramatically just as the war ended. He met a local girl at a dance and in September 1946 they were married. On the Friday before his wedding day he had been told he had been selected to do a course at Sheffield on Mining Engineering. Albert never returned to live in Liverpool. He settled in Atherton, raised a daughter and eventually left the National Coal Board to work in Wigan as a Contracts Engineer for Gullick Dobson a Mining Equipment Company.

Being a Bevin Boy had seemingly deprived Albert of the opportunity to travel the world but as a Contracts Engineer he arranged exhibitions in all five continents and went underground in mines in South Africa, China, the Soviet Union, Sweden and Germany. He had never wanted it, he always said going down a mine scared him far more than the prospect of being a soldier or a sailor, but he was proud to be a miner. The Bevin Boy Association helped him to be proud of being a Bevin Boy too and he was delighted to be in attendance at the National Arboretum in 2013 when the Duchess of Wessex inaugurated their memorial.

When Albert drew a number at registration that ended with a 9, it changed his life. It didn't have to, he could have gone back to Liverpool, the solicitor's office or the Navy but he didn't. He retained a lifelong love of his home city in general and Everton Football Club in particular but he lived and worked in the mining community to which he was sent in February 1944 and true to his character he made the very best of it.

An Excerpt from 'The War Experience of R. Gordon Todd'

..... In 1944, I received my 'Calling up Papers' after having my Service Medical at Renshaw Hall, Liverpool.

I found that I had been directed to serve in the Coal Mines. I wrote to the National Service Department saying I wanted to do my service in the Forces. I received a curt reply informing me I had no option in the matter, and they enclosed a Travel warrant for Sheffield where on the 1st May 1944, I commenced my training as a Bevin Boy at Woodhouse Training Colliery.

On arrival at Sheffield Victoria Station, I went to Pool Street Bus Station and got a bus to Woodhouse Mill Colliery. Most of the conscripts were allocated Nissin Huts, but I was fortunate to be directed to a terraced house in Lower Woodhouse with two other conscripts, John and Bill, to a Mrs Linley. It was very strange to have your bath in a tin bath in front of the fire, and also to go down to the bottom of the garden to the outside W.C, with the toilet paper being the local newspaper torn up into squares and threaded onto string, then being hung on a nail driven into the brick wall.

On arrival at the Colliery we were kitted out in a blue coloured overall, safety boots and hard hat. Surface time was allotted for country runs, hard physical exercise under the supervision of the Sheffield United Football Trainer and lectures on mining and other things. The Coal Screens, were where the mineral coal was placed on a conveyor belt, so that then large lumps of coal had to be man-handled and thrown into railway coal wagons standing at a lower level adjacent to the conveyor belt. This work was known as Surface Work and in some collieries, women were employed to do this work.

We were informed that no one was allowed to go into the Colliery Winding room (The machinery controlling the cages when men, women and animals were being transported down into the mine), when the winder was operating.

On our first trip to the underground workings, we were directed to the Lamp House where we received an electric battery lamp, which was quite heavy, in exchange for our Talley (a metal disc with a number stamped on it) this had been given to us when we arrived at the Colliery. This meant that at any time Management knew the number of men that were underground.

This was now to be our introduction to descend to the underground workings known as 'Pit Bottom'. Before transporting men in the Pit cages, Engineers or Deputies would descend slowly on top of the cage to inspect the steel cable, and not until the clearances were given would the cages be used. After the cages had been loaded, the Banksman would 'Then Ring Off' on a signal bell connected to the Winder and we would be lowered. The descent was quite alarming at first, as the descent was like the sensation of having the steel cable cut, and before you nearly reached Pit Bottom the Winder would stop the descent leaving the cage bobbing up and down like a yo-yo! When the cage settled it would be lowered onto the Pit Bottom. The number of rings on the bell (signal) indicated to the Winder what was being placed in the cages e.g. men or coal.

When the Government decided to call up men into the pits, the Country had about three weeks stock of coal. It was decided that the conscripts would be employed purely on Haulage work underground as the Face Men (Cutting Coal) were on Piece Work and in one sense were similar to the Colliery Owners, who were individual private companies. Whereas, the conscripts at 18 years old were paid 44 shillings per week by Government after a week underground, increasing to 52 shillings per week and 56 shillings per week when you were 19 years old.

Alan Lane's Memories of his life as a Bevin Boy.

I worked at Lady Windsor Colliery, Ynysybwl, Glamorgan, South Wales, this was situated in the Rhondda Valley and was a dry pit, so we had to watch out for Methane gas (Fire Damp), where a spark could ignite the gas, causing a fire and/or explosion.

I was in lodgings in the old village, if my memory serves me right, my Landlord was known as Yunto Chips. The owner of the Old Bwl Pub, Dai something, who became a Bevin

Boy whilst I was there and he used to down several pints of beer before his meal to get rid of the coal dust in his lungs, so I was told, I spent quite a number of evenings in his Pub. My snap tin contained three slices of bread, two with a little bit of jam, the other with a small piece of cheese. It was shaken up so much I could not separate them – what a mess! Most of my rations went to the landlady's grand daughter. My second Digs were in the Main Street with a Mr Jack Hall and his wife, whose name escapes me, and their two daughters Caroline and Jacqueline. These were great lodgings with plenty of food and I was treated like one of the family.

When I went into the cage for the first time it descended at an alarming speed, my ears popped and breakfast felt like it was coming up! I worked on the coal face and then on a hard heading, dangerous and back breaking work. It was very noisy and dusty working with pneumatic picks. A collier near me was killed by a falling lump of coal, it took four of us to lift the lump off of him, he had a broken neck, which had proved instantly fatal. In total six or seven miners were killed in the pit while I was there.

I was walking out on my own after finishing the morning shift one day, on opening an air door, there was a pony blocking the roadway! I let the door close while I thought, now what was the command in Welsh for move over – because he wouldn't move when I spoke to him in English! So I opened the door again and said in my best Welsh voice, ' See back'. The pony moved instantly, and I was able to pass through and on up into the welcome daylight. I heard him move back to his original position as I continued on my way!

I worked on the Coal Shift with Colliers whose names I cannot remember, but did work for quite a long time driving a hard heading with Harry Stone who used to pay me in the Pub at the bottom of the Pit Road. The Beer was excellent, but was awful in the evening, I was told that the owner of the Pub was in the habit of putting Mild Beer into his best Beer to help pay for his imbibing Whisky. True or False I don't know!

Two other names that I remember were Jim Evans and Harry Brown who worked on the Pit Bottom, Jim 'master haulier' didn't have a tooth in his head and when he smiled he showed a set of Tobacco stained Gums, not a pretty sight!

On the lighter side, us Bevin Boys were not allowed to play Snooker or Billiards in the Workmen's Hall, because we didn't know one end of a Cue from the other (supposedly!). The Films changed twice weekly and the price of admission was ninepence or sevenpence in old money, but the highlight of the week was the Saturday dance in Pontypridd with some of the girls from the Village. Just as an afterthought I can remember a Café in the main Street run by an Italian where he used to heat up a Pie or Pastie by pushing it onto a copper pipe coming from the hot water cistern, primitive but effective!

I worked for nearly four years in Lady Windsor Colliery, but I cannot say that I enjoyed it, in fact I hated it because I wanted to join the Navy, having said that I think we got on very well with all the Miners having dispensed with the misnomer that we were there to take their jobs away from them!

For the last six months of my four years as a Bevin Boy I transferred to Pensford Colliery, Somerset, nearer my home in Bristol. A Very wet pit! We worked in shorts and boots with a carbide lamp, no gas in this pit! We worked with hand picks and shovels, in a two foot seam on our backs or sides.

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