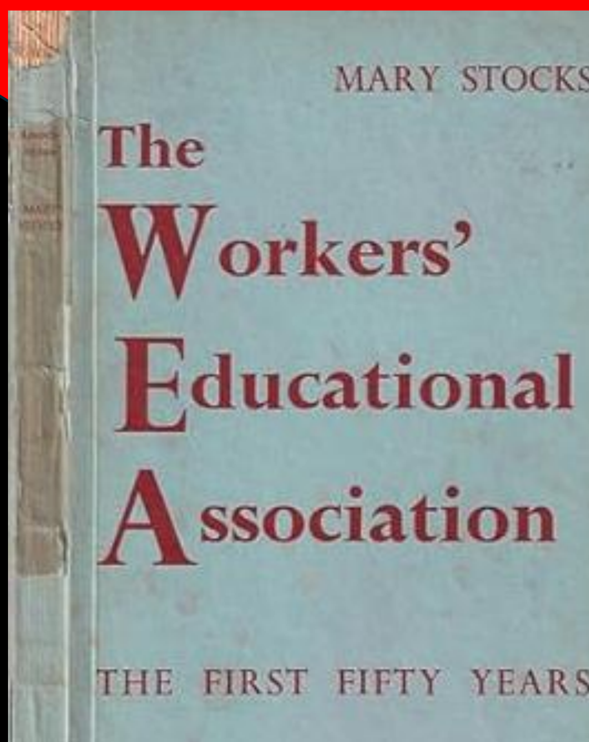
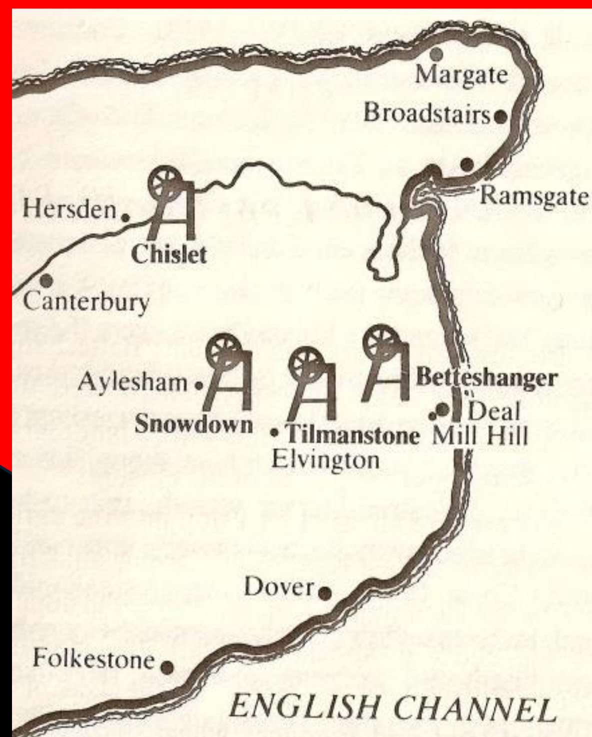
Radical Dissent: the Kent Miners and Workers' Education, 1920 - 1985

Background Notes to the Exhibition at the Kent Mining Museum, April-June 2024.

Linden West





Preface

I grew up in an industrial city called Stoke on Trent in the English Midlands in which mining held a central economic and cultural place. Stoke was a city of pottery manufacture, now much diminished, iron and steel production, alongside coal mining, all long gone. Coal was a key ingredient in Stoke's industrialisation, fuelling the development of the pottery industry over more than two centuries.

I was raised in a working class family where education was held in high esteem and a tradition of autodidacticism in the wider family was strong - self-taught men, in the main, eclectic in their reading and non-conformist in spirit. Autodidacticism had a central role in the development of workers education more widely, as historian Jonathan Rose (2001/2010) has persuasively chronicled. Its influence, I now understand, led me to university adult education, on graduating from the University of Keele, near Stoke, at the beginning of the 1970s. One of the first courses I taught was called *Coal and Conflict.* It was held in a Miners' Club in a pit village called Silverdale in the North Staffs Coalfield. The room was lined with books and the class of miners helped me learn from the university of experience as well as academic texts: the lessons of which can be profound. This marriage of life and learning can also speak to us in our contemporary precarity and confusion.

The experience never left me. Years later I worked in university adult and continuing education at the University of Kent. I began to learn about the Kent Coalfield: the last mine - Betteshanger – had just closed but vivid memories persisted of a once proud, complex history in which workers education was a strong presence. In the mid-1990s, thanks to a small grant, a group of us undertook oral history research with 30 or so miners on the theme of radical dissent and workers education. Kent, it should be remembered, was one of only two places in the country to witness a strike during World War Two – at Betteshanger. We wondered about the role of workers' education in this. Miners moved to Kent from all over the United Kingdom, sometimes with militant reputations. Some in fact emigrated because of difficulties in getting work because of this. We wanted to understand more of the history - from the bottom up – not least to rescue them and their experiences from what the great Labour historian and adult educator, Edward Thompson, memorably called 'the enormous condescension of posterity' (Thompson, 1963/80). Quite recently I donated those 1990's recordings to the newly opened Miners's Museum at Betteshanger. Frankly, not enough was done with the material at the time, and I wanted to do more oral history to do justice to a complex history. This exhibition is the result, a kind of people's history at a historical moment when working class agency is weakened, our world is deeply unequal and authoritarian, even fascism is gaining new ground. We might learn something from previous generations of working class men and women about educational motivation and purpose, and in their efforts to make sense of the times and dangers of the world in which they lived. To understand their struggles for a more economic, political and cultural democracy can, I believe, help us with our own efforts today. Especially appropriate on the fortieth anniversary of the 1984/5 Strike.

Linden West, Canterbury, April 2024.

Acknowledgements

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Biographical information

Linden West is Professor Emeritus at Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent, England, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA). He was previously a Senior Lecturer at the University of Kent, and Visiting Professor of the University of Paris Nanterre, the University of Milan-Bicocca and Michigan State University. He jointly coordinated the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) Life History and Biography Network over many years and is published widely on adult education, lifewide and lifelong learning, using psychosocial perspectives. His book *Using biographical methods in social research*, written with Barbara Merrill explores the nature and role of oral history, alongside biography, in what is described as a 'family' of research methods. Linden's book *Distress in the city: racism, fundamentalism and a democratic education* examined the historic, present and potential future role of adult education in social and cultural renewal and democratisation. *Transforming perspectives in lifelong learning and adult education, a dialogue*, written with Laura Formenti, won the Cyril O. Houle 2019 prize for outstanding international literature in adult education. Linden was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 2020.

Linden West, April 2024

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The Legacy of Workers' Education and the Kent Coalfield

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Introduction

This exhibition focuses on an important period in Kentish working class history, partly shaped by an educational alliance between leaders of the miners' movement and representatives of a body called the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) as well as progressive academics at the University of Oxford. The WEA was founded in 1903 by Albert Mansbridge and his wife. The son of a carpenter forced to leave school at 14, he was largely self-educated and initiated the project that later came to be called 'an experiment in democratic education' (Tawney, 1966). He attended university extension courses in London but had concerns over how extension lectures, beginning in 1873, were aimed at the upper and middle classes. He wanted greater intimacy, dialogue and academic intensity, later materialising in what were called university tutorial classes. Mansbridge and his wife Frances started the WEA experiment in their home on 16 May 1903, using two shillings and sixpence from the housekeeping money. Originally it was called An Association to Promote the Higher Education of Working Men but changed to the WEA after pressure from the Women's Co-operative Guild (Goldman, 1995). Women, as we observe, have an important place in this history. The WEA's potential was quickly recognized by some progressive people in universities. Mansbridge left his clerical work in 1905 to become the WEA's first fulltime general secretary.

The WEA grew rapidly as an alliance of activists in the Labour, Liberal and various socialist organisations, and diverse others in churches and co-operative societies, alongside progressive elements in universities, especially Oxford. Miners played a key role in the development of workers' education in Kent (and elsewhere), from the outset, building on their own self-improvement traditions. The spirit of this movement lasted, arguably, from the earliest years of the twentieth century through, at least, to 1985. It has been described as the most successful of all organisations in bringing higher education to working people (Rose, 2010: 265). But the story is not without controversy: some on the left thought its appeal to broadly-based independent scholarship and impartiality risked compromising a more radical proletarian impulse to transform capitalist society (Macintyre, 1980). The works of Karl Marx, in these perspectives, offered profounder resources of hope while the WEA served to incorporate many would-be working class radicals, so the argument proceeded, into a national political consensus that was more conservative and pro-capitalist.

But the debate on spirit and consequence has often been framed by reference to teachers and administrators to the neglect of the experiences of worker/students themselves (Rose, 2010). This new exhibition is rooted in the latter's complex stories, in an effort to understand a past through their eyes rather than a potentially condescending posterity: to reengage with their struggles for greater social justice, equality, democratic and collective control of working life, albeit viewed from different perspectives, under varied influences. Here lay a kind of radical dissent against conformity – including within workers' education itself. Not least against the tendency of authorities to instruct ordinary folk how to think and feel: there could be radical differences however among miners themselves about where inspiration lay in social, economic, cultural, personal and even religious struggle. This is no simple, uncomplicated tale but one of difference and debate as well as solidarity over what was required to build more of a social and educational democracy. If some looked to Marx,

others looked to religious inspiration in non-conformity and associated cultural creativity, or even to Catholic liberation theology and St Francis of Assisi. Particular miners looked to both Marx and the Church.

This exhibition draws, as stated, on 30 oral history interviews from the mid-1990s: with specific teachers but largely a number of students involved in the WEA in the Kent coalfield from the 1920s onwards: tutors like A.T. D'Eye, John Thirkell, and worker/student/tutors like Jack Dunn, Arthur Clay, Terry Harrison, Phil and Kay Sutcliffe, Malcolm Pitt, and Peter Sheppard. These stories illuminate the richness of workers' education, alongside what we can call lifelong and lifewide learning, especially for women. This is especially true from 1972 through to the 1984/5 Miners Strike. A number of inspirational women were involved in the struggle to save communities as well as for recognition in a very male world. Here is history easily lost to national and even local consciousness. The examples of working class agency – ordinary folk meeting and learning together, more or less formally; and their determination to transcend negative gendered and classed labelling, matters now in our confused, embittered, unstable and increasingly authoritarian world. Their stories and commitment to collective as well as individual self-improvement, to internationalism and solidarity with miners and working folk in other countries, speaks powerfully to our contemporary moment when nationalisms and populism too easily take hold of the collective imagination.

Oxford, the WEA and Workers' Education

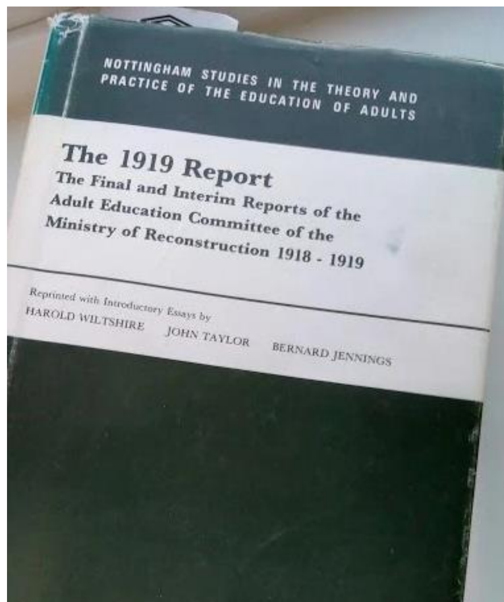


Figure 1: The 1919 Report: The Final National and Interim Reports of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction 1918-1919. Authored by the Ministry of Reconstruction, Republished by the Univ. of Nottingham, Harold Wiltshire, John Taylor, Bernard Jennings.

In the 1870s the universities of Oxford and Cambridge began to send lecturers to the towns and cities of Victorian England. The motives were complex: general reform of education was in the air of mid-Victorian England, while the slow development of political representative democracy was generating demand for educational reform. Some academics in universities feared they would lose their cultural and academic influence unless they found ways of reaching new audiences. More directly, Oxford and Cambridge lecturers had come across a demand for lectures among middle class women and for education among working class people (Goldman, 1995).

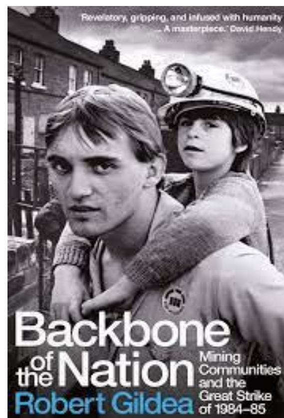
By the end of the nineteenth century university extension centres formed in places like Deal, Dover, Margate, Ramsgate and Canterbury, and in industrial cities like the Potteries of North Staffordshire and Rochdale in Lancashire. The Workers' Educational Association was established, as explained, under the influence of cooperators, socialist organisations and progressive university people. In 1908, a famous conference was held in Oxford leading to the production of an important report on working class education (Harrop, 1987). Rather than just lectures, many working class attendees in university extension wanted direct involvement in defining what was studied and how, using more democratic, dialogic, participative and interactive methods. The first tutorial classes, as they were to be called, began in 1908. If the first workers' tutorial classes began before the First War, in the light of the horrors of that war, a famous report in 1919 recommended a national structure for

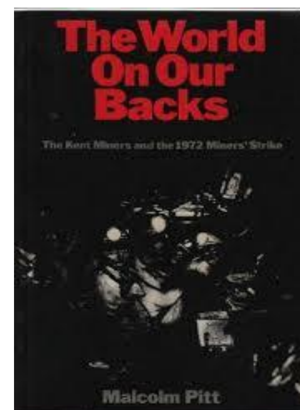
Figure 2: Oxford University. Courtesy of Oxford University website.

adult education as ‘a permanent national necessity’ (Ministry of Education, Report of the Adult Education Committee, 1919). This provided a strong impetus for the expansion of workers tutorial classes in the Kent Coalfield – as did financial support from and the enthusiasm of the Miners’ Union. Classes developed in centres like Mill Hill, Elvington and in the four pits. They brought together miners and others. What do we know about these classes and how radical and questioning were they?

Oral history: Stories From Below

Oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s and now using 21st-century digital technologies (Merrill and West, 2009).





Oral history's 'democratic purpose' is to allow more people to tell their story; it focuses on storytelling and giving voice to those most often excluded from national or even local conversations in a deeply classed, gendered and raced world. Oral historians deliberately allow more of the people to tell and frame their story, helping to create confrontations of different perspectives. This, according to the Italian oral historian Alessandro Portelli (Portelli, 2006) is what makes oral history interesting, important and democratic.

Stories matter: just imagine a world without stories. Imagine not even telling stories to ourselves and those close to us. But some stories have mattered more than others: especially those of the powerful and privileged. The material in the Exhibition and booklet is at heart a collection of stories from below: complex and evocative of individual lives as well as the times in which people lived. We straddle in the material large, historical events like war and international conflict, the world of human institutions like trade unions or workers' education, on to the most intimate of human experience in families and personal relationships. The dynamic between these different levels of experience provides the core of what we can call interpretative imagination (Wright Mills, 1973).

So, what has oral history to teach us about workers' education in the Kent Coalfield, a place known for militancy? The location, as noted, was of one of only two strikes during the Second World War. This history originally drew the small team of adult education researchers to undertake the oral history in the Coalfield, and to consider its the role in nurturing (maybe even constraining?) radical dissent. Some workers' tutorial classes in the Coalfield, it was suggested to us – like an International Relations class taught by A. T. D'Eye, over many years – played a role in the 1942 Betteshanger strike: by giving space for debate on the whys and wherefores of the strike, maybe, and how it fitted into wider struggles of miners, their communities, set in the middle of a violent conflict against fascism and authoritarianism.

Figure 3: Daily Herald Photograph: Coalminers on trial for striking. Betteshanger miners, 1942. Image courtesy of Science Museum Group Collection Online.

Workers' Education in Kent: Friends, Tutors and Influences

Alfred T D'Eye (and Hewlett Johnson), and John Thirkell

Figure 4: Copy of photograph of A.T. D'Eye (left) from The Red Dean of Canterbury; the public and private faces of Hewlett Johnson, by John Butler, 2011.

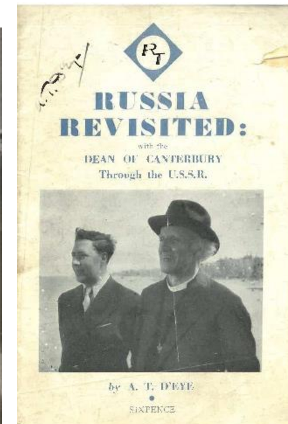


Figure 5: Leaflet, "Russia Revisited: With the Deal of Canterbury through the USSR." Courtesy of Carol Duffield.

Alfred T D'Eye was a key inspiration in workers' education in Kent. He appealed to some Kent miners because of his explicit left-wing politics. D'Eye was born in 1898, left school at 14, worked for the Post Office, and won a scholarship to Oxford to study economics, politics and philosophy. He then worked for the Oxford Extramural Delegacy. He met the famous 'Red Dean', Dr Hewlett Johnson, at one of his own lectures in Canterbury. Twenty years younger than the Dean, D'Eye encouraged the latter to take an interest in the Coalfield and Hewlett Johnson went down a pit and even dealt with bullying. Hewlett Johnson, like D'Eye, was sympathetic to the experiment called the Soviet Union. The place and credibility of the Soviet Union as a model of the good, or better society, was to be a bone of contention over much of the period. For some it represented a kind of bulwark against fascism, and while there were blemishes, the eventual victory against Nazism indicated a strong social and economic fabric.

D'Eye helped shape the Red Dean, he said, 'through our conversations'. He served as Hewlett Johnson's Secretary and assisted in writing books and pamphlets. He helped protect Hewlett Johnson from criticism within the Cathedral and attempts to oust him as Chairman of the Canterbury King's School Governors. D'Eye was said to have an encyclopaedic knowledge and to be an impressive commentator (Butler, 2011). We need to imagine the world as seen through his eyes: the Soviet Union representing a beacon of hope against the darkness of fascism and the grimness and pain of war.

D'Eye looked to the Miners' Union to develop tutorial classes, 'and there was no difficulty in getting students'. He was a prickly yet inspirational character. He was not always popular with more conventional WEA Branches in Kent, who resisted having him as a tutor because he was too left wing (Goldman, 1995). But his teaching obligations were amply catered for via miners' tutorial classes. There has also been a long debate about the role and toleration of communist sympathisers like D'Eye, and others, within the Oxford University Extramural Delegacy/WEA, not least during the Cold War. There were accusations, even, that he was a

spy (Bulter, 2011). But he was tolerated by Oxford and liked by the miners and continued to teach in relative freedom (Goldman, 1995)

John Thirkell is of a later generation. Born in Hastings in 1934, he went to Tonbridge (private) School, then studied at Trinity College, Oxford. He subsequently worked for the National Coal Board and then Oxford Extramural Delegacy. His leftish politics meant he got on with Miners like Jack Dunn. John was the driving force behind Miners' Day Release courses.

John, like D'Eye, was inspired by the Soviet Union. A member of the Communist Party for a while, his son, Mark, thought he held a romantic view of Russia, where everyone had a job. His house in Canterbury was lined with diverse books: he was into gardening and prominent in the Delphinium Society as well as loving music and travel. John was a private man who loved to talk politics and political philosophy rather than about family. He influenced students like Terry Harrison, helping establish a structure of educational opportunities from local study to Oxford summer schools as well as visits to Socialist countries. We must essentially judge educators like him on the quality of their relationships with, and inspiration to students – rather than our contemporary take on politics. Both D'Eye and Thirkell pass this test. Moreover, John Thirkell was a serious researcher, (Holford, 2023) and a list of some of his publications is given in the references. I met him later when we both worked in the School of Continuing Education at Kent, (me from 1990), after responsibility for adult and continuing education was transferred from Oxford to Kent in 1975. Universities can be fragmented communities, and I only got to know John and his work through my present writing. One thing that is clear is John missed the Oxford University Delegacy and the access this gave to a range of scholars and sources of wider influence in English culture (Holford, 2023).

Figure 6: Photograph of John Thirkell, on loan from the private collection of Mark Thirkell.

Worker/students: Jack Dunn and Arthur Clay

Learning across generations

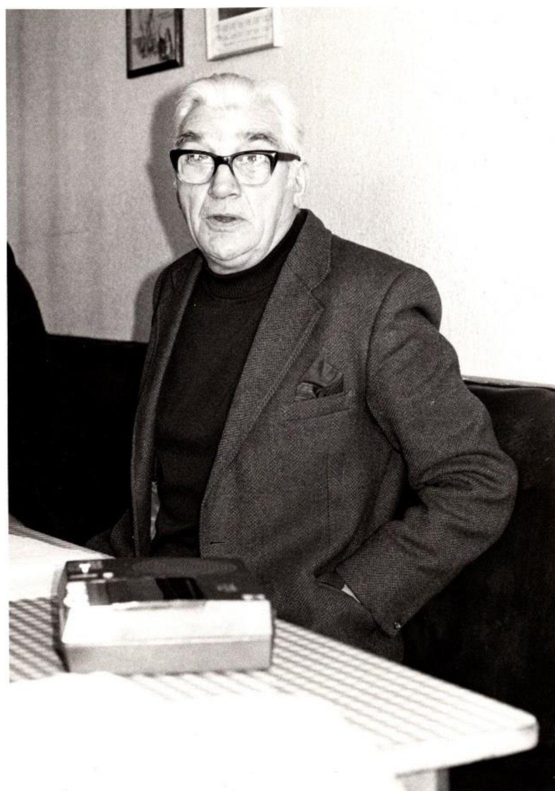


Figure 7: Photograph of Jack Dunn from the KMM collection. BEKMM: 2023.116.20.15.1

Jack Dunn was born in 1915 in the coal mining town of Nuneaton in South Staffordshire. 'I couldn't go to Grammar School', he said, 'because of the cost' and ultimately his family moved to Kent in 1929.

Jack talked passionately about 'injustice', and of an elder brother injured in an underground accident. He likened working at Snowdown to Dante's Inferno; 'atrocious, 7 pints of water were needed a shift'.

In 1930, there was a problem with an engine to do with coalface haulage; they couldn't repair the belt and he took his meal break, at the right time, after a great deal of effort to mend the engine. The Deputy then asked what he was doing: 'what the [f…ing hell] are you doing sitting there?', he said. But the Union at that time was weak and Jack was suspended for 3 days for apparent insubordination in the face of 'management'.

Jack described Betteshanger as a 'much better pit than Snowdown, but there were frictions over 'snap time''. There were conflicts too over compensation for injuries in the mine, and 'people being forced to go back to work by coal owners before they were fit, so they didn't have to pay compensation'. Radical dissent was needed.

Jack was interested in Hegel and the Communist Party; he had started by going to union meetings and then to a class at the Miners' Welfare Club at Mill Hill, Deal. There was a library, made up of political tracts and various novels. Reading was taken seriously.

A class by D'Eye covered topics like socialism, capitalism, the Russian Revolution; Tom Paine and the Rights of Man, the French Revolution, the British Empire and Colonialism. At Betteshanger, there were constant union meetings, and 'a whole maelstrom of factors created the atmosphere': the Catholic Church, the WEA branch: there was 'politics for breakfast, tea and dinner'. Jack became Chair of the WEA Branch for many years. 'We never considered ourselves inferior to anyone', said Jack, and an active democratic educational culture was created.

Jack talked of learning how to research, and that good communication became essential, 'on behalf of your comrades'. 'We used the WEA, the National Council of Labour Colleges too' (a more explicitly Marxist organisation). This suggests that disputes at a national level between these two organisations (a debate sometimes framed as between 'education' and 'propaganda') made little sense in the Kent Coalfield. The students used both. The NCLC, Jack said, was 'very useful', 'a paper once a month, and a test after 8 lessons. Schools on Lenin, Engels, Communism, a host of subjects…We wanted union members to be technically educated too'. They were sent to the Technical College at Canterbury: again challenging a conventional distinction between 'liberal' and vocational learning. Jack felt miners needed good technical education to challenge high handed actions by managers. Around 10-14 students would also go abroad every year, including to France.

There were weekend schools at Balliol and later Ruskin College in Oxford. The topics were industrial, political, cultural, and economic. There were trips to other countries, with organised translators etc. Two weeks were taken from miners' holidays for this. There were active links with the miners of Pas de Calais in France. And with Sweden, Denmark and every Eastern European country. Various miners used to go to Balliol College Oxford with Professor D'Eye for summer schools. Here was a lively ecology of life and learning nurturing radical questioning as well as international sensibilities. But the Second World War made it difficult to continue with this, for obvious reasons.

Self-aggrandisement for some at Ruskin was a problem in Jack's eyes 'but most people educated themselves to serve the working class, and other trade unions'. 'Building up an army that had the knowledge of working class experience and the kinds of change that might be needed', grounded in the university of work and life as well as the academy.

Arthur Clay, 'looking up to Jack Dunn'

Arthur was born 1925, in Yorkshire. His Dad was a miner who found work at Betteshanger; Arthur was about 8 at the time; 'I was a foreigner with a Yorkshire accent'. 'I sat the exam for Dover Grammar School, couldn't afford the uniform, the books etc. In a family of 8 impossible'. Interestingly 'a feeling of vast relief not going to grammar school'. The imprints of class working in a young life.

Arthur got a job at Betteshanger at 17, but got called up; However he became a 'Bevin Boy' (young British boys conscripted to work in coal mines to increase the rate of production. The programme was named after Ernest Bevin, a Labour politician, who was Minister of Labour and National Service in the Second World War Coalition Government). 'I looked up the Jack Dunns of this world'. 'The Mill Hill course was funded by the Miners' Welfare; miners who were extremely well read, always the most significant people in the pit. They had a role to play from the pit to the wider community'. 'Jack Dunn in the canteen would lead the discussion: information, ideas and politics would be flung around'. Arthur participated in a whole range of educational courses, eventually taking on Open University course, and becoming a Youth Worker and an Education Officer for Community Education

in Thameside. Eventually he returned to Kent on retirement and rejoined the International Relations Class. A miner and lifelong learner dedicated to public service.

Terry Harrison: made in Birmingham and Betteshanger

Figure 8: Photograph of Terry Harrison in front of NUM Kent Area Banner.

Figure 9: Photograph of Terry Harrison in Mill Hill. BEKMM:2019.521.

Terry was born in Erdington, Birmingham in December 1930. There were 5 brothers and one sister. Maureen, another sister died young. He moved to live near Aston Villa's ground in 1937. There were 'smogs, dense and thick'. 'Mother had a hard time with Dad, who had been in a cavalry regiment towards the end of the 1st World War, and later served in the BEF (Second World War British Expeditionary Force). He was at Dunkirk. He was shot and injured'. A couple of bombs dropped in the Avenue where Terry lived.

Terry was an evacuee in the 2nd World War, while School was 'nearly non-existent'. He left school at 14. School was about 'training you for local industries, a bit of mental arithmetic'. He got an apprenticeship but at very low wages. He tried carpentry, and then turned to manual labour, making mudguards and fittings for motorbikes. He finished up at a Rubber works, using a loom to make vacuum cleaner hoses. 'You needed always to be on your guard to protect your rate. It was piece work'.

Terry eventually signed up for 7 years in the Marines in 1948. He took the 'King's shilling and came to Deal'. He served in the 3rd Commando Brigade in places like Hong Kong, and Malaya. The experience during the Emergency there, 'didn't do me any favours'. He was at Port Said during the Suez Crisis in 1956. Deal looked grim back then: 'badly bombed' and nothing very much done about it, even by 1953.

Terry left the Marines in 1955, and married Phyllis, the daughter of a miner. Her father was not pleased: Phyllis' Dad was a 'Scottish Communist and a miner'. Terry was troubled by his own father's treatment of his Mum, and he, Terry, sought to treat women differently. 'Things changed a bit anyway during the 2nd World War as women worked in factories. Attitudes were shifting'. But change was slow and difficult.

Terry started working at Betteshanger on the 1st of June 1956.

The Red Table

Figure 10: Photograph of miners/students in Bulgaria. Terry Harrison and Jack Dunn were two that attended. BEKMM: 2023.116.20.5.

He told stories of the 'Red Table' in Deal Welfare Club, in Cowdery Square. 'The Communist Party basically ran the Club. The Red Table was a social occasion, a bit of drinking but also we spoke of progressive things'. 'Talked about decolonialisation, independence movements in various British colonies, Paul Robeson and his passport'. And what Labour Governments weren't doing, and why. 'I was a good listener.' There were tensions and potential schisms around Trotskyism and the Soviet Union. And over Hungary: schisms were showing, cracks opening on the left. Phyllis's Dad was very concerned about Hungary, and later Czechoslovakia. He sent Phyllis out to buy other papers than the Daily Worker of which he had been an avid, dedicated reader. He became a troubled man. 'Hungary was a metamorphosis for Phyllis's dad'. He'd already been criticised for being a bit of a Trotskyist. Jack Dunn, on the other hand, was a hardened Russian supporter. 'I got disillusioned with the CP': 'if it fitted their purpose, democracy went out of the window'. 'Bob Morrison the national organiser tried to get me back: 'bite the bullet' he said. 'I joined the Labour party instead. There was more freedom to think your own thoughts'. 'There was too much hectoring and bullying' in the CP. 'Good minds in the CP that just couldn't face the Pogroms'.

But they continued to talk at the Red Table of emancipation: from colonialism, and for women: 'a good spirit. but there were no bloody women in the room'. 'You tend to struggle on, ignoring the obvious, till something rings a bell. For some it was Hungary; for others, later, the 1968 Prague Spring'.

There were relationships with various countries: the miners, or at least the committed minority, were enthusiastic internationalists. Links with Czechoslovakia, especially the old mining town of Lidice (the town that the Nazis turned on during the 2nd World War, in retaliation for the assignation of Reinhard Heidrich, the Reichsprotector of what the Germans called Bohemia). 'Lidice shall die' the Nazis proclaimed, and many of local people were murdered. The Kent miners established a strong relationship and there is to this day a rose garden at Lidice paid for by them. Later the Cold War raged, but there were continuing links: choirs going over, and Lidice families and choirs coming to Kent.

They were very progressive people like Ernie Marshall, Bill Hudson, Ted Herbert, and Tommy Young, also a Scot. They were committed to wider community well-being: walking the walk

as well as talking the talk. Ernie started a Youth Club, which was Terry's introduction to the 'social side' of mining, and mining communities. Terry got involved in the Youth Club and a campaign for building a new Youth Club. It was built and opened around 1960. Lester Magnum, another activist, encouraged the Union to purchase the land. It was all backed by the Betteshanger Union Branch of the Kent Miners. There was 'a great football and netball team'. There was camping trips organised for the young people, and kids taken to Amiens, embodying strong links with miners in the Nord Pas de Calais. International solidarity and social commitment. But there were strains and stresses: 'I was a witness to a fervent movement'.

Initially Terry worked on the surface at Betteshanger: 'bloody pathetic wages'. Working underground, the earnings were much better. Eventually Terry worked as a Panman. But there were props and danger in unsupported ground at the Number 7 seam: unstable ground under the miners' feet. In 1960, as the pit ran into difficulties, 100 or so young men were sacked, under a manager called Plumtree. On the Red Table questions were asked: what can we do? 'We'll have a stay-down strike!'. 'Remember, this is a period of pit closures. So, in February 1960, a Stay-Down Stike started. There were demonstrations outside Hobart House, in London. Lester Magnus was one of the leaders. We fought in the Branch and the Union to give us a chance at No 6 seam'. (Which management had initially pooh-pooed). The mining was successful, with a solid floor, good production, the coal flowing, 'producing the most valued coal that could be mixed with Northern coal'. The miners refused to accept, passively, management dictat, or their 'evidence'. They were determined to work things out for themselves.

Workers' Education

Terry went to Mining Schools from 1959-60, supported by the Branch. Jack Dunn was a key figure in this: 'he'd been elected General Secretary in 1957/8 and helped start an educational programme for local miners. There were weekend schools used to prepare for a week in Oxford, where there was opportunity to study a particular country, often from the 'Socialist Sixth of the world' and the mining industry there'. These week-long summer schools were initially held at Baliol College. Jack Dunn, he said, helped set this up with the Workers' Educational Association, in alliance with Oxford University Extramural Delegacy, based in Wellington Square, Oxford. Jack came up with an idea that three weekends at Kingsgate College at Broadstairs could be used as a preparation. 'First couple of times we had Ed Coker from Oxford, an Extramural Tutor'. 'We went on Fridays, returning on Sundays. Then a week in Oxford in the summer. We had 3-4 years there. It was, as stated, linked to study tours to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union'. 'We prepared for that'. All part of the internationalism, then, of the progressive left.

Betteshanger meets Baliol

At Baliol, there were other WEA groups: women on 'the Love and Lost' of English literature we called them. 'We had a wonderful relationships. Helping women up the stairs, because

of the steep stairs to the Dining Room at Baliol. More bloody food than for an Irish Navvy'. Breakfast, lunch (dinner to us), tea (with rows of bloody sandwiches), and then a big meal later. 'We worked hard and played hard'. 'One night there was a bit of a rumpus and a Dr Brown (or Thomas), came to complain, in his dressing gown and slippers (we didn't have such things), but he had every right to complain'. Then Baliol kicked us out, and we moved to Wellington Square. 'Bloody marvellous food there, and a marvellous chef'. 'All this was the first time in education since I left school in 1944, aged 14'.

A.T. D'Eye

'I then met Professor D 'Eye'. 'We called him D.I'. 'I took him at first as a middle class academic. But he'd been in the Post Office and got a scholarship to Oxford. He spent time in Russia. All of his work started in the 1930s. D'Eye of course worked with the Red Dean, Hewlett Johnson at Canterbury Cathedral'.

'D'Eye would encourage everyone to contribute, everyone to speak a bit more'. 'He was a very pleasant man to be with. But he was an academic. They like to have their skills recognised. There's egos sometimes'. 'Perhaps that's what happened with Hewlett Johnson and D'Eye in their occasional falling out. D'Eye was a campaigning teacher, over things like opening up a 2nd front against Germany during World War Two'.

'There's a good 10-15% of miners that have a thirst for knowledge'. And many of these were involved in politics. 'They wanted to broaden the perspectives of the working class: the thirst was not just about individuals but a whole group. Making a better world for the majority. They were interested in regional development, and cultural education. Among the Welsh especially: it came out of the Chapels, and the love of music. Sometimes the regional or national differences boiled over. Miners were not all the same: local cultures mattered. There could be violence, say between Yorkshire men and the Welsh'.

So D'Eye came in and stayed till the 1980s. 'I first met him at Magnus House, where he taught classes drawing on initiatives from the Betteshanger miners. He was teaching WEA classes. 'He was the most professional punter on the Isis in Oxford: 'we were just veering from bank to bank', but he steered a straight course.

George Brown the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party was there at Baliol, giving a talk. Eddie Coker, an Extramural Delegacy tutor, used to love the miners choirs. 'I sang in the bloody choir, but at the back'. The summer schools then went to Wellington Square in Oxford and later Ruskin, the Workers' College. Tony Benn spoke and Jack Jones. There was an interest in the nationalised industries and their future. How could they fulfil their potential in the there and then as well as in the future? A reservoir of skilled workers and wider experience: imagining a better, sustainable future. 'The Kent miners were concerned about the advent of cheap coal and the arrival of nuclear power. Could new structures be imagined, more democratic forms of ownership, to build creative organisations like John Lewis Partnerships? Could other forms of work be imagined?' 'We went to Yugoslavia, to study

transitions there from mining to Shipbuilding.' How best to secure the future of the Coalfield.

'Jack Dunn drew a pamphlet up on the question of energy. And the dangers of over-reliance on cheap fuel. He was presciently forecasting an energy crisis. The Kent Miners had already fought battles over Betteshanger and thought we should be allowed to diversify into other products. There was highly trained manpower, good management structures (built on partnership); we had the land and the technology for diversification'.

John Thirkell eventually took over organising responsibility for Oxford and the WEA. 'Some thought he was training cadres for the revolution. But he made teaching look easy and was a lovely man'. He asked me if I had ever considered teaching? 'And that led me to teaching – rather more facilitation actually – on trade union courses. We would raise a topic, consider the evidence, and then encourage discussion among the 20 or so in the class. I did Health and Safety courses. We looked at topics like the 1974 Health and Safety Act, the Mining and Quarries Act. There was never a problem getting discussion going'. 'The lad who had left school at 14 ended up teaching'.

Miners and the Communist Party

In 1947 at nationalisation, men still had to purchase their own picks and shovels. There was no proper pension scheme till 1975. No compensation for pneumoconiosis. 'My mother was earning better money in Birmingham'. 'We sat at the Red Table, discussing whether the lot of miners was better in places like the Soviet Union. 'They retire at 55'. Yes, this has to be defended, for reasons like that, despite Stalin. 'What the CP did was incredible. Like Lidice'. They were dynamic, 'a real vanguard, what they provided the kids at Christmas. A broader social welfare role. They were always looking for ways and means of educating, socialising; 'they gave up hours and hours for voluntary work'. This is an important story in the history of the Coalfield.

But some also figured out what was happening in Russia: a god was failing. 'D'Eye turned his attention to China by 1961/2. He was criticised for being a bit Trotskyist'. In the Schisms, 'you could easily get lost'.

Marines and Miners

'A heady mix'. There was a Speakers Corner in Deal, with people like Willie Marshall. 'Some people have hobbies; some have their politics'. Willie was tossed into the sea by a group of marines. Eventually I became a political activist in my own right. I became a councillor. A School Governor; and then Secretary of the Branch. Health issues were huge'. Like others, becoming a kind of social worker: re pensions, coal allowances, trips to the theatre…Did voluntary work, against some of the cynics, who thought we were in this for ourselves'. 'No, there was something good and heartfelt here. We built a gymnasium, a sauna, and established proper screening by the Pit Doctor'.

'We developed good relations with the Print Workers, Dockers, and others, but also learned that miners were relatively poorly paid; an elite? No. Maybe in spirit but not in the pay packet'.

Women and the 1984/5 Strike

The strike with its picketing and travel came to demand more of partners. Logistics mattered, as did the growing strain. 'The women had to do the Deal Welfare Club. Breakfasts for the kids, 3 course lunches, and dinners. They organised at Magnus House, preparing food parcels for families. There were places the women could get, where we couldn't during the strike, focused as they were on families and children. Getting out to other places; a new movement'. There were changes in family relationships too, new roles, new identities.

The impact of the Strike? 'It was not as bad as in the North East. Men found work as fitters, electricians, in drawing offices; some moved to Scarlatti's steel works in Sandwich. The Union struggle continued though: 1992 we got pension increments established; in 2000 there was compensation established form Coal-related health claims. For COPD, osteoarthritis, 'vibrating white finger''. The work of the progressive miner continued into a new century.

Malcolm Pitt: Worlds on our Back, love in our hearts

Figure11: Malcolm Pitt during the 1984-85 strike.

Malcolm Pitt was President of the Kent Area of the NUM in the 1970s and 80s. He wrote *The World on our Backs* – a story of the role of the Kent miners in the 1972 strike (Pitt, 1979). This is a book read by local miners and still widely cited in the literature. Malcolm had an active role in the 1972 strike, helping organise power station pickets. A power station fitter recruited him into the Communist Party, where he stayed for a decade. Later he joined the Labour Party.

Malcolm grew up in Thanet, and completed a BA in History at Selwyn College, Cambridge, as well as spending a year at Ruskin, the Trade Union and Labour College.

He taught in a Catholic secondary school, and his faith was important in sketching out the nature of the struggle for a better world. He began working at Tilmanstone in 1972, was soon active in the NUM alongside Jack Dunn who Malcolm saw, like many others, as a mentor and comrade. After the closure of Tilmanstone in 1986, he studied the life of St Francis, and then worked for the Catholic Bishops' Conference in England and Wales as Secretary of the World of Work Committee and the Committee for Public Life. He was to complete a PhD in 2000 on the relationship between Marx's materialist conception of history, and Catholic Social Teaching. He believed Franciscan thought and spirituality were relevant to contemporary issues, linking his faith and philosophy with an understanding of science, ecology, social justice and peace. Materialism and religion. A true renaissance figure, he was proficient in Karate, which helped at a picket of a National Front Rally in Ramsgate, but also got him into trouble with the law.

Considering the Catholic Church's social role would have brought him into contact with liberation theology and the work of popular educator Paulo Freire in Brazil, yet another indication of the cosmopolitanism of miners like Malcolm. Freire developed a living, vibrant, loving religious as well as secular perspective within popular education, doing justice to the richness, complexity and existential challenges of ordinary human beings. Malcolm would have understood the need for the right balance between critique, and affirmation and encouragement; between love and critical action in the world. The roots of liberation theology lie of course in profound inequalities, injustice and violence against the poor in Latin America, and more widely, as well as the conservatism and corruption of the Catholic Church. Malcolm like Freire believed that the poor, including miners, were given the great gift of epistemological privilege within liberation struggles. They knew what it was like to suffer, bringing them closer to a suffering, crucified Christ. And thus, to understanding,

experientially, where the priorities might lie for wider human flourishing. Love, actually, as one of the great virtues.

Peter Sheppard: a lifelong learner

Figure 12: Photograph pf Peter Sheppard, from the private collection of Carol Duffield.

Peter Sheppard was born in 1924, near Rotherham in Yorkshire. His daughter Carol described him as a person with great compassion for others along with a quick wit and great sense of humour. A mainly self-taught man, he was deeply involved in the WEA and the Miners' Union. He had a great passion for books and thirst for knowledge from a very early age. A lifelong learner who could talk on any subject, a committed person engaging with diverse literatures and ideas. He was once a member of the Communist Party too, but became disillusioned and left, like a number of the others. A god that failed, for some of his generation: learning and seeing things afresh and critically after hope had been invested could be hard. He also cared for the union, serving for a while as President, and liked debating a range of subjects. He even looked to Buddhism at a later stage of life.

He continued to be interested in politics and involved in the Labour Party: one of that army of committed working class people who helped build a better world after the horrors of World War Two. These auto-didactically inspired folk really mattered, as Jonathan Rose (2001.10) has chronicled. They helped through their agency to shape a new kind of welfare state – for all its imperfections – that lasted until the 1980s. Then a different, more neo-liberal and individualistic order took over. A big price may have been paid in insecure employment, a diminished role for the State, and in new forms of fascism and authoritarianism emerging.

Figure 13: Peter Sheppard at his retirement 'do.' From the private collection of Carol Duffield.

Peter was the youngest of a family of six. His father George Clement (Clem) Sheppard was the son of a headmaster and became the youngest person of that time to obtain a mining degree at Sheffield University, which led him to find employment managing mines in India. Obviously missing his family, the new Kent Coalfield provided an opportunity to relocate the whole family to Kent and the Sheppard family connections with Tilmanstone Colliery began when Clem was under manager. This was a position later held by his oldest son Jim while Peter eventually becoming the Chief Mechanical Engineer. The NCB at that

time did not allow managerial positions to be given to people from the area but an exception was made in his case.

Carol understood how much her father wanted to improve the lives of miners, in their working and social life. He had, as she saw it, a more positive, less conflict-ridden view of pit life than some: Tilmanstone, he felt, was a happier, well managed pit with a good ethos. The Elvington Youth Club ran a very good Debating group at which Peter excelled. He went to a D'Eye class in Elvington and knew the Red Dean. He was a WEA enthusiast, getting a scholarship to one of the Baliol Summer Schools in Oxford on the topic of the American Civil War. But his commitment to others' welfare may have been at a price: his own tireless contribution affecting his health. He engaged with management about a range of problems, often at a fundamental human level, including insisting that sick or injured men should be properly looked after both at the time and subsequently. His own notebook illustrates this compassion for others. Sometimes struggles for a better world ask no less than everything, at many different levels.

Kay Sutcliffe: Ladies Becoming Women. Phil Sutcliffe: The Last One Down the Pit

Learning is about with more than events in classrooms and formal education. It can be lifelong and lifewide. Kay Sutcliffe, the wife of a miner still lives in Alyesham and recalled the 1984/5 strike. A topic of profound interest in this the 40th anniversary year. She observed how the strike led to 'striking' changes in the lives of some of the women of the pit communities. Kay was closely involved and talked of how Aylsham Ladies Support Committee metamorphised into the Women's Support Group as the 1984/5 strike unfolded. No burning of bras but a profound moment for the women's movement, nonetheless.

Figure 14: Kay Sutcliffe in front of the NUM Snowdown Branch banner, now at the Aylesham Heritage Centre. Photo from the BBC/Liberty Phelan.

Phil Sutcliffe was born in Kent in 1948 and grew up in Woolage village, the family later moved to Aylesham. Dad was a miner from Barnsley. He came to Kent with his Mum in 1945: originally, for a holiday but they decided to stay. Dad got a job at Snowdown in 1945. Phil was aware of his Yorkshire heritage because of his accent, and how others never let him forget it.

He left school in Aylesham when he was 15, getting a job at Betteshanger. He had 6 weeks training at Betteshanger, followed by another year before being transferred to Snowdown. Working at the Pit bottom and at 18 moving to the coalface. He learned about doing such work, just like his Dad and Grandad, using a pick and shovel. At the coalface when he actually started, 'it was more mechanised'. He became a 'Shearer', cutting the coal. He worked with Geordies, Scots, the Welsh, but by his generation, regional differences had diminished. At one time, Aylesham had been described as the Klondike, but his generation grew up together in the village and regional differences became less marked.

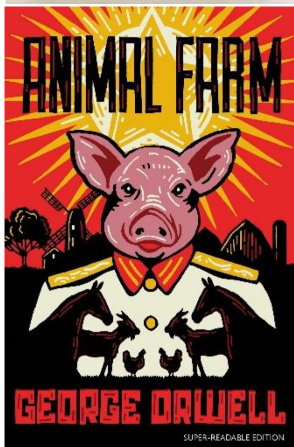
The Pit was sometimes called Dante's Inferno. 'A mile deep, not a uniform roof above you, and it wasn't easy to mine', he said. Dad – Fred Sutcliffe – had been a militant miner, who 'was sacked from 3 pits in Barnsley in the same week'. He wouldn't do anything he thought was wrong or unsafe. In the 1972 Strike, Phil was 24. He picketed at Battersea and West Ham Power Stations and was billeted with members of the Communist Party in 1974.

He stood for the Union Branch Committee. The 1972 and 74 Strikes were about wages, but he met people involved in politics. He went to hear Harold Wilson speak, and Phil began to

feel part of a movement. He got on to the Committee straightaway, later becoming Vice-Chair and eventually Chair. The seeds of politicisation worked away.

During the 1974 strike Phil noted how the police became less friendly on the picket lines. He was kicked in the shins. He joined the Communist party for a while: for a couple of years. He attended a Summer School at Ruskin College, in preparation for a visit to the Soviet Union. Four miners went from each pit. ‘A Russian Ambassador came to talk to us’, he recalled. ‘I went to Russia, Cuba and Bulgaria. We wanted to see how a workers state functioned, and the role of unions in relation to management. John Thirkell was always with us. He was a proper intellectual: he could talk all day about Communism or workers control. He never though talked about family and things like that’. ‘There was Jack Collins, a member of the CP; Bob Morrison, a good Communist. Jack Dunn was in Russia with us. He was a good mentor to me. He’d try to calm you down. Later during the 1984 Strike some of the men were scabbing working in the fields’. ‘Don’t pick on them’; Jack said.

Jack also told him to drink the red wine in Russia, because 90% of people drink the white!



And then they were on a bus, travelling in Moscow, and the traffic was stopped. ‘A load of fancy limousines passed at the end of the road. The interpreter explained that it was the Politburo going to the Bolshoi ballet’. ‘I was naïve’. Phil fell out of love with Soviet Communism then, if not yet the British CP. There was a tourist shop too. ‘They were selling all sorts of things: at the back fridges, washing machines etc. We used our dollars or pounds, and then those running this would then buy things for themselves. It was seeing communism in practice. It was no better there’. All pigs were equal, but some pigs were more equal than others as Orwell put it. ‘And beside the hotels there were hovels’. There was real disillusionment. ‘When I first put up for the committee I got a big vote, but then I was seen as Phil the Red, and just scraped in.’ ‘So, for these various reasons, I decided to leave the CP’.

Snowdown, Phil remarked was more the Catholic Pit, Betteshanger, Communist and relatively militant. Before 1974, all the officers of the Union were members of the Communist Party. ‘Many at Snowdown were more moderate in their views. Catholics would pay to the Catholic Church directly from their wages’. Welsh owners influenced things too. There was a Welsh methodist church.

Phil had to leave the pit, aged 40, when it finally closed in 1987. He felt distraught. He imagined that the 1984 Strike would never have to last a year. But then with Nottingham and Leicester working, it became harder. Philip was at Orgreave. ‘We had lots of support,

with convoys of lorries from France – from the CGDT – and from Holland'. 'Masses of food, kids meals. It annoys me about Brexit and this village, given the international solidarity then'.

Figure 15: Photograph of Phil Sutcliffe during the 1984/85 strike. Photo courtesy of Phil Sutcliffe/ Aylesham Heritage Centre.

'We were sent to Yorkshire: the strike was 100% in Kent. We were stopped at the Dartford Tunnel and ended up in Barnsley. We were told to go to Leicester'. 'And I stayed there for nearly a month. 'South Wales then took over. I was arrested and bailed. I was told that if I was ever there again, you'll be in prison'.

'Then scabbing started at the Pit. But it was better to have fought and lost than not to have fought at all. 3 years after that the Pit shut. Some men and women divorced, as economic and personal strains left their mark. There was always a sense of humour in the pit', 'somebody said to Kay that she was down the pit more than Phillip' (because he had so many meetings).

Kay

Kay was born in Alyesham in 1949. Her Mum's family came from Clay Cross in Derbyshire. They lived in fact near Dennis Skinner. Dad came from Wales. He walked to Kent and was a bit of a militant too. 'He's fallen out with his Dad, but worked at Snowdown, which was owned by a Welsh company. I always felt more on the Welsh side'.

Kay went to school in the village, and then went to Barton Court School in Canterbury. 'It was a technical high school for girls'. 'Preparing the girls for typing, other office stuff, and working in health'. A careers teacher told her it was to an office job for you. 'Don't know whether it was the accent and coming from Alyesham. This despite doing an A level'.

Social class, and gender intruded in other ways: some of the girls thought it strange that she was there at Barton Court at all, her Dad being a coalminer. Accent matters: 'in English literature classes you would read a paragraph, and I used to count the desks to see what paragraph I would have to read. I tried to say it in the way some of the other girls talked: there were some very snobby girls. But then I get friendly with some who were posher than me, one girl's father worked at the Kings School, Canterbury. And some from background like mine weren't that friendly, as they were trying to get accepted in the school'. The perversities of class.

Kay left school and went to work at Barclay's Bank in Canterbury. 'Most of the staff came from my school'. Phil thought that Kay had a posh voice at the bank, 'when we got married'. Terms of employment were different for women then, 'no maternity leave or rights for women': a gendered as well as classed society.

Kay eventually did what was called a TOPS course (Training Opportunities Programme) at the end of the 1970s. 'Me and my friend did a project together on education. Got a number of jobs, as a wages clerk, working in health care. Then a job at Securicor for 18 years. In the 1974 Miners strike we formed an Aylesham Village Ladies Group: what in 1972 was called Ladies, by 1984 became women. We used to meet after the 1974 Strike as a social group. It was after the 1974 Strike that we as women were taken down the pit. 3 miles to the coalface. Showed us the seams. Where they were on their hands and knees. That's when I first realised what it was like to work down the pit'.

Kay talked of her Dad who had been crushed by a coalface car. It banged him against a wall when he was 59. Punctured his lungs. 'He only lasted 8 more years after that'.

In the 1984 Strike, when Phil was away in Leicester picketing. 'Me and my sister called a meeting, and we only thought a few would attend. But about 40 women turned up. Because of the numbers of men away picketing. We began to see the strike as a do or die situation.'

There was a programme on TV, some women from Doncaster supporting the strike, some women from Nottingham were against. 'We're not having that we thought, we're supporting the strikers. We should be getting on a bus….and got the support of the NUM. The Kent men had been stopped at the Dartford Tunnel'. 'We wanted to go to Nottingham. The NUM told us we shouldn't go to Nottingham, and suggested Leicester. To Coalville. We got the women from Tilmanstone and Betteshanger. And then somebody told the BBC what we were doing, and a BBC reporter went with us. And we got through the Dartford Tunnel. Philip and others came to meet and march with us, with the Snowdown Banner'.

'They wouldn't let us have a rally in the club. When we were walking, a lot of the local women were shouting at us. We then spoke to some of the women, and we explained what we were trying to do – to save the pits and communities – their attitude changed. And there were many wives who thought their husbands should be on strike. Then a women's movement started all round the country. We were the first women's group to do that kind of thing. After that I spoke at meetings, on the Radio. Women's organisations were springing up. It became a National Women against the Pit Closures movement. Meetings were packed out, with the women sharing their stories. We started a soup kitchen and help with children'. 'We were inundated being asked to speak at various events. All with 3 teenage girls around. I encouraged other women and spoke at events in Holland and Germany. The women in Securicor were supportive of me, as was the manager.'

'The first time I did a radio interview, Phil gave me some advice'. 'Just be honest. Say what you really feel. It was easier because it was on the phone, and I had my notes in front of me'. 'I was also a bag of nerves at a public meeting in Lambeth Town Hall. Tony Benn was speaking and Ted Knight and Jack Collins. I was the only women on the panel, up there on a raised platform. And a lot of women had come with me. 300 to 400 people in the hall. So, I set my eye on one woman in the hall, and just spoke to her. I was speaking about my Dad, who'd died in 1980. He'd not been able to work anymore. I'm a miners daughter and a

miners wife. I got a standing ovation'. 'I spoke at County Hall with Ken Livingstone. April 18th, 1984. The police weren't pleasant in Kent. There was intimidation at the Health Club. I'd never been used to anything like this before. If we went to the Club as women we were properly dressed up. Really, really intimidating'.

'Dennis Skinner also gave me some tips'. 'Don't do a whole speech, word for word. He told me how to do it.' 'And then I wrote the poems (in Terry Harrison's book). It was put to music, by among others the Whitstable Oyster Band and used by Ricki Tomlinson in one of his programmes. Coal not Dole it was called. We sang it on the bus, but to the tune of the Red Flag. People asked if they could use it, like the Oyster Band. And a choir in Canada wanted to sing it. It's on the collection of English Rebel Songs CD. Ricki Tomlinson did it. We were paid £1000 that I put to the Snowdown Regeneration Fund. The song is on YouTube'. The song talks of sacred ground, where a Pit once was, and men worked and died. A place of banter, camaraderie, and death. Sacred. Was Kay's a feminist journey? Linden asked. 'I didn't think of it like that then. But a group of women did come down here in 1984, and they were very feminist. But I wasn't married to them. Phil became more understanding of what the women were doing. There remained issues about the girls. Were they abandoned?' 'They would have liked us to be at home more. The care they got from Mum was good, but sacrifices were made'. Kay said for her 'it could be work/London/a meeting. There weren't so many where the husband and wife were so into the strike'.

Kay and Phil on the day we went back in 1985.

'We walked with the banner. We were right to be worried about our community. When the pit went, so too did the secondary school. Younger people had to find work outside the village. If you destroy the pit, you destroy the community. Snowdown Club was lost. Freddie's Club too'.

Phil said that it affected him in a really bad way. 'I got a job at a local factory. I'd tried to get a job at the Channel Tunnel but was blacklisted. The person in charge there was a senior overman at Snowdown. Then came the sale of council houses, there was no free coal. There was talk of selling all the homes to a Housing Organisation. Society was being taken downhill'. Kay mentioned the privatisation of BT and people being encouraged to buy shares. Change; not for the good. 'More individual, less collective; out for self not the common good'.

Kay said it all made her more politically active. She was elected on to the Parish Council, 'a lot of the women changed; a lot of us joined the Labour Party. I wasn't really political before. Mum never spoke about elections, women didn't'. Kay was even asked to stand as a Labour MP in another constituency, far from home, but declined. 'Before the Strike, women would sit separately. During and after the strike it was more mixed. All talking about politics and things. We'd even gone to Wales; the place Dad had come from. To a meeting, and we challenged the segregation there. Challenging the men only bars'.

Phil and Kay said that 'nobody in our village scabbed. Apart from 1 person in the last week. There were 30-40 who scabbed who were from Dover'. 'The Pit was so democratic' (a participative democracy). 'If there was an issue down the pit, we'd have a discussion there and then. And even if 4 or 5 disagreed, we'd walk off together'. 'In a factory environment, you'd just get individuals. Union dues were taken direct from wages at the Pit. In the factories, other workers came from elsewhere, and they didn't have the concept of an active democracy and solidarity'. Phil talked eventually of a heart attack: 'I'd been over-active, pressure of a job and a difficult union representative role in a factory that I didn't like'. When the Pit closed, he said, 'I was the last one to leave, as the Branch Chair. On my own'. A moment of intense sadness and loss.

The Legacy of Workers' Education and the Kent Coalfield

Workers' education in the coalfield has a long history, and its impact and meaning are illuminated in diverse ways in these individual and collective lives. This is the power of oral history. Workers' education – alongside trade unions and other working class organisations – generated space to enable miners to build confidence, agency and mutual recognition: not least to challenge the idea of the world as given and unchangeable; or that those making decisions were part of some natural order, beyond question. Workers' education provided impetus to imagine a world through the eyes of experience, including of people in different countries. Through engagement with a world of ideas, literature and lived experience, the culture of the Kent miners was rich in politics, technical knowledge, as well as music, art and books. All of which helped create a more egalitarian social democracy in the middle of the last century.

The experiences of these miners when studying in places like Oxford could be powerful. Raymond Williams the cultural theorist and socialist adult educator, worked for the Oxford Extramural Delegacy like D'Eye and John Thirkell. He recalls a deeply emotional and relational encounter with a particular miner at a summer school in Oxford. He might well have been from Kent: the story revolves around a visit to the Ashmolean museum in Oxford, in the 1960s (McIlroy, 1993). Worker students were being encouraged to read novels on working class life and to write directly of their own experiences. The miner and Williams found themselves alone in one section of the museum as other participants wandered elsewhere. The miner started to talk, hesitantly. "I can't talk to explain to anybody what my work is". Writing, by implication, was also hard. He looked past Raymond and said, "I can't". He couldn't do it. He talked quickly of being a roadmaker underground. Building a road to the coal face. Williams said he got the picture, but the miner responded, "with an aggressive edge". He said he didn't draw very well and took out a pencil and piece of paper and handed them to Raymond. "I don't draw very well (…) Draw it then", the miner said. Raymond did and thought, "it wasn't too bad". The miner looked relieved, took the pencil and paper back and made a slight alteration. They waited a few moments, talked a little more about the nature of a miner's work. Raymond considered this a crucial moment in creating confidence for the student, and maybe for him too. The rest of the week went better for both of them. A moment, we could say, of self/other recognition, even of emotional intimacy where risks were taken, and solidarity generated.

But this was a deeply gendered world, as many women have pointed out; misogynist, even, within the hierarchy of the NUM as Kay Sutcliffe recalled. Maybe some on the left among the miners – like people more generally – could also be over zealous in how they argued for particular causes. But this is nothing compared to the contribution of these worker/students: their commitment helped empower many more in the Kent Coalfield, as part of a culture of self-help and improvement, supporting families, children and young people shaped by the fundamental concern for the common good.

But the culture of autodidacticism - of self-improvement, eclectic interests and passionate discussion - declined. The 1984/5 strike marks a crucial moment in the story, and in the emergence of a more consumerist, individualist society. Certainly, the 1984/5 strike often lies close to the beating heart of the testimony in this study: maybe as Robert Gildea (2023) has observed, (he too uses oral history), it represents a moment of tragedy alongside triumph; resilience and retreat, reinvention as well as ruin. From 1972 we bear witness to the triumphs of a women's movement in Kent, most especially in 1984/5. Many of the women of the coalfield learned new and assertive consciousness of their place in the world. That they too had an important role to play in politics, cultural renewal, and that their own educational and personal development mattered. Resilience is to be found in Kent in how the vast majority of miners stayed more or less united in 1984/5. But from thereon in, a kind of tragedy unfolded as collective power waned, pits closed, and communities weakened. Many found new jobs – like Phil Sutcliffe – but there was little or no tradition of collective action or workplace democracy.

There was reinvention, even renewal of personal relationships among men and women, but alongside the ruin of certain marriages. The State's commitment to economic, social as well as cultural renewal was largely inadequate when the pits closed. In a mining village like Elvington newcomers arrived but with little knowledge of mining communities and their history. The pithead gear was dismantled, and sites cleared. A sense of collective purpose, pride and history, and the spirit of a close-knit community was lost, at least in the eyes of the Elvington Oral History Group (Elvington Oral History Group, 2005). Phil and Kay Sutcliffe remained committed to their community of Aylesham, but its working heart stopped beating. And if there were jobs available, in the building of the Channel Tunnel, for instance, a wider culture of self-help, personal and collective improvement, as well as internationalism waned. Brexit was the price eventually paid.

Terry Harrison thought the impact of the 1984/5 Strike and closures was not as bad as in the North East of England, especially in small mining communities there. Men did find work in Kent: as fitters, electricians, in drawing offices; some, he noted, moved to Scarlatti's steel works in Sandwich. And the Union's determined struggle continued: in 1992 pension increments were won; the year 2000 saw compensation established for coal-related health claims. And for osteoarthritis too, the 'vibrating white finger'. The work of these progressive miners continued well into a new century. Some were involved in preserving the heritage and memory of the Kent Coalfield. But the symbolic space of workers' education was largely lost: it was like a climbing frame, to use a poignant metaphor, of opportunities for serious study, fellowship and conviviality: of movement between the local, Oxford as well as international. Many of these worker students were motivated by an idea of collective learning: they saw such a project as essential in the struggle for a more democratised, materially secure and spiritually enriching world. Their passion and eclecticism provide a real lesson for students today – maybe for all of us - including in universities. We have been indoctrinated by the neo-liberal idea of education as a purely private good, for individual

gain. Notions of collective public good sometimes get lost, yet remain essential to building a healthier, securer, more equitable, democratic, educated and sustainable world; and for doing it from the bottom-up. As does learning the habits and values of participative democracy, as Phil Sutcliffe reminds us, in the classroom and beyond. Walking the walk, as well as talking the talk. Maybe, the loss of a relatively vibrant ecology of work, life, learning and democratic agency lying at the heart of the exhibition has proven huge, but we have the power to preserve the history and to continue to learn from it.

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