



# THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1989

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## NEWSLETTER FOR SPRING 2021.

### Chairman's Message.

**Welcome to Spring 2021**, goodbye to a very wet and windy winter and of course hopefully we will soon say the same to Coronavirus now that the vaccine is available to us all. I have had my first dose!! I hope you are all keeping safe and well.

We have again taken the decision to postpone our AGM in April as we don't feel confident that we will be able to go ahead. So we are going ahead with the planning of our **AGM and Reunion from September 27<sup>th</sup> leaving 30<sup>th</sup> September**, still at Bedford in the Swan Hotel. But we will keep those who tell us they are interested in joining us, updated. No money needed at this time. I have reserved some rooms, so please DO NOT book direct with the hotel.

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 2021

**Anne. (Lane)**

### MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY.

The appearance of snowdrops, crocus and now the daffodils, herald the end of a wet cold winter and bring a cheerful note, after a long lockdown difficult time due to the Covid 19 virus. The requests either by telephone or email, for information on family members who may or have been Bevin Boys, have increased, possibly with more time available in lockdown to spend on research. We have heard over the years, the same stories, that questions were not asked, or as in many cases Bevin Boys did not talk about their experiences, all are dealt with By Anne, Barbara or myself.

Now to a query I had from Arthur Rollings in Leicester, wanting confirmation of the fact he had heard that Bevin Boys were to be awarded a Gold Medal, sadly, another item of 'fake news' I wonder where that came from? Sandra Dowle, whose father had been a Bevin Boy, contacted me about a 'Poppy' lapel pin. These are made for sale by the British Legion, giving the name of an association on them. Sandra asked if we would support her request to have one produced for Bevin Boys? After researching this item I found all 100% of profits would go to British Legion coffers. I then sought the opinions of a number of Bevin Boys, the overwhelming response was, considering the past history of the Legion's continuing rejection of membership for Bevin Boys, with the repeated 'they were not in uniform' that in no way should we add to their profits in producing a pin! When I explained all this to Sandra she understood as she had no idea of the background to the situation.

The publication of Gary Bridson Daley's book, 'The Last Stand', mentioned in the Autumn Newsletter, has been postponed until the summer. Hopefully we will have a positive update later in the year.

Finally to all Bevin Boys who's 95th birthday falls this year, the committee send their very best wishes to you all on this special occasion.

To everyone keep safe, keep well, warmest wishes,

**D. Elizabeth Todd (Liz)**

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

As we might expect there has not been a great deal of movement on our account because of Covid although we have received a cheque for £42 from Bigbury Mint this year.

Expenses for the website and newsletters have been our biggest expenditures, mostly offset by contributions towards the newsletter and donations. Our total balance is down slightly but we still have a healthy amount left in the bank to cover us for as long as necessary.

Barbara McElroy.

### **ARCHIVIST**

Well three lockdowns have caused us to be busier than normal as so many people are sorting through items left by Bevin Boy loved ones or have decided to find out more. All too often we have to tell people that there are no records which is why personal reminiscences are so important. I continue to receive items from Bevin Boys or their families and I am very grateful to them for ensuring that the Bevin Boy story is told as clearly as possible. Every Bevin Boy had a different experience so the more stories we have the better.

Two sets of correspondence have been discovered, copies of some of these have been forwarded to us. This is an important area as so many letters have been disposed of, but often they give a fascinating glimpse of life at the time and how the writer felt about their life in the mines. If you have any letters like these lurking in boxes, drawers or cupboards please consider ensuring that they are kept and ultimately passed on to either the Imperial War Museum or Caphouse English Mining Museum. Please note however that only originals are accepted by the Imperial war Museum. I can always include any items such as these in the parcels I send to the IWM.

I sincerely hope that you have all kept safe and well in these difficult times. At the time of writing there at last looks to be a light at the end of the tunnel. My very best wishes to you all.

Best Wishes, Barbara McElroy.

### **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT.**

Sadly we now have 1728 names in the Book of Remembrance.

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.**

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	@ £6.00	Digging Up the Past	@ £10.00
Bevin Boy Lapel Badge	@ £5.00	(Same design, new supplies)	

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 September 27<sup>th</sup> leaving Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September. The AGM will be held in the afternoon of Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> September 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. We will provide a light lunch, sandwiches and tea or coffee at 12 noon for those attending the AGM.

The Reunion will consist of three nights bed and breakfast at The Swan Hotel in Bedford at a cost of £307 for a double room for two people occupancy, or for a King size bed for two people occupancy £322, and £282 for a single bedded room. 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 Reunions are dependent on the Coronavirus restrictions.**

**Cheshire, Lancs & North Wales.** Ring Liz Todd 0151 342 3703 for details and if you would like to join us, all are welcome. Liz will contact recent attendees.

**SOUTH WEST.** - Maybe we can meet this October. Please ring Anne Lane on 01275 463703 if you would like to join us. We usually meet at 12 noon.

**ESSEX & NE LONDON :** Barbara McElroy and Les Raymond are hoping to hold a Reunion for Essex and NE London in the summer but this will be dependant on a number of factors. Barbara will contact those who have attended recent area reunions at Mersea Island once a date is set. Anyone else who would like to join us please let Barbara know directly on 01728724533.

### **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.**

## **An Unconventional Bevin Boy**

The question is “Why was I unconventional?” I will try to answer this question by starting my story with some background information. My Father was a miner, he worked at the local colliery as a coal hewer in number 2 pit of the Harvey seam, so as a school boy I was very familiar with “pit talk”.

On leaving school at the age of 14 years there was little prospect of obtaining employment other than working in a coal mine, unless you had passed the eleven plus examination. Unfortunately I did not “pass” the eleven plus, which would have qualified me to attend the local grammar school. I did learn later in life that the school I attended was only allocated two places at the grammar school and obviously these were awarded to the two boys who gained the highest marks. Although I did not “pass” the examination, this does not mean that I failed, it just means that I wasn’t first or second in the results table.

The boy that I sat next to at school was exceptional, he was the son of a butcher, so his future employment outside the mining industry was certain. When he left school he would work in his Father’s business. I too was fortunate, a vacancy for an office boy at the local colliery arose at just the right time and following an interview I was offered the job. I started my working life at the Dean & Chapter Colliery, in Ferryhill, County Durham. The Colliery was owned by Dorman, Long & Company who owned the largest group of collieries in South Durham. The firm also owned iron stone mines in North Yorkshire as well as steel works in the Middlesbrough and Redcar areas.

One of my regular tasks, as office boy, was to collect the Manager’s safety lamps and walking stick and take them to the shaft where he would be working on that day. (The stick which was 36 inches long was very useful for measuring.) It was war time, and when supplies were delivered I was required to collect the relevant invoices for processing and for directing the lorry driver to the correct delivery point. This meant that I was involved with every department; Surveyors, Engineers, Blacksmiths, Painters, Electricians and Joiners etc. Another daily task was to take the post to the village post office and often I had to collect tobacco for Mr Heslop. He was the Treasurer and head of department.

So how did I become a Bevin Boy? About my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, in March 1943 I received instructions from the Ministry of Labour to go to Middlesbrough to have a medical examination and to register for the armed forces. Since I was employed in an office I was not classified as a miner and nor was I a member of the Miners’ Trade Union. I discussed the instructions with Mr Hunter, the Office Manager and we agreed that because I was a very keen member of the St. John Ambulance Brigade either the Royal Army Medical Corps, or The Royal Naval Sick Berth Service would be the most suitable posting. Mr Hunter also suggested that I avoid telling the interviewers that I worked at a colliery and just describe my occupation as a clerical assistant. Unfortunately, I was obliged to tell them that I worked at a colliery when they asked me about my place of work. During the process I was also interviewed by a recruiting sergeant and he said that he was very impressed with my choice of possible postings, since these units were not particularly popular. However, following the medical examination, much to my disappointment, I was given a form which clearly stated in red ink “A1 Medically Fit for Coal Mining”. So it seemed that my immediate future was decided.

On returning home I gave the form to my Father, and his response was “You are not going to work in the pit, I will see to that”. My Father was an active trade union member and was the elected delegate for the Miners’ Lodge, this meant that he represented members of the Union in any negotiations or discussions with management. He showed the form to the Union Secretary, who wrote a letter to the Ministry of Labour on my behalf. A very prompt reply was received which stated that I had been selected to work in coal mining and that failure to do so could result in serious consequences. I also received a letter instructing me to report to the Dean and Chapter Colliery Manager. I reported to the manager’s office and his secretary directed me to Mr Bell, the under manager of Number 2 pit. (The Colliery had three shafts known simply as Numbers 1, 2 & 3 pits.) The Colliery had opened the Hutton Seam and I was sent to work on one of the gateways to a 100 yard coal face. My first shift started at 11.00 pm one Saturday night. I was instructed to

meet Mr Straughan who was an experienced miner. Another man Harry Hall was also present. Our first task was to erect 6 feet arch girders to replace the wooden supports that had previously been installed. We developed a system of working and made good progress. This task took three months to complete and I was relieved when the work was finished and we didn't have to work every night. This area was known as the Tail Gate and since the seam was inclined the coal was first shovelled by a team of eight miners, known as fillers, into the steel troughs which in turn fed onto rubber belting and conveyed to a loading point.

I then became a Timber Leader, which was just the title given to a supplies person. I was given a pony, named Rifle, to pull a four wheel tram to collect everything required for the coal face and take it as far as possible into the Tail Gate. It was then collected by hand for use on the coal face. I also had to collect wooden props and steel bars from the tail gate and bring them onto the coal face so that the fillers could use them to support the roof area where the coal had been removed. The team of fillers had the responsibility for clearing the full stretch of the coal face, and I also became useful in using a shovel. As time went by I was moved onto the coalface to operate a compressed air engine which powered the steel troughs.

Just a word of my association with my pony Rifle. He was very good natured, easy to handle, would stand still without being tied and somehow seemed to anticipate the next task. Rifle became a centre of interest for my family. My mother always asked about him and on a Friday, which was market day in Ferryhill, I would accompany my mother to the market to collect bruised or damaged apples and some carrots for Rifle. He could smell the apple in my pocket and he would stand very close to me and nudge my coat until I gave him the apple. He always enjoyed these treats. (Underground all smells, pleasant or otherwise are accentuated because of the system of ventilation.) One day when I went to collect him I found his stall empty. I asked the horse keeper where he was and he said "He's ok, he has just gone shopping for a new pair of shoes!" In other words he had been taken to the blacksmith. All the ponies were very well looked after.

Since I did not receive the initial training that most Bevin Boys did or have the problems of leaving home and living in a hostel or some other type of accommodation or have to travel to get to the mine, I think I can justifiably use the phrase "An Unconventional Bevin Boy" to describe my role.

As time passed I was encouraged to think about my future and so I attended evening classes which led to me being awarded a Shot Firer and Deputy Certificate in April of 1947. I was also awarded a certificate which authorised me to administer morphine to an injured miner should I consider it necessary. Being able to treat an injured miner underground was very important because of the time taken to transport him to the surface. I became a member of the Mines Fire and Rescue Service. Each colliery was required to have a number of miners trained in rescue procedures in order to assist the full time service when the need arose.

Sometime following my birthday in 1948 I received a letter from the Ministry of Labour advising me that it was no longer compulsory for me to work underground and I was free to consult my previous employer about re-employment. However, I was also given the option of continuing to work underground in my current role and was given three months to decide what I wanted to do. I consulted Mr Hunter and he informed me that several changes had been made to the office staffing and there wasn't a suitable vacancy. At that time it looked as though I would have to continue working underground.

However my future was decided by national events. The mining industry was nationalised in January 1949 and fairly quickly after that improvements were made in the care and welfare of the miner. At the larger collieries first aid rooms were replaced by Medical Centres which were staffed by a state registered nurse and three first aid trained men who staffed the Centre 24 hours each day.

One morning when I went to work, I found a note on my lamp stating that the manager wanted to see me at the end of my shift. After having a shower I reported to the office and following a short wait was called to see the manager. The manager knew of me because of my role in the

colliery office and my experience in first aid said that he had received favourable reports about my progress and asked me if it was my intention to continue working in the mine. He then explained that with the introduction of Medical Centres there was a vacancy in the medical centre and asked if this would be of interest to me. My immediate response was that that I would be pleased to accept the post. Following a meeting with Sister Hood, the Nurse in charge of the Medical Centre, arrangements were made for me to become a member of a team of three Medical Room Attendants, thus ended my work as a Bevin Boy and a miner.

Bill McAdam

### **Howard Williams - A Bevin Boy.**

On December 20th 1943 a letter arrived, but it was not the letter my father had been expecting, this was calling him up for coal mining employment. It didn't sound like an ideal Christmas present! Just a month before, Howard Herbert Williams had passed his medical examination to join the National Service with the Royal Navy.

His mother promptly wrote to the MP for Streatham, South London, David Robertson. In his two replies he reassured Mildred Williams that her son would be treated well and explained the national importance for his recruitment. Mr Robertson had contacted Mr. Malcolm McCorquodale, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour and a telephone call to Captain Pilkington, MP Civil Lord of the Admiralty, to discuss Howard's plight. It was decided that Mildred's appeal was unsuccessful.

Sir Godfrey Ince, Minister of Labour and National Service and Director General of Manpower, was a friend of the family and his several letters offered support and empathy but upheld the ballot as the only fair way to select young men for the mines. He was precluded from intervening in any individual case. However he did recommend that Howard should appeal and that Mildred should accompany him to the tribunal. There must have been more disappointment as they learned that the outcome was not favourable and Howard would have no choice but to accept his circumstances. In Sir Godfrey's later and personal letters I was able to ascertain exactly where my father had been posted to; Birley East Training Centre, Woodhouse, and then to Langwith Colliery, Nottinghamshire. He assured my Grandmother that 'the man in charge of the centre is the best manager we have. I have arranged for both his welfare and his discipline to be taken care of and I shall have a report about him when he has completed his training at the Centre'. Let's hope he behaved himself! Howard's father had sadly passed away in 1938 and his mother possibly thought he needed to have an eye kept on him. It must have been a difficult time for Mildred with young Howard entering coal mining, and her daughter, Marion away in East Africa with the W.R.N.S. Their older sister Pamela had married in 1940.

After leaving school Howard joined Barclays Bank and an acknowledgement stating his call up and best wishes were offered for his new duties. It would be

fairly accurate to say that Howard made his way north in late February to report for duty on the 28th.

As most of his wonderful collection of recently discovered letters are in addressed envelopes it would seem that he stayed temporarily in Victoria Road,

Woodhouse. Interestingly on the back of his Call Up paper is another address of Balmoral Road although this isn't in my father's hand. From there he moved to lodgings in Langwith, at 60, The Woodlands, with the Jones family. Reassuringly for us, it appears that my father had the good fortune of living with Annie and Stan. In a pal's letter he comments on the daily baths Howard had the luxury of! My mother recalls a story from my father, that Annie made snap for her husband, who was a regular miner, and for Howard, but that the pit pony rather liked to tuck in too! It is mentioned that 'Stan was absolutely lost' the weekend after Howard left Langwith.

After the post Bevin Boys days Annie corresponded for a few years and referred to their times all together as happy ones with laughter. She talked fondly of her family and always asked after Howard's. In my father's wallet is a Jones family photo.

On the 27th March 1944 a contract of service was signed with The Sheepbridge Coal & Iron Company and Howard's Langwith lamp number was 582.

Howard's colleague and pal, Lionel Lewis lived in digs in the next road at 262, Chapel Street. They formed a strong bond with their humour and love of jazz and seems they spent off duty time together and trips home, when leave was permitted, to each other's family homes in Streatham and Basingstoke. It is reputed that they entered the ballroom at Hatfield House via a tunnel to see the Glenn Miller Army Air Forces Band perform in the summer of 1944.

On 13th July 1947 Lionel wrote a poem in Howard's autograph book entitled ;

A Bevin Boys' Dilemma.

I'm only a poor old Bevin Boy!  
My work I try to do!!!?  
I fill up empties all day long?  
Until the shift is thro'!

One of Bevin's 'shovel' boys - Lou LH Lewis

Their friendship continued after Langwith. Lionel was released a month after my father on October 16th. In March 1946 Howard received A Notice of Intent for Release but like most Bevin Boys continued mining into 1947 and some until Spring of 1948. On August 12th 1947 he must have been overjoyed to learn that he would be released on September 13th. His sister Marion wrote to him on September 2nd with news of holiday arrangements in The Isle of Wight, saying that she had secured accommodation at a cost of four and a half guineas. That

seemed like a very fair price for the pair of them! A photo shows them together, my father must have felt liberated.

On 22nd September, just a week after Howard's release, Barclays Bank wrote to inform him that his application for reinstatement to the staff would commence on 6th October. After more than three and a half years, my father like so many other Bevin Boys, gave so much to the war effort and the vital need for service in the coal mines. They all performed dangerous work in hazardous conditions.

I have been really interested to read the most informative book, 'Called Up, Sent Down' which was recommended to me when I initially contacted Barbara McElroy. It has given me a very good insight into what my father would have experienced and along with the discovery of letters and memorabilia it has enabled me to write his story.

A week ago I proudly received his Bevin Boys Bigbury Mint medal. It has been my wish for many years to discover more about this part of his life. Judy Thorpe.

### **Norman John Hanslip**

My husband Norman John Hanslip was born 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1926 at Dersingham, Kings Lynn, Norfolk.

He was educated at Lynn Grammar, was in the ATC and started training as a rear gunner in the RAF in 1944 but was conscripted to go down the mines as a Bevin Boy. Training was at Cresswell and then he was sent to Alfreton where he stayed for four years.

On the first day having descended at great speed and crashing to a halt one of the boys suffered from shock which caused his hair to fall out completely within a short time, it never grew back. Work was using a pick axe while kneeling in water in a 3ft seam. They had to fill a certain number of trucks before they could leave and had their legs pulled by the miners, who of course were much quicker and before going would often empty the boy's water and peed in them. However soon the lads equalled and some bettered the miners who gradually became more friendly and helpful. Leaving at the end of their shift they had to walk two and a half miles to the barracks where they could have a shower etc. Not too good when it snowed.

After three years Norman was billeted with an under manager and treated like one of the family which included sitting in a tin bath in front of the fire and having his back scrubbed by the teenaged daughter. When Norman left in 1948 this man offered Norman a job as trainee under manager but Norman said he had to refuse such a kind offer, as a place at York University was being kept for him to train as a PE teacher. He started at York in Sept 48.

Whilst in the pit Norman loved the pit ponies who worked so hard and only came up for a short while once a year. There was an incline on their run and a nasty accident occurred when a man was crushed between two trucks splitting open his stomach, they never knew what became of him. Norman had a minor accident when his middle finger was crushed and he lost the top joint. This meant rest at home while the local doctor dealt with tidying it up. By the time Norman left the mines all were working in harmony and looking out for each other.



Back in civvy street after leaving York and marrying me we met four other 'Bevin Boy' couples each year. Those were happy times and all said that mining made men out of boys. Sadly Norman died in 1992 from lung cancer.

As told by Audrey his widow.

**NB.** The Nationalisation Bill was passed 20<sup>th</sup> May 1946, but this would have taken time to implement.

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