



# THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1989

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## NEWSLETTER FOR SPRING 2020.

### Chairman's Message.

**Welcome to Spring 2020**, goodbye to a very wet and windy winter and of course hopefully we will soon say the same to Coronavirus. I hope you are all keeping safe and well. At the moment we are going ahead with the planning of our AGM and Reunion in October 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>. 2020, but we will keep those who tell us they are interested in joining us, updated. No money needed at this time.

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 2020

**Anne. (Lane)**

### MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY.

At last spring has brought longer days and welcome daffodils so we can say goodbye to a very wet and windy winter.

While I was on holiday I met Robin Ellis who told me about Gresley Old Hall community centre in Swadlincote. Perhaps anyone living in the area would like to visit there. It is only a few miles from the National Memorial Arboretum near Alrewas where we have our Bevin Boys stone memorial. Gresley Old Hall has a mining history section plus a large section of mining memorabilia. This reflects their history as a miners welfare scheme. There is a large free car park and licenced bar, the post code for sat. nav is DE11 9QW.

Arthur Wheeldon wrote to tell of the Bilsthorpe Heritage Museum, which could also be of interest to members. It is based on the Bilsthorpe colliery mine The village was very small before the mine was sunk, but was listed in the Domesday Book. The village was part of the Rufford Estate owned by the Savile family but now owned by Nottingham County Council. They are a registered charity and received accreditation by the Arts Council in July 2017. They have artifacts, mining memorabilia and photographs on display. Free admission and parking, open Wednesday to Sunday 11am--4pm. Address Bilsthorpe Heritage Museum, Cross Street, Bilsthorpe, Newark NG22 8QY.

### Where Are You Now?

I get fewer requests for this section of the Newsletter, but I have recently had a communication from Hugh Memess who is part of a team that makes B.A.F.T.A winning stories for I.T.V. on 'Long Lost Family'. They are making a new series that might be of interest to some of our members. Provisionally entitled 'Lost Love Stories' about people who wish to connect with a romantic love from their past and they aim to reunite them after years apart. It is intended to only feature stories where both parties are single and happy to meet as friends. The programme was originally inspired by a recent story of an American Veteran who was reconnected with his French girlfriend after 75 years apart. Is there someone out there you have occasionally wondered, 'What happened to so and so?'

If you think you would like to take part please contact Becky Dale Everett on 0203 301 8514 or e-mail [longlostloves@walltowall.co.uk](mailto:longlostloves@walltowall.co.uk)

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.

Keep well! Keep Safe! Best wishes,  
D. Elizabeth Todd (Liz)

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

We continue to receive donations, so thank you everyone. The balance is healthy with plenty of funds to continue our Association. We still receive a yearly donation from Bigbury Mint which is perhaps surprising especially as after a dip last year the amount has gone up by £12.  
Barbara McElroy.

### **ARCHIVIST**

I had hoped to get the archives I am holding to the Imperial War Museum and had arranged to take them on March 19<sup>th</sup> however events have overtaken this trip. I then considered sending them by special delivery however the Museum is closed, so for now I will hold onto archives entrusted to me. I was also going to get the Bevin Boys information leaflet done in time for a VE Day event, again this is no longer taking place so I will work on it in draft and get it printed at a later date.

One thing I have managed to accomplish is that we have purchased a glass disc to go in the Caphouse Memorial garden at the English National Coalmining Museum where we had our reunion last year. We went to look at this memorial wall at that time which is like an outdoor stained glass window and decided to get a disc on your behalf. We had limited words allowed but it reads

‘Bevin Boys Association’  
‘In memory of Bevin Boys who served 1943-1948.’

I did manage to contact Tony Richards, who is the curator at IWM, and he confirmed that we still need to go to London if anyone wishes to look at the Bevin Boys Archives even though they are stored at Duxford.

I have had a very few enquiries lately, probably because of all that is going on. I saw a funny comment on the internet this week saying ‘I wish to cancel my subscription to 2020 as the first three months have been highly unsatisfactory’ I guess we all feel like that. I hope you are all keeping well and safe.

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 Bedford. The dates are arriving Monday October 5<sup>th</sup> leaving Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> October. The AGM will be held in the afternoon of Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October 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 at The Swan Hotel in Bedford at a cost of £349 for double room occupancy, and £280 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 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 2020.

I would like to thank the Area Reps, for all their hard work in arranging lunches etc. **All these dates are dependent on the Coronavirus restrictions ending.**

**Cheshire, Lancs & North Wales.** Wednesday June 25<sup>th</sup> - A lunch at 12 for 12.30.at the Red Fox, in Thornton Hough, Wirral CH 64 7TL Ring **Liz Todd 0151 342 3703** for details, all are welcome.

**SOUTH WEST.** - Postponed! Maybe we can meet in October. Please ring **Anne Lane** on 01275 463703 if you have any questions.

**ESSEX & NE LONDON :** Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July is the date for our get together. I did email the tea room at Mersea Vineyard to make the booking before things closed down and hadn't heard back but of course there is little hope of getting confirmation now. If you would like to come along let me know by June 16<sup>th</sup> as by then we will have a clearer idea of what is happening. Open to all Bevin Boys and their families. Please 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.

Please go to:- <http://www.bevinboysassociation.co.uk> or to email [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.

### 70 Years on - A 'Bevin Boy' Remembered. (Part 2)

I was met by the Deputy (Underground Supervisor) who proposed to take me on a tour of the workings. He started off at a fast pace and I followed carrying my snap tin, water bottle and a lamp hanging from my belt. The going was very rough, I was tripping on lots of rocks etc. that were in the roadway, I was striking my helmet on the low roof (I am 6ft tall). On the way he was pointing out things such as the convoys of tubs of coal being taken by rope haulage to the pit bottom and empty tubs going back to the coal face. We visited the stables where ponies were kept, very smelly! After about twenty minutes of this 'walking' we stopped and went into the Deputy's office - a hole cut in the side of the roadway, about 6ft by 6ft and 6ft deep, furnished with baulks of timber for seats and a table - no lighting but a telephone!; redolent of a first world war dugout.

After making a couple of phone calls, the Deputy said "we need not go on further - (by this time I think he had realised I was not cut out for a mining career!) - we will return to the pit bottom" where he left me in charge of the Corporal (Chargehand) as spare man for that area. This suited me fine as the pit bottom was a whitewashed, well lit area about 20 ft wide, 80 yards long and 10 ft high.

I watched the way things were done and soon fell into the work which was fairly fast. After a few days I was tried out on the running of the job, working alternate day and afternoon shifts - 6.00 to 14.00 and 14.00 to 22.00 hours.

My task was to uncouple the tubs as they rolled down the incline then hold them at about six feet from the cage doors and release two to roll down into the cage as it docked and the gates opened. This required split second timing as too early would result in a damaged gate or too late would slow up the whole process. The cage was a triple decker so the task was carried out three times in a very fast operation.

The operation of the lift or cage was the responsibility of three men - the onsetter in pit bottom, the banksman on the surface who both communicated by bell signals to the engine winder who sat in the winding house and controlled the cages with two levers and pedals. As the full tubs were loaded into the cage, two empty tubs were pushed out and returned to the conveyor end for re-filling.

Before entering the pit one had to collect a lamp in exchange for a numbered brass token and carry a snap tin (lunch box) and water bottle. The lamp was carried by a hook over the trouser belt so that it hung between the legs. The pit bottom area trousers, a hardhat and heavy was well illuminated so hand lamps were switched off and placed in a refuge hole until end of shift when they were returned to the lamphouse and exchanged for the numbered brass token.

My dress for work was a shirt and trousers, a hard hat and heavy safety boots and gloves as I worked near the downdraught shaft where fresh air was drawn into the pit. It could be cold in winter so a coat and scarf were sometimes needed.

The tools for my job were two 'dicks' - triangular pieces of wood about three foot long, similar in shape to a cricket bat - which were placed under the front wheels of a tub to stop it moving. The other items were 'lockers', twelve inch long, thick wooden dowelling which could be thrown into the wheel spokes to slow them down.

This was my job for the rest of my mining 'career' with a few highlights - the first was the end of the European war - for a few days chalked messages had been coming down on empty tubs giving news of events, culminating with European war over - day off tomorrow!!

The following morning our landlord, Jack Woodfield, took his three lodgers out for a celebratory drink at The George Hotel, after which I staggered out and boarded a bus to Derby then caught a train home to Northampton where I stayed for three days, thinking the war's over, they won't need us now! But sanity prevailed and I went back to Alfreton and work next day.

In the early days of the Bevin Boy Scheme absenteeism was taken very seriously and many were taken to court and fined; a few were eventually sent to prison, but as 1945 went by no action was taken and a few deserted and went home.

I carried on working until September when I had an accident and crushed a finger end. Part of my job was to uncouple the tubs as they moved down the incline and throw the heavy coupling onto the top edge of the tub. In this instance my left hand was resting on the edge of the tub when the hook landed - my finger, although encased in gloves, turned red and the air blue! After some basic first aid I carried on with the shift until the end - 10pm. Next morning I went to see the pit doctor who inspected my finger, dressed it, said no bones broken, I will put you on 'compen' and see you in two weeks. 'Compen', or compensation was a weekly rate of money, higher than normal sickness pay.

I then, of course, went home for two weeks, returning to see the doctor again until after six weeks I was allowed to return to work. Of course, after six weeks away from my lodgings, my bed space had been re-let so I then became a resident of the Miners Hostel in Nottingham Road, Alfreton.

**Ken Peasgood. (deceased)**

Poem from Pat Ribbans (BB widow)

Theres always another tomorrow

However hard the day.

Theres always another tomorrow

Time wipes our tears away.

Theres always a reason for living,

Though sad your heart might be.

Theres always another horizon

Beyond the one you see.

Hi, As a former coalminer (Australian) and also a Viet Nam Veteran we thought your boys deserved a poem for posterity Cheers!

## THE BRITISH ARMY'S FORGOTTEN CONSCRIPTS\*

Have you ever heard of the Bevin Boys?  
Plenty of work but not much joy!  
All were conscripted and sent to the mines.  
They didn't have any choice at the time.

The Police thought they were deserters when seen on the street.  
Ordinary folk thought them draft dodgers when they would meet.  
They had no insignia or uniform to wear.  
And were refused entry to all the NAAFI canteens there.

So they slaved in the coal mines instead of going to war  
It was back-breaking work but they all did their chores.  
Working in the darkness till the war ended  
Then turned out on the street with no rights to defend them.

They were not even entitled to a demob suit  
To help them in their new job pursuit.  
Their old jobs weren't held for them as in servicemen cases  
It's unbelievable the trials that a Bevin Boy faced.

No medals, no paid leave, no recognition at all  
For these conscripts who had answered the call.  
They did their duty in appalling conditions  
Throughout the war in many positions.

48,000 men worked as Bevin Boys.  
They did not receive the accolades a serviceman enjoys  
Till a 1995 speech by the Queen  
Gave them belated recognition for their previous deeds.

Bill Charlton c 2019

\* Mr Ernest Bevin, Minister for Labour, devised a plan for 10% of conscripts per month to work in the coalmines instead of going to war. The usual ballot took place each month with those with marbles ending in 0-9 took work in the mines. There was no disputing the outcome.

After an accident killing several women and children down the coal mines, Queen Victoria brought out a law that no females or children under fourteen years old could work underground.

## **The Pit Brow or Pit Screen Lass was BORN!**

They were given clogs, a shawl and a headscarf. The wooden clogs were very heavy, but they kept their feet really warm, it was so cold working outside in winter as well as summer. Their wage was only half the wage paid to men.

Although an essential at these times, reserved occupation during both World Wars, many miners left the mines and joined the armed forces. The Pit Brow lass was really essential at these times, they would sort the coal from the stones and clean off the coal dust, so that it would burn efficient. The coal would come up from the pit, tipped onto a shaker so that the smaller pieces would drop onto a screen in front of the women to be sorted. The large pieces travelled along the belt and dropped into a railway wagon, weighed and then delivered where it was needed. The women were not allowed to talk, so they would lip read, so they didn't get in trouble from the foreman.

Pit Brow (or Pit Screen) lasses worked at the mines until as late as the 1960's. They are now referred to as the unsung heroines of the collieries, and were heralded as the pioneers for gender equality. A plaque was unveiled in their honour in Wigan recently.

**Harry Parkes. (Ex Treasurer.)**

### Poem by an Anonymous miner.

I am an Aspull collier	Could you but see my Nancy
I like a bit of fun	Among the tubs of coal
To have ago at football	In tucked up skirt and breeches
Or in the sports to run.	She looks exceedingly droll.
So Goodbye old companions	Her face besmeared with coal dust
Adieu to jollity	As black as black can be
For I have found a sweetheart	She is a Pit Brow lassie
And she's all the world to me.	But she's all the world to me.

Some of the women wore trousers which was frowned upon by the men (in the First World War) and lots of them would wear a brightly coloured ribbon to show their femininity. They were very strong women.

The RAF will always be remembered for the Battle of Britain.

The Royal Navy & Boat & Shipowners will always be remembered for bringing the troops back from Dunkirk, giving them the chance to fight another day.

The Army led by Monty will always be remembered for beating Rommel in the deserts of Africa, but no one remembers the conscripts who worked underground out of sight. No one remembers the Bevin Boys.

My name is Paul John Nabi, known by friends as John. I worked down the pits in the 1960's, so was interested when I found out about the Bevin Boys. When we became interested in the 1940's Re-enactments, my natural choice was to portray the Bevin Boys, God Bless 'Em. While at one of the events I met Harry Parkes a Veteran Bevin Boy giving a talk, we became friends and now give talks together. I have written a poem about Harry, but it could be about any of the 48,000 conscripts who worked down the mines.

Bevin Boy Harry Parkes by John Nabi.

Harry Parkes was a Bevin Boy,	They never received any medal,
He still is, he was never demobbed.	They never got any thanks.
He wanted to serve in the forces,	Without them we'd have had no weapons,
But no! Well I think he was robbed.	We wouldn't have had any tanks.
He signed up for the army.	Bevin Boys weren't trained to shoot rifles,
He was all ready to go.	They were trained to mine the coal,
His papers said Bestwood Colliery.	So when the hostilities ended,
So off he set in the snow.	They remained down the big black hole.
He was expecting a uniform.	Three more years they had to stay there,
He got helmet, boots and a lamp.	While the country got back on its feet.
Training was up and down the snowy hills.	The factories were in need of the furnace,
It was as tough as an army camp.	The homes were in need of the heat.
There were 48,000 conscripts,	The government took desperate measures.
Conscripts who had no choice.	Ernest Bevin knew what to do.
48,000 raw young men,	The Bevin Boys deserve recognition,
Who never had a voice.	By saying well done and thank you.
The war wasn't just won by the forces.	So while you're sitting in front of the fire,
The Bevin Boys played their part,	Watching your children play with their toys,
They were there after war finished,	Spare a thought for the coal that was worked for,
Although they weren't there from the start.	And remember the Bevin Boys!



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