



# THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1989

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## NEWSLETTER FOR SPRING 2019.

### Chairman's Message.

**Welcome to Spring 2019!** Thirty years since the Bevin Boy Association was founded. I wrote at the beginning of the year to all those of you on email, unfortunately we only had a couple of days notice, to ask you to vote to name the new bridge at the Heads of the Valley The Bevin Boys Bridge. To those who voted for the Bevin Boys Bridge, 'the public votes were very close, but afraid the Bevin Boys came in a close second. The bridge will now be named after the winner John Williams, a local hero in World War II.'

Just a reminder, when you book a train ticket you can also book Assistance, this means you should be helped to your train seat with your luggage, and if you have to change trains during your journey, someone will assist you to find the correct train and platform!

I wish you all a Happy and Healthy 2019,

**Anne. (Lane)**

### MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY.

Spring is here, I hope you are enjoying the longer brighter days. This year we celebrate 30 years since the Association was formed. We hope to mark the occasion at our Reunion and A.G.M. at Caphouse, the English National Coal Mining Museum, Wakefield, from October 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>. December 2018 marked another special date. It is 75 years since Earnest Bevin announced in Parliament the start of the Bevin Boy scheme. Not a happy day for so many, who then as a result of that decision, had to spend their war-time service in the mining industry. Those who receive the Pit Pony Sanctuary Pontypridd, Newsletter, will have read that C.A. Polly asked if anything could be done about pit ponies who spent long hours in sometimes terrible conditions. Few pit ponies are still alive, but some from drift mines are still cared for at the sanctuary, along side rescue or neglected ponies. They are always pleased to receive donations. David Hollows who wrote the book 'Voices In The Dark' pony talk and mining tales, makes interesting reading for those who want to know more. The book was published in 2010 and can possibly be obtained on line, or if you are lucky to have one, a local bookseller.

I had a long conversation with Derek recently. He is now confined to home but still active preparing a new book. He tells me he is 93 years old in August, as are so many of our members. Congratulations to all ! Many members have told of their close association with pit ponies, as many were employed on haulage which gave opportunities for strong bonds to be made.

Phil Yates from Winchester writes of the passing of another good Bevin Boy friend, Graham Grant also from Winchester. He was well known in the area and will be sadly missed. A full account of Graham as remembered by Phil appears later in the newsletter.

In the last Autumn Newsletter under stop press, mention was made of the magazine 'Britain At War' in which an article on Bevin Boys featured Phil Robinson (a committee member) and Gordon Waterhouse. It was a good article and will go into our archive. Also I was given an American

magazine called World War 11. in which Tom Holloway's drawings were featured from the exhibition in the Mining Art Gallery in Bishop Auckland in 2018.

In addition Les Raymond, Bevin Boy father of our archivist Barbara Mc Elroy, was interviewed by Geraldine McKelvie, for an article in the Sunday People newspaper, December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2018. It was well worth reading, giving yet another insight into the life of a Bevin Boy.

Marina Hinkley whose brother Cyril Nightingale was a Bevin Boy, contacted me concerned that the Bevin Boys were not mentioned, either at the Remembrance Service at the Royal Albert Hall or Cenotaph Parade. She had also contacted the British Legion with the same query.

Members of the Association last took part in the Cenotaph Parade in 2012, and ceased to do so because age had taken its toll and the assembly and standing time of two hours, was no longer possible.

Since then I have contacted the British Legion who organise the occasion at the Royal Albert Hall, with a request for tickets and / or participation in the Remembrance service on the Saturday evening this year. Although I was told application is via the British Legion for members of the armed forces only, I stressed that these men were conscripted to do their service in the mining industry, and should be considered along side the armed forces applicants. I am awaiting further information as the allocation of places only takes place in April, with allocation to the general public in October

Any member who is interested, fit and able to attend, please let myself or Anne Lane know. If we were allocated tickets we would then have to decide by ballot those who would receive them, that we feel would be the fairest way of allocation. We will also contact the B.B.C. requesting a mention at the Cenotaph Parade, as the British Legion tell me they have no input on the B.B.C. voice-over on the day.

Finally we have fewer requests for information about friends members may have made during their service, but family members send in enquiries wanting to find out the past story of their loved ones.

With every good wish,

**D. Elizabeth Todd (Liz)**

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

To date all income is down on last year. Our donation from Bigbury Mint was £24 as opposed to £56 last year. Both money for newsletters and donations are also down on last year at present, although we are grateful for the generosity shown. This is all perhaps inevitable as our membership ages, but the good news is that we are still in a very good position to continue for the foreseeable future and as you will see elsewhere we are still going ahead with an annual reunion with plenty of funds to support any extra expenditure needed. We have had a plastic banner made replicating our actual banner for any occasions where we are invited to represent the Bevin Boys.

Barbara McElroy.

### **ARCHIVIST**

Owing to family illness I have been unable to contribute anything in this area since the AGM in Stratford upon Avon. I have had very few enquiries, but have been doing a lot of hospital visits so may have missed calls. The organisation has had an enquiry about Bevin Boys after the end of the scheme, also the same person asked about a Conscientious Objector who been sent down the mines as late as 1952. We have always pointed out that the conscripts between 1943 and May 1945 are the actual conscripted Bevin Boys although we

accept that volunteers and optants during this period were also widely known as Bevin Boys. The last Bevin Boys left the mines in 1948 so those who called themselves Bevin Boys after this time were not part of the scheme and were just using a popular term to describe themselves. There is nothing in our archives to suggest that Conscientious Objectors were sent down the mines as late as 1952 although they may have done National Service in the mines as a matter of choice. Nothing I have come across supports compulsory service in mines but our remit is 1943-48. During that time we know for certain that only 41 Conscientious Objectors were Bevin Boys.

We were invited to represent the Bevin Boys at a WW2 re-enactment and display at Easter (no we weren't expecting to don helmets and start digging) We planned a stand but the organisers have just changed the dates and venue so we are now unable to attend because of prior commitments. Hopefully we will be invited again.

Thank you to Eric Johnson who has just contributed his Bevin Boy story to the archives.  
**Have you?**

Finally my father, Les Raymond had his moment of fame when his story appeared in a double page spread in 'The People' in November marking 70 years since the end of the Bevin Boy scheme. If you are online you can google 'Bevin Boy who wanted to fight the Nazis' (their title online but it appeared as something else in the paper)

We still get asked for interviews so please let us know if you are willing to be interviewed.

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 2018 were £29. 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 Forgotten Conscript (1 only) @ £10.00

Miners Lamp Keyring @ £5.00 Digging Up the Past @ £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

This year we are going to Caphouse at Wakefield, which is the Coal Mining Museum for England. The dates are arriving Monday October 7<sup>th</sup> leaving Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October. The AGM will be held in the afternoon of Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> October promptly at **14.00 hours 2 pm** with a free day on the Tuesday.

The Reunion will consist of three nights bed and breakfast at The Ramada Hotel in Wakefield at a cost of £216 plus a charge of £8 for double room occupancy. 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 required and the number of people in your party by April 30<sup>th</sup> to Anne Lane. We will then 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.

### 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, lunches etc.

Cheshire, Lancs & North Wales. Wednesday June 12<sup>th</sup> - 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 29<sup>th</sup> April a reunion lunch at 12 noon at The Star, with bus stops outside! Hope to see everyone again. Please ring **Anne Lane** on 01275 463703 if you wish to attend.

ESSEX & NE LONDON : Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> July a reunion has been arranged at the tea rooms at West Mersea Vineyard arriving for coffee at 11 am followed by lunch. Dad and I will be pleased to see Bevin Boys and their friends and families - please let me know if interested **by April 30<sup>th</sup>** just let me know later if you are unable to make it. Telephone 01728 724533 or 07824516279.

**Barbara McElroy and Les Raymond.**

### 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, and 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.

Any other memories and experiences of your time as Bevin Boys I am happy to print.

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.

## Jim Wylie - an Optant.

During the Second World War all the young men and women were conscripted into the forces to fight in the war against Germany. Winston Churchill was Prime Minister and needed someone to take charge of the job of seeing that the Services were supplied with all the material they needed to fight a war. He appointed Ernest Bevin as Minister of Labour. It was his job to keep the factories going. This was called the 'Home Front', a Front that was to prove itself second to none.

We were at war and little did we know then, what the consequences would be if we lost the war. Women played an enormous part in the factories, making aeroplane engines, ammunitions, guns, ships, making tanks and all the other things required for war. There was a special Flying Corps of American women who flew bombers, that were gifted from America to Britain. Land Girls helped to feed the nation, working on the farms, early mornings, late at night, and heavy work. Public Parks were made into allotments to grow food in.

Coal was the power house of the industrial revolution, it also fuelled the growth of the Commonwealth. Coal was the powerhouse of the factories during the war. Without coal, furnaces would shut down. Homes would be left with no heating. Without labour production would come to a standstill. Since there was a shortage of labour in the mines, due to men not wanting to work underground, and miner's taking the chance to leave the mines to join the army. It's ironic that miners were leaving the mines to go into the army, and men were being conscripted into the mines, when they would rather go into the army. You were fined or sent to jail if you refused.

I couldn't get into the Navy and was in the Air Force Cadets for a short time. I kept shooting down friendly aircraft, during my aircraft recognition test! So I opted to go to the mines as a Bevin Boy. Bevin Boys were treated shabbily. They were not given the right to get their job back after their service in the mines, nor were they given clothing or boots, these they had to buy themselves, no travel passes home, or Demob suits after your service.. I was alright as there was a shortage of piano tuners.

**Why did I choose the mines?** In the navy you could freeze to death in an arctic convoy. Get shot out of the sky in the Air Force. In the Army you could get blown up. The mines I thought offered the best option. Get buried alive. I knew this was not going to be easy. In any of the Services there was a chance I might find an easy job, not likely in the mines as there was no place to hide. I became a Bevin Boy, along with 48,000 other men.

## Sue Tallentire – Remembrance weekend in London.

I was lucky enough to have an article in your Newsletter saying I was going in the People's Procession. I wanted to do this for my Paternal Grandfather. I proudly wore a WW1 Army Cyclist Corp badge. My Dad was a Bevin Boy so I wore the Association Badge .I have since learnt from The Ministry of Defence that he went into the Royal Artillery, but was too late to find a badge to wear. We have just come back from an amazing weekend in London.

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> November - we made our way to The Tower to see the Lights in the moat and what a wonderful sight. Saturday we went to the Albert Hall afternoon service and I found it very emotional. We were asked to stand and hold photos of the dead. Having done work for Durham at War WW1 diaries etc. I felt as if I knew these soldiers. Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> we were up and out early, waiting a few hours before we started to march. What an honour and a privilege. One of the most moving times was when the veterans had marched and were returning as we were all waiting, we clapped and cheered them. Very touching! Unfortunately the BBC coverage stopped as we reached Admiralty Arch and turned down Whitehall. All our family and friends never got to see us. We completed our weekend by visiting the Shrouds of the Somme. Another emotional experience and spoke to the artist who had created them.

Altogether a whole weekend's experience I will never forget.!

## **BEVIN BOY**

A thousand feet below the ground,  
Where nature's light is never found,  
Where night is day and day is night,  
And nothing natural meets the sight.

Where air is stale and damp and foul,  
And flooding threats and gases prowl,  
And walls and roof crash to the floor,  
'Tis there he works at death's dark door.

'Tis there he works in sweat and grime,  
He makes the bells of victory chime,  
He makes the planes, he makes the guns,  
He arms the men who chase the Huns.

His no smart uniform to wear,  
His no proud victors' palm to bear,  
No cheering crowds to give him joy,  
The poor unnoticed BEVIN BOY.

Copyright reserved, P.R. Taylor 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1944  
Pontypridd Miners' Hostel

## **Jack Stoddart's Memories**

In March 1944 my call up papers arrived and although I had expected to join the RAF and even possibly be trained to fly, the opposite was to happen and I was conscripted to work underground as a Bevin Boy. My training was at the Morrison North pit at Annfield Plain, Co. Durham and we were provided with boots and a hard hat and later industrial gloves. Although I have seen lots of photos of boys wearing overalls, I have no memory of being supplied with a set. Certainly when I was underground for my three and a half year stint I wore old clothes of my own including heavy trousers bought at an Army Surplus store.

After the two or three weeks of training I was posted to work underground at the Billy Pit at Quaking Houses, near Stanley, Co. Durham. Strangely named Quaking Houses were purely there because of the pit. It consisted of four long streets of miner's houses and a Co-Op store. However, please don't mock it, that's where my girlfriend Mary lived. At this point I should explain that I was a local boy, born in Annfield Plain and living in Stanley, when I was called up.

The fact that I was from a mining background did nothing to lessen the impact and contrast between my previous job in an office of the County Treasurer's Department, Durham County Council and my manual job underground.

My day started at 5 am or 1 pm (in back shift) by walking from the pit bottom about a mile and a half along an unlit tunnel designed to accommodate a single track railway for the train of full and empty tubs, not for a six foot eighteen year old Bevin Boy. However when I reached the workplace it had full height, electric light and was dry, though very dusty.

My job on haulage was at the foot of a very steep incline about one hundred yards long. The thirty tub train of full tubs came to our place by means of a main and tail steel cable powered by a 100hp hauler controlled by a grey haired miner, Ralph King. Once uncoupled, the train came around a curve to me. If it was coming too fast I had to slow it down using 'dregs' pushed into the wheels. My job was to uncouple the full tubs three at a time and send them up the incline by means of fixing a fork to the front of first and third tub and hammering a moving 'endless' rope into the forks on the move. There was a real incentive to get it right, otherwise the full tubs would come crashing down to where I stood! Once all up to the top of the incline the coal would progress to the pit bottom of the Louisa Pit at Stanley and then up to the surface.

Ralph King turned out to be a good friend, he showed me how to lift a full tub that had come off the rails by using my back and, in effect lifting with my legs. He even gave me an old 'arse-flapper', a heavy leather square to attach to your belt to protect base of your spine when pushing or lifting.

There were no pit head baths at the Billy Pit but the Bevin Boys living in the hostel at New Kyo had showers available there. Living at home as I did, had many advantages but the downside was that, in common with I suppose 99% of houses in the area, we had no bathroom and a tin bath in front of the coal fire was how I had to wash every day. Did someone say these were the 'Good old days'?

I was released on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1947 and returned to my job with Durham County Council having left in March 1944 as an office junior and returning in 1947 as a married man – Mary and I had married in April 1947 – with the maturing experience of being a Bevin Boy behind me.

### **Ronald F J Lentz**

My grandfather Ron Lentz started work as a Bank Clerk in North London near where he lived, but was allocated by Ballot to become a Bevin Boy at 10 days notice in April 1944. He had to report on 24th April to Cramlington, Northumberland for training, which must have seemed a long way from home.

After two weeks training, during he told us they just moved coal from one place to another, he was sent to Ellington Mine near Ashington North; The work in both mining and moving coal (with pit pony's who seemed half wild to him.) was not pleasant easy or enjoyable.

He told us he was billeted with a landlady who gave him condensed milk sandwiches for his lunch and woke him in the night to read him poetry she had written!. He decided that the billet was not for him and asked around the village if anyone would take him in. Eventually a couple did so, and he said they looked after him very well for the rest of the time he was there.

He was invalided out of mining after 12 months and returned to banking for a few weeks in May 1945, after which he was called up into the regular army, where he travelled to Greece Egypt and other places. He was re-employed by the National Provincial Bank at the end of the war and became Manager of a Grade 4 National Westminster Branch with 35 working for him.

His retirement was saddened by the death of his wife, but he had four grandchildren from his three children and traveled the world with his companion. He enjoyed classical as well as music of the 60's and 70's, he was also a keen prize -winning photographer, and e-mailing the family up to his death aged nearly 92, in 2017.

.His time down the mine always stayed with him and he likened the Northern Line on the London tube as being a similar environment - dirty, noisy and claustrophobic.

Ron was very pleased when the memorial to the Bevin Boys was unveiled at the National

Arboretum a few years ago, and said 'At last they had been recognized for what they had done'. He also took part a few times in the Remembrance Parade by the Cenotaph in London, on Remembrance Sunday, always grateful he had survived the war.

Ron was not physically a big man, but he has left a huge gap in the lives of those he has left behind.

**This Account has been written and submitted by his daughter Mrs Sue Stewart and grandson Liam Stewart. Thank you.**

### **Graham Grant as Remembered by Phil Yates.**

Bevin Boy Graham Grant died on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019 aged 92. Graham who lived in Winchester, served 'his time' down the pits in the Somerset Coalfields. I first met Graham in 1992 while I was writing the booklet *The Bevin Boys Story*. I wrote letters to several newspapers asking for Bevin Boys to get in touch, with their memories. Among them were Warwick Taylor, Les Wilcock (both died last September) and Graham. All three joined the Bevin Boys Association and came with me to Chatterley Whitfield Mining Museum, Stoke-on-Trent for the 1993 Reunion where the booklet was launched. I remember Graham, Warwick and Les carrying bags of booklets on the journey back to Winchester! At that reunion Channel 4 were filming us on the top of a slag heap on a very cold autumn day!

Graham was, for many years, the Captain of the bell-ringers at Winchester Cathedral as well as being organist of a village church nearby. A special service was held in Winchester Cathedral in the presence of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester (I can't remember the details). Again, Warwick, Les and myself represented the Bevin Boys. Graham was, of course, in charge of –the bells. He rang us the previous day and said "if you come down an hour before the Service starts I will take you up to the Belfry". We met him at the side entrance to the cathedral, the only entrance to the belfry, climbing over one hundred uneven steps and walking along a narrow passageway overlooking the chancel, and finally reaching the bell chamber where the ringers were in place to ring the twelve bells. Graham then said "I will now take you up to the bell tower so you can see the bells". He must have given the signal 'to start ringing' We all felt like Quasimodo – the sound was deafening! On returning to the bell chamber he said "How did you like that?" knowing we were in the cathedral we said "Not very much" although Warwick and Les would have liked to add a few swear words!

Later that afternoon we attended a reception at the Great Hall of Winchester Castle and there we met the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. While Warwick and Les were busy chatting to the Duke, Graham and myself were trying to tell the Duchess about Bevin Boys (she had never heard of us) – not surprising as she comes from, I believe, the Netherlands. It was always a pleasure being in his company – he had such a lovely smile all the time!

**Mary Fletcher**, a long time supporter of the Bevin Boys, Reunion and AGM, has sent some notes about Wilfred Owen who was killed during the last week of the First World War on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1918. His was one of the faces carved into the beaches in tribute by director Danny Boyle last year. He wrote a poem entitled 'Miners' in under an hour in response to the Minnie Pit Disaster of 12<sup>th</sup> January 1918 in which 156 men and boys lost their lives as a result of a firedamp explosion, including 40 pit-lads under 16.

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