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CLASS, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

A

Study of Social Change in
Mining through Biography

by

W. Williamson B.Sc. (Soc) London.M.A., Dunelm

A thesis submitted for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Durham 1980

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17 MAY 1984

Abstract

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This is a study of social change in a mining community in the North East of England. It is based on a biographical study of a miner and his family and covers the period from the 1870s to the 1960s. The aim is to show that biography, a literary form, is nonetheless a method of reconciling sociological and historical analysis.

The focus on one person through time it is claimed, makes it possible to see how changes in society are experienced in everyday life. The argument develops to show that the routines of everyday life, particularly of work and of the family, together with the taken-for-granted forms of understanding the world in the village, were embedded in the structures of the community itself and these, in their turn, were shaped massively by the changing relationships of class. Class analysis is discussed here as being essentially a tool of historical study.

Such relations cannot be understood statically as if they existed outside of time. The mining community is described as a constructed community defined historically by the actions of a paternalistic coal company and by the local actions of the organised labour movement each seeking to achieve their own ends and protect their interests. The outcome was a system of social relationships shaping the constraints which miners and their families faced together with their outlook and opportunities.

The changes in British society discussed here and which form the spine of the whole account is the shift from the paternalistic capitalism of the late Victorian period and up to the mid 1930s, to a system of corporate capitalism and the welfare state after the Second World War. The aim of the study is to show how these changes, forced by crisis, changed the mining community and through that, the life of the man who is the subject of this study. The sociological methods used here, particularly those of working closely with respondents to interpret their own past represent one way of carrying out historical ethnography.

By the same author

The Poverty of Education; A study in the politics of
opportunity

(with D. S. Byrne and B. G. Fletcher) Martin Robertson 1975

Education, Social Structure and Development

Macmillan 1979

"See to your needs first, then your wants."

- James Brown of Throckley

PREFACE

I have incurred many debts in writing this book and most of them are of the sort that can never be repaid. Many people have given me their time and willingly allowed me to question them closely. I have been given advice and help and above all, support. I have borrowed books, photographs, scrap books and letters. Above all I have borrowed a lot of time and memories; they can not be returned. I only hope that if the people I have spoken to read this book they will feel that for all its faults it conveys accurately something of the life of the community in which they spent a good part of their lives.

To name but a few of those who helped is invidious. But I must thank Jack Armstrong, Throckley's local historian for guidance and access to his photographs, Mrs Donaldson of Heddon-on-the-Wall for having the foresight to keep her father's union records, the Headmistress of Heddon School for allowing me to use the school log books. Hubert Laws of Houghton Farm, Heddon, showed me photographs and documents; but better still, he has allowed me to thoroughly explore the farm my grandfather spent so much of his own youth on.

Jack Davison of Pegswood, the man who wrote Northumberland Miners' History 1919-1939 gave me some helpful clues at the outset of my work. The Vicar of Newburn gave me access to old parish magazines. Mr Walton of Newburn Public Library helped with photographs,

and information about Methodism. Albert Matthewson, Tom Stobbart, Charlton and Jean Thompson, all from Throckley, gave me much of their valuable time. John Stephenson of Wylam, former coal Owner helped a lot with the history of the coal company. Mrs Gibb, of Cambo, Former northern Region organiser of the Labour Party gave me plenty to think about concerning the Labour Party in Throckley.

The staff of the Northumberland Record Office and of the Tyne-Wear Archive have been incredibly helpful. I would like to thank them for the enthusiastic and impressively competent way in which they have dealt with my queries. I should like to thank, too, the staff of the Northumberland Miners at Burt Hall, Newcastle. They gave me access to their records and made me feel very welcome every time I went to use them. Bill Dowding of the Durham Miner's at Redhills, Durham helped, too, with information and support. The photographic archive at Beamish Museum, County Durham, is a fantastic resource for researchers. I would like to thank the museum staff for the help they gave me in locating some of the underground photographs I have used.

My colleagues in the University of Durham, Richard Brown in particular, have steadied my hand throughout persuading me when I doubted it that the enterprise of writing this book was worth its risks. David Chaney and Robin Williams have helped me with many questions of method and of approach in what came to be known as

my "grandad project." Martin Daunton of University College London University and formerly of Durham, helped a lot with questions about sources and historical methods.

The main thanks, however, must go to my own family. My mother, aunt Eva, uncles Bill and Jim and aunt Nelly must be pleased the project is at an end. I have pestered them with visits and telephone calls and they gave me material in abundance. Gloria, aunt Mary, Olive Francy and Sadie have had their memories dredged, too. The composite picture of my grandparents which has been built up from these discussions is, of course, my own doing. Without them, however, I simply could not have done it.

The colleague who told me that a biography of a working man who had not committed his thoughts to paper was impossible gave me a special, if unintended spur. If what I have done encourages just a few ordinary folk to treat their family history seriously then I shall be well pleased; we might then make more sense of history itself.

Diane, Johnny and Joanna managed to live with me while I was writing. They have checked tables, read proofs and, Diane particularly, searched archives and libraries. They, too, must be relieved that "the grandad project" is finished. Finally, I want to thank

once again Trudy Harrison. There can't be many mothers-in-law who will turn a tatty typescript into a smart manuscript with such ease and skill and still remain friends with the author.

W. Williamson

Durham

May 1980

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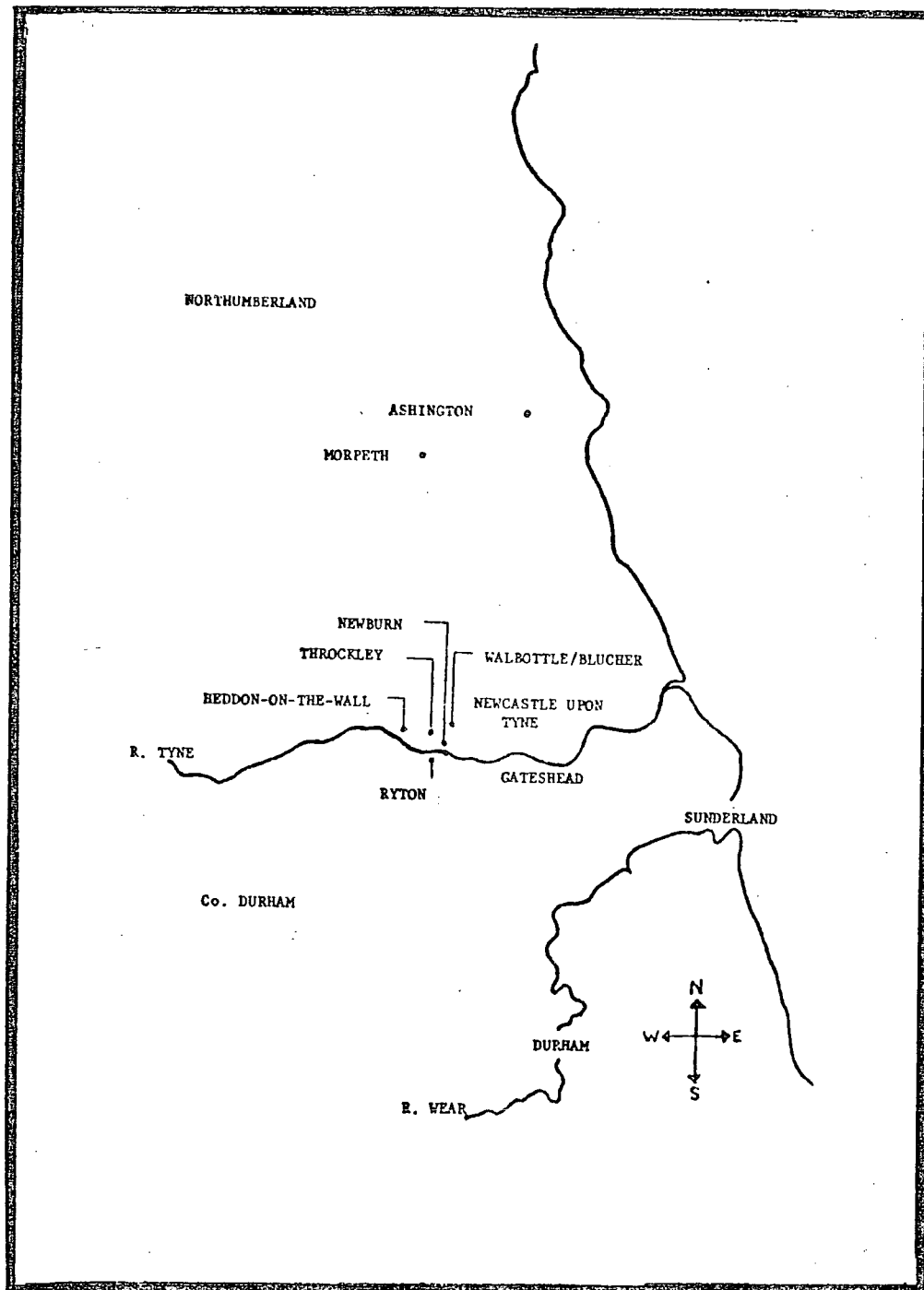
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THE SETTING

INTRODUCTION

This book is about the life of a Northumberland miner. Although its focus is on one man and his family it is intended as an account of the changes which took place in the society and community in which he lived. It is written as a biographical study of social change in mining to be, I hope, a small contribution to the two disciplines I have drawn on to write it, sociology and history.

The themes which dominate these pages are those of class, culture and community and a principal aim of the book, apart from describing something of the life of the man who is its subject, is to show that biography is a form of writing and analysis appropriate to the study of social change and representing a way of reconciling the work of historians and sociologists. This is, of course, hardly new. C. Wright Mills emphasised twenty years ago that the "co-ordinate points in the proper study of man" were the problems "of biography, of history and of their intersections within social structures." (1970: 159) And his point with respect to history and social science namely, that "history is the shank of social study" is one which I accept fully.

James Brown of Throckley

The man I write about was, for the whole of his working life, a miner. He was born in a small village in the Tyne valley in 1872 and he died at the age of ninety-three. From the age of eleven onwards he worked



in three pits, the Heddon Margaret, the Throckley Isabella and the Throckley Maria, each of them within the same area of the Northumberland coalfield, each owned by the same coal company. Heddon-On-The-Wall, the village in which he grew up was a small almost rural village. Throckley, the village to which he moved when he married in 1900 was entirely a mining village. He had seven children. One died within the first year, the rest, of whom four still live, survived to bring up their own families to maturity. Most of their family life was spent in a colliery house, 177 Mount Pleasant, and there is little in that life which distinguishes any of them from everybody else who lived in Throckley. They were an ordinary family and James Brown just an ordinary pitman.

He liked a drink; he was a family man. He looked after his gardens. He travelled hardly at all. After the First World War he voted nothing else but Labour. He spoke in a soft Northumbrian accent with rolling "r's" and used the archaic pronoun forms of "thee" and "thou". He never tried to leave the pits or the area. He was a hard-working man, well respected in the village. He was uncharacteristically tall for a miner, very strong and not easily roused to anger. He was a member of the Northumberland Miners' Association till he left the pits in 1935. And in old age, prompted to talk about his past he talked of progress and improvement. He died content in his own home surrounded by his family.

These, in obituary form, are the essential facts of his life. Unravelling and discussed historically and

fleshed with as much rich detail the record now allows us to reconstruct, they become illustrative of some of the major, complex moments of social change which have transformed British society since the last quarter of Victoria's reign to the second half of the twentieth century.

Moments of Social Change

Social change is pervasive and in a sense total; it embraces everything in society and culture and for this reason it is difficult to describe since any description involves selection and simplification. And no description is free of theorising or avoids making assumptions about what counts as valid explanation in history. There is no space in a book which is more descriptive than analytical in its basic aims to treat any of these philosophical questions fully. I shall, however, make clear what my assumptions are with respect to such issues as understanding and explanation and return to them again at the end of the book.

For the present it needs only be noted that this book concerns itself with several interlocking trajectories of social change and two major historical transitions. The trajectories of change include the rise of the organised Labour movement and the decline of Liberalism, shifts in the character of mining trades unionism and structural changes in the mining industry itself. In respect of the community I have written about there is the growth of local institutions, the

co-operative store, the chapels, the working men's club and so on. And there is, too, the more subtle long-term transformation in the meaning and significance of community for the people who still live in Throckley. With respect to the family I deal with there are unfolding patterns of growing up and of new generations being formed.

The man I have written about experienced all of these changes directly; they were distilled for him in a continuous flow of events and experiences and the task I set myself in writing his biography was to show how he ordered those experiences into a coherent view of a changing world and his own place in it.

The historical transitions I am concerned with I have described as the shifts from paternalistic capitalism to corporate capitalism and the welfare state. My grandfather grew to manhood in a village which was paternalistic and squirerarchical and in a society which was buoyantly imperialistic and rooted in the social framework of liberal capitalism. He brought his family up in a village which, at least until the early 1930s was dominated by the paternalism of a single coal company. After the Second World War he lived out his retirement in a society of corporate capitalism and the welfare state.

These, at least, are the terms I use to describe as I see it, the changes which have taken place in the structure of British society since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The two forms of society are defined by the way in which particular configurations of production, power, class and crisis relate to

one another. The shift from one to the other is not the outcome of an unfolding unilinear pattern; it is the product of the actions of different social groups pressing their inconsistent claims for their share in the rewards (both material and symbolic) of industrial production and political power.

It would take another book to explain properly this view of social structure and for my present purpose it is not strictly necessary to do so. What I mean by the phrase "configurations of production, class and crisis" is this. For the different time periods covered here, economic production changed in its scale and organisation. The large corporation employing thousands of people replaced the small firm. State involvement in the economy, itself a response to crisis of different kinds, combines with both changing social expectations and economic organisation to define new patterns of class relationships. Economic and political change define changes in the distribution of power throughout society and together such changes modify the market position, life chances and perceived interests of whole groups of people, workers and employers alike. At each point in time the limits and possibilities of social change are circumscribed, if not fully understood, and social change itself is forced by crisis.

The crises I am principally concerned with are those of the two world wars, the industrial troubles of the 1920s and the Depression. In a sense, of course, these events encompass the whole history of the twentieth

century. What I show is that they had specific meanings for the changing patterns of power in British society and that it is these specific meanings which fuelled demands for change which could only be met by older social structures giving way to new forms of social relations. The most visible and well documented shift has been the growing involvement of the State in the regulation of economic life and within that, the growing involvement of the organised labour in the affairs of the State itself.

The task I set myself when I began this work was to see in what ways the changes I have described penetrated the village in which my grandfather lived and shaped the experience of men like him.

Questions of Approach

The work I have done has its roots in two largely distinct traditions of enquiry. The first of these is a tradition of sociology extending back to the work of Dilthey and Weber in Germany and to Mead in the United States. The guiding propositions here are, firstly, that the actions of men are subjectively meaningful and the explanation of their action involves taking into account the viewpoint of men themselves. Secondly, the subjective world of the person is a shared one patterned by culture.

Acknowledging these propositions I have been concerned to so portray the life of my grandfather and the structures of community in the village in which he lived that the meanings he attached to his actions and which he shared subjectively with significant others in the village can be made clear.

The second is a growing body of research and writing in the field of labour history concerned to portray faithfully something of the lives of those whom Lucien Febvre once described as "doomed to do the donkey work of history." (1973: 2) There is a growing body of research and writing in this field. There are many autobiographies of working people available. (see J. Burnett 1974) The oral historians extended our awareness of the richness of recollection and the "depth" of oral traditions. (see G. Ewart Evans 1976; P. Thompson 1978; S. Meacham 1977) But ordinary people do not appear through the mists of time simply as writers or raconteurs; they exist, too, as poets and preachers, singers and villains, unsung activists in politics, and trades unionism; (see R. Colls 1977) in the receding memories of those who have succeeded them they appear as fathers, uncles, grandparents and friends. The kaleidoscope of their experience has always been a rich seam for novelists. My hope has been that the recreation of that experience or its rediscovery should not be something left to the imaginative pen of the writer; it is meat, too, for the historian and the sociologist.

The character of the work I have been engaged in writing this book bears comparison with that of for example Stella Davies (1973) Robert Roberts (1971, 1976) and M. K. Ashby (1961) These books take the form of family histories and each has a strong autobiographical purpose. Davies deals with the family history of both her husband and herself tracing them back to the sixteenth

century. The main period covered is, however, that of the nineteenth century industrial revolution and the first half of the twentieth century. The book itself a vivid and kaleidoscopic picture of the birth and transformation of the Lancashire working class.

The work of Roberts is a brilliant reconstruction of the life of a Salford slum in the years before the First World War. It could only have been done by an 'insider' and then only by one as sensitive and observant as Roberts himself. The same can be said of Ashby's book dealing with the life of her father in Tysoe, a small rural village in Warwickshire. She is too self effacing to describe her work as history on the grounds that "it relies too largely upon memories and oral tradition - on family and village stories, reminiscences of table-talk, of daily life, of speeches heard and occasions shared." (1961: 1x) But history is what it is and her book is richly evocative of nineteenth century rural England.

These books, in fact, succeed in communicating a sense of change mediated directly in the experience of individuals and their families; they succeed because they personalise social change. My aim, with the same unashamed focus on one man and his family, my own family, is to record something of the experience of social change in a mining community.

Class and Community

The analytical purpose of my work has been to understand more fully the potent force of class in British

society and to clarify what is meant by the idea of community. Briefly stated my position is this. Class is not a category; it is a relationship among men and it is rooted ultimately in the organisation of economic life and the social relationships of production. (c.f. E. P. Thompson 1968) Class analysis as I understand it, is essentially a tool of history since what is of central importance to it is the way class relationships change through time.

The focus of this book on two small communities and on Throckley in particular raises many questions about the value of community studies and about the appropriateness of different methods of community history. In recent years community studies have come in for a great deal of criticism. It has been argued that they have contributed little to general theory in the social sciences.

(N. Elias 1974) A. Macfarlane has pressed the point that the use of anthropological methods in community studies has tended towards a neglect of history. (1977) The result, he feels, is that many such studies portray a false picture of the social relationships in small localities invariably stressing features such as integration and social cohesion to the exclusion of conflicts, change and instability. Margaret Stacey has argued that the notion of community is very imprecise; it is not clear whether it is defined in terms of geographical space or some vague sense of belonging. (1969) She suggests that instead of studying communities sociologists should study how social institutions interrelate in

particular localities. I have made no attempt to adjudicate in these arguments; I have tried, however, to remain aware of them.

My point about community is three fold. Firstly, and here I agree with Stacey, studies of particular localities must recognise that localities are not in some way isolated. What I show in the cases of Heddon-on-the-Wall and Throckley is that while much of the life of these villages must be understood, as it were, "on its own terms", their social structure was nonetheless massively shaped by society as a whole.

Secondly the notion of community embraces not just the idea of locality or social networks of particular kinds; it refers to the rich mosaic of subjective meanings which people attach, or in the special case of this study, attached, to the place itself and to the social relationships of which they were a part. (c.f. E. Thorpe 1970) It is in terms of such meanings that the community can be recognised and the people who live there could recognise themselves. The pattern of these meanings is what constitutes the culture of the community.

The geographical location of the villages is only important to my account insofar as people themselves placed some importance on it. One of my themes, in fact, is that the mining community of Throckley disappeared in the period from the late 1930s onwards. Throckley is still where it always was; evidence of mining is there for all to see; old people still recall the mining community. But insofar as it exists now it exists as

images in fading memories.

Questions about the disappearance of the mining community leads to my third and perhaps most important point. Throckley did not always exist as a mining community; it was built up as a community of miners quite deliberately by the coal company who sank the pit there in the late 1860s. The term I use to describe it is that of a constructed community. Some of the qualities which have been associated with mining communities can certainly be traced in Throckley. Geographical isolation, traditionalism, a suspicion of strangers, great solidarity among the men and a clear sense of "Us" and "Them" - features which C. Kerr and A. Siegel once argued explained the militancy of miners (1954) - can all be found. Tight bonds of kinship, the clear separation of the roles of men and women and occupational homogeneity i.e. some of the key characteristics of the ideal typical mining community described by Martin Bulmer (1975) are also in evidence.

My point, however, is that such qualities have to be grasped historically. They have to be seen as part of a moment of historical change when the special circumstances of capital investment in mining requires the creation not just of labour camps, but of communities. They have to be understood, too, against the uniqueness of particular villages for while mining communities had much in common there were nonetheless subtle but powerful differences of structure, experience and attitude which associated with very different political and industrial

behaviour. (R. Harrison 1978)

The same moment of change spawned a response among miners themselves. Through their unions and co-operative societies they built their own institutions distinct from those of the coal company. Through family and kinship they built defensive walls against chance and circumstance constructing a way of life which was theirs and not simply a reflection of the coal company's plans.

This is, of course, the point where my focus on community connects with my concerns about class. As I use the term, class relationships refer to relationships among groups of men. The form of those relationships determines the social distribution of opportunities and life chances with respect to work, income, housing and personal development. Class relationships are by definition relationships of superiority and subordination reflecting the distribution of power in society.

But class is also something which is experienced; it is a mode of social recognition bringing, under certain conditions, a consciousness of belonging. From this viewpoint class is like a mirror. In its reflections a man can recognise himself and others. And the recognition is instant. Small cues - talk, dress, accent, gait - are all that is needed to recognise a much larger pattern. "Us" and "Them" can be sharply defined. Common experience, shared anxieties and hopes are at the base of it. The boundaries of that recognition, a sense of belonging, are intensely local. (see R. Williams 1977)

The family, the street, the village, and, in this book, the pit, define most of them.

But these are permeable boundaries. Village life, lived in the present tense, often involving rivalry with other villages, is transcended, though never with any certainty, by a collective recognition extending hesitantly to a feeling of common cause with other working men, perhaps, even, to the abstraction of a working class as a whole.

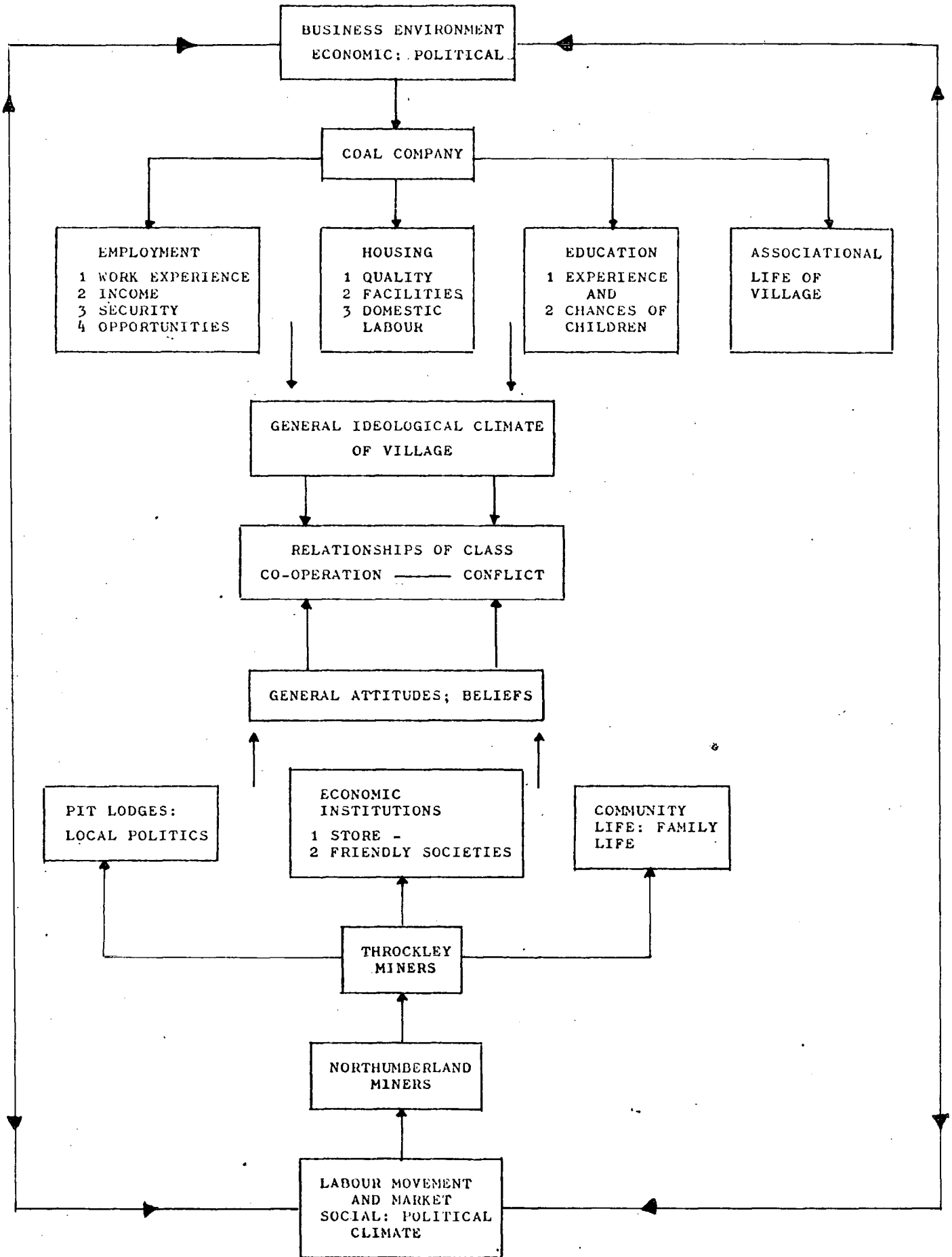
Such a shift is not a natural one; nor is it ever present. In the history of the labour movement in Britain it is something which had to be forged by politics and it has always been contingent and precarious. The kind of recognition which Karl Marx described referring to classes "in themselves" has a firm base in the social encounters of everyday life. But the recognition implied by social classes "for themselves" is altogether of a different order. Indeed, much militates against it. Dominant ideologies blurring distinctions between capitalists and labourers are only part of the problem. Social divisions among working people themselves are equally important as corrosives of a theoretically expected class consciousness.

My aim, however, is not aridly to theorise all of this in an abstract scheme of linked concepts standing pristinely aloof from history. I simply want to set out some of the elementary terms I have found to be helpful in making sense of the actions and experience of my grandfather and changes the political life of the village I have studied.

My conception of the village, viewed statically, is represented in the following diagram. I have tried throughout this book to locate the structures of the village to the wider society in which they were found and to trace in the specific relationships between the Throckley Coal Company and the men it employed, the pattern of opportunities and experiences which the generic term, class, summarises. The coal company appears in these pages as the representative of industrial capital, of ownership and the political dominance of a bourgeois class.

The Throckley miners' lodges, the Labour Party, the Co-operative store symbolise organised labour. The character of the relationship between these two forces defines the character of Throckley as a community. Changes in the community can then be interpreted as elements of the moments of social change itself which I described earlier.

The diagram does no more than indicate how I have constructed my account of the village and its principal institutions. The account itself takes seriously, however, that these institutions existed in time and that their significance in the life of the village changed through time.



SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN A MINING VILLAGE

A MODEL

This is particularly true of social conflict. As in all mining villages the divisions between owners and workmen was absolutely clear. While the potentiality for conflict between the two groups was always imminent, part, as I show, of the organisation of pit production itself, there were long periods of industrial peace and intensively short periods of conflict during the time period covered in this book. Most of the time Throckley pits were peaceful; it was not a militant village. Until the late 1920s the coal company was considered a good one to work for and the owners were well respected. Larger conflicts of organised labour and capital found their expression elsewhere in the growth of labour politics, in the co-operative movement, in political processes at county and national levels. The community itself, then did not encapsulate all the structures of class which shaped the opportunities and experiences of Throckley pitmen. But it was nonetheless, an integral part of that experience and their sense of who they were.

The experience of class itself, the subjective feel of it, connects closely with the theme of biography. Biography is a form of understanding which in principle could illuminate well what class feels like, what it is to be a member of a particular group in society. For class feelings, as Sennet and Cobb (1972) have brilliantly shown, involve the self. They shape a person's sense of their personal worth for they follow on socially sanctioned ways of recognising inferiority and superiority. These subjective feelings at least with

respect to those thought to be inferior are what Sennet and Cobb call "the hidden injuries of class."

A recurring theme in my account of my grandparents concerns the way in which they, and others like them, parried the injuries of inferiority which defined their social position by building up a basis for their own self respect in ways which neither the coal company nor economic circumstance could affect. They did not just assert they were as good as anyone else. Against much in their experience, particularly their education, which persuaded them of their inferiority, they built up, over the years, a reputation in work, in the home and in their dealings with neighbours, which gave them dignity and respectability as people, quite apart from their limited social roles as housewife and pitman. Probing closely, with sensitivity, the private world of the person - and this I take to be the hallmark of biography - is one way of focussing on this dimension of class.

But class shaped them in a way directly related to this biography. They conceived of themselves very much in the same terms that society conceived of them namely, as just ordinary people. Being like everybody else they were never disposed to see their own lives, particularly their own history, as being of any interest to anyone. Indeed I am absolutely convinced that if my grandfather could know that I had written about him he would consider it a monumental waste of time. Not placing any public value on his opinions he kept them very much to himself. He can be respected for that but it has made the task

of describing those opinions a lot more difficult. His reticence and lack of interest in himself is, however, a subtle injury of class.

The Person and Biography as a Method

The person appears in sociology as an actor or player of roles, a prisoner of circumstance or an agent of change. Rarely, in contrast to psychology and to psycho-analysis in particular, is the person conceived of as having a past, as someone who exists in time. And until recently the person has simply been ignored as a focus of analysis. The reasons for this are connected with the growth of a scientific attitude in social science in which the logic of large numbers, of generalisation and empirical research methods has displaced that of the interpretive understanding of social action.

This has not always been the case. Wilhelm Dilthey, the German philosopher and one of the fathers of interpretive sociology gave the study of individuals a central place in his armoury of historical methods. "For him" writes H. P. Rickman, "the biographies of historically influential men are the natural building blocks of history because the pattern of a man's life provides a principle of organisation of diverse themes." (1976: 35) The thinking individual is the fulcrum of our understanding of the interconnectedness of a whole culture. For this reason Dilthey saw autobiography as "the highest and most instructive form of the understanding of life" and the study of how individual men reflect on their own

lives is what "alone makes historical insight possible"; such reflections, he says, "are the foundations of historical vision which enables us to give new life to the bloodless shadows of the past." (H. P. Rickman 1976: 214-215) For these reasons Dilthey's work is rich in biographical sketches of particular individuals.

In similar vein W. I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki argued in their classic study, The Polish Peasant that social institutions cannot be fully understood unless studied in relation to the personal experience of their members. For this reason they suggest that "personal life records, as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material." (1958: 1832) More recently Howard Becker, discussing how important life-history studies were to the Chicago school of sociologists, has argued that such techniques, focussing on single individuals are a "touchstone to evaluate theories" giving insight into the subjective side of institutional process, "a live and vibrant message from 'down there' telling us what it means to be a kind of person we have never met face to face." (H. Becker 1971: 70)

Life histories and biographies are not the same thing, the former being largely under the control of the person or subject, whereas biography is written by someone else. For the moment, however, such a distinction is unimportant; I merely want to stress that both are concerned with the subjective experience of individuals and to be of any value at all they must locate that experience in time.

Biography has an external and an internal aspect. Externally, it refers to the way in which individuals move on in the course of their lives through the roles their society lays out for them to play. Internally, it refers to the socially mediated significance of those roles. (C. Wright Mills 1970; H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills 1954) The roles men have played shape powerfully how they act, think and feel; they are a major component of a man's self image and self respect.

But biography is something which men act on too; it is something under constant re-interpretation and through this process of self understanding men come to understand the course of their lives in particular ways. This process of understanding is an integral part of their consciousness of themselves and of their society.

In addition to the two basic assumptions that the individual has a history and that people think about themselves and live in a meaningful world, I make a third. It is that the life of an individual is embedded in a complex of everyday routines which clothe it with a taken-for-grantedness and matter-of-factness from which it is difficult to stand back. The world of everyday life is a highly structured world; it communicates to the individual a sense of order and makes available to people conventional ways of making sense of events and experience. (P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann 1966) At the same time the individual acts on that world; he must, as Thomas and Znaniecki pointed out "consciously define every situation" constructing in a reflective way general schemes of

understanding of self and society which they call "life-organisation." (1958: 1852) In this light what is interesting are the kinds of men or of situations which effect change in patterns of life organisation.

Central to my notion of life organisation is the notion of commitment. (c.f. H. Becker 1970) This refers to the decisions people make with respect to many different aspects of their lives e.g. their work, family life, trades union activity, leisure and so on, which reflect their priorities and their sense of obligation and which result in consistent forms of behaviour over time.

Commitments are interdependent and therefore have implications for each other. As Becker has analysed the term commitments involve "side-bets" so that consistent behaviour in one sphere of activity e.g. work, is likely to imply consistency in another sphere such as family life and the one can reinforce the other making it extremely difficult for people to make radical changes in the pattern of their lives without incurring great social and psychological costs.

The character of particular commitments is shaped by prevailing social values and expectations. Commitments themselves, given this particular usage, are not necessarily the outcome of explicitly conscious decision-making. But they do refer to what people think of as important in their lives, what is worth working for, what is worth defending and worth worrying about. I show in this book that, given the specific range of opportunities in Throckley my grandfather gradually evolved a series of

commitments - many of them different to those of other men in the village - involving his work, his family and his gardens which reflected his priorities, distinguished him from others and gave pattern and meaning to his behaviour over many long years and that these commitments were woven into his everyday routines.

I have tried to show in this book that for much of his life my grandfather never stood back from the routines of his everyday life to question them. In this respect he was an unreflective man. Indeed, my argument is stronger than that. There was little around him to encourage him to do so and much to prevent it. His education, the character of the work he did, the stance of his union leaders and local politicians were all part of a broader ideological framework or climate in which men like him were persuaded, although never completely, to accept their everyday life and conditions as something normal and inevitable.

But there were times when he did reflect, great formative moments of change when his understanding of himself and his world changed. These were the moments of crisis. They include the First World War and the Miners' Lock-out of 1926; but they also include events much closer to him in space and time such as accidents in the pit, the death of a friend or events in his family life. And how he modified his understanding is, in essence, the process which we call social change, the intangible metamorphosis against which the more obvious changes of law, policy and power in society as a whole must be seen.

Such changes, I hope to have shown, are amenable to study using biographical techniques and methods of life-history research. There are, however, some serious methodological problems to be faced, particularly so, if, as in my case, the man being studied did not express himself in print.

Problems of Method

Life-history techniques of research, biographical studies and other kinds of materials using "personal documents" have fallen out of favour on the grounds of their scientific inadequacy as evidence. H. Blumer has raised pertinent questions about the adequacy, reliability, representativeness of such data and of the validity of the ways in which they are interpreted. Martin Bulmer has argued, however, that Blumer's criteria, though valid in themselves, do not amount to rejecting the use of personal documents related to the life of particular individuals. Used in conjunction with other kinds of data, a method known as "triangulation", such accounts serve richly as a source of material in their own right and as a basis of "re-analysis and fresh theoretical interpretation." (1978: 309)

H. Schwartz and J. Jacobs have recently endorsed this view claiming both that life-histories of single individuals can be representative of a larger group of people and "an independent totality" from which generalisations may be drawn. (1979) It remains true, however, that those who are interested in life-history

techniques, biography and the unique individual are also those committed to a particular tradition of interpretive social theory. (see A Farady and K Plummer 1979) It is also the case that little agreement exists about the appropriate methods for studying life-histories or about the limitations of the materials which can be collected in the overall programme of social research.

The methods I have used in writing about my grandfather exploit these approaches although I do not rely on them exclusively. I have spent a lot of time talking to my relatives about their past. My sense of what the important themes of the biography had to be was largely built up from those conversations. I have not taken the view, however, that such accounts, as it were, speak for themselves. I disagree with H. Schwartz and J. Jacobs, for example, who, emphasising the importance of doing so-called life-histories as a method of social research, insist that the golden rule of such work is: "Believe what you're told." (1979: 72) Like M. K. Ashby, I, too, feel that the data of reported experience has to be set alongside other kinds of data so that it can be read in context and be corroborated.

Checked in detail against conventional documentary sources the value of personal reminiscence is high; "triangulation" is an ugly word to describe this process but it is a very necessary task.

But there are two additional features of my methods which need emphasis. One concerns the place of imagination in historical work and the other the nature of the

historical enterprise itself. My contention is that to portray faithfully the experience of people requires imagination and empathy. The techniques available to us as members of society which enable us to take the role of another person, to see the world how others see it thereby helping us to understand them, are techniques essential to historical and sociological work, too.

The imaginative reconstruction of the behaviour of others is an integral part of our ability to empathise with them and, therefore, to understand them. (see H. P. Rickman 1976)

The question is raised, of course, whether the understanding arrived at in this way is literary rather than historical. My answer, simply, is that it is both and that it is wrong to drive too strong a wedge between history or sociology and literature. Both forms of understanding have techniques in common though their aims may be different. (see D. H. Fischer 1976) History, sociology and literature have as their data or sources various forms of human expression - documents, rules, letters, stories, physical artefacts and so on - which carry the essential clues to the thoughts and feelings of men in the societies they come from. In the case of literature the materials are, of course, imaginative; in history the onus is on the historian to deal with real persons and events of the ascertainable past.

As to technique, narrative is the essential form of both history and literature. (see O. Mink 1972) The telling of a story is a device to convey understanding, the aim, in fact of both history and literature.

Narrative frames events in time; it links events and experience into a coherent sequence and this, I maintain, is a form of understanding. The technical work of the historian or sociologist in establishing the evidence around which the story is based is what distinguishes historical understanding from that of literature but the two can be fused on the genre of the historical novel. Essential to both, however, is the disciplined use of imagination and empathy and an ability to relate events, artefacts and experience to their broader contexts of society and culture. Historical research differs from the writing of historical novels, at least from this point of view, because of the commitment to understand events which did actually occur in the past.

Such arguments about imagination, understanding and the essential task of history and social science, have been forcefully made by writers in the so-called "Annales School" of French history (see P. Burke 1973) and as an attitude to literature by John Berger. (1969) Without claiming my work to be representative of these approaches I have nonetheless felt free to reconstruct imaginatively those thoughts and feelings of my grandparents which they never articulated to their own children and which, but for reconstruction would be lost entirely. Such reconstruction is not arbitrary; the artefacts I have worked on to be able to do it at all are the reports of my grandfather and his actions which have come to me through my family. I have set these against documentary records and the accounts of

other people in the village I studied.

This brings me to my second point; it is not directly methodological but it bears on method and concerns how the kind of interpretation I have been involved in actually gets done. My account of my grandfather is clearly a subjective one and with respect to some issues e.g. his entry to the pit as a boy, it is based on a form of imaginative reconstruction of experiences he might have undergone but about which I have no certain evidence. But it is not entirely a subjective and idiosyncratic account for at each stage I have tried out my interpretation on people who knew my grandfather well. They have read what I have written; I have tried out my arguments on them to see if they "strike true." Together we have interpreted my grandfather's experience. The words used might, in the end, be entirely my own. But the ideas they seek to convey were developed cooperatively.

The form of work in which I have been engaged, although not, at least when I first began it, consciously, is close to that currently being developed by the Ruskin History Workshop in Oxford. Their aim is to make history "relevant to ordinary people". (1976: 1) Their journal, History Workshop "is dedicated to making history a more democratic activity and a more urgent concern." They go on:

We believe that history is a source of inspiration and understanding, furnishing not only the means of interpreting the past but also the best critical vantage point from which to view the present.

So we believe that history should become common

property, capable of shaping people's understanding of themselves and the society in which they live.

(1976: 2)

This view of history not only expresses my own purpose well; it also, it seems to me, represents an effective way of organising research and generating the data from which social history has to be written.

Working this way does not, however, guarantee truth or prevent distortion for it portrays experience in ways that those being portrayed would not themselves use. It draws connections which people might not themselves make for reasons of theory or of analysis which interest the subjects not at all. This is the distortion of taking an analytical attitude. There is no way that I could ever become an insider and make sense of their social reality as my grandparents experienced it. The result is that my account is an interpretation which might in several major respects be wrong. I must, however, take the risk. In any case, history cannot be re-lived. But since history is no one's particular property others can plunder it just as freely as I have done to make of it what they can.

This book is organised into fourteen chapters with a short conclusion. The first three deal with my grandfather's life as a child, youth and young man up to when he married. Chapters five to nine describe the period when they moved to live in Throckley and to bring up their own family. Chapter ten discusses the

First World War, the first turning point in my grandfather's life.

The following three chapters discuss the industrial troubles of the 1920s and 1930s including the General Strike. The theme for these chapters is industrial defeat and class politics. The final chapter examines the changes wrought by the Second World War to Throckley and returns to the theme of how British society as a whole had changed.

The short concluding chapter tries to make explicit what the value of my account really is placing it in a comparative perspective and emphasising that studies of this kind need to be complemented by similarly conceived attempts to interpret the experience of different villages and generations of working men, in different industries in different parts of the country. Only in this way can the rich experience of ordinary folk penetrate through "the enormous condescension of posterity" to use E. P. Thompson's striking phrase.

Chapter One

HEDDON-ON-THE-WALL
AND
FRAGMENTS OF A CHILDHOOD

"O World, how apt the poor
are to be proud" - William Shakespeare
Twelfth Night

The village in which my grandfather was born and in which he grew to manhood lies eight miles west of Newcastle high along the valley of the Tyne and Hadrian's Wall. Today it is an estate-rimmed commuter village, a dormitory for professional middle class people who work in Newcastle. There remains a nucleus of the old Victorian village. There is a village green, an ancient church, St. Andrew's, a Wesleyan chapel built in 1877, an early Victorian vicarage, slightly shabby and certainly not as proud as it once was, a school and the remains of a busy blacksmiths. The smithy is now a pub in late twentieth century old world style attracting the motoring public to keg beer and a soft-lighted restaurant. The reading room is being converted into an executive residence and the few people who knew Heddon as it was, before the First World War or the turn of the century are fast fading away.

The village is described by estate agents as attractive. To its south lies the river, curving its way into Tyneside in one direction and into the hills

on the other. To the north, on clear days, the Cheviot hills stand proud on the horizon. The village is surrounded by neat farms and on its western border by the carefully laid grounds of Close House, the former home of the Bewicke family, now owned by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. The pit, brickworks and quarry which, apart from the land gave the citizens of Heddon their work have long gone. The village, once semi-rural, is now fully absorbed into the life of the conurbation as a whole; most people who live there do not work there. It is a village of expensive houses known throughout Tyneside as a desirable place to live.

In 1872, the year my great-grandparents came to Heddon the village was busily organised around farming, quarrying and mining with a social structure and social life which was distinctly paternalistic. It was a paternalism based firmly in the ownership of land and the authority of the leading families of the village was largely unquestioned. There were, of course, long term changes in the whole structure of society which were eroding that authority - the rise of trades unionism in agriculture and mining, the emergence of a powerful new class of industrial capitalists represented in Tyneside by such families as the Cooksons, Ridleys and Spencers and by such men as Lord Armstrong and Sir Andrew Noble whose wealth was based in heavy engineering and coal. (Benwell Community Project 1979) But Heddon was still clearly dominated by owners of land. John Clayton of Chesters, for example, who owned much of the land

around Heddon held over 11,000 acres in 1883 with a rental value of over £13,000 annually. (Benwell Community Project 1979: 35) And the Heddon Squire, Calverly Bewicke was heir to an estate of over 2,500 acres dominated by the early nineteenth century mansion of Close House.

In this and the following three chapters I shall describe the village context in which my grandfather spent his childhood and something of his family life. I shall describe his schooling, his early start to work in the pit and a little of his youth. My aim is to show that his experiences as a boy and a young man were powerfully shaped by his class position.

Class, as I argued in the previous chapter is a pattern of social relationships whose regulating principles determine the roles people play and the opportunities which are available to them. It is a system of domination, injury, constraint and social recognition which shapes experience and it is experienced first in childhood. Through my account of the position of his family in Heddon, his work and his youth I seek to illustrate the ways in which structures of class fashioned this early sense of himself and his worth as a person.

In the rest of the book I show how changes in the structures of class relationships brought about partly, at least, by working people themselves altered his perceptions of himself and the opportunities available to him and his like. And these alterations, I hope to show, are the changes against which the rise of the

organised Labour movement in this country has to be understood. They are the profound changes of consciousness which transformed the political culture of this country. But this is to move too far ahead.

My grandfather's images of his childhood for reasons I have already explained are available now only as fragments, filtered through his family. But these images of images, checked in research, fit well into a more precise portrait of the man and lend force to this claim: much of his adult life can only be understood against the poverty, insecurity and indignity of his days as a boy in Heddon. He defined his own life at critical moments against those experiences. Through his work, his initiative, and his family life he sought to build a basis for his own self respect which much in his class position both had and did deny him. And, because throughout his childhood his life was lived close to the land and its rhythms he never became fully absorbed into the urban industrial culture in which he spent the greater part of his life. Whether, ultimately, he was successful is something others can judge; what remains true is that recalled images of his youth formed a benchmark against which he measured his own achievements and the course of social progress itself.

His Parents

I must begin with his parents. Little is now known about them but it was they who communicated to their children distinctive attitudes and values which figure strongly in my account of my grandfather.

The most powerful of those were self-reliance and independence. They clearly avoided demeaning contact with their superiors and they put their trust not in charity or fate but in their own wit and hard work. These were the assumptions they shared although, perhaps, his father was less committed to them than his mother. Since much of their life is a mystery now there can be no firm conclusions about them. There are sufficient grounds for believing, however, that these attitudes were born of their own experience and that they sought through their own children to realise values that their own childhood had denied them.

His parents came to Heddon from Norfolk. She referred to her husband always as "Brown." They had met when the travelling fair in which he was temporarily employed as a groom for the horses passed through Kings Lynn. Married at sixteen, illiterate, they already had two children when, at the age of eighteen they migrated North. They travelled by boat from Norfolk to the Tyne and settled in Heddon-on-the- Wall.

Rural migration in the Victorian age was fuelled by a search for better wages and the social attractions of expanding towns. What the specific reasons were in this case is not known. Perhaps they left to escape work in a labour gang tramping from one place to another contracted out to farmers, living under the harsh discipline of a gang master. Norfolk at this time, the 1860s, and early 1870s was notorious for the depressed state of its landworkers and low wages. And at the time

they left they could not have looked with much confidence to a future where things would be different. The depression in agriculture was making the lives of labourers even more difficult and rupturing the social ties of villages and creating a bleak outlook. They may even have considered emigration to Canada or New Zealand and might have received help from colonial governments in doing so. Perhaps they sought better housing. Rural housing in the 1860s was grossly overcrowded. But the reasons they themselves would have given are simply not known.

Northumberland: Landownership and Squirerarchy

Northumberland was a prosperous county in comparison to Norfolk. There was no gang system on the farms and they may have known that, because of the coalfield, agricultural wages were higher than in the south of the country, the higher wages of mining forcing up the cost of agricultural labour. In his report to the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1882, Mr. Coleman noted of Northumberland that wages ranged from 18s per week in the colliery districts to 15s in the purely agricultural parts of the county. (Mr. Coleman 1882: 6) And in a more general comment he had this to say:

Notwithstanding the comparatively high rate of wages, which cannot be estimated at less than 18s a week, it is a fact well deserving attention that the cost per acre of labour in Northumberland does not exceed, and is often much lower than that of districts where wages are from 25s to 40s per cent

lower. This is attributable to (1) the superior quality of the labour, both physical and moral, (2) the extensive use of women workers, (3) more systematic and economical management.

It was satisfactory to learn that with few exceptions that the quality of labour had not degenerated, that they had not been injuriously affected by unions and strikes, and above all, that the system of centralization did to a considerable extent promote a feeling of interest in the work, which would be naturally strengthened according to the influenced radiation from the centre of the colony. (Mr. Coleman 1882: 7)

This curious last remark is a reference to the large size of many of the estates of Northumberland. In the document, Returns of Owners of Land, the popularly named 'Doomsday Book' of 1873 (a survey of agricultural landholdings commissioned by the House of Lords on the suggestion of Viscount Halifax, to disprove the popular thesis that land in England was mainly owned by a small number of great landowners) the following figures are recorded for Northumberland. The total population of the county in 1871 was 386, 646. There were 62,436 inhabited houses distributed across 541 parishes. The number of owners of land was given as follows:

Numbers of Owners below an Acre	10,036
Number of Owners of 1 Acre and Upwards	7,221
Total Number of Owners	12,257
Gross Estimated Rental	2,141,743 pounds

These figures are, however, very misleading giving little clue to the structure of landowning in the county at that time. A further re-working of the "Doomsday Book" figures by J. Bateman is much more helpful. The following table is adapted from Bateman's figures:

Landownership in Northumberland: 1871

Number of Owners	Percentage of All Owners	Class	Acres Owned	Percentage of Total Acreage
9	0.07	Peers	322,722	26.4
53	0.4	Great landowners	471,523	38.6
84	0.68	Squires	173,000	14.1
181	1.4	Great Yeomen	90,500	7.4
1,531	2.3	Small Proprietors	42,456	3.4
10,036	81.8	Cottagers	1,424	1.1
76	0.6	Public Bodies	39,288	3.2
12,259		Total	1,220,329	

Source: J. Bateman (1971)

Squires in this county held on average 2,055 acres whereas in the rest of the county the average holdings of squires was 1,700 acres.

Far from disproving popular theories about land-ownership this research showed a very heavy concentration of ownership. In Northumberland 81.8 per cent of land-owners owned only 1.1 per cent of the land. A small number of Peers and Great Landowners, sixty-two people, owned sixty per cent of the land and set the social tone of the whole county. Their estates were large and efficient and at the time of the survey they continued to employ women 'bondagers.'" Their politics were Tory and in England at that time their like, both nationally and locally, still held the reins of political power. The 1832 Reform Act may have given the franchise to the middle classes. Urban working men were yet to wait another ten years - till 1884 - before winning their vote. The dominance of big landowners and the system which made such holdings possible did not go unchallenged. And insofar as their power over the labourer depended on the absence of other forms of work, the expansion of the northern coalfield from the 1860s onwards was, in a quite literal sense, undermining it.

The young couple from Norfolk came to a county both richer and more varied than the one they left. That it was dominated by large landowners is not something which was likely to bother them; they were not political. What probably attracted them most was coal. Between 1854 and 1914 the output of the 'Great Northern Coalfield' increased from 15 to 56 million tons and the labour force increased from 50,000 to 200,000. (D. J. Rowe 1973: 8)

The growth of coal fuelled manufacturing development

in the region and fed a flourishing export market. My great-grandfather known as Norfolk John, brought no mining skills with him although he was clearly willing to learn for judging by his subsequent career he was prepared to try his hand at almost anything. At various times he had been a miner, a general labourer in a brickworks a carter and a part-time farmer. His young wife was a competent housewife and had in addition an interest in carving jewellery and brooches from the jet she collected on the beaches of north Norfolk. It is said that her jewellery work with jet was beautifully carved. It was not, however, a skill which she could develop in Heddon; family life and work consumed all her time.

In his old age Norfolk John used to refer back to a time in his youth when he worked on a treadmill, and throughout her life his wife feared the prospect of the workhouse. The treadmill was either part of an irrigation system or a reformatory; no one in the family knows although some of his grandchildren still have a chilling image of it. The workhouse fear was real enough. My great-grandmother was born in one.

I mention this for these early experiences both set a mood and form a context within which the attitudes of their own children were formed, all of them being encouraged to achieve, through work, an independence from charity and authority which had been absent in their own young lives.

These facts too, reinforce the view that their move north was an escape from painful experience. They were,

therefore, able to communicate directly and vividly to their children still in the age of the workhouse a picture of rural poverty extending back to the mid-nineteenth century. These were images my grandfather retained forming his sense of where he came from and what he would do. And they illustrate a more general point: experiences which shape us go much further back in time than our own biographies and the potent principle of class of position, is grasped early in a person's life.

Heddon-on-the-Wall and The Paternalism of Squirearchy

Why they should have descended on Heddon is a mystery but work was available at Heddon pit and housing too, by the side of Heddon Common. If it had been by chance then they might have considered themselves fortunate. The village was both well-served and well-placed for both work in the pits and on the land. There was a school and a public house and a small but growing community of about four hundred people who, among themselves, supplied most of a couple's main wants. It also offered opportunities for enterprise. The countryside around was a source of food and the village lacked transport. Between spells of work at the pit my great grandfather ran a small carrying business from Heddon to Newcastle and Wylam and the horse could graze freely on common land.

On this same common land they could and did keep pigs and a cow and although their cottage was small, with only two rooms, it was at least well situated.

'Quarry Cottage' was rented from the Squire at Close House, Calverly Bewicke. It stood back from the road on a small hillside overlooking rolling farmland stretching right to the Cheviots. They were two hundred yards from Law's farm where they could get fresh milk, eggs and chickens and the same distance the other way got them effortlessly to the pub, the Three Tuns, owned at that time in the early 1870's by William Armitage who also ran a blacksmith shop.

It would not have taken them long, feeling their way into a new place, to realise that Heddton was a village dominated by two families - the Bewickes (and, later, Sir James Knott) and the Bates of Station Bank, the former being the major landowners in the district and the latter the owners of the mine. There were other important landowners who saw Heddton as their village for example the Claytons of Humshaugh and Chesters and the Freemans of Eachwicke. These prominent families were benefactors to the village subscribing to the school, the village institute (provided by Mr. Clayton) and, most important of all, to St. Andrew's Church. They were the major employers of the district; Mr. Bates was the Justice of the Peace and they all served, at different times, on the local Board of Guardians.

Through the provision of employment, charity and public service and drawing on the social values of the landed classes from which they came and identified, these families maintained a social order which was distinctly paternalistic. They clearly felt their obligations to

the village acutely and as gentlemen they looked for respect and an acceptance of their authority. Mrs Hall, an old resident of Heddon noted for example when interviewed about her life in Heddon before the First World War, "if you worked on the farms or for the gentry, elections times you had to vote what he said. He used to tell them what to vote. They expected you doing it." (NRO T/114)

Heddon was, in this way, typical of agricultural villages throughout England; its leading families drew on a traditional justification of their authority, and involved themselves closely with the life of the village.

Howard Newby had argued that through close involvement with the villages such people were able, through an 'ideological alchemy' focussed on ideals of community to "convert the exercise of power into 'service' to those over whom they ruled" and to form "a rigid and arbitrarily controlled hierarchy into an 'organic' community of 'mutual dependency' in which they exercised their obligations through assuming the responsibilities of leadership and through their periodic doles of charity and patronage." (1977: 55) Their paternalism presupposed personal contact and the closer they became to the people - although they could never get too close, the social insulation between classes was high - then the more secure was their authority and the less likelihood that those over whom they ruled would question it. Such an analysis fits the Heddon case well enough.

Mrs Hall evokes something of the social atmosphere of the place speaking about St. Andrew's Church and the Freeman family:

They were always looked up at. We got a lot of gentry at Heddon church in my young days, a lot. They came from Holeyn Hall there, and there was a little tub trap - she used to drive it herself - from Eachwicke. The Knotts, of course came in their carriage and their lodge is along the Hexham Road. They still have that lodge there. It's King's College now. (NRO T/114)

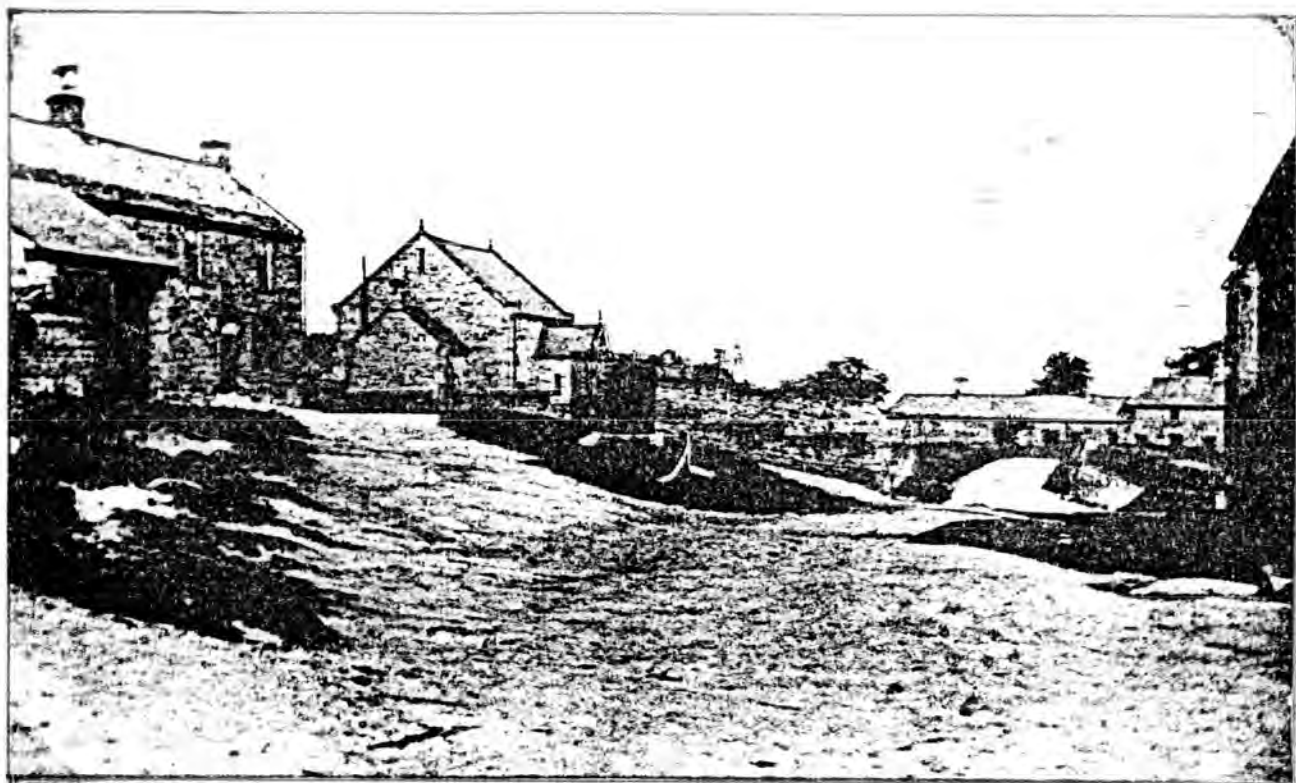
Since Quarry cottage stood above Hexham Road my great-grandparents would have seen the Sunday parade of gentry every weekend. They would certainly not have seen them in the church; the church was rarely visited by them. They christened their children but they do not figure on the church's list of members. My grandfather was not, in fact, christened until he was seven years old and when the Holy water was splashed on his brow he apparently yelled to the vicar, "Hancock, ye bugger, be canny!" And the same irreverence was clearly part of his father's make-up. Norfolk John had a horror of crossing bridges and used to repeat as he did so, "God's good; the Devil's not bad; God's good; the Devil's not bad." And, safely across to the other side he would announce with triumph, "Now you can both go to hell."

The presence of the Bewicke family was felt everywhere. They subscribed to the school - they had, in fact, first provided education in the village as early

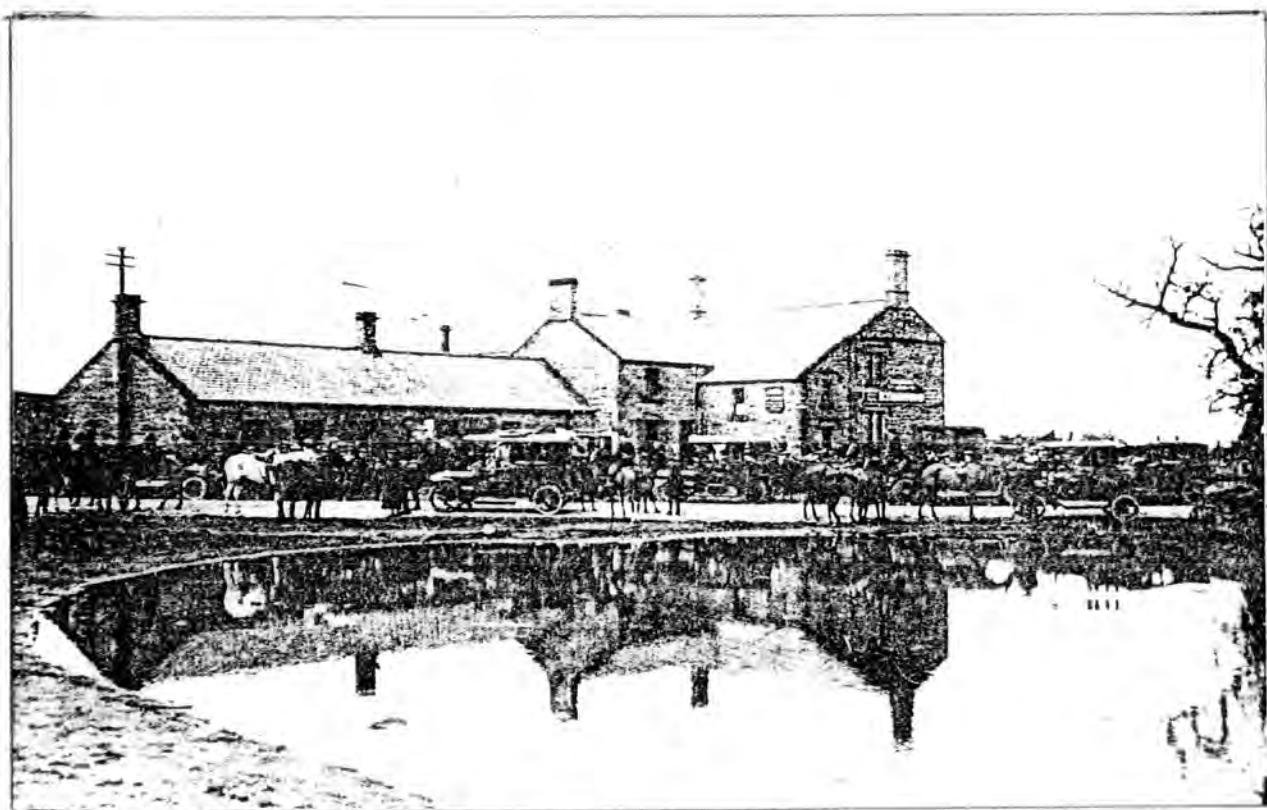


Close House

as 1820 - and were pillars of the church. They organised annual picnic treats in the grounds of their mansion at Close House. They were prominent in the village hunt which met regularly from the village pond beside the Three Tuns and which, as I shall show in the next chapter, created so many difficulties for the school attendance officer. Calverly Bewicke, the Squire, was a keen cricketer and the president of the Heddon cricket team which was also based at Close House. Apart from cricket there was a simple social life to the club. The following report of its annual supper in the Three Tuns public house



Post Office and Chapel Heddon Village 1900



The Three Tuns and Heddon Hunt 1906

November 1873 evokes something of its atmosphere. In the Hexham Courant, a local paper in the district we read: 'The company were then favoured (i.e. after the formal business - W. W.) with some splendid pieces of music by Mr. Ogle and Mr. Todd, the former on the harmonium and the latter on the violin, which reflected great credit on the performers. Mr. Ogle also favoured the company with his vocal abilities; and accompanying himself on the harmonium sung the following songs ... "Wor Cuddy" "Snook's Dinah" and "The straight-haired lad." The company adjourned later to the school hall where, with the permission of the Headmaster they held a ball.'

The Bewicks's were a focus of gossip and close contact with them brought special benefits which, once reported, confirmed the view that the Squire and his family were really good people. Gardeners at Close House could bring a lot of produce home; domestic servants might pick up cast-off clothes; the summer treats for the children were appreciated by everyone. They gave blankets out to the poor in the winter. A thousand trivia of this kind sealed their ties with the village. The one I like best was reported by Miss Sarah Elliot, another old resident of Heddon. "The cooks" she said, "was allowed the dripping." (NRO T/117)

Next in importance to the Bewickes were the Bates, the mineowners. They lived on Station Bank in a well-appointed house above the pit. Mr. Bates owned the brickworks beside the pit and much land, too. Justice of the Peace, School Manager and Barrister, the census

enumerator returns give the details of his household in 1871 as follows:

Thomas Bates	Head	60 yrs	Barrister, Land and Coal Owner
Matilda	Wife	40 yrs	
E. Harbin Bates	Son	8 yrs	
Charles L. Bates	Son	7 yrs	
Margaret B. Bates	Daughter	4yrs	
Amelia Fox	Governess	24 yrs	
Jane Philips	Housekeeper	51 yrs	
Edwin Mainer	Footman	24 yrs	
Alice Malter	Nurse	19 yrs	
Mary Eliot	Nurse	17 yrs	
Jane Thompson	Dairy Maid	18 yrs	
Margaret Goodfellow	Cook	24 yrs	
Anne Reid	House Maid	30 yrs	
Alfred Davis	House Boy	16 yrs	

(Source: Census Enumerator Sheets 1871 Census)

This was a very well appointed Victorian household and Mr. Bates played his part in the life of the village. He often made his fields available for village fetes; as a member of the school management committee he and his wife and daughters visited the school regularly.

He clearly sensed his own political importance, too. Following the reorganisation of parliamentary constituencies after the 1884 Reform Act; Heddon became part of the Wansbeck Division. Since this included some mining towns such as Bedlington some of the landowners of south Northumberland (the former Constituency) felt considerably threatened. In late May 1885 a meeting took place in Heddon to form a political association to oppose the

constituency reorganisation. This meeting is reported fully in the Hexham Courant (June 6th 1885) and the principal speaker was Mr. Bates. The speech was a wide ranging one. As the newspaper report puts it:

He did not believe in government by classes, castes, cliques or caucases. We must not have a policy of masterly inactivity at home. All feudal hindrances to the transfer of land should be done away with. The landowners were unfortunately in a small minority..... Everything should be done to increase their number and influence, but you could not chain people to the soil. No doubt some agitators would be coming and telling them that they were going to divide the land among the people. These gentlemen always talked as if they were going to divide land on the moon among wax dolls (laughter). He would give them a sterling piece of advice, which was always to talk and vote only about those things they could properly understand.

At the end of his speech, which was obviously well received, and in which he quite clearly echoed the fears that extending the franchise would threaten the greater traditional bastions of property and emphasising for good measure the greater wisdom of the landowning elite, he made a gesture, perhaps because the vicar was in the audience, to religion. He insisted that social differences should not stand in the way of Christian unity.

The vicar, too, of course was an important person in the village. The splendid vicarage had been built

in 1841 and even then carried a 'living' for the vicar of £250 per year. In 1871 the vicar was Mr. Herron and his household appears in the census returns for that year as follows:

Heddon Vicarage 1871

Mr. M. Herron	Head	61 yrs
Charlotte	Wife	55 yrs
Harriet	Daughter	35 yrs
Mary Edwards	Parlour Maid	32 yrs
Isabella Robson	Servant	25 yrs
Jane Donaldson	Servant	18 yrs
Mgt. Ascom	Servant	16 yrs
John Potts	Page	13 yrs
George Bennie	Page	16 yrs

His position was that of the respected gentleman, a man of means, and scholar, his religious authority not in any way threatened until the building of the Wesleyan Chapel in 1877. Even then the Established Church had little need to worry, its Sunday School was well-attended by the children of the village - although not the Browns - and as Mrs Hall notes for the period of the turn of the century "There was a certain lot went to the chapel but I think the Church got the majority." (NRO T/114)

The vicar was the Correspondent of the school and in regular contact with the children. The social and political views which emanated from the Heddon pulpit can be clearly seen in the Preacher's Records. Between 1897 and 1898 some of those sermons are recorded as follows:

<u>Preacher</u>	<u>Text</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Offertory</u>
Rev. Walters	Gen 1V 10	Selfishness	9/6
"	St. James 111,5	Gossip	4/11
"	Matt 1V 44	Be Ye Ready	3/1
W. S. Lloyd	Matt 1V 1	Temptation	
Rev. Walters	Acts XX1V 25	Sloth	3/6
"	Ps 101, 2	Rest for Weary Souls	4/3
"	Ps CXX111, 6	Pride	17/0
C. A. Fitch	Heb X11, 1,2,3,	The Christian Race	
Rev. Walters	St. Peter 1V, 8	Charity	

(Heddon Parish Records NRO)

The pulpit emphasised a full range of civic virtues - duty, sobriety, charity and chastity, service and respect; it catalogued, too, the sins to be avoided. It had, in short, a high moral tone and though the congregation was always smartly dressed - Sunday was a rest day - it was clearly not an affluent one, the weekly offerings on the collection tray rarely exceeding £1. In 1880, however, in response to appeals to help the bereaved mining families of Seaham, following the terrible disaster in that pit, a sum of £7 15s 6d was collected and sent to the vicar of Seaham. (Hexham Courant October 9th 1880)

The schoolmasters, too, were pillars of respectability. Housed handsomely next to the school and appointed by the vicar, Mr. Bewicke and Mr. Bates, they also kept their servants and stood somewhat aloof from everyone else. Mr. Pestle, says Miss Elliot "Though himself above the village." (NRO T/117) But it was these men, as I shall show in the next chapter who maintained the awesome authority of the school and the

values of Victorian education. They were not always successful but they did, at least, have close contact with the villagers and, like their employers, looked in that contact for respect.

Apart from the small group of gentry the community at Heddon was made up of a number of tenant farmers, quarrymen, miners and agricultural labourers. There was a postmaster and postmistress, a dressmaker, a shoemaker, two blacksmiths, a publican, a joiner who was also the undertaker and a small but significant group of domestic servants. The village was in many respects self-sufficient and everyone knew everyone else's business.

Physical proximity and social interdependence were two aspects of life in Heddon which strengthened a sense of place and community. Another factor which operates in much the same way is the movement of strangers through the village, contrary to some images of settled rural communities. There was a great deal of turnover of population through agricultural labourers moving on to new jobs and this movement defined clearly who was and who was not from Heddon. In addition to this Heddon was, like many other villages, part of a circuit of visiting fairs, gypsies and tramps, the presence of whom sharpened the selfconsciousness of the community. Miss Elliot evoked this very graphically. Asked about gypsies she said:

Yes ... they used to come. The German gypsies came through one year. They were always about the hopping time and they used to camp down the Mill Lane

and they were never away from the door wanting this and wanting the other, selling this and selling that. And we used to lock the door if we saw them coming.

You never knew what they were getting up to or anything. They would stay the time of the hoppings and move on to where the next ones was going to be. (NRO T/117) (my emphasis W. W.)

There were other regular itinerents. Miss Elliot singled out the scissors grinder:

We used to get the old scissors grinders with their machine. There was a wheel and they used to work it with one foot and sharpen your scissors. They were often worse when they were finished than when they started. There was nearly always their wives with them. They'd be rolling about drunk at night. We never knew the names of them. (NRO T/117)

(my emphasis - W. W.)

Asked about tramps she said:

Oh, tramps. We had some regulars. Hot Water Jack. He was one of the regulars. He wore a hard hat, but it was green with age and he had a great big coat with pockets on the inside, and he collected crusts and the coat was reet oot like that, and he had about half a dozen soles on his shoes. They were nearly like horses hooves. We used to call him Hot Water Jack. So he went from door to door.

This Jack was given coffee by many people and came once a month. People did not mind him.

Jack the Liar used to come on a Saturday. He used to tell us such tales. There was a woman used to come with a basket; she was supposed to tell fortunes. They used to call her Big Hannah. She used to be always smoking her pipe. She was selling things as well. (NRO/T117)

Strangers were clearly approached with suspicion, particularly gypsies, but those who were known, the regular tramps, could be accounted for and tolerated.

Because transport out of the village was difficult people did not travel far. There were no buses before the First World War although people could travel to Newcastle by train. They did not go there very often, however, since there was little need. Carriers came from surrounding villages, from Newburn and Throckley and further afield still. If people did want transport themselves they could hire a trap from someone.

The carriers and regular traders who visited Heddon included the following; Throckley co-operative store cart; Brooks, the shoemaker from Denton Burn; fishwives from Cullercoats who came with herring and kippers. Miss Elliot described the pattern: "Kippers on Monday, Haddock on a Thursday. Three or four carts a day during the herrin' season." (NRO T/117) Butchers came from as far away as Hexham and Ponteland bringing fresh meat, game and rabbit. Carriers like Norfolk John also took orders for people and would go to Newcastle to collect 'messages' i.e. groceries and the like. Miss Elliot says that everyone knew the times of the traders.

Their coal was, of course, got from the pit and local farms were a source of fresh food.

The picture can be built up, then, of a small self-contained community of ordinary folk in which those who were 'Heddoners' could be clearly distinguished from the rest. Networks of gossip defined who was of Heddon and who was not, and if being talked about was not sufficient in itself to be a recognised member of the community, then talking itself would make the point; old 'Heddoners' spoke and speak with a soft flat-vowelled accent and a strong rolling 'r'. Their gentle intonation distinguished them clearly from those who spoke the harsher dialects of industrial Tyneside.

Heddon was not, however, the stable community free of the conflicts its leading families sought to suppress. 'The Revolt of the Field', i.e. the demands of agriculture workers to form a union took place in Northumberland, too, and the miners of the district, as I shall show in a later chapter, were actively building up their union. The issue of extension of the franchise was urgent even in Heddon.

The period of the early 1870s was one of great unrest throughout the country among agricultural workers and of attempts to form a union. Late as February 1872 a meeting of agricultural workers took place in the Three Tuns at Heddon, just along from where the Browns had settled in. The issue was the bondage system which required a labourer to supply a woman worker to his employer and to live, tied to the land in what was known as a 'bondage cottage.'

The local newspaper, the Hexham Courant reports the following resolution:

That bondage be done away with altogether and no hours to be stated for the women workers who are to make their own arrangements. (February 24th 1872)

The report goes on:

The Chairman said this in particular was a great grievance, and he thought it was time, in this part of the country, that the abominable system should be done away with. Neither man, woman nor child required to be tied down in any way that he could see in a free country. As the sons of virtuous women, and the husbands of industrious and virtuous wives, it was their duty, and he hoped they would see to it never to rest satisfied till the system was abolished. When they went to the hiring it should be understood that there was to be no bondage.

This resolution was carried unanimously. The next month an Editorial in the same paper (the paper had some reputation as a Liberal paper being sponsored by the MP Joseph Cowen) voiced the fears of landowners that perhaps more was at stake than simply grumbles about wages and conditions:

The conviction is taking deep root in the minds of the contemplative that the relative condition of capital and labour are serious in the extreme for it is not one branch of industry alone that seems to be affected, but in all there is a deep

discontent with their position in life....

The style and ideas of living are keeping pace with the increased intelligence of the masses, but their means do not augment in a corresponding ratio, and affairs appear to be drifting to some universal co-operative system, or some such pleasant but impracticable theory of life. Idle and verbose agitators have sown to effect ... (March 2nd 1872)

Worries that they were being manipulated by agitators clearly did not worry the men of Heddon for the very next week, again in the Three Tuns there was another meeting, this time in support of the call for the nine-hour day, which called for the formation of a union to help fight their case. Later that year, on September 28th, the Editor returned to the issue of unrest noting that wage competition from the manufacturing industries made matters worse:

Agitation and combination for redress may be necessary with our southern brethren, but their combination should be freed from the intervention of those who only see the small wages in their consideration of the case, forgetful to make some allowance for situation. There no manufacturing industries drain off the rural population to share higher wages and more uncertain health and less social employment.

The Editor then went on to stress that improvements in the conditions of agricultural workers would come from the actions of employers, not agitators.

Another issue which created a great deal of discussion at this time was the franchise. The Hexham Courant reports on July 5th 1873 a demonstration on Ryton Willows a beauty spot just over the river from Heddon in support of universal manhood suffrage. This meeting was addressed by Thomas Burt, the miners' leader. Burt complained that the union had not shown sufficient interest in politics. The press report goes on:

His notion of trades unionism was that if working men combined for elevating labour and improving their social, intellectual and moral conditions, they were equally justified in doing so in order to secure their political rights. (Applause)

After Burt's speech a miner from Heddon, proposed the motion demanding universal manhood suffrage:

Mr. James Armstrong, Heddon, in proposing the first resolution said he thought it was quite time they got up a little agitation in order to obtain their rights, and he believed that meeting would help to let the Government know what they wished to be at: They claimed the right to vote, as reasonable thinking men.

The Browns, then, would have sensed unease about big political questions. They would have sensed change, too, with pits growing up fast in the area. But in Heddon much would have appeared to remain unchanged, even unchanging.

Trapped in their daily routines and attending to an uncontrollably growing family the sense of society undergoing some massive transformation would not have preoccupied them. The local big-wigs still went out about their affairs with ostentatious conviction and much of their lifestyle underlined the apparent permanence of their position.

The village was a peaceful one but it did have its villains. Drunkenness, offences against the Elementary Education laws, gambling, fighting and petty theft were frequent enough. An entry in the Hexham Courant of January 1872 notes, for instance. 'Richard Barnes (41) and William Elliot (29) both pitmen, were charged with stealing 21 lbs weight of feathers, and a couple of bags of the value of 15s, the property of George Woodman, farmer, three months imprisonment.' Norfolk John was taken to court once over the attendance record of his son, Harry, and for Harry's assault on the schoolmaster. My grandfather was himself questioned for the theft of buns from a travelling cart. On occasions offences were much more serious. On February 28th 1880 the Courant reported:

At the Moot Hall Police Court, on Saturday, Edward Handyside, a farm labourer, was remanded on a charge of having committed a rape on his daughter, Margaret Handyside, aged 18 yrs at Houghton Farm, near Heddon.

This was the farm in which my grandfather played and which lay just over from where he lived. The case was

later discharged but it left suspicions of incest.

A common enough offence was poaching. Howard Newby has described poaching in the period up to the Prevention of Poaching Act of 1862 as a form of resistance against poverty and powerlessness, "a kind of guerilla class warfare." (1977: 64) In Heddon the poachers were pitmen. Mrs Hall said, "In our younger days there was a lot of poaching. You used to go out and poach for rabbits. They used to go out through the night into the fields." (NRO T/114)

Within the small geographical space of Heddon people were acknowledged and recognised themselves by a number of subtle criteria. Whether someone was from Heddon or not from Heddon mattered; whether people were respectable or unrespectable was, of course, a basic if complex consideration. But because the village was small and people interdependent it was virtually impossible for anyone, or a family, to assume an attitude above their status. Status in rural communities is, as Frankenberg has insisted, total. (R. Frankenberg 1966:262) There were few devices available for people to pretend that they were something other than what, in the eyes of their neighbours, they really were. What developed then, was a strong sense of "the likes of us" who were clearly distinguished from the gentry and people like the schoolmaster and the vicar. They were not, nevertheless, a cohesive group; among themselves they were acutely conscious of hierarchy. The Browns added to this a certain reserve; they spoke little of their past and

in this way, controlling what others knew of them, they maintained a view that they were as good as anybody else.

Home Life for the Browns

In the subtle structures of hierarchy by which the people of Heddon measured themselves, the Browns had, however, a lowly position. They had come as immigrants. In this respect they were little different from the itinerant labourers of the land. Their thick Norfolk accent marked them off as strangers and they were, of course, poor.

During the early 1870s they were quite marginal to the village and not really part of those relationships of deference which bolstered the authority of the Bewickes and the Bates. Their position was, in this respect, auspicious; they never subscribed to the prevailing ethos of paternalism. Mr. Bates mattered only because he paid a wage. The Browns trusted nobody and preferred to rely on their own wits seizing what chances they could to make a bit of money. Norfolk John, having witnessed hard commercial agriculture in East Anglia strip paternalism of its veils and having seen, too, the early stirrings of agricultural unionism - the so-called 'Revolt of the Field' - had learned early to mistrust the logic of locality, community and deference which were so much part of the dominant value system of rural areas. His sympathies lay firmly with those Heddon labourers in the Three Tuns struggling to give definition to their own claims for a better life and the right to form a union.



Great Grandmother in Sunday Best



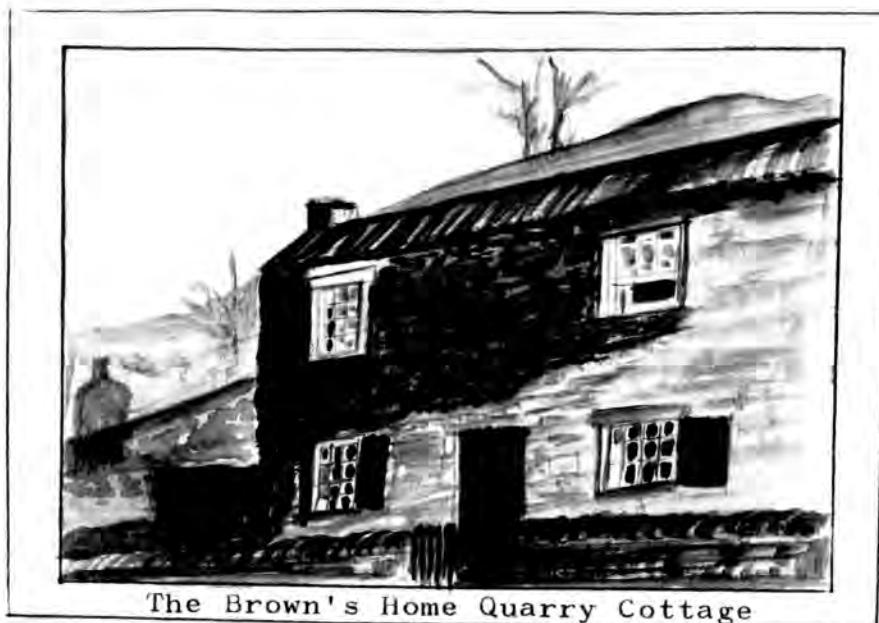
Great Grandparents
at Eltringham 1920s

His worries, however, were much more immediate. They concerned attending to the needs of a growing family. How they met those needs given their own perceptions of them and the resources of a miner's wage, set the constraints within which my grandfather grew up and experienced the world.

They had brought two children to Heddon from Norfolk, Jenny and Tom. My grandfather was born in Heddon shortly after they arrived and in an almost incredible state of permanent pregnancy my great grandmother went on to give birth to nineteen children of whom sixteen survived to adulthood and some of them, in fact to ripe old age.

The children were delivered in the cottage by a local midwife. Any medical help they needed had to come from Wylam, two miles up the river and the doctor came on horseback. It is astonishing that so many of the children survived. The house was excessively damp. A later occupant of this property told me that, because it was built into the bankside, when the rain came it came in so hard it had to be bailed out with buckets. It was inconvenient, too. There were only two bedrooms. They slept, as my grandfather used to say "top to tail" and got their water from a well. The sanitation comprised an outside midden and they had a persistent problem of rats. My grandfather used to say that killing rats was a regular job for the children. So, too, was breaking up sandstone to sprinkle a covering on the earthen floor of the cottage. The medical armoury to

deal with the problems such conditions could produce was hopelessly inadequate.



Medicine for the people of Heddon had not quite extricated itself from magic, certainly not from superstition and self treatment was the most common form of medical care. They had to face epidemics of diphtheria, scarlet fever, whooping cough, each one threatening death. Pneumonia was also a killer as was tuberculosis. The Browns survived these illnesses but others were less fortunate. Death was a regular visitor and learning to cope with it an important feature of growing up.

Some idea of the resources available to combat illness can be gained from the local newspaper, the Hexham Courant. The paper ran lots of adverts for patent medicines. Its pages were full of new cures. 'Dellar's Corn Plasters', 'Peppers Quinine and Iron Tonic' are typical, the latter bringing health strength and energy. Promises were made to cure stammering and stuttering 'without the aid of mechanical appliances.'

Glycerine dips were offered for 'ticks, lice scab and foot and mouth.' Liver complaints, bile and indigestion were all promised cures 'without mercury.' Potents were available for nervous debility, urethral disorders, liver complaints and ruptures. Poultices and purgatives, salves and soporifics were all offered, lavishly illustrated and strongly recommended by a whole host of famous doctors down to the enterprising travelling quack.

Death was, however, common in Heddon; it was typical practice at funerals for the coffined body to be stood outside the door of the house on trestles for the visitors to see it and for hymns to be sung over it. Miss Elliot described the funerals this way making in passing a nice point about the children at school:

They used to get some chairs out at the door and get the coffin at the door and stand and sing over it. Pestle (the schoolmaster) if he knew there was a funeral about half past three, he used to keep us in because he knew we would be there to hear the singing. (NRO T/117)

The proximity of death in the pit is something I shall discuss in a following chapter. Sufficient to note here that the Browns brought up their bairns always knowing that the risks were high they might not survive. That each one did so accounts to some degree for the 'count-your-blessings-while-you-can' mentality with which my great-grandmother muddled through life.

Childhood for the older Brown children was swiftly curtailed by the growing obligations of work; they got

little attention from their parents. Their upbringing was, as my aunt Eva described it "very rough and ready." Their mother was always too preoccupied with babies and this meant the children were drafted early into housework. Norfolk John got the children to help him in the garden. They fed the pigs and milked the cow.

When they grew older they learned to measure the contribution their father really made to the home finding him a man of unpredictable effort and temperament. My grandfather grew to mistrust his father even, perhaps, to dislike him. He kept discipline with a horsewhip and if his behaviour towards his grandchildren is any measure of how he treat his own then he was clearly a great tease. One of his grandchildren, Alf Hudspeth, told me his favourite tease was to agree with everything the children said. "Did you work on a treadmill, Granda?" "Yes, my boy." "Did you live with gypsies, Granda?" "Yes, my boy."

Norfolk John cultivated a public image of himself as something of a character. His Sunday best was a tailed coat and bowler hat; he joined the village life but in a sense, too, kept himself apart. He acquired some notoriety for building a cart for his horse in the upstairs bedroom of the cottage and on completion could not get it down the stairs. My grandfather used to insist that this often told tale was not true but that his father let it go unchallenged for a bit of fun.

His family experienced his humour often to their discomfort. My grandfather used to tell the tale of

how, once recovering from an accident in the pit his father had to use crutches for walking. The family felt that, after a few weeks, the old man had no further use for the crutches yet he still would not part with them; they thought, as my grandfather put it, he was 'shammin' to avoid going back to work or to do any work around the house. One day, however, looking over a sick pig, he poked the animal with his crutch and the pig turned and bit him on the leg. At this he began to flay the animal with his crutch chasing the poor creature around the field as it fled, squealing, to avoid his blows. Even as a very old man he retained his eccentricity. My uncle Bill likes to relate how, on a visit to Mount Pleasant, the old grandfather was told that there was a goat in the allotment that was not wanted. Not to miss a chance he took the goat on a rope from Throckley to Eltringham on the other side of the Tyne. He was then eighty-two-years of age and without thought of his age or his stomach walked away, the goat dragging behind.

To live frugally may have been stressed as a virtue in Victorian England and it was certainly a sentiment echoed loudly from the pulpit of Heddon Church, but it was also something which my great-grandparents could not avoid. Feeding such a large family was costly and difficult. The physical problems of cooking for such a large number were overcome by using large pans and a boiling tub. All the puddings were put into 'pokes' and boiled together. On Sundays there was always a huge joint of beef, always the 'plate' cut of meat.

But the family produced a lot of its own food. There were chickens and pigs; this meant a home-based supply of eggs and bacon. The cow supplied milk and the garden gave them vegetables. There was, in addition, the payment in kind they got from the farm for casual work - potatoes, turnips, milk. Finally, there was the food which grew around them. My grandfather used to say the nobody but the Browns ever got a blackberry or a mushroom from Heddon Common. The whole family scoured the place regularly; what was there, they got and often they got enough both to meet their own needs and to sell the rest. They were self sufficient in jam.

Their income was augmented by the horse and trap and the part-time carrying business which the old man ran, taking people and post between Heddon and Wylam and sometimes going as far as Newcastle. During the Summer the Browns took their horse to Ryton Willows, a pleasure spot on the south side of the Tyne to give pony rides at tuppence a time. They bought and sold livestock; the children, even when they should have been at school, often worked on the harvest.

In the time they had for play the Common the valley and the river below offered rich opportunities. This was the same valley etched for posterity in the woodcuts of Thomas Bewicke. When my grandfather was a boy the river was rich in salmon and trout; they fished it, swam in it, lit fires by the side of it and walked on roughly-cut stilts across it. By its banks they went 'bird-nesting' stealing the eggs of Sand Martins, Moorhens and the occasional Kingfisher. In the woods around

Close House they found Tawny Owls and Magpies. There were Badgers too, and deer and rabbits in abundance.

Their sense of their own locality was shaped by how far they could reasonably walk. They walked to Throckley and Newburn and back up the tidal stretch of the Tyne to Wylam, the birth place of George Stephenson, the railway engineer whose cottage still stands by the riverside. They crossed the river by rowing boat ferry to Ryton to play on the open land of the 'Willows.' They scrambled up pit heaps and watched engines on the dilly line pulling endless tubs of coal. Visiting fairs, seasonal events like the picnic at Hedwyn Streams, the Hunt, farm sales, concerts, cricket matches and football games added diversion to the compelling commitments of work in the house, school and, of course, a little later, the pit itself. They particularly liked a pig killing. Several families in the village kept pigs and the children had great fun from avoiding the adults to get illicitly near the killing of a pig; here was rich excitement.

The boys frequently got into trouble although never seriously. The risks of trouble came directly from their play. Water bailiffs policed the river, gamekeepers stalked the woods. School attendance officers visited families and the colliery police kept a sure eye on trespass and petty theft. And because they were like other children, well known, they knew that anything they did would likely be reported. But the Browns were not

thought of as a troublesome family. They were regarded as odd on account of the size of their family and Norfolk John was thought something of an eccentric but the family was accepted; they were 'rough diamonds' whose encounters with authority were no more serious than anyone else's.

Their position was a lowly one but they had their pride. Their children were carefully instructed that they were no better and no worse than anybody else. They did, of course feel their low status; they were not invited to the garden parties at the vicarage and the contrast between their home and those of the gentry was a stark one. Their furniture, for instance, was simple. And as if to emphasise their poverty but actually saying a lot more about the standards the family was subsequently to acquire, my aunt Eva told me that "They never had tablecloths, you know. They ate from a scrubbed wood table."

They held cleanliness as a special virtue. Eva stressed for me that her grandmother was ashamed of nothing so that "Even if King Pete came she wouldn't put off her washing - dozens of white pinnies hanging on the line." The impression left with me, having discussed them extensively with relatives, is of a couple burdened (though not bowed) with children, living off their wits, totally untouched by deference and living very much for the present.

They themselves had no strong attachment to Heddon although their children, growing up there saw Heddon as their home and where they came from. They were largely uncritical of the world around them and utterly unconcerned with politics. Norfolk John was a quick-tempered eccentric and congestion in the home often led to angered outburst. It was, nonetheless, a close family; if their feelings erupted quickly they nevertheless carried few grudges. They were all too busily unconcerned with the immediate present to bother. They knew their place but since they expected no other that did not worry them either.

Chapter Two

SCHOOL

My duty towards my Neighbour, is to love him as myself, and to do to all men, as I would they should do unto me: To love, honour and succour my father and mother: To honour and obey the queen, and all that are put in authority under her: To submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters: To order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters: To hurt nobody by word nor deed: To be true and just in all my dealing: To bear no malice or hatred in my heart: To keep my hands from picking and stealing, and my tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering: To keep my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity: Not to covet or desire other men's goods: but to learn and labour truly to get mine own living, and to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me.

From the Catechism The Book of Common Prayer The Church of England

The quotation with which I have begun this chapter is, as it says in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, "an instruction to be learned of every person, before he be brought to be confirmed by the Bishop."

It is only a small part of a much larger text and if it seems long then my purpose in using it will have been achieved. The children of Heddon school were required to learn the whole thing and if they were unlucky they might have been asked to repeat it, in front of the whole class, to either the visiting School Board inspectors or the Ecclesiastical inspectors. Such recitation was part of the examination which all nineteenth century Board Schools were given under the Elementary Code and as a result of which were or, as the case may be, were not, allocated central government funds. I quote it fully, however, for it would be difficult to find a more concise and eloquent

account of the principles which guided the educational practice of Heddon school and, simultaneously, the tedium of studying there.

The Diocesan inspector recorded in the school log book on May 8th 1899 that the children's knowledge of the catechism was "very good" and that they recited their parts well: "due reverence and care in reciting the Repetition have been successfully cultivated." No one can say what the effects of such learning were on the children of Heddon. No one can determine how far, in the course of their lives, lines and phrases dimly recalled from hours of dull recitation, lent meaning and purpose to feelings and actions, fitted to their experience and station.

Children, as they grow up, forget the detail of what they learn at school. My grandfather certainly did not speak much about his schooling and the detail of what he learned there was of no importance to him. In any case, since he left at the age of eleven it is hardly likely that the formal curriculum and syllabus would have much impact on him. What the school did teach him, I think, and supremely well, was that education and learning were both difficult and alien and concerned not at all directly with the likes of him or the world he had to cope with. In his negative attitude to school, both as a child and to a much smaller extent as an adult, we can see one source of that much larger gulf between mental and manual labour which is one of the principal contradictions of a capitalist society.

His education was one of the major forces shaping his class position; it embodied massively dominant assumptions about the role and status of working class people conceiving no other role for them than that of manual work as subordinates. And what it reflected, as recent historical work has made clear, was a long standing attempt to so control the learning of working class people that they would fit in without protest to dominant structures of work and political authority. (See R. Johnson 1976, T. W. Laquer 1977, R. Colls 1976 M. W. Flynn 1967).

No one can say how well the public educators of the late nineteenth century achieved their purpose. But that purpose was a clear one with a coherent rationale. Religion and the Catechism had a big part to play in it, as did poetry and the three R's. The Victorians had well-worked out justifications for the curriculum of their schools and it is easy to detect, in the unique history of particular schools, the subtle, but direct, effects of a much more central and powerful impulse which showed itself in the way schools were staffed, financed, run and controlled entering directly the daily experience of thousands of children. Heddon school was no exception, indeed it was all too typical of schools in the colliery districts of the North.

The early history of Heddon school is unrecorded though it stems from the period of the 1820s being set up by Mrs. Bewicke, the major landlord of the area. The main building of the present school was built by the

National Society in 1851. The later development of the school from 1886 onwards is recorded in the school log books and it is these upon which I mainly base my account of the school. The period covered by the log books does not correspond directly with my grandfather's time at school. This is a pity but it is not, in fact, an obstacle. They cover a period sufficiently close to his own to justify treating what they contain as evidence of the quality and character of his own schooling.

From the 1870s onwards to 1903 the school was under the jurisdiction of the Newcastle School Board and the rural Dean of Corbridge. The local vicar was always the correspondent of the school, or school secretary and the Board of managers included the vicar, Major Calverly Bewicke and Mr. J. C. Bates. The regular voluntary subscribers to the school, their subscriptions amounting to more than the annual government grant or the sum collected in the so-called 'school pence' from the children, were local landowners, including a rich vicar, and the owners of Heddon colliery. The management and control of the school was, therefore, in the hands of the most powerful men in the village. Those who symbolised authority and respectability were thus closely associated with education and it was an association reinforced by regular visits to the school and regular contact with the children. The log book for November 6th 1886 reads: "Rev. C. Walker and C. Bewicke Esq. visited the school. They looked at copy books and registers and questioned infants in Arithmetic." Mr. Bewicke gave the children an annual

treat in the grounds of Close House. Mr. Bates lent his field for school sports. Miss Bates often came to the school to help with the needlework. The vicar, of course, was a daily visitor and helped a great deal in teaching. When the Reverend Bowlker's wife died the children attended her funeral. The log book for November 23rd 1892 read: "Last night at 10.15 the wife of the Rev. C. Bowlker, Manager and Correspondent of this school, died after a long and peaceful illness. I addressed the children this morning being anxious for them to show all the signs of sympathy in their power." And on the 26th the Head notes that: "The children attended church and joined in singing the Hymns and Psalms." This was at the memorial service.

Apart from such formal contact between children and managers there was extensive informal contact. Casual work on local farms was always available for the children, particularly during the harvest and despite the fact, as I shall show, that the school had chronic problems of attendance, even the school managers were not averse to employing children. The log book of August 15th 1886 notes: "Several children are working in the gardens of Close House. I sent word to the gardener that school had commenced again and asked him to dismiss the boys." And in a small parish of no more than nine hundred people the local gentry were known personally to many; they were not distant figures of an anonymous authority but were closely involved in the lives of the children and their parents.

There are no records which document the reasons for their involvement in the school. In the vicar's case it was clear; it was part of his job and flowed from a long-standing preoccupation of the Church with the education of the poor. For the others it might have seemed a clear case of noblesse oblige or a natural extension of their other roles as Poor Law Guardians or Justices of the Peace, tempering their awesome authority in this respect with the charity their Church required of them as gentlemen.

For the children school attendance was a duty and their parents faced prosecution for not ensuring their attendance at school. Successive education acts from 1870 onwards during the decade leading to Mundella's Act in 1880 built up the legal framework of compulsory attendance but the obligation on children to attend pre-dates the legislation. Although there is no surviving documentary evidence to prove this definitively in the Heddon case there are good reasons for believing that the parents of Heddon did make an effort to send their children to school. There had been a school there for a long time before the 1870 Act. It was closely connected to the Church. Two of the principal landowners were keen supporters of elementary education. Finally, from the early 1880s onwards where evidence does exist, it is clear that most children stayed on at school to complete the course. The idea of schooling was therefore not a new one to the people of Heddon or to working people of the mining districts of the north east more generally.

It was a qualified idea, however, and like many other parents of elementary school children at the time, their attitude to school was influenced by the cost of it and the availability of other ways of keeping their children busy, either in work or at home. This reflected in the almost despairing report of J. R. Blakiston to the Board of Education in 1886:

There is strong reason to believe there are still many thousands of children over the age of five and some over six, and even older, who have never been inside a schoolroom.

There is an innate dislike in the people of the north-eastern Division to do anything upon compulsion. Even when sufficient visitors are employed to go regularly from house to house, some parents contrive, by frequent migrations and otherwise, to elude their vigilance, others to defy their action.

The "law's delays", the smallness of the fines imposed on offenders, and the unwillingness of many Benches to convict, continue to paralyse the action of compelling bodies wherever money can be earned by children. (J. R. Blakiston 1886: 263)

It did not occur to Mr. Blakiston that regular attendance at school is best secured, not with the stick, but with the carrot, and that his inspectors' observations from which he compiled his report, reflect the poor quality of education the schools offered and not the wilful neglect of parents. The parents of Heddon could have no reason to expect much from education. their own experience of it having been so slight and unrewarding. Twenty years previous to the Blakiston report, Mr. J. L. Hammond reported to the Schools Inquiry Commission

on the state of schools in Northumberland and, referring to schools for working men had this to say:

Practically in these schools nothing is taught beyond reading, spelling, cyphering and writing. There is little pretence of attempting even geography or grammar....

Intellectually considered, the instruction given at these schools is extremely meagre. In fact, no mental faculty of the pupils is exercised or even interfered with by the teacher.

(J. L. Hammond 1867: 276)

He did praise, however, the "neatness, method and regularity imperceptibly instilled by the system" and claimed:

They have one merit; except in the higher rules of arithmetic they do not pretend to teach more than they do teach; and even an illiterate parent can test pretty carefully the progress his son makes at such a school. (J. L. Hammond 1867: 275)

Heddon school fits well into these general descriptions. The assumptions about the education of workers which were common in late Victorian England and which stressed the importance of school as an agent of social control penetrated Heddon school directly, affecting its resources, staffing curriculum and results. In retrospect it is surprising how well the children resisted its affects to assert their own values and to find ways of escape which drove the 'School Board Man' to despair.

Resources

In 1882 the cost of education per pupil was 35s. 3½d. This was for the country as a whole. In London it was 53s. 5d. and in the country outside London, 41s. 4¼d. These figures come from Matthew Arnold's General Report for 1882 and he was emphatic that the cost was too high. (M. Arnold 1883: 196) His view was that the parental contribution to the cost of education should be higher on the grounds that:

It has so often been said that people value more highly and use more respectfully what they pay a price for, that one is almost ashamed to repeat it. (M. Arnold 1883: 320)

At this time Arnold was probably the most influential government spokesman on education being the Chief Inspector of Schools. His figures however, are slightly misleading since they do not break down the overall figures into their separate components. At this under the Revised Code regulations from 1861 onwards education was paid for from three main sources, central government grants, fees - 'school pence' - and voluntary donations. In the case of Heddon school, as can be ascertained from the school Cash Book, each source contributed about one third to the total cost and that, naturally, the biggest single cost was teachers' salaries. Parents in Heddon were relieved from paying fees from September 1891 when the school became entirely free, an event which prompted the Head to note: "The Attendance has been very

good since free education was adopted in our school." (School Log Book September 18th 1891) Without quite a high level of voluntary contribution the school would not have been financially viable, a fact, which under the Elementary Code regulations, reflected both meagre central government funding and the academic performance of the school itself since the grant was paid dependent on the children passing tests in the three R's and on the level of their attendance. Arnold's views about paying for a service thus neglects a vital element of the calculation, the ability of people to pay. It is clear that for some parents in Heddon the 'school pence' were a priority they just could not afford, a real deterrent to sending their children to school.

The following table shows that it was not until the turn of the century that the annual grant per pupil reached more than £1.00 per annum.

Cost Per Pupil: Heddon School 1885-1903

	No. of scholars for whom accommo- dation is provided	Pupils Regi- stered	Average Attend- ance	Annual Grant £ s d			Grant per pupil (New Pence)
1885	136	124	108	65	6	0	52
1890	136	136	135	85	10	11	62
1895	172	177	161	132	16	0	75
1900	172	-	142	147	18	0	52
1903	172	-	151	154	8	0	1.02

Source: Board of Education Parliamentary Grants
and School Cash Book.

When a parent could not meet the school fees the Attendance Officer of the School Board could make an application to the Board of Guardians for the fees to be paid by them. The Log Book notes on December 22nd 1886, "Attendance Officer to apply to guardians for payment of Robert Napier's fees." And in 1889 in an entry which suggests that school fees for some children were a deterrent to their attendance and a financial strain, the Head Notes: "I sent Geo Hepple home for his school-fees and he never returned for the rest of the week." School fees could not be met at times of industrial trouble. A log book entry in March 1887 notes: "Several children absent this week on account of the school pence, the strike affecting several families. The figures above however simply emphasise that, consistent with the explicit aims of the Revised Code, education in Heddon was cheap.

Staff

Teachers' salaries represents the single largest charge to the income of the school. In 1878/9, the year during which my grandfather started at the school, the total income was £205 10s 10d. Total expenditure for that year was just over £150 and of this sum £138 17s 6d went on teachers' salaries. Three grades of teacher existed in the school, Headteacher, assistant teacher and pupil teacher, the latter receiving her own education and training for the profession. Between 1886 and 1900 there were four headmasters in the school, thirteen assistant

mistresses and seven pupil teachers and monitors. One head teacher Mr. Grocock remained for just over one year. These figures suggest, in contrast to the cosy myth of the close-knit village school Heddon school experienced quite a high level of teacher turnover in the period before the 1902 Education Act. There is no obvious explanation for this except that, relying mainly on young women teachers, marriage and child rearing would take its toll on the staff. Here, of course, is one of the nicer ironies of Victorian education. The full moral force of it was felt by the children through the work of their young lady teachers, hesitant, poorly trained and, in the case of the pupil teachers, not much older than the pupils themselves. One tetchy comment in the log book for December 1st 1899 emphasises this point: "I had to speak seriously to F. Stephenson (Candidate) about bringing her lessons very imperfectly done." Earlier in that year the Head had to warn the pupil teachers about their own poor attendance! These young girls were the front line troops of Victorian education.

Curriculum

The staff of the school were not in control of what they should teach. The Elementary Code dictated what they should do although they did have some freedom in the selection of teaching materials. What they taught, however, reflected directly the dominant values of the time. In their songs and poetry, their history and geography the values of patriotism and deference were heavily underlined. The object lessons of the pupil

teachers emphasised such virtues as honesty and kindness and the whole emphasis of the school was on the development of standards of appropriate behaviour. The April 1886 entry to the log book illustrates this quite well. Singing lessons for the coming school year are set out as follows:

Division 1 (Infants and Standard 1)

The Rainy Day
Hold the Right Hand up
The Robin

Division 2

Welcome to Spring Birds
The Robin
The Squirrel
Blue Bells
Evening

Division 3

Patriotic Song
Who is a Patriot?
Before all Lands
Rule Britannia
God Save the Queen

The poetry to be learned is listed as follows:

- Class 1 Goldsmith's Traveller
- 2 Wreck of the Hesperus
- 3 After Blenheim (Changed to Lucy Gray)
- 4 Village Blacksmith
- 5 The Two Little Kittens

And the texts which the school would use that year are listed as:

Readers: Geographical - Nelson's 'World at Home'
Historical - Nelson's ''Royal'
Literary - 1,2,5, Nelson's 'New Royal'
4, 'Masterman Ready'
5,6,7, 'Settlers in Canada'

Singing for the younger children was an indulgence in a mild and mainly innocent rural nostalgia. For the older children songs were an induction to the values of Victorian imperialism. This was the period of the expansion of the colonial Empire, a period of confidence tarnished only by the awareness that Britain's world leadership in industry and technology was being overtaken by other nations, particularly Germany. But the themes in the poetry stressed traditional virtues of the home and the hearth and where it did extend the range of childrens' emotions it reached no further than a shallow sense of pity for the misfortunes of others - 'Lucy Grey' is a good example as is 'The Wreck of the Hesperus,' in both cases the object of the pity being most unlikely ever to be encountered in the daily lives of these children. 'The Traveller' by Goldsmith and 'The Village Blacksmith' by Longfellow both emphasise a sentimental attitude to the village and to home and emphasise the timelessness and inevitability of the social order itself. In 'The Village Blacksmith' we find the following verse, celebrating the virtues of hard work and toil:

Toiling,-rejoicing,-sorrowing
Onward through life he goes
Each morning sees some task begin

Each evening sees it close;
 Something attempted, something done
 Has earned a nights repose

The poetry fare of the school should not be thought of as an idiosyncratic selection on the part of the Head. Mr. Hall was drawing on opinions which were quite firmly held by the Board of Education itself. Even the inclusion of poetry in the school curriculum had a very explicit rationale. Once again, Matthew Arnold tells us what it was. In his General Report for 1878 he insists that "good poetry is formative." It has he says, "the precious power of acting by itself and in a way managed by nature, not through the instrumentality of that somewhat terrible character, the scientific educator.... We enlarge their vocabulary, and with their vocabulary their circle of ideas. At the same time we bring them under the formative influence of really good literature, really good poetry." (M. Arnold 1878: 187-1888) And in his 1880 report he takes up the theme again: "Good poetry does undoubtedly tend to form the soul and character; it tends to beget a love of beauty and of truth in alliance together, it suggests, however indirectly, high and noble principles of action, and it inspires the emotions so helpful in making principles operative." (p. 22-201) He goes on to regret the influence of Lord Lyndhurst in recommending Goldsmith to the schools preferring instead the popular Mrs. Hemans (The Wreck of the Hesperus) and such poems as 'The Graves of a Household,' 'The Homes of England' and 'The Better Land.'

Patriotic values were also reinforced at key points in the royal calendar, and when events in the Empire overseas gave grounds for special celebration. During the jubilee celebrations of sixty years of Victoria's reign a Union Jack and Royal Standard were placed above the Queen's picture, flags were given out together with instructions about processions. The log book of June 30th 1897 reads: 'This afternoon, in school 500 Jubilee Mugs were distributed by Miss Violet Margaret Bewicke to all the children in the parish up to fourteen years of age.' Miss Bewicke was given a 'beautiful casket' and the whole room was decorated with flags. Less important Royal occasions were also marked with day-holidays. In 1893, July 6th, the log book notes: 'Holiday all day on account of marriage of the Duke of York with Princess May of Teck.'

The Diamond Jubilee was a very important event in the village and so, too, were military successes overseas. The log book for May 21st 1899 reads: 'Half holiday this afternoon in honour of the relief of Mafeking.' The June 6th entry: 'Closed this afternoon in honour of the British occupation of Pretoria.' And, in what must have seemed a truly idyllic month, on June 20th the children were given another half-day on account of a visit to Newcastle by the Prince and Princess of Wales. That the South African war was exposing British military weakness and the Government was greatly concerned with the health of army recruits was not something which the parents of Heddon would have been aware of. The history and geography

taught in the school were clearly not very well developed. Geography was taught from 1888 onwards most likely in response to Board of Trade prompting. In the Board's Report for 1886-7 it was noted that:

It is beginning to be widely felt that, in schools where geography is not presented for a grant, it is a subject of which the future citizens of so wide an empire should not be wholly ignorant and that the wives, sister, and daughters of soldiers, sailors and settlers should read books that treat the subject in an interesting and intelligent style. (p. 273)

It is interesting that the rationale for geography teaching was aimed particularly at the women, those who would be left behind, encouraging them to see in their husbands' colonial exploits the unfolding of an historic mission which they themselves could not properly oppose. The theme of empire was often reinforced by guests to the school such as the Church Missionary Society when magic lantern shows would be given. On July 10th 1902 the Rev. Stenson from South Africa, gave the children a lecture on that part of the British Empire.

The women were a target, too, of another Victorian pre-occupation, savings and self help. In 1891 a savings bank was opened in the school to encourage the children to save. There is no specific record of the reasons given. A Board of Education report for 1895 sets out the rationale for encouraging those schemes. The Heddon case could hardly have been unaffected by thinking of the following kind:

Experience has shown that many of the evils which weigh most seriously on the industrial classes in this country are the results of improvidence and waste. But some of these evils admit at least of partial remedy. To learn how to economise slender resources, how to resist temptation, needless expense, and how to make reasonable provision for future contingencies is an important part of education. Such knowledge is calculated to protect its possessor from much trouble and humiliation, and to help him greatly in leading an honourable and independent life. (p. 483)

The instruction points out that the lesson learned will be passed on to the whole household; and it went on to raise the prospect that, through thrift working men might lift themselves up into self employment. And finally, the connection with drink is made:

Thrift and temperance are very nearly allied; each is helpful to the other, and having regard to the enormous waste caused by intemperance, there can be little doubt that if the people of these islands were more temperate and thrifty our home trade and the profitable employment of our people therein would be very greatly increased. (p. 484)

The curriculum of a school is not simply the formal subjects which are taught; it includes everything that constitutes the formal life of the school as a community. It includes the way in which knowledge and learning are tested and the way in which children are punished. (See B. Bernstein 1971)

Under the Elementary Codes there was an incredible amount of testing in schools. The children of Heddon were

treated to regular examinations. In the case of the upper standards examinations were run on a fortnightly basis. The pupil teachers of course were under constant examination, often having to give formal object lessons in preparation for both the diocesan and state inspection. And the reason for all this was a clear economic one. Inadequate performance in basic subjects could lead to the withdrawal of the grant. The Inspector's report for May 26th 1890 underlines the precariousness and urgency of the situation for the school: 'The Merit Grant is recommended solely on account of the epidemic, since elementary subjects were not up to the mark. Much better results of instruction will be expected next year.' (Article 115 (i) The children of Heddon must have experienced school as a series of hurdles to be jumped or ambushes to be avoided for failure meant additional work or punishment.

Punishment at Heddon was frequent. Between February and the end of March 1886, punishments are recorded for playing among the shrubs on the Church hill, running and playing in the school, truancy, stopping younger children on their way to school, throwing stones, climbing trees in the playground and unruliness in lessons. And the log book has frequent entries of the following type: 'Gilbert Tailford sent home for insubordination. Returned next day with message that he had to be caned' (Oct. 21st 1886). 'Punished J. Wright and M. Charlton for being in girls' yard' (June 4th 1887). 'I punished Harry Brown and John Laws for climbing the playground walls' (Oct. 30th 1888).

'I punished Wm. and Ed. Scott for using bad language.'

'Punished Harry Brown for insubordination.' (June 10th 1890).

Most of the time the punishments are the trivia of a petty tyranny but occasionally they are serious. Great Uncle Harry was actually expelled and had to find alternative schooling in Horsley. The log reads: 'I punished Harry Brown for stone throwing. He retaliated by wounding me in the leg, and on being brought before the magistrates his father was bound over to answer for his good conduct and he was ordered to be taken away from the place and pay the costs.' ((Feb. 12th 1894) That the children often retaliated is seen in the following entry: 'Punished Geo. Swallow for playing away from school yesterday afternoon, and gave him a second dose for kicking me after he had been punished.'

The underlying problem was, however, attendance. Like many schools of its type the problem of actually keeping the children in regular attendance was a constant source of worry, not least because the grant depended on good attendance levels. No explanation of the attendance problem would be satisfactory, however, which stopped at the attitudes of the parents of Heddon. The school did in fact have special problems and it must not be forgotten that the idea of keeping children at school was a relatively new one to many working class families.

The attendance figures for the school for the years 1885 to 1900 are as follows:

Attendance Levels, 1885-1900
Heddon School

Year	Pupils registered	Average attendance	Percentage attendance
1885	124	108	87.0
86	120	113	94.1
87	145	111	76.5
88	152	112	73.6
89	142	132	92.9
1890	136	135	99.2
91	133	131	98.4
92	181	136	75.1
93	172	154	89.5
94	193	165	85.4
95	177	161	90.9
96	169	151	89.3
97	172	155	90.1
98	152	153	100.
99	139	137	98.5
1900	145	142	97.9

Source: Board of Education Parliamentary Grants
and calculations from school records.

The figures, taken overall, indicate that in the closing decades of the century average attendance figures gradually improved. This was no small achievement since during this same period the school experienced a very high level of pupil turnover, as well as of staff. The following table shows this very clearly. Geographical mobility on the part of farm workers no doubt explains these figures for what they show is that the average length of stay of children at the school dropped sharply near the end of

the century. These figures undermine totally, at least in the case of Heddou and perhaps, too, of other rural schools throughout the county, the image of a stable small community where everyone is known to everyone else. Friendships among the children of Heddou were being constantly broken up by the regular movement of agricultural labour.

Average No. of Years Attendance at School

Years	1876-79	1880-84	1885-90
Boys	9.4	9.7	3.1
Girls	9.0	8.0	3.4
Total enrolements	18	42	187

The official figures conceal, however, two features of the attendance problem. The first is its seasonal character and the second is its age-specific form. Younger children seem to have been much more regular attenders than older ones, being presumably less affected by the pulls of work and girls attended for a longer period than boys. Figures given in the school log book for February 28th 1896 indicate something of the sex difference.

Numbers of Children in Different Standards-1896

Standards	All	1	2	3	4	5	6
No.	55	15	11	11	8	8	6
BOYS							
%	44	27.2	20.0	20.0	14.5	14.5	3.6
NO.	70	12	10	17	18	8	5
GIRLS							
%	56	17.1	14.2	24.2	25.7	11.4	7.1

Sources: Calculated from school log figures.

The sex differences are not large. There were more girls at school than boys and they seem to have stayed the course slightly better, a fact no doubt reflecting differences in opportunities for work. For the boys work on the farms or in the pit were easily available; there were few opportunities outside domestic help for the girls and, not being a large parish, the opportunities for domestic work were in any case quite small.

The seasonal problems of attendance come out vividly in the school log. The entries speak for themselves. 'Several pupils reported to the Attendance officer. All were under fourteen years of age and working without a certificate' (June 8th 1886) 'Vicar called and 'looked up' some absentees as the attendance is falling on account of harvest.' (Sept. 8th 1886) 'Attendance very low on account of hinds leaving the neighbourhood.' (April 16th 1886) 'The attendance in the upper standards is very bad today as many of the boys are potato gathering. (Oct. 11th 1889).

These are the systematic distortions of gathering in the harvest. But there were many other factors which would reduce attendance. The weather was a big factor. The entry for May 5th 1896 reads: 'Rain very much desired has fallen all this morning, but while it will be very beneficial to the crops it has a most disastrous effect on the average. The attendance is less than 50 this morning.' Such entries are very common. The children were not averse to a run with the hunt either. The entry for March 1st 1897: 'Fox hounds met in village this morning. Eight boys are absent this afternoon having gone after them. They will come up for judgement in the morning.' And if the school work had been strenuous, say through having another examination, children would often take time off to recover. The entry for May 21st 1886 reads: 'Attendance gradually rising though some have not returned yet since the Examination - six weeks ago, notably A. Hepple.' On occasions the school even took pre-emptive action. On May 5th 1886 the school was deliberately closed in anticipation of high levels of absence: 'School closed all day as I ascertained that many children would be absent with parents leave on account of Auction Sale at neighbouring farm.' But it was not always possible to anticipate events in this way. The entry for December 1st 1886 makes this clear: 'Many children absent on account of a fire in the neighbour hood.'

The award of attendance tickets in 1887 seems to have had some effect but this was not so important as the adoption of free education in September 1891.

Prizes for good attendance were given out on prize days and despite the official figure which I have quoted it is clear that this attendance problem was seen by managers and teachers alike as the most intractable one the school had to deal with. Perhaps the clue to why this was so, lies, in the end, in what the school could really do for its pupils and for most of them school must have seemed an irksome interlude between being really a child and having a job and the idea of a job had clearly much more appeal than the dreary routines of school.

Performance

Elementary education was both intended and experienced as a terminal education; it carried no promise of better things to come although, through the trades union movement, skilled workers were demanding better opportunities from the early 1870s onwards. Nor was it an education keyed into the experience of the children. The staff were poorly trained and the schools had few resources. The grant system imposed a heavy emphasis on the acquisition of pretty basic skills and encouraged stylised, repetitive and highly formal teaching. The results are catalogued in the Inspectors' annual reports, all of them carefully recorded in the school log book, constant reminders to the Head of the need to improve his performance.

On May 12th 1886 the Inspector wrote:

The children passed a fair examination in the Elementary subjects, but the staff is not quite strong enough for efficient teaching. More intelligence should be shown when questioned on

the Reading and prompting should be checked. The Grammar was bad in the second standard, very bad in the third standard and below fair in the sixth standard; on the whole a failure. Pieces of short poems should not be learned as to destroy the sense. Copy books need more attention. The Needlework was pretty fair; the work in the second standard must not be fixed. The old admissions register and the Report of last year were missing. The first standard had no desks and were taught in the small infant class room. In singing the ear test should be more practised.

This is the full report of the Inspector and it testifies well to the limited objectives and expectations of the Board. The report for the following year indicates little improvement. 'The Elementary subjects were decidedly below fair, nearly all points requiring much improvement. English was a failure, as the Repetition was neither accurate nor intelligent and the Grammar generally weak.' Complaints about spelling, monotonous reading, teacher shortage and inability on the part of the children to understand what they read litter these reports. One rather enigmatic comment even suggests that school children were expected to deteriorate as a consequence of their education. 'The upper part of the school passed better than the lower which is unusual.' (My emphasis) It is clear that the scholastic achievements of the children, at least insofar as these were measured at the time, were very low.

The Inspector's reports should not be taken at their face value, however. They indicate a very narrow range of qualities were being measured and they reflect,

too, something of the class system within which the school functioned and the position of the school Inspector in that system. The great gulf which separated the children from their educated superiors comes out clearly, as most other class related differences do, in the Inspectors' attitudes to English and Grammar and Reading. In Heddon these were invariably bad. But what is being measured? An earlier inspection of schools in 1861, admittedly in County Durham, gives us a clue. In his famous report to the Education Commission of that year A. F. Foster notes, writing about Sunday Schools: '... the teachers conducted their earnest catechising, and the pupils their eager and intelligent answering, in one of the most uncouth dialects it was ever my lot to hear.' (quoted J.Y.E. Seeley 1973: 328) The Northumberland dialect of the children of Heddon must have sounded strange to the school Inspector's ears and I hazard the guess that, like many educators of today, he confused the form of speech with its meaning attributing ignorance to children whose main fault, if indeed, it is a fault at all, was the unselfconscious and authentic use of their own dialect with those little deviations from standard English grammar which rendered their speech unique. Presented with such ignorance on the part of their superiors, what response other than hopeless resignation to failure was it more appropriate to make?

In history and geography the story is much the same. For children intended for the pits or work on the farm, what appeal could there have been in the far flung

exploits of colonial adventures or the details of dynastic history? And what pleasure was there in the dull repetition of both poetry and prose when its relationship to their own experience or even the language which was used was so remote that learning became a punishment? It is hardly surprising that the harvest and the hunt were much more attractive alternatives to school.

Finally, if they devalued school, then it was hardly surprising for, quite apart from the school's limited achievements and the doubtful pleasures of attendance, it was a commonly held view, particularly among employers, that schooling was not worth it anyway. In his report to the Royal Commission on Agriculture, Mr. Coleman noted the attitudes towards education of several Northumberland landowners, including those of Mr. Clayton, a landowner in the Heddon district and the man who held the mining royalties for Heddon pit. Mr. Henry Bacon Grey Esq, farming 265 acres, noted for the Commission: 'Effects of the Education Acts: increased expenses to the farmer in summertime. It is a loss to the labourers, and the children of from 12 to 14 years are not so rosy and healthy as when they worked in summer and went to school in winter. They do not learn so cleverly, for the younger ones used to remain half workers for a longer time, and so they did not need to slur their work to keep forward and hereby were trained more perfectly.' (1882: 25)

And Messrs Joicey, in their returns said: 'The Education Acts have increased the farmers' expenses and deprived the labourer of a little help in bringing up his family.'

Mr. John Cookson was emphatic: 'Children are not employed, the Education Acts are a perfect nuisance to the farmer and a great hardship to the labourer; he ought to have the summer months for his children from 11 yrs old. The children prefer the 3 R's to the new code.' With such attitudes so tenaciously held by their employers what possible value could the parents of Heddon, particularly the itinerant ones, place on keeping their children at school?

The Brown Family at School

School records still in existence show that eight of the Brown children attended Heddon school although it is known[^]_L in the family that all of them did so at some point. The school admissions register reveals the following information about the Browns:

	<u>Total Years at School</u>	<u>Age on Leaving</u>
Edward	8	11
Robert	6	12
James	6	11
George	8	12
Harry	7	12
Annie	7	12
Alvina	6	10
Joseph	- not recorded	-
Alfred	4	10

Since there are so many of them it is tempting to analyse the results statistically but these figures, in fact, are not reliable. They do indicate accurately the age at which they left school but they underestimate, I think, the number of years of schooling some of them actually had.

Harry spent one of his years - the year of his expulsion for wounding the Head - at Horsley school. Some of the others, Alvina and Alfred in particular may have had more schooling. The figures do underline, though, that the Browns were slightly out of step with other Heddon families who were more likely to keep their children at school longer.

But of what they felt about school no record remains. My grandfather merely used to say, with a matter of factness that surprised no one, that if he did not feel like going to school, then he just used to play truant ('play the wag'). Books were not part of his life; nor was writing. He could read and write but left much of that to his wife or his children. Uncle Bill says that he has often written letters on his father's behalf. His attitude to his own children's education was pragmatic. They had to go to school and he saw to it that they did. But he did not expect from them more than that.

That his own schooling was a matter of such indifference to him is hardly surprising. As the Inspectors of the period underlined it offered little more than some very basic skills; in such a small school it was claustrophobic and often painful. School was a massive symbol of authority. His real education, at least those experiences which were to equip him with the skills he really valued began when he left school. And there is every reason to suppose his parents agreed. Keeping their children at school had involved brushes with the School Board man and the courts. They probably felt

relieved when they no longer had the worry of it all; one less to drive to school, one more income. The boys were clearly intended for the pit. Only George escaped this fate by serving his time as a cobbler. Robert became a pit blacksmith but he did, at least avoid work underground. The girls found no real employment before marriage. They did occasional housekeeping around the village. For them, too, school was of little importance. It was far more important for them to help in the home although they, too, when it was possible, did occasional work on local farms picking potatoes.

One final point: it has become something of an orthodoxy in modern sociology that the development among some groups of children of a 'counter school culture' is a reaction to the fact of failure arising from a recognition, however inarticulate, that school is a race in which they cannot succeed. (See e.g. P. Willis 1978; D. Hargreaves 1969) The evidence of the rejection of school given here could not properly be explained in these terms. There was no expectation in Heddon that anyone should succeed at school; the success of schooling was measured by how well the children were prepared for their social position. Given this it was hardly likely that these children possessed any sense of failure. J. P. Robson, a Tyneside song writer sums my argument up nicely in his song, 'The Pitman's Happy Times' which evokes the period I am writing about; his verse can stand as my conclusion:

We didn't heed much lairnin' then,
 We had ne time for skyul;
 Pit laddies ork'd for spendin's sake
 An' nyen was thowt a fyul.

Chapter Three

INTO THE PIT

My grandfather left school in 1885 to start work at Heddon pit. He was eleven years old. He could read and write; he knew a little poetry, some geography and he had passed the test which allowed him to leave school and start work.

A raw-boned slightly impulsive boy already quite tall, he was eager to get his 'start' at the pit and earn some money. He was keen to please, willing to work and prepared to do as he was told. His father, in any case, was there to see that he did just that.

To understand what starting the pit meant to him, however, it is necessary to stand back a little from Heddon and, indeed, from the Brown family and see in his starting work the unfolding of a social process of labour recruitment and work training. I shall call this process 'pit hardening' to underline that becoming a pitman was not so much a matter of acquiring particular technical skills - although, clearly, that is involved - but of assimilating certain special attitudes and dispositions towards work which mould the character of miners, setting them apart from others and without which it would be impossible to work underground. These attitudes include a strong attachment to the idea of being 'tough' , of not worrying about danger; they are extremely fatalistic attitudes which allow men to believe that they themselves are not really at risk and if they really were to have an



accident then there was little they could have done about it anyway. Then there is the value, central to their masculine self-image, of hard graft and that only 'real men' are capable of it. These and other basic attitudes have to be acquired; without them underground work is impossible. Like many children my grandfather must have anticipated them while at school before he went to the pit but there is much about the mine which cannot properly be imagined from without and how it might really be to be underground is not something boys could properly anticipate.

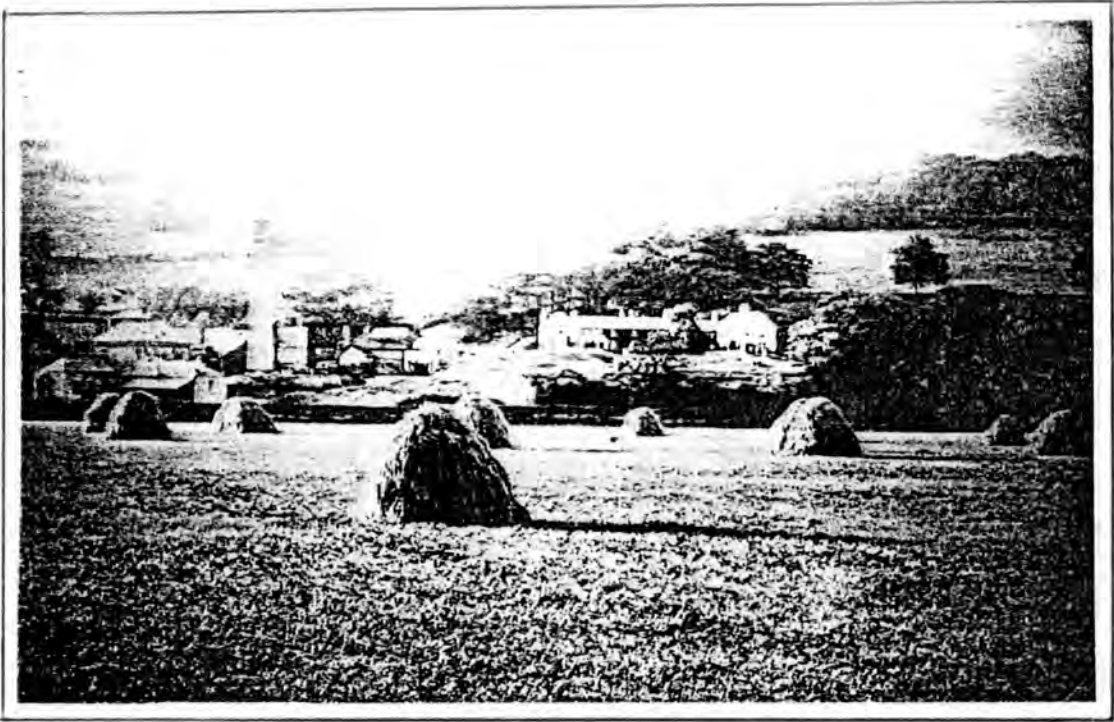
Pit hardening must be seen, like education, as a process further defining the miner's class position. The structure of ownership of the industry, the wage contract and the authority relationships of the pit itself defined the objective conditions of that class position. But education and pit hardening defined how it was experienced subjectively. Through both processes miners came to see themselves and feel themselves to be miners and to accept - although never completely and not in an unqualified way since their trades unionism testifies otherwise - the general social expectations attached to their status as mere workmen.

My grandfather's parents, on their own experience in rural Norfolk urged him to the pit. Farm work for them had a totally negative connotation. Looked at as a straight economic problem the pit was a more attractive proposition to him than farm work. Wages were higher and the prospects of regular employment in the same place greater. In any case he could start work sooner in the pit

than he could on the farms. The work itself was worse but the hours were shorter and since he, like thousands of others was not encouraged to have any high expectations about the quality or kind of work he should do the nature of the work itself could hardly have been a decisive factor.

His early start to work marked him off from many of his friends at school but his premature elevation to adulthood was not a unique occurrence. Other children did the same and for the same reasons, the need to supplement family income and encouraged by parents who saw more value in hard cash than in the dubious benefits of book learning.

The pit was at the foot of Station Bank tucked into the bottom of the valley and surrounded by trees. To get to it the pitmen had to walk a good mile following a gently curved track. From the valley top they could see the river cutting its way into industrial Tyneside. Opposite lay the pit at Clara Vale. To the left they could see the chimney and winding gear of Throckley pit, its coke ovens and wagon ways and the terraced rows of houses which the coal company had built for its men. By the river they could see the coal staithes to Ryton Willows and if the mist had cleared they could make out pits at Lemington, Ryton, Stella and Prudhoe, mounds of waste and red brick buildings, smoking, noisy and brutally inconsistent with the valley they had scarred and undermined. The Margaret pit was connected to the village by a tramway for tubs which hauled coal up the hillside



Heddon Colliery circa 1908

"A Man takes off his clean clothes and puts on his pit gear. That's all; but between the acts lies a lost world.... Look back to the fields. How precious things soon to be lost. Rows of haycocks and the smell of hay, the heavy fragrance of hay, the sweet almost intangible smother. A tree on the skyline and a farmhouse cuddling into the hillside for sleep. The soft outlines. The lost."

Sid Chaplin The Thin Seam p.9

to a depot where it was stored. Beside the pit were the brickworks, also owned by Mr. Bates.

To get to the pit my great grandfather used his horse; if his shift was different from that of my grandfather they used to arrange that the old man would have the horse for his journey back up the hill; my grandfather would ride it there and his father would ride it back. Like all boys his first job was to sit by a gate underground opening and closing it as ponies and tubs went by. Such gates regulated the air supply and the boy would sit there for his ten-hour shift in almost total darkness. The job was a vital one; the careful regulation of air flows prevents dangerous gases building up and so reduces the risk of explosions.

By the time he was thirteen he was a driver working with the pit ponies. He enjoyed working with horses and felt confident in his job although it could be dangerous. One of his school friends was killed by a pit pony, and some of them could be very flighty but he was good with horses having been brought up with them.

Feelings and expectations are closely woven and there is no record of his early start to pit work creating in him any feelings of dread or despair. In fact, such evidence as there is suggests he was keen and utterly unperturbed, despite the fact that he faced a ten-hour shift underground. Indeed, it is likely that he felt quite elated at the idea, for starting work was the essential first step to becoming a man and would confer on him a new position of authority in the family and

and give him a lot of freedom from home. Some evidence of this feeling of excitement comes from Jack Lawson's biography (1932) and in George Parkinson's account of his childhood. (1912) They can be cited here as first hand accounts of starting the pit which symbolises the experience of thousands of other boys although, clearly, it would be quite impossible for young boys to articulate their feeling in quite the same way. Nevertheless, such accounts are valuable in that they sharpen the images through which we imaginatively reconstruct the past and they enrich our ability to grasp sympathetically the daily experiences of ordinary people.

Jack Lawson (Lord Lawson of Beamish) recalls his first day at the pit vividly. (1932) At five in the morning, 'wedged in between two brothers', he was woken up from a half sleep by the caller: "Up, up, Get up, Lad. Away lad. Aw-a-a-ay". And as he explains:

The sensation of the traveller who starts on his journey to Central Africa is nothing compared to the thrilling realisation that I was commencing work in the mine that day....I wanted to see that Aladdin's cave, the pit. (1932: 45)

The walk to the pit with 'the ring of heavy shoes' around him seemed to take an eternity. The steel superstructure of the pit head overawed him a bit, especially since, being small he was having great difficulty in keeping his lamp from trailing on the ground:

There was steel everywhere. We were surrounded by it; we could hear it in the crashing coal 'tipper' and running-tub. We saw the thick, glistening,

steel-like ropes gliding up and down the shaft and the steel chains emerging, heralding the coming of the steel cage which carried the iron shaft gates upward in its flight. (1932: 45)

He says he 'shrank inwardly' at this 'but the lure of the pit did not diminish in the least.'

Its mystery called and drew me like a magnet, and I was thrilled when at last I found myself with some forty others, sliding slowly and silently down the deep shaft. The slimy beams at the side, the black depths I could glimpse, and the flashing lights of a seam we passed, all held me spellbound. (1932: 46)

But it was not just the wondrous experience of the pit which enthralled him. It was the change of status his starting work implied which was by far the most significant feature of it.

Now that I was a wage-earner I could go out at night for as long as I liked and where I liked. Thus ten hours a day in the dark prison below really meant freedom for me. (1932: 47)

This odd paradox is also recorded in George Parkinson's account of his own descent to the pit although he writes of an earlier period, the 1830s. (1912) He, too, needed no rousing out of bed. He, too, welcomed the transition to manhood:

I looked down with pity on the poor boys who had to continue at school and struggle on with vulgar fractions, whilst I should not only earn some money but be initiated into what seemed to me the mysteries and the manly phraseology of a pit-boy's life. (1912: 16)

His mother's advice to him as he left the house (and for the mother to get up with the men was the common practice

arising, at least Jack Lawson suggests, from the primitive fear that this parting might, indeed, be the last one) was simple: "Be very careful, hinney and mind what thi father says." He, too, was impressed, in the morning half-light with the 'grimy massive woodwork around the pit's mouth.... the clanking of engines, the creaking of the pulleys overhead, and the running of the ropes in the shaft.' He was terrified by the 'terrible depths of darkness' into which he was about to descend and the only comfort he got from his father was "Keep thi heart up, hinney; thoo'll mak' a good pitman yet."

The work of the trapper boy spanned two shifts and as his father left the pit that day, leaving his son at the gate, he said, with tears in his eyes, "Aw wish ye'd byeth been lasses". And as his father left, Parkinson says, 'a feeling of loneliness came over me ... As I looked on the wall of coal before and behind me, and on the roof overhead, home and friends seemed a long way off in the world above.' (1912: 23) Both men were struck by the unique aesthetic of the pit, the glistening steel, the noise, the power, the contrast of light and day, darkness and candle light. Parkinson says of his trapper boy's candle, 'To this moment I have never seen candles burn so brightly.' And of the quietness and solitude - something which, to the surface worker might seem terrifying - Parkinson has this to say:

During a long silent interval my candle went out, and, alone in the darkness which might almost be felt, I sat in my hole afraid to breathe.

The fearful silence grew oppressive, till I noticed for the first time the sounds made by the gentle oozing of gas and water escaping from the close grained coal around me. A strange and harmonious combination of soft and pleasant sounds they made, delicately varied in tone, rising and falling, now feeble and now full, occasionally ceasing as if their force were spent, then again chiming in perfect concord. All the sounds, though independent of each other, combined to form a symphony which seemed very beautiful to the lonely trapper boy. (1912: 23)

Similar feelings are described in the coalfield novel by Harold Heslop, The Earth Beneath which was very popular in South West Durham in the 1940s; its popularity deriving clearly from the way miners could recognise themselves and their history in the story of the Akers family which is the core of the book. (1946) Referring to the experience of George Akers going down the pit for the first time Heslop, himself a pitman, writes:

He discovered a thousand silences in the mine. There, all about him, were the dense, loud silences that he had to learn to recognise.... Each silence its genesis somewhere in the loud dark roar, and each silence was different from the other. There was the silence of the roof. That was the most menacing. It hung there in great slabs of grey-blue shale, a continuous and awful silence, ever-muttering in far-away corners, always ready to leap out of its grim tidiness to become a tearing menace seeking to devour and to destroy. (1946: 27)

And of the darkness he says this:

There is no infinitude like the darkness of a mine, nothing so obscene, it oppresses every nerve in the body. It is the absolute. (1946: 25)

His parents may have viewed his going down the pit more philosophically. Work in the pit was dangerous. They themselves had not been bred to it. It was well known and had been so since 1842 that young boys in the pit not only ran considerable risks of accident but could often cause accidents. Fatal accidents were a regular occurrence but the risk of non-fatal accidents was also high. Cuts and bruises were common enough. The movement of tubs and ponies on narrow tracks always carried risks of broken limbs, jammed fingers, crushed toes. Roof falls, explosions and flooding could all occur away from the stalls in which the coals were actually being cut.

Then there were the other men. They could often be brutal. Coal putters have long had a reputation of being short tempered and men who face the daily dangers of the pit acquired an immunity to their conditions through which feelings of care and consideration to the private fears of small boys could barely penetrate. It was not that they were intentionally cruel or incapable of sympathy; it was just that since there was pit work to do boys had better get hardened to it as quick as they could.

My grandfather would have known this; he would have known, too, most of the men and boys in the pit. He was not entering a strange world in that sense. It would be wrong, however, to stress too much the almost natural inevitability of young boys starting at the pit.

A very moving letter to the local newspaper by a miner from Throckley emphasises that children in the pits stirred not only pity and suffering but also anger in their parents. Complaining about the way in which a recent correspondent, referred to as 'Nondum' had misrepresented the miners in the paper the pitman from Throckley urged all those who criticise miners to go down the pits themselves for they would then see that this kind of work was not something human beings could just accept. And in a specific reference to child labour he wrote:

Now, Mr Editor, I will ask 'Nondum' whether it would but wring even his heart with agony to see an offspring of his own lifted (more than half asleep) out of bed at three or four o'clock in the morning and be doomed for fourteen long uneasy hours to toil with aching limbs and dwarf his young mind in the recesses of a coal mine, never seeing the light of the sun between weekend and weekend; would 'Nondum' but fancy that even Hope itself would be stifled in the labour of a boy at such a tender age? Would it not wake even the cold heart of the most feelingless to cry for justice.... ? We need not thank 'Nondum' and his class that our boys are now protected by law from rusting the budding intellect in inky darkness for so many hours at a stretch... (Hexham Courant August 23rd 1873)

There is a big difference, however, between reflecting in the abstract about the dangers and injustice of children in the pits and actually facing daily the prospect that a child might not return home or, if he did, he might easily be badly hurt. It simply does not do to dwell on

the prospects. All that could be done was trust to luck and the Lord himself and get on with what had to be done careful not to communicate those dark fears to the child. The busyness of daily routines has a soporific effect; to be occupied is a way of avoiding having to think the unthinkable. And the thought that there were other children in the pit must have been a great source of comfort to his parents; the risks, pain and guilt of sending him there each day could then be shared with everybody else.

The worry of it all, however, is captured movingly by Joe Skipsey, the pitman poet from Northumberland in his poem, 'Mother wept'

MOTHER WEPT

Mother wept and father sighed:
With delight aglow
Cried the lad, "Tommorrow", cried
"To the pit I go."

Up and down the place he sped -
Greeted old and young;
Far and wide the tidings spread;
Clapped his hands and sung.

Came his cronies; some to gaze
Wrapped in wonder; some
Free with counsel; some with praise;
Some with envy dumb.

"May he", many a gossip cried,
"Be from peril kept",
Father hid his face and sighed;
Mother turned and wept.

From Joe Skipsey Pitman Poet of Percy Main.
(1832-1903)

His early experience at the pit, as it was for thousands of others, was an induction into the adult world he himself would inhabit. The adults he saw around him

were the sort of men he himself would come to be and in watching them he would gain some appreciation of his own future; in living through the tragedies he would gain some sinister clues to the kind of world he lived in. An old miner and lifelong friend and workmate of my grandfather; Mr Stobart, told me that he would never forget, as a boy seeing a Mr. MacDonald being carried out of the pit on a stretcher. Both his legs were broken and there were fears that his hips and back might be too. As he was carried out he was muttering over and over again, "Whaat's gan 'i become o' me bairns?" As Mr. Stobart said, (he had just celebrated his hundredth birthday) "I nivver forgot that nivver."

Worries about the effects of accidents on the family income might have been assuaged a little in the Brown household by the sheer size of the family with several boys working, but they could not have been complacent about it. Under the Employer's Insurance Liability Act of 1880, coal owners were required to insure their workmen against accidents and loss of life. The Steam Collieries Defence Association (later the Northumberland Coal Owners Association) set up their scheme with Thos. Bates signing the agreements for Heddon Colliery. The Minutes for March 11th 1881 set out the rules governing the "charities" of the Association. 'Smart money', it declares, is to be paid to injured miners 'engaged in any way to the advantage of the owners; and in all cases, except at Heddon, it is paid for injuries received while travelling from face and bank.' Money was payable for 'Beat hands

damage from fellow workmen's picks, sprains, carelessness.' In the case of fatal accidents collieries provided coffins and £1 towards funeral expenses. They also undertook, as required, to provide a man and a hearse for the funeral itself. The scheme was financed at the assurance rate of one shilling per ton of coals drawn from the colliery. Minute book No. 2 of this Association sets out many settlements which took place under the scheme, indicating gravely, though not intentionally, the haunting fears from which no mining family could be entirely free. Thus:

No. 334 Heddon. William Breckons, 14, driver.

Killed on July 12th 1906, by a fall of stone.

Family consisted of the following:

	Age	Earnings Per Week	Remarks
Deceased	14	£0.8.0	Gave all earnings to parents
Father	42	1.2.0	
Mother	34		
Brother	16	0.8.1	
Brother	10		

Claim made by father for £40

Awarded £25

This particular entry refers to a boy related to my grandfather. William Breckons was his nephew, the son of his sister Alvina. Or again:

No. 571 Heddon, Robert Lowney 33, deputy.

Killed on January 13th 1911, by a fall of stone.

Deceased leaves widow, two daughters aged 10 and 7
and a son aged 1, wholly dependent.

Three years earnings £322.4.0

House and Coals 39.4.0

Full liability admitted £300

(Source: Northumberland Coal Owners Mutual Protection
Minute Books. NRO 60 NCB/DL/L)

The first point about such entries is the meagre provision they indicate. Families faced with the loss of the principal earner were faced with desperate problems. But the main point, for me, is the way they underline the proximity of death in the pit and that in this lies the roots of both fatalism and hedonism which have been so much a part of working class life, particularly in mining districts.

My grandfather learned early on, as a boy, undergoing his 'pit hardening' that it was futile to worry about accidents; that, while much could be done to avoid them there was nonetheless nothing to be done against the caprice of fate. And if the future, at least insofar as it revealed itself in the lives of those around him who were older, threatened to be bleak, then it was much better to think on the pleasures of the present and to have a good time. Just as it says in the song:

Let's not think on to-morrow
Lest we disappointed be
Our joys may turn to sorrow
As we may daily see.

Pit hardening was therefore not just a technical business of finding out how pits work or what the job of a pitman was. Indeed, in giving evidence to the Select Committee on Mines in 1866 Thomas Burt, described as a coal hewer but a man later to become a miner's MP and and at that time union leader, pointed out quite emphatically that there was no difference in skill between a pitman who had worked as a boy in the pits and someone who had come in as an adult. (Report from the Select Committee on Mines: Minutes of Evidence 1866: 1-15)

The employment of children could not therefore be justified on training grounds. It was more a subtle process of getting boys used to a whole way of life and to cope with, through ~~supp~~ression, those fears which, if allowed out, would prevent a man ever going underground. The irony, even the tragedy, of it all was that coal companies could actually rely on some of the attitudes of the men themselves - their sense of manliness and their unwillingness to think too far ahead, their toughness and their acceptance of work, any kind of work, as their own peculiar fate about which it did not do to grumble too much - to reinforce the responses from young boys which the company required of them as employees. These responses include regular attendance, an acceptance of authority, sustained effort at work and an almost total acceptance of the conditions of work itself, a respect for the dangers of the pit but without too much concern for them and finally, a sense of resignation that since this is what pit work was like it was not worth bothering

too much about changing it or dreaming of other things. That, in the end, is the full tragedy of 'pit hardening'; it closed off their dreams and trapped them in the present tense.

Heddon Pit

Heddon pit was known locally as a bit of a 'blackening factory', that is, as an old, not very efficient pit. The drawing shaft was narrow at the top and bottom and wide in the middle. The men entered it through a drift tunnel which spiralled downwards into the earth, the last few feet of the drift being on a very steep incline known as 'Knack Bank.' The winding engine was a single cylinder machine which regularly jammed and had to be rocked to jerk it back into action.

The men who worked in the pit, so far as can be ascertained, were from the North of England and from areas in Northumberland close to Heddon. Of the coal miners listed in the 1871 Census enumerator sheets for Heddon (twenty people in all) only three had been born outside the county. The pit, then, was a very local one. Its owner Mr. Bates, was well known in the village. Its managers, living beside the colliery were clearly seen as part of the village itself. They were accorded respect and they were not feared in any way. Indeed, there were times when the pit manager seemed little different from the men he employed. Mrs. Hall, a life-long resident of Heddon (born 1894) recalled how, before the First World War Fenwick Charlton, one of the colliery

officials actually broke into the village chapel: "Him and Joby got too much to drink here and they broke into Heddon Chapel. They cut themselves with glass and stuff and they had to buy a new bible for the Chapel." (Tape recorded interview NRO T/114) And of the manager, Mr. Musgrave, she said, "He joined in with the village." The pit, then, was not an impersonal place.

There was, however, a clear hierarchy among its employees. The managers and officials, as in every other mining village, had higher wages although, in Heddon, not necessarily better houses. There were no special houses for officials and, indeed, many of the miners themselves rented their homes privately from local landowners. In this respect Heddon could not be described as a typical mining village; there were too many opportunities for work outside the pits and for houses to be had outside the control of the coal company. But the managers did get a better class of coal as part of their wage. Miss Elliot, another life-long Heddon resident (born 1892) noted in an interview that her father being a 'master's man' got the 'second quality coal'. "He didn't get the small like the miners." (NRO Tape recorded interview T/117)

The tone of working relationships in the pit can only be guessed at. E. Dückershoff a German miner who worked in the area in the 1890s, noted a particular spirit of comradeship in the English pits:

In the pits here there is a spirit of comradeship. Every order is given and carried out in a friendly

manner. Cursing and bad language are seldom heard; here it is a real pleasure to work. (1899: 13)

The working hours, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. he thought were fair and manageable and with wages at 5s 6d per day, each pay being made fortnightly, Duckershoff was impressed by the comparative affluence of the miner's life:

He gets up about eight o'clock and breakfasts on bacon or brawn, with a couple of eggs, and bread and tea. He takes a couple of slices of bread and meat or cheese with him to the pit. On finishing the shift at four o'clock, he has meat and pudding, or soup with eggs or meat and for supper, bread and cheese or meat, with tea, the kinds of meat always changing. (1899: 31)

These remarks are particularly interesting since they come from a foreigner. He is curious about everyday things and since these are seen in a comparative perspective they are made to stand out. Their healthy diets at this point reflected good wages and contrasted sharply with the intense exploitation Duckershoff claims to have experienced in the German coalfields. German industrialisation was in his view being paid for dearly by German working men. But he was not so impressed with the Englishman's politics:

English workmen do not attack capital itself but only the nuisance of capital, and the exploitation of workmen by the capitalist class. In point of economics, the English workman is in advance of the German. In points of politics, he is behind him. (1899: 78)

The German may well have been influenced by Marxism. In Lemington where he was working, as in Heddon, and, indeed, throughout the coalfields, the predominant political mood was, however, Liberal.

Until 1918 my grandfather was a Liberal. The M.P. for the Wansbeck Division (the Parliamentary Constituency) Charles Fenwick, was a Liberal. The Northumberland Miner's Leader Thomas Burt, elected to Parliament in 1874 as a 'Radical Labour' member and a man who straddled coalfield politics like a colossus for over forty years was a Liberal. Page Arnot, the miner's historian says of Burt that he 'embraced the Liberal creed with an intellectual fervour that led him to accept all its current applications, not only to politics but to industrial problems. Hence his view on the identity of capital and labour was part of that contemporary political economy which he both practiced and preached.' (1949:53) Burt was also a deeply religious man, a methodist, just like his colleague, John Wilson, secretary of the Durham Miners Association. He was active, too, in the Temperance movement. Throughout his political career he had pressed for the reform of Parliament and the improvement of the living conditions of miners. He did not, however, support the movement from the 1880s onwards for the eight-hour day legislation; he resolutely held out against joining the Miners Federation of Great Britain on the grounds that national unions should not interfere with the mechanism of the sliding scale which ought to govern wage negotiations between men and their employers. Burt preferred

instead the strengthening of local conciliation machinery and arbitration. This belief of his, which permeated the leadership of the Northumberland miners was at the root of what Sydney and Beatrice Webb thought was the acceptance by Northumberland pitmen of the social and economic views of the mineowners. The 'victory of arbitration' said the Webbs, 'brought results which largely neutralised the advantages.' As in the case of political triumphs, the men gained their point at the cost of adopting the intellectual position of their opponents. (my emphasis) (quoted Page Arnot: 1949: 125)

Dückerhoff was therefore highlighting a vital feature of coalfield politics. Unwittingly he was also saying something important about the differences which separated the Labour movement on the continent from Britain. Burt and Fenwick had been active in the late 1880s in setting up an international association of miners. At the first meeting of the international conference in 1890 (a meeting decided upon at the first Socialist International in Paris in 1889 which itself had been convened to celebrate the centenary of the French Revolution) the British delegation (at Jolimont in Belgium) were shocked to discover the trades union organisation among continental miners was very weak although their socialist rhetoric was very powerful. In Britain the opposite was true; organisation was strong and socialism undeveloped. British miners were, therefore, always more likely to press for changes in their conditions through industrial and parliamentary methods;

on the continent, and particularly in Germany miners were far more interested in revolutionary Marxism.

The Heddon Lodge

There are no surviving records of the union at Heddon. It is only possible therefore to gain glimpses of what pre-occupied the men in the pit. There was sufficient solidarity among them socially to organise a rota system of calling each other up in the mornings. The one on duty each morning used to stand in the village square and yell to the rest to get out of bed and there was, as I have already shown, a rich associational life in the village which reinforced common marks of identity in the pit. The politics of their union leadership in the period up to the turn of the century and before the First World War may have been Liberal but many of the Heddon pitmen could well have been Tory in their outlook. Mrs. Hall, the old lady already referred to, speaking about pre- World War One elections said in her interview:

Newburn was a Liberal place. Heddon was a Tory place. The better class was all Tories and the farmers. My father was a pitman but he was a staunch Conservative. There was a lot of pitmen voted Tory. He would have a red ribbon in there. We had a dog and it would have a red ribbon in as well. And we had to have a red ribbon in our hair.

The lodge leaders at Heddon were strongly connected with the chapel. George Anderson and Harold Jackson were both chapel men. The lads used to call Harry Jackson 'Holy Harry.' Harry Jackson was, however, well respected.

As an orphan aged ten he had escaped from the Newcastle Workhouse and, working in several pits in the area eventually settled in Heddon. His was an early conversion to Wesleyan Methodism and he remained a devout Christian till his death in 1929. He was an active supporter of Charles Fenwick the Liberal M.P. and was for many years secretary of the Heddon Liberal Association. (See William Straker, Monthly Circular 1929, NMA Minutes). For my grandfather, therefore, the connection between people like himself - the poor of the village, in contrast to those in the social circle of the Church - and politics generally, was most obviously made by the Liberals with their close connections with the union.

In the period from his starting work to the turn of the century when he left Heddon pit to work for the Throckley coal company the problems the lodge had to cope with were largely those of falling wages under changing sliding scale arrangements and redundancy. On a broader plane the Northumberland Miners Association was concerned in this period with parliamentary reform, housing policy, the rise of a labour politics with the dark promise of class warfare, with whether to join the Miners Federation of Great Britain and with impending legislation on the eight-hour day. These are the issues around which my grandfather's early political education, such as it was, crystallised. These are the items which Anderson, Jackson, J. Graham and J. Wilson - all of them, at various times Heddon Delegates to the Council of the Northumberland Miners Association would have reported

on at lodge meetings and which were discussed at home after lodge meetings.

Judged from the minutes of the Northumberland Miners Association of the period there was little which would encourage the miners of Heddon to a coherent class analysis of their condition. In a letter to Joseph Chamberlain M.P. in February 1884 for example, the union stressing the need for safety legislation and parliamentary reform, underlined their interest in the politics, not of class warfare, but of self-help and parliamentary reform. With as they put it, 'other Liberals of the North' they welcomed Chamberlain to Tyneside and pointed out to him:

We belong to an industry which employs half a million men who follow their daily avocations at the peril of their lives. We are firm believers in self-help and have done much for ourselves, but we are not altogether independent of Parliament for protection.

(My emphasis) (NRO 759/68)

And in 1888, in an address to the members of the union Burt fired a broadside at the idea of a purely labour party in politics. He insisted the 'working men did not want class representation but they objected to class exclusion.' (NMA Minutes, NRO 759/68: 1888: 2)

A labour party, he argued, would be too sectional in its outlook. 'Our aim should be to unite men, not to divide them; to break down, and not to intensify and accentuate class distinctions.' (p. 3) Self-help and consensus politics are hardly the ingredients of class consciousness.

Nevertheless, the consciousness of exploitation and of hardship was firmly rooted in the direct experience of working at the pits. Daily bargaining over prices for different types of underground work encourages, as I shall show in more detail in a subsequent chapter, a defensive belligerence essential to protecting the level of earnings underground. That such bargaining could escalate into full scale trials of strength between the owners and their men was something my grandfather grew up with as a fact of life. As a very small boy in 1887 he lived through the so-called 'Nine Weeks Strike.' In the first year of his employment at the pit, 1885, he was himself involved in a stoppage lasting twenty-one weeks when the miners of both Northumberland and Durham resisted a plan on the owner's part to introduce a system of monthly notices.

It is not inevitable, however, that the experience of such conflict should lead to a class conscious outlook. The experience of the famous seventeen-week strike in Northumberland in 1887 illustrates this nicely. Not only were the men defeated - the owners had asked for a 15% reduction on the sliding scale, the men resisted it having to agree finally to a $12\frac{1}{2}\%$ reduction - but there appears to have been little evidence of this protracted dispute creating either bitterness or disturbance. An Editorial in the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle of March 5th 1887 noted, for instance:

The strike in the Northumberland Coal Trade is pursuing so placid a course that few people in the district are able to realise that thousands of men

have ceased work. Even the newspapers have little to say on the subject, for the simple reason that there are no exciting incidents to record.

There was, of course, great hardship, especially for non-union miners. A letter to the Weekly Chronicle from the Blyth Relief Committee to the coal owners urging them to settle the dispute gives some idea of how difficult things were, noting especially the exhaustion of any capacity for neighbourly self-help among the miners:

It is within our knowledge that in many families there is pinching poverty, in some semi-starvation, and in not a few little ones are crying for the bread that mothers cannot buy, and we cannot provide.... The unemployed and poor we know aid each other, but their ability for neighbourly help is now almost exhausted. (Evening Chronicle March 26th 1887)

By this time there were seven children in the Brown family and Annie was just a young baby; there were only two wage earners, my great grandfather and my grandfather. Some Heddon pitmen toured the area busking to earn some money. A Weekly Chronicle report of April 16th describes three Heddon pitmen playing a tin whistle and a banjo in Hexham market place and doing so so effectively that they destroyed the trade of the permanent Hexham buskers. The Browns, however, relied on their own resources, their cured bacon, occasional casual work on Law's farm for which they were paid in kind, their chickens and the proceeds from their carrying business,

There was clearly a strong resolve behind this strike and the strike itself was strongly supported by other trade unionists and the public at large.

The Newcastle Relief Committee for instance collected £2005 17s 4d in aid of strikers and their families. And in the Heddon area a poet pitman and activist, Frank McKay, employed then, although not afterwards, by the Throckley coal company, circulated a poem about that resolve:

Now, when we've brought our gear to bank
 and boldly faced the foe
 There must be "no reduction"
 or to work we will not go
 We must not let those Bishops
 or Ministers of the Crown
 Step in to settle our dispute
 and bring our wages down.
 We can manage all our own affairs,
 and that we mean to do
 With hearts and hands united -
 like soldiers brave and true
 We'll charge the enemy right and left
 and do the best we can
 To retain the present wages
 for "The Honest Working Man."
 (Newcastle Weekly Chronicle February 15th 1887)

The wages at issue were five shillings and two pence for a seven hour shift underground, a rate of just over ten pence an hour. The strike ended in May with the miners accepting a $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent reduction in their wages. The leader of the Northumberland Miners, Thomas Burt, had urged his men to settle on the clear grounds that they could never win a strike in a declining market. This same argument was clearly proclaimed by the Weekly Chronicle in an editorial warning the miners of the future ahead of them:

In the light of recent events, ... it will be well to bear in mind the fact that the age which built up our own trade has also made an open market of the whole country, and that it is simply butting the head against a rock, or an illustration of Quixotic tilting, to fight against the necessary regulation of wages according to ruling values.
(Newcastle Weekly Chronicle May 28th 1887)

This argument is a vital one for it clearly tries to link the fate of miner's wages to factors over which the miners and, indeed, the coal owners themselves could have no control over whatsoever, the market. In the case of exported Northumberland coal to the Baltic, the market had an additional uncontrollable quirk. Since the Baltic froze over in winter, coal supplies, and in consequence, employment in the pits were both cut. But to the extent that miners themselves subscribed to this argument then they would not equate their own exploitation with their immediate employers. The influential Weekly Chronicle reinforced this view and did so throughout the strike. In January, for instance, the miners were told:

... if the miners come out on strike, according to all past experience, they will, after weeks of privation and weary waiting, be in no better position than they are at present.

The men say they can hardly live at the present rate of wages, and the owners say they cannot make their collieries pay.

What then was the problem? The paper was quite clear that the issues raised in the dispute should be translated into an 'attack on the system of royalties and wayleaves,

the owners of which are reaping the harvest denied to workers and capitalists alike.' (January 22nd 1887)

The significance of this is that the issue of exploitation is further removed from the employment relationship itself transferred, if to anywhere at all, to an anonymous class of landed capitalists who could not be brought to heel through normal union activity. And seen as a broader moment of historical change it symbolises that harmony of interests between capitalists and workers which the ascendent industrial bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century used as a weapon against the older landed aristocracy. Along with ideas like self help, laissez-faire and parliamentary reform the theory of the harmony of interests between capitalist and workmen had been, at least since the agitation to repeal the Corn Laws in the 1840s an essential ingredient of what Bendix has called the 'entrepreneurial ideology' and was used to define the interests and legitimate the position of the industrial bourgeoisie. (R. Bendix 1956)

Such considerations seem far removed from Heddon but in fact, they are not. I have no record of what my grandfather felt about the 1887 strike and it may be presumptuous to believe that a fifteen year old boy thought much about it any way. But his income was at stake; his friends were on strike; and if the men did try to explain it to themselves then they would have taken into account the role which markets, landlords, capitalists and unionists all played in the winning of coal, an ideological matrix which at that point in time

would not support very radical solutions to the miner's plight.

The experience of a protracted and, in the end, pointless dispute was, I believe, a formative one. It emphasised his powerlessness and it strengthened a resolve to build a defensive line around his home to protect his family from the vagaries of wage labour. It cultivated in him a feeling that too great a dependence on one source of income was risky. Like many young men, encouraged clearly by his father, he learned quickly to appreciate the importance of the garden, the pigs and chickens and the need to grab at any casual work when the opportunity presented itself. Without such protection the alternatives in Heddon in difficult times were to receive charity, to work on the land or to migrate.

The two years following the 1887 strike were difficult ones. In 1887 the miners terminated the sliding scale and resorted to direct bargaining with the employers. The whole coalfield was in a parlous state. William Straker, Burt's successor wrote: 'When the pits reopened after the strike the colliery owners had practically to buy back their trade by selling at ruinous prices, so that it was very questionable whether they did not lose much more than they gained by the lock out.' (W. Straker 1916: 54) Prices did recover until 1894 when they suffered again a decline. In 1894 a Conciliation Board was set up to regulate wages but it too was abandoned in 1896 due to falling prices.

The effects of these difficulties in Heddon can be seen in the figures for union membership. In 1893 thirty-four men were dismissed. In 1894 a further ten men were made redundant through 'bad trade'. In July 1893 the Heddon lodge voted against the Northumberland Miners joining the Miners Federation of Great Britain and in the same year, their tail between their legs, voted against strike action in support of a wages demand of 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. The membership figures, calculated from the annual balance sheets of the Northumberland Miners Association are as follows:

Union Members Heddon Colliery
1884-1900

Year	Numbers
1884	26
5	21
6	61
7	-
8	61
9	51
1890	96
1	114
2	109
3	105
4	72
5	34
6	49
7	46
8	65
1900	61

Source: Annual Balance Sheets

Northumberland Miners Association.

NRO 759/68

They show a pit in difficulties shedding labour at a drastic rate and only showing modest growth towards the end of the century and in this respect being far out of line with the coalfield as a whole. It was during this late period that the Throckley Coal Company tried to take over the Heddon Margaret.

This period corresponds to my grandfathers growth to maturity in his early twenties, the period which he might well have thought of as the peak of his career when as a powerful young man capable of a great deal of work he became a coal hewer. During this time it was not unknown for him to work two shifts in the pit consecutively covering for his father who for whatever reason was unable to put in his shift. As an old man he often spoke of those times when, learning that his father had not turned in he simply had to go on and brace himself for another seven hours underground. On occasions it happened that he had come all the way up Heddon bank and would have to take the horse back to the pit and do his father's shift.

By the end of the decade the negotiations which had been going on since the early 1880s between the Throckley Coal Company and Mr. Bates over the sale of the Heddon Margaret were virtually complete. My grandfather was courting. His home was very congested and relationships between himself, some of his brothers and certainly his father were becoming abrasive.

A persistent theme of union politics at this time was housing. The Coal Owners had tried on several

occasions since 1888 when there had been a strike at Delavel pit in Benwell over rents for colliery houses to charge miners a rent for their houses rather than have them as part of the job. This the union had resisted. The union's aim was to improve the amount and quality of housing for miners and in 1900 had passed a firm resolution urging collieries to build more houses and to improve existing ones. (Northumberland Miners Association; Minutes June 1900: NRO 759/68)

The relevance of this to my grandfather was that he needed a house. There were many miners in Heddon, unlike in other villages, who had to rent privately and housing was difficult. The insecurity of his job at Heddon and the need for better housing eventually crystallised themselves in a decision to move on, to Throckley. From trapper boy, through a spell as a coal putter he was now a fully qualified hewer. Sixteen years in Heddon pit had helped fashion his basic outlook and establish his secure self respect as a good worker. They had instilled in him a work discipline which his father had never acquired and which he himself, as will be seen, never lost. Quite apart from the pit skills he had acquired he had learned to negotiate his way through the underground price system which paid different amounts for different classes of work; he had acquired, through union membership, a clear conviction that miners needed to be organised to protect themselves. The political stance of the union reinforced his belief that the Liberal Party was for the working man

although politics was very much something only the "big nobs" (as he used to say) were bothered with. Above all, however, precarious employment, industrial defeats and fluctuating wages had strengthened his determination, so far as it was possible, to be self reliant and free of a total dependence on wages alone.

Chapter Four

IMAGES OF A YOUTH

Outside the pit his obligations to his family pressed hard on him and as he grew older he was expected to do more - to carry more water, to spend more time in the garden and with the animals. Seasonal work on the farm, picking potatoes, stacking hay ricks, grading potatoes and the regular work of the farm - milking, grooming horses and cleaning out the pigs - took up his time although he never found such work onerous. His friends were from the farm and they all enjoyed the work.

For the first few years of his time at the pit he spent his own spare time in play; he was, after all, still a child. But as he grew the boundaries of his life were extended. On Saturdays he went with his father to Newcastle with the horse and trap to pick up orders for people. And when it was clear that he had full control of the horse he was allowed to take it away himself, to Wylam to collect the mail or to Newburn to pick up a parcel. He also took it to Ryton Willows whenever there was a fair or a meeting there. Always a popular beauty spot, visited frequently by tripper parties brought by boat from Newcastle, there was often the chance to earn a few coppers giving children a ride on the horse. The Willows (pronounced 'Williz' locally) was an important place for political meetings in the district before the turn of the century and in 1887 even William Morris,

the socialist and revolutionary of the Socialist League addressed a meeting there.

The long strike of that year brought him north along with Tom Mann of the Social Democratic Federation. This was the period when the socialists were attempting to build up their support among the urban working class and a period, as I have already shown, when miners in Northumberland were still strongly attached to the Liberal Party. Morris described the place rather accurately to anyone who knows it as "a piece of rough heathy ground ... under the bank by which the railway runs: It is a pretty place and the evening was lovely.'

(quoted E. P. Thompson 1977: 445) He went on:

Being Easter Monday there were lots of folks there with swings and cricket and dancing and the like.... I thought it a queer place for a serious Socialist meeting, but we had a crowd about us in no time and I spoke, rather too long I fancy, till the stars came out and it grew dusk and the people stood and listened still, and when we were done they gave three cheers for the Socialists, and all was mighty friendly and pleasant. (1977: 445)

Had he cast a glance across to the path along the river bank he would almost certainly have seen my grandfather and his brother Tom, leading children on their horse, earning a few vital coppers and oblivious to his rhetoric.

There was nothing, of course, in his experience which led him to see politics as having much to do with the likes of him. And although the union connected

questions about pits with parliamentary politics on such questions as workmen's compensation, mines safety and so on, politics was nevertheless something remote and little in his experience could have given him much confidence that his views mattered. Indeed, they did not; even the idea that working men had a right to vote was, in parliamentary terms, a novel one. Parliamentary action by miners had the character of pressure group politics rather than that of a movement of working men. (see R. Gregory 1968)

Information on political questions came to the village through the Hexham Courant and serious political analysis vied with the astonished reporting of crime and and patriotic treatments of colonial exploits. Dr. Livingstone's despatches from the dark continent were extensively reported. Seeing itself as a radical paper under the sponsorship of Joseph Cowen it naturally enough stressed the themes of parliamentary reform and dealt extensively with local questions and grievances always reporting extensively the public utterances of local politicians. In the 1880s its pages were dominated with Home Rule for Ireland, Parliamentary reform and the issue of religious liberty. Its radicalism did not, however extend to a questioning of the rights of private property; its case rested on the hope that reasonable men, persuaded to the truth, could be relied on to improve the lot of others.

Being interested in politics is not the same as being unaffected by politics. I have already stressed that during this period his inclinations were Liberal. He was, in addition, mildly proud of the Empire and sentimentally patriotic if the occasion demanded it. I suspect, too, that he was mildly racist. Aunt Eva remembers him once saying that if he had to sleep in a bed that he knew had been slept in by a black man then he would not do it. This improbable eventuality creased my mother with laughter; she knows nothing of her father's attitudes to black people but found it amusing that he should say such a thing. In Throckley, she told me "you never saw a white face. They were all black from the pit."

The one political idea which he did retain was that of self reliance. The ideological climate of the time allowed a distinction to be drawn between the deserving and undeserving poor and between those who were unemployed through misfortune and those through fecklessness. (see T. Novak 1978) Self help and self reliance were powerful ideas suspicious of charity and the State and my grandfather accepted them completely. From the beginning of his working life he paid his weekly insurance into 'Heddon Club', a branch of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows Friendly Society. The same spirit of self protection was what lay behind his membership of the union.

Certainly, there is no evidence that he nursed any political resentment either about the position of his class as a whole or even specifically about his position in Heddon. There was little to make him feel otherwise

and here, perhaps, his parents played a key, if unwitting role. Not having a mining background they could not draw on a historical imagery of injustice and exploitation in the pits which almost as folklore, could be passed on to their children. The great struggles of 1832 and 1844 against the miner's bond, the early and abortive attempts to form unions, strike breaking through the recruitment of blackleg labour, the use of bailiffs - 'candymen' - to evict striking miners all of these things in the bitter history of the coalfield were effectively unknown to Norfolk John. If he did know them they meant little to him.

Norfolk John rarely spoke about politics; there is no record of his having instructed his sons in history. What bothered him was the present, not the past. Nothing in my grandfather's schooling reduced his historical ignorance either and although this must be pure speculation, I doubt whether he had any coherent grasp of the history of the miners. He was not unique in this. In any case the first history of the miners of Northumberland and Durham, that of Richard Fynes, did not appear until 1873. Heddon itself, being a small village in the relatively undeveloped western part of the coalfield was insulated from the political currents which, elsewhere, fuelled a more radical consciousness of injustice.

Death in the pit, news of disasters elsewhere, strikes, though infrequent, all could produce a 'distancing effect' when ordinary men, temporarily

lifted out of their routines, could stand back and reflect. Some disasters, like Hartley, were well known. What was lacking, however, and what, perhaps, had been lost, was a coherent political and economic analysis of such events which could lend a radical meaning to experience. And working for a small, paternalistic company in a village where plentiful casual employment on the land took the sharp edge off exploitation my grandfather was, in contrast to men on the east coalfield or in parts of Durham not really exposed to a radicalising, historically reflective rhetoric to jerk him to a strong political awareness. Like his father he lived his life rather uncritically in the present tense.

Local Lads

His relations with the village squirearchy were formal and respectful though not deferential and largely indifferent. There is only one episode which has filtered through the family which gives a small clue to this aspect of his early life. Mr. Bewicke, the squire, was the first one in the village to acquire a motor car and the fact that it had cost £1.000 had clearly prompted a good deal of local discussion. When the car broke down Mr. Bewicke would often call on some of the young men of the village to give him a push. My grandfather's comment about this was always mildly cynical. "For the want of a few pennyworth of petrol a thousand pound car is no good." He told this often enough as if to underline that all a man could really trust was his own two legs or a good horse.

What interested him most and intensely was his pleasure, and Heddton had much to offer a young man. The Three Tuns pub was the focus for bacchanalian nights boozing, sing-songs and often a battle. Once his 'board' was paid what was left of his money was his own and he spent most of it on drink. If he was not drinking in the Three Tuns then it was likely he would go to Wylam or even, on summer nights, to Horsley on the Hexham road although boozing trips away from home were risky; they often ended in fights with 'local lads' elsewhere. (c.f. S. Chaplin 1978) Such battles, apart from the rich excitement they produced and the mythology they generated about which men were 'the hard men', had the effect also of reinforcing an identity with the village. They were also, of course, a ritual celebration of the qualities of masculinity which suffused the culture of manual work.

Doing nothing was a popular pastime; pit lads used to hang around corner ends, sat 'on their hunkers' passing the time just talking. Outside mining communities such behaviour might have been regarded as pure aimlessness. And they were certainly recognisably different from the less cohesive body of 'hinds.' In Heddton the young lads played quoits quite a bit behind the pub but often they just sat and talked, smoking their pipes, cracking jokes and playing games. They played 'chucks' a game with pebbles; they played dice, sometimes cards. I reckon, too, knowing the persistence of the all male corner-end culture, they must have enjoyed the wilfully unsavoury

excitement and the bravado of who could tell the filthiest jokes. The jokes made available to them weekly by the Hexham Courant seem to me to be far too anodyne to strike a chord with the pit lads. Here are two of them, said to be popular in the district in the 1880s:

"A country undertaker boasts that he had the best hearse in the place and defies anybody who ever rode in it to say the contrary."

"A Gentleman passing a woman who was skinning eels, and observing the torture of the poor animals asked her how she could have the heart to put the animals in such pain. 'Lord, sir' she replied, 'they be used to it.' "

Closer to their concerns might have been the one which went: "Wild oats are said to be the only crop that grows by gaslight." For it was on the corner end that they learned about sex; here they could swop tales of their exploits, measure up the girls of the village and establish their own reputations or perhaps just learn a bit from the older lads. School ended for most of them by the age of twelve; the corner end school went on well into adulthood; membership of it was a powerful social marker.

And the group itself, as a source of information, news, gossip was a powerful instrument of social control among the lads themselves. The solidarity of the corner end carried right over into the pit and vice versa. And the group acted as a reference group; it set the

standards of expected behaviour and demanded loyalty. A pit lad would become so well known by his mates that he could conceal little from them, even supposing he wanted to. Pretence was impossible. The group was a critical forum both supportive and destructive of projected self images. The wit, the clown, the hard man and the fool all had their place. And if it was on the corner end that they traded images of themselves it was there, too, that they learned their own history. Images of the past were formed here and passed on. On the corner end they could talk justice and rights. Their collective experience of the pit and that of their parents could be filtered and assessed. In the utterly everyday business of "hevin a bit crack" with their rolling "r's" "thou's" "thee's" and "thine" a powerful sense of place and position emerged.

As an institution the corner end meant something quite different to the lads to what it did to the 'big nobs' in the village. What they defined as aimlessness had, for the lads, great significance. It was the focal point of friendship and fantasy, a source of information and a framework of self respect. Like much else in mining communities it is an institution which must be understood in context and in its own terms. For the danger of misrecognition, as Robert Colls has pointed out with respect to some of the "socialist realism" writings of the 1930s concerned with poverty, violence and squalor in the mining districts, is very great. (R. Colls 1977)

The village had a rich associational life, however, which the lads did join in. The Reading Institute was the focal point for an annual picnic when the colliery brass band played and sports were organised for the younger people. The first annual picnic was in July 1880 and is reported in the Hexham Courant. In a field "kindly granted for the occasion by T. Bates", "The Heddon Band ... played a choice selection of music during the afternoon, and also at the ball, which was fairly attended. Dancing was led off by Mr. Hunter ... to the well-known tune of the "Keel Row" and was carried on until eleven o'clock when all quietly dispersed. During the afternoon a number of sports were brought off..." (July 17th) As time went on the picnic became much more colourful. Miss Elliot evoked this talking about the picnic at the turn of the century and referring to its central character, "Harry the Mayor":

... he used to ride around on the donkey. He was the cowman at Heddon Steads. He used to have a bit of fun with all the young ones. He was always Harry the Mayor. There was a lot never knew what they called him ... They used to borrow the donkey and get him dressed up and he used to have for the Mayor's chain he maybe had a long dog-chain and a great big button-hole. I remember one year it was the heart of a cabbage. He used to ride around the village on the donkey with all the children following behind.

(NR) T/117)

After the picnic there was always a dance.

Dancing was a regular thing in Heddon. Mrs Hall explains: "We had whist drives and dances in the reading room and the school. They got the place full. One played the piano and the other the fiddle... There were always concerts at Heddon; somebody would get a concert up." (NRO T/114) Then there was the annual flower and vegetable show patronised by the Squire and Mr. Bates. "Everybody", says Mrs Hall, "showed stuff":

... and there was sport for the children. They used to have foot races for the men, bicycle races for the men and a big marquee. It was a calamity if it was a wet day.

The social life of the village thus followed annual cycles which governed such activities as growing vegetables, making new clothes, raising funds and the like. And just before Christmas, as Miss Elliot explained, the "Guizers" used to tour the village to dance and to sing, soliciting drinks from door to door and playing mischief:

At the new year you never knew what you were getting. They used ... You would hear them ... They used to roll the rain barrels down into the pond!

(Sarah Elliot)

And on Christmas day itself the village was visited by the Throckley brass band and the Salvation Army band from Newburn. Since the village was closely connected with other villages up the valley the people of Heddon could easily join in the celebrations of others. Ovingham Goose Fair, for example, was a popular annual event even for the people of Heddon.

My grandfather liked particularly to go to the Stagshaw horse fair, only a few miles up the Military Road. He could keep in touch with horse prices and watch the rogues get rid of their nags. He used to go sometimes to Hexham races for a day out or to Newcastle races. He went on occasions to a whippet race nearer Newcastle. There was no whippet racing in the immediate vicinity of Heddon although there was some greyhound coursing at Ovingham.

Beneath the organised life of the village, however, there was the illicit and the unorganised; pitch and toss gambling, poaching, ferreting and thieving. Sarah Elliot once again evokes something of this talking about poaching in the village. She once asked a friend of hers who lived at East Heddon how it was she was not afraid to travel home across the fields in the dark after the dance. She herself was terrified at such a prospect. But the friend replied with a matter-of-fact nonchalance, "Oh, I'll just meet a few of the Heddon poachers or the Throckley ones!"

Settling Down

My grandfather rarely spoke about his youth although throughout his life he was deeply attached to Heddon. It is only possible therefore to convey something of the character of his days as a young man. He was tall and strong and self reliant as a matter of basic conviction. He was hardworking, healthy and well known in the village.

Not easily roused and with an even temper he was nonetheless quite ready to retaliate if he felt offended or cheated. He was tough, a little shy with women and because of his large family, gentle and indulgent to small children. He was clearly content with his lot. Only once that anyone is aware of did he consider leaving the pit. He used to tell of how he and a pal thought of joining the police force but he decided against it because he was too honest! It is possible he considered joining the army. In the 1890s the army offered security and colonial adventure in India, the Middle East and Southern Africa. It is more likely, however, that what he looked for was a home of his own, free of the congestion of Quarry Cottage.

My grandfather never spoke about girlfriends and he did not marry until he was twenty-seven years of age. The village clearly allowed him many opportunities to meet girls - in the chapel, the reading room, the village dance - and he could also travel to neighbouring villages and to Newcastle. In fact, he travelled to Newcastle most weekends to the market. I suspect, however that courting was not one of his great interests; he was busy with his father's carrying business; he spent a great deal of time at Law's farm and he liked a good drink with his mates. The Brown family were seen in the village as mildly eccentric and I suspect, too, that because there were so many of them and because the boys were all in the pits and because they were strangers they were looked down on somewhat. All of these factors

might have prevented my grandfather feeling at ease with girls; what is certain is that he married late and that the girl he married was not from Heddon. She did, however, come from an ordinary working class family.

Born in Belmont, County Durham, a small village just outside Durham City itself, she was the daughter of a pit sinker, an itinerant worker who moved from one place to another wherever pits were to be sunk. Although her own family moved on to South Shields she retained her Durham origins: she was confirmed in Durham Cathedral and into old age hoped that her children would get the opportunity sometime to see that magnificent old place and the mediaeval town which it dominates, a wish, nonetheless which she, at least in her own lifetime never had fulfilled. She retained, too, the Durham habit of dropping the letter 'h' from her words.

At the time she met my grandfather she worked as a shopkeeper along the Scotswood Road in Newcastle, (the road made famous by the Geordie song, 'The Blaydon Races'). They met in Newcastle on a market day. My grandfather had taken their horse and cart to the town for the market; my grandmother was visiting her sister who lived not far from Heddon and who knew my grandfather. When they were introduced my grandfather was slumped, quite drunk, across the neck of his horse. Pay Saturday - 'baff Saturday' - and market day combined was always a good time to have a good drink. When he looked up through his stupor he saw 'Aunt Maggie' standing with this young (she was twenty-six years old) tall stranger and whether

through devilment, drunkenness or desire - no one knows - he proposed to her, although in a pretty cack-handed fashion. "Have ye browt me a wife, then Maggie?" are the words he uttered. My grandmother was mildly affronted by it but obviously felt that this tall young man with his cap and red neck-scarf had something about him. My grandmother often told the story of how they first met. It was always told, as it were, 'against herself' as if to emphasise that she had made a fatal error in marrying him. Within the year they were married and within a year after that their first child, Olive, was born. They were married in Heddon church and lived first in a small stone terraced house just along from the Common where his parents lived.

Her education in Belmont had been much the same as his perhaps, if anything, a little worse. The log books of Belmont school are just as pre-occupied as those of Heddon with drumming the three 'Rs' into reluctant young heads and teaching them the poetry of Longfellow and Mrs Hemans. The Inspector's report for 1883 notes: "Girls' work very inaccurately done and attend very badly"; only their needlework was well done. Belmont was an old village but during the second half of the nineteenth century there grew up around it a pit and a steel works, shops and chapel. Indeed, the chapel often offered alternative school education free of charge thus depleting the roles of the church school my grandmother attended. These things I mention only to underline that my grandparents were of the same kind; both were

connected with pits; both knew small village life; both paid little heed to school and neither of them had any other expectations than that they would marry, work and live, much as their parents had done. The only difference, in their case, is that they did not want such a large family. My grandmother used to say - no doubt partly in reference to her in-laws - that "Big families are happy families; but they are poor ones."

She gave up her work on getting married and settled into being a housewife coping with the special problems of having a husband in the pit. She was well prepared for this though, as were most young girls and if the Belmont school books are to be believed her domestic skills were acquired at the expense of her schooling.

She fitted into the Brown family with ease, visiting them regularly and joking with the old man. She used to taunt him with being a "dirty old man" for having so many children and he used to reply, impishly, that "Them's not all I've got either", but when they eventually moved to Throckley she maintained a diplomatic distance from them such that her own children never got to know their grandparents very well at all.

Chapter Five

THROCKLEY

In 1900 my grandparents moved to Throckley. They moved first to a house opposite the school - Gladstone House - and then, shortly afterwards to 177 Mount Pleasant, a two bedroomed terraced house owned by the Throckley Coal Company. They were clearly determined to get into a pit house and when Gladstone House came up for sale they refused the offer of a loan so that they themselves might buy it preferring instead to wait their chance of a colliery house.

The colliery maintained a waiting list, just as councils do now and when the Mount Pleasant house became vacant they leapt at the chance to move in despite its poor decorative state and general cleanliness. Perhaps Gladstone House held painful memories for them; their second child died there as a baby. There was an added incentive to move too, my grandmother's sister Maggie and her husband Harry lived in Mount Pleasant, he being an official at the pit. But the overriding reason was a search for security. My grandfather believed firmly that a colliery house was, as he used to say, "a secure home." The rent and the coals were free and so long as his job was safe there was nothing to worry about.

The notion of a 'free rent' and that of 'free coals' now seem anachronistic since both were in reality part of his real wage. But as a married man, during the

period when sliding scales were in operation free housing and heating were stable components of his real income. Wages could go up or down but his home and hearth would still be seen to. The worries his parents had had over rent payments could be avoided in a pit house.

His notion that his job would be safe is equally rational in the circumstances. It was based on his own self respect as a pitman and a shrewd assessment, based on the contrast between Throckley and Heddon pit, that the Throckley coal company was a dynamic concern growing rapidly at this time and likely to stay in business for a long time to come. He knew he was a good worker, someone the company would value and since he had no ambition to move elsewhere anticipating neither social mobility or even promotion in the pit, there was every reason to settle for Throckley. Seen in this way the irrational thing to do would be to burden himself with debt threatening the independence which he valued so highly.

Throckley is two miles east of Heddon built on the high slope of the valley leading down to the Tyne with the west road from Newcastle cutting it into two distinct halves. In 1851 there were 159 people in Throckley. They were moving, therefore, into a village that was growing very quickly and for the first ten years of their life there the growth continued. The figures are:

Population Growth: Throckley

	No. of Families	No. of People
1901	390	2,063
1911	530	2,612
1921	532	2,612
1931	589	2,640

Source: Census

In 1851 the main facility of the village was a Methodist chapel. By 1900 a church had been built (St. Mary's, erected 1885/6), a Wesleyan chapel (1870) a Primitive Methodist chapel (1891), a school (1873), a Mechanics Institute, a co-operative store, several small shops, a church hall, a store hall, but above all, row upon row of miners' houses named, in sharp contrast to the unnatural underground world of the pit workings over which they stood, after the trees of the wood - Pine Street, Ash Street, Maple Street. The street my grandfather lived in, like many others in colliery villages was Mount Pleasant. It hardly lived up to it's name, but at least it had one. Ashington Coal Company further north into Northumberland gave its terraced rows only numbers. The houses closest to the pit they called The Leazes with the connotation of untilled pasture land for that, until the sinking of the pit in 1869 was what the place was. Throckley, then, grew on and out of coal. But for coal Throckley would not have existed at all except as a cluster of houses on the turnpike road.

In this and the remaining chapters of this book I have attempted to describe what kind of community Throckley was, to show how it changed during the course of my grandfather's life and illustrate how the structures of community life in Throckley can be understood through



Throckley Front Street c. 1904

the patterns of everyday life of the people who lived there.

My central point is this: Throckley was a constructed community with two historic impulses working through its structures. The first of these deriving from the actions of the coal company, was a drive for capital accumulation and profit. As I shall illustrate this involved the coal company not just in capital investment in the pit but also investment in a social infrastructure to attract, support and control a mining labour force. Throckley from this perspective was a creation of the coal company,

a community designed to win coal from the ground which could be sold on a market. Coal company policies, operating in the free market environment of liberal capitalism, defined in a major way the class position of the men they employed and the opportunities inherent in that position. It was never just that to the coal company; they were men of business but they also possessed



Mount Pleasant Throckley

an image of themselves as social benefactors with responsibilities to their employees extending far beyond the employment contract.

The second impulse is the rise of an organised labour movement and concerns the efforts of working people to gain a greater control over their own lives, to guard against exploitation and to create institutions of their own to further their own interests outside the control of the coal company which employed them and removed as far as possible from the vagaries of the economic system in which they laboured. E. P. Thompson, in an often

quoted passage pointed out: "The working class made itself as much as it was made." (1972: 213) I describe what it means to say this in the specific case of the institutions which working people in Throckley constructed for themselves.

Throckley was different from Heddon in that, as I shall illustrate, the village was based, at least until the inter-war period in the twentieth century, almost entirely on coal and the status, power and authority of its ruling family was based entirely on industrial capital. Throckley was a paternalistic village, almost a model village, but it was the paternalism of industrial rather than that of landownership which prevailed there. The early vitality of the village, its rapid growth, its firm economic base reflected the rising fortunes of a bourgeois class of which the Stephensons and Spencers, the leading employers of the district, were representative.

Throckley was not just a market for labour; the two impulses I have briefly described fashioned the constraints within which a community grew up possessed of values, relationships, attitudes and customs. For the people who lived there it was not just a place on the turnpike road; it was a way of life with its distinctive nuance and symbolism, with particular commitments and obligations, a framework of social relationships in which people were known and could be recognised. Focussing my account on the family life of my grandparents I show what was distinctive in that way of life.

The two historical impulses, or moments, I have briefly sketched are part of one another. In the period before the First World War they define a society of liberal capitalism and, in the coalfield of Northumberland, of paternalistic capitalism. It was not a stable order; while industrial co-operation and political stability were both possible within it, change was its central feature and conflict a frequent occurrence. And while the central thrust of paternalism had always been, as E. P. Thompson argues, a managerial technique for coping with "the exploitive relationship" and the "need for industrial peace, for a stable labour force, and for a body of skilled experienced workers" (1972: 222), the period during which paternalism in the coalfield was at its zenith is one which corresponds with a shift in the consciousness of ordinary workers which allowed them to penetrate its facades and conceive of a new kind of industrial order. I seek to show how this change occurred in my grandfather's awareness of the world around him and through him to show how working people acquired new meanings for their experience.

When my grandparents moved to Throckley Britain was still fighting a colonial war in South Africa. I do not really know what he thought about that. He once told me, as I struggled with a history essay on Southern Africa that: "Kruger was an owld bugga." I suspect, given his schooling, he felt that national pride was somehow at stake, a view heavily endorsed by the Press and even the Pulpit. In his January letter

to the flock for example, the Throckley vicar noted in 1900: "The disturbing element in the State has been the Transvaal War - a war pre-eminently a just war, and positively a necessary war." (Newburn Church Magazine January 1900: Newburn Vicarage) And in February went on to emphasise:

One grand result of this war has been the wave of Patriotism which has swelled out all over the British Empire, and that from the most unexpected quarters. The war has knit together all the subjects of our Most Gracious Queen into one grand Brotherhood, and shown them to be One in loyalty to her.

By August, the end of the war in sight, the vicar took up the theme of returning soldiers and the dangers confronting them:

The great danger which confronts our soldiers on their return is "killing them with kindness." The subject is engaging the minds of not a few of our best men, who fear that the return of our troops will be marked with outbreaks of intemperence and excess, as a rebound from privation and hardship, and as a means of showing thanks of a grateful people who were compelled to stay at home. (Newburn Church Magazine August 1900: Newburn Vicarage)

I mention this small example of clerical jingoism to convey something of the political mood of respectable opinion at the time and to introduce the Throckley

Coal Company.

The reason is this; Major Stephenson, the nephew of Sir William Stephenson had fought in the South African War with the Elswick Battalion of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers. He returned to the village shortly after my grandparents had got there and that return was an excellent introduction to the social status of the Stephenson family in Throckley. Major Stephenson's return to a hero's welcome has acquired something of the status of a folk myth in the district and my grandfather often referred back to it with a tellingly indulgent smile.

The train from Newcastle stopped at Newburn and there was a huge crowd waiting to meet him. His horse and trap were ready for him but the horse, as things turned out, was not needed. A group of miners unhitched the horse and pulled the Major all the way up Newburn Road to Throckley. And stretched across Coach Road, the road down to Throckley House, there was a banner which read "Welcome Home, Willy, We've Missed You." Major Stephenson (my grandfather, like many of the older people of Throckley pronounced it "Stivvyson") was the heir apparent to the coal company, a local politician, a stalwart of the Royal Northumberland Volunteers and a man much respected in the village. How he acquired that position can only be explained if the history of the coal company itself is examined. What follows therefore, is an account of the development of the company and how it built Throckley. G. M. Norris has suggested that systematic work on industrial paternalism has yet to

be carried out. (1978: 469) This chapter is a small contribution to the work that has to be done.

The Throckley Coal Company

The Throckley Coal Company was set up in 1867 to work the Throckley royalty, then owned by the Greenwich Hospital and Lords of the Admiralty on ground formerly owned by the Earl of Derwentwater. Two local families were its principal shareholders, the Stephensons and the Spencers, the first being brick manufacturers and farmers who had leased farms in the area since 1882, the second steel manufactures from Newburn owning at that time one of the largest steel works in the North of England. Two other shareholders were J. B. Simpson and E. J. Boyd, both mining engineers. The Company Minute books (NRO/407) set out their holdings as follows:

John Spencer	Chairman	2 shares
M. Spencer		2 shares
J. Spencer		2 shares
W. H. Stephenson		3 shares
Chas. Stephenson		3 shares
J. B. Simpson		1 share
E. J. Boyd		1 share

The shares at this stage had a nominal value of £1,000 each. They anticipated a capital requirement of £18 - 20,000 to develop the colliery and with the agreement among themselves to float the company with the share capital just described, moves were quickly set in motion to build workshops, railways and to sink the shaft. On April 24th 1867 Isabella Stephenson cut the

first sod and the pit was named after her, known locally as "The Isabella."

The men who formed the company were very respectable local businessmen. The Stephensons were farmers in the area and brickwork owners, owning at that time one of the largest brickworks in the region. Coal had been worked extensively in the district for centuries but the small local pit - The Bobby pit - which supplied the brickworks with both its fire clay and its coal was not big enough or deep enough to produce coal on the scale the company required. More efficient pumping engines opened up the possibility that the lower seams in the Throckley area could be won and this, together with the firm local market for coal which the Spencer Steel Works guaranteed, made the sinking of a new pit at Throckley a commercially sound enterprise.

The growth of the company illustrates clearly that process of industrial growth which economists describe a vertical integration. It is a theme to which I shall return since, having a firm local market for its output although not being entirely a local producer, the Throckley coal company was saved from many of the difficulties of export price fluctuation which affected so many pits in the Northumberland coal field. This immunity from export market pressures is a significant factor in explaining the relatively peaceful character of industrial relations in Throckley. Initially, however, a firm local market was what justified the new pit.

The Stephenson's fireclay works had grown initially out of their farming activities producing clay pipes for field drains. William Stephenson, the father of the principal coalowner, was an ardent Methodist and as early as 1851 had built a small gothic chapel for the people of Throckley and a Mechanic's Institute for the local artisans, pitmen and farm workers. William Haswell Stephenson, his eldest son, both in his capacity as businessman and methodist lay preacher, carried on his father's interest developing a thriving coal company and acquiring a dominant presence in the methodist communion throughout the whole of Tyneside. The civic involvement of the Stephenson family was thus a long-standing one and grew in importance with their business success.

W. H. Stephenson is perhaps the best known of the original shareholders. Known to the miners of Throckley as "Him doon the Toon" since he lived in Elswick, he was a man described in Welford's Men of Mark 'Twixt Tyne and Tweed as being "identified in many ways with the municipal and commercial life of Tyneside." (1895) For several years he was Chairman of the Tyne-Tees Shipping Company and a Director of Hawthorne and Leslie Company of Hebburn, a major engineering works on the Tyne. He was both Sheriff and Mayor of Newcastle, a senior magistrate and for a while Chairman of the Tyne Improvement Commission. He was knighted in 1900. A fuller listing of his business interests is given in

the Benwell Community Development report, The Making of a Ruling Class (1979) as follows:

W. Stephenson & Sons (Chr)	Free Trade Wharf Co (Chr)
Throckley Coal Co (Chr)	Leeds Phosphate Co (Chr)
Walter Scott Ltd (Chr)	Cerebos Co (Chr)
John Spencer & Sons	National Peat Co (Chr)
Tyne Steam Shipping	North East Banking
Tyne-Tees Shipping Co (Chr)	North Accident Insurance
N/C Grain Warehouse	Royal Insurance Co (Chr)
Cairn Line of Steamships	Newcastle & Gateshead
Scotswood, Newburn &	Water Co
Wylam Railway Co	Newcastle Commercial
Newcastle & Gateshead	Exchange
Gas Co (Chr)	Royal Tyne Commission
	(Chr 1901-18)

The Spencers were steel manufacturers. They wanted coal and coke and both could be got cheaply from Throckley since, being close, transport costs would be low. For these reasons they invested their money. The Minutes of the Coal Company record in November 1870 that Spencers had made an offer to purchase 600 tons of coke per week for seven years. This is a large order at a time when, in any case, the export trade for the whole of the Northumberland coalfield was growing. It meant that together with their own needs as brick manufacturers the colliery could be guaranteed a firm local market. At the turn of the century the steel works of Spencers at Newburn, a mile away from Throckley, employed over 1,000 men and extended over sixty-acres. The Spencers

themselves had extensive business connections throughout the heavy engineering industry of the North East of England. John Spencer was, for instance, a Director of John Abbott and Company of Gateshead and of Blair and Company of Stockton. Like the Stephensons this family maintained a strong civic presence in the district. They were active unionist politicians, local councillors and pillars of the local church. They owned most of the houses in Newburn and were also local magistrates.

The connection between the Stephensons and the Spencers was, as John Stephenson, grandson of one of the original shareholders and himself a former director of the coal company, says, one of "great friendship." The Spencers lived at Walbottle, a little over a mile from Throckley and the two families mixed socially together travelling, at least before the motor car, in horse and carriage to visit one another. There was a business connection too. The Stephensons had shares in John Spencer's company.

John Bell Simpson was a mining engineer and, as I shall show something of an economist. He was an active member of Durham County Council and, with his son, Sir Frank Simpson, a Director of the Stella Coal Company. This was a company located just south of Throckley on the other side of the river owning four pits (Greenside, Clara Vale, Stargate and Addison) and with close business connections with Vickers Armstrongs, the great engineering works stretched along the Tyne from Elswick to Scotswood.

John Bell Simpson's business contacts were extensive, as was his involvement in the commercial and intellectual life of Tyneside as a whole. In the Benwell Community Development report (1979) they are listed as follows:

Throckley Coal Co	Cambridge Electricity
Stella Coal Co	Supply Co
Elswick Coal Co	Waste Heat & Gas EGS
WallSEND and Hebburn Coal Co	Sunderland Gas Co
Walter Scott Ltd (Colliery Steel Co)	Mining Consultant to Duke of Northumberland and
Marine Steam Turbine (later Parsons MST) (Founding Director)	Sir Matthew White Ridley Institute of Mining Engineers (Pres)
Hawthorne Leslie & Co	
Newcastle & District Lighting Co (Chr)	

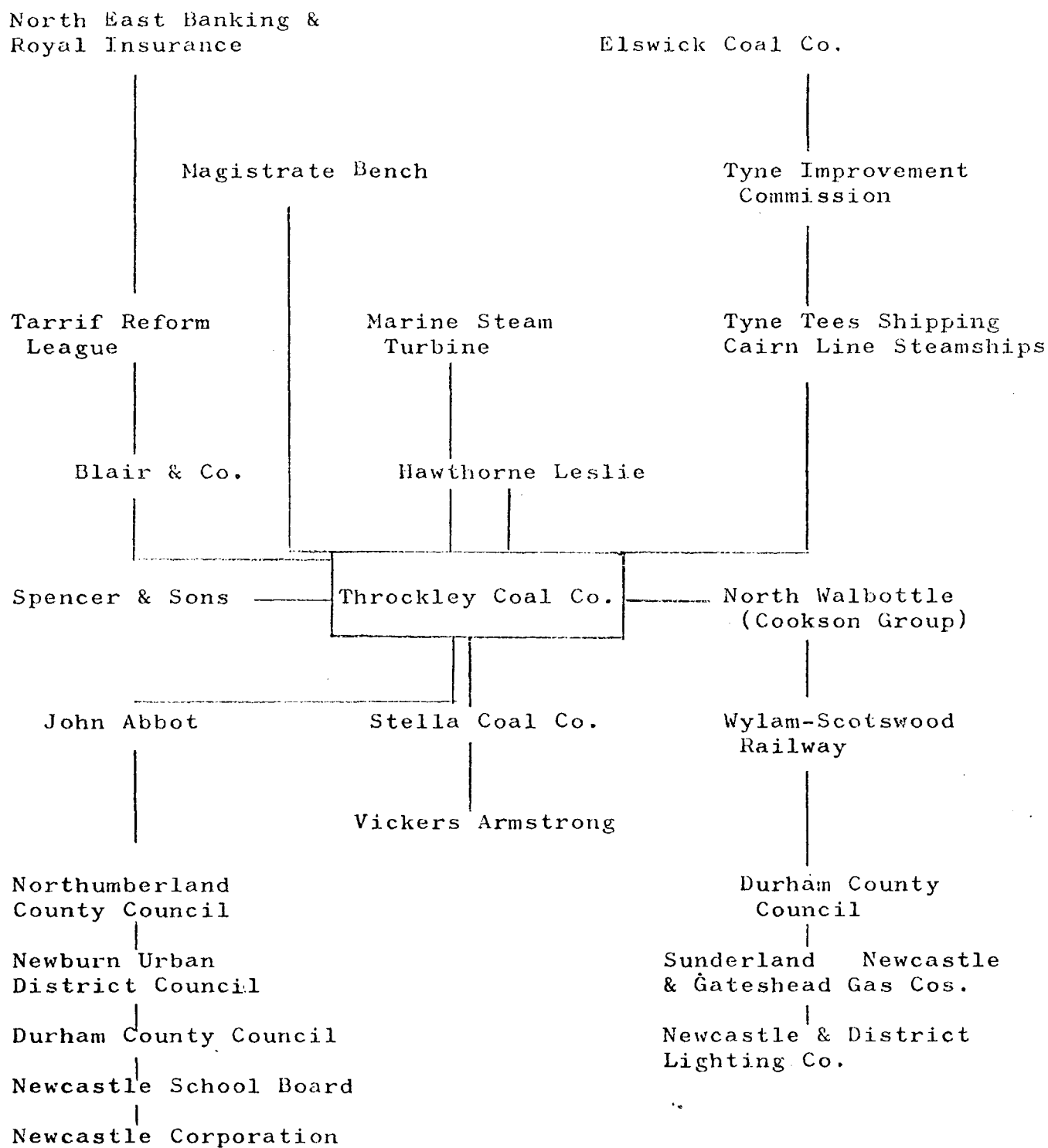
E. G. Boyd, a man later to become High Sheriff of Durham was, like Simpson, also a mining engineer. Boyd had business connections with a Newcastle firm of solicitors, Thomson and Haig, and was also a Director of the North Walbottle Coal Company. This particular company was part of the Cookson group of collieries which included the Mickley Coal Company, mining interests in South Wales and Consett Iron Ore Company.
(W. H. Williams 1937)

The men who formed the Throckley Coal Company had, therefore, extensive business and social contacts throughout Tyneside and the North of England. They were not part of a larger coal combine but they were nonetheless

all ample representatives of the master class of local capitalists, their civic dignity and growing wealth underwriting their status as gentlemen. And as I shall show, this status, following the analysis of the gentleman ethic developed by Newby (1977) was an integral component of their claims to be the legitimate leaders of the villages they created and so completely dominated at least up to 1914.

The interconnections among the business interests of the principal shareholders can be represented in the following diagram. It shows at a minimum the close interpenetration of the coal industry with heavy engineering, public utilities and property development. The typical coal company in the late nineteenth-century may have been small. But it was certainly well connected.

Business and Political Connections
of the Throckley Coal Company



Coal companies face the same problems as any commercial organisation. They need capital to invest. They need workers to win the coal and they need a bouyant market in which to sell their product. But the uncertainties of the operation, the basically uncontrollable variables of business practice such as price movements or technical difficulties in production, even the supply of labour, are much greater in this industry than in almost any other.

To begin with there are great technical difficulties in winning coal and the initial capital investment is necessarily very heavy before any returns on capital are possible. And, as Kirby points out, once capital is committed to mining it cannot easily be moved elsewhere to seek more profitable returns. (1977) The period of time during which the risks are high is therefore quite long.

When the shafts are sunk and the roadways cut new kinds of uncertainties have to be faced. Coal does not lie in even seams. Geological faults which shift the level of seams by as much as fifty fathoms or twist the rock in which coal is embedded create obstacles which cannot easily be foreseen. Inflows of water, excessive dust, gas and variation in the quality of the coal measures all have to be faced and can upset the flow and volume of coal production.

Secondly, coal companies all had to face difficult legal questions about royalties, wayleaves and transportation. Since they did not own the coal, only

buying the right to mine it and sell it, coal companies often came into conflict with royalty owners who were unwilling to allow them undermine the land or landowners reluctant to allow them to transport coal over their land.

Thirdly, being situated often in rural areas largely isolated from services and facilities of existing towns coal companies were forced into building up an infrastructure of housing, transport and such necessary social facilities as shops and schools. In addition, therefore, to the heavy capital investment of the mine coalowners were committed to high levels of investment in non-productive capital especially housing.

This was necessary to solve the fourth problem which the companies had namely, to guarantee a supply of workers. Without houses they could not attract miners. (See M. Daunton 1979) The development of a satisfactory workforce is a rather complex task particularly so in an industry with a history of bitter conflict, intense competition for labour - at least in the period from 1870 to 1920 - and one which had to rely on men who were tough, poorly educated in the main and, in recent memory, untainted by the sober virtues the coalowners valued. They were men, too, who were willing to move pits in search of better pay or conditions. The coal companies faced the task of recruiting such men, holding them and justifying to them the management arrangements, working conditions and wage levels which they offered.

These four problems are interdependent and they were handled during the late Victorian period through the coal companies consolidating themselves as the focal point of village and communal life and legitimating that central position by appeals to the rights of property, and through the adoption of an ethic of social responsibility which went far beyond their legal commitments as employers of labour. It is in this respect that the social history of coal companies is just as vital a part of their economic history as their actual business practice.

The problems I have set out are persistent ones; they cannot simply be solved and it is through tracing how the Throckley coal company coped with each of them over the life of the company that the history of the company and of Throckley itself must be written.

The first set of problems, the geological ones, I shall discuss in a separate chapter on the pit itself. It is sufficient to note here that the Isqbella pit was a wet one being located low on the side of the valley which slopes down to the Tyne and sunk through rock and coal strata which, at that point, dipped to form a steep depression beneath the surface and into which land drainage from other pits tends to flow.

It was this geological fact which led the company, right at the very beginning to write to the Admiralty asking them to bear part of the risk - a sum of £5,000 - of developing the pit. As they explained, since it had not been possible for them to buy the Heddon royalty

they could not control heavy inflows of water as well as they might. The Admiralty refused this request but relented a year later offering the company, in May 1868, a loan of £800 at a repayment interest rate of five per cent. (Company Records NRO/407)

This was clearly an inadequate amount given the scale of the investment being undertaken but it is clear why, from a very early period in time, Throckley Coal Company sought to incorporate the Heddon Margaret Pit. For in addition to the flow of water the western part of the royalty could have been more effectively and economically mined too, and the company could also have avoided the rather long and acrimonious disputes with Mr. Bates, owner of the Heddon colliery and the landowner over whose land part of the wayleave of the Isabella pit lay. For many years there were conflicts over rights of access, rent payments and service charges which the two concerns never resolved satisfactorily. Indeed, it is said that Mr. Bates built two rows of miners' cottages - Blayney Row and Moor Court - right on the riverside so as to be in full view of Throckley House, the Stephenson home, thereby interrupting brutally a very beautiful view across the Tyne and prompting the Stephensons to plant trees in front of their house.

Being a much more dynamic firm than Heddon colliery the Throckley Coal Company eventually absorbed its neighbour. As early as 1881 they entered negotiations with Mr. Bates both to lease his coal and to purchase

his colliery and by 1902 they finally persuaded Bates to sell at a cost 'not exceeding £11,000.' (Throckley Coal Company Records NRO/407)

The transport problem is not solved when wayleaves are secured; coal had to be carried great distances by rail. The rail linking Throckley to other lines further down the valley at Scotswood had to be built and the two families joined together in a further venture, the Scotswood-Wylam Railway Company. Work on the rail link began in May 1872. William Stephenson was a director of this company and the first sod was cut by John Spencer prompting a comment in the local newspaper, The Hexham Courant:

The completion of such an undertaking must be of the greatest possible advantage to the entire district, which is rapidly becoming very populous, inasmuch as it will afford greatly increased facilities for the transmission of produce from the Throckley, Walbottle and Montague collieries.

The Montague colliery at Scotswood was owned by the Benson family, friends of the Stephensons and connected to them through the marriage of a cousin.

The investment in a railway is another aspect of vertical integration in the company's activities and it reflects also the boldness of their entrepreneurship, a propensity to move into businesses of which they had little or no experience. It flows from a determination to be their own masters and presupposed a basic optimism about the future since this type of investment is not

easily transferable to other kinds of business.

Mines need miners and miners need houses. Out of the initial capital of about £20,000 the company calculated that £8,000 would be required for housing. This is, in fact, a very high proportion of the initial investment. From 1871 onwards the coal company began to erect miners' cottages and they continued to build cottages right up to the end of the century, their housing stock having increased proportionally to the size of their labour force. In 1873 they were accepting tenders for building houses at £79 each, £59 for the mason and £17 for the joiner. In 1875 they were building four-roomed cottages for £115 5s 0d. The fact that their capital was so tied up together with the fact that the house was part of the miner's wage, housing costs represented a fixed payment to labour outside the scope of the sliding scale arrangements which governed pay bargaining. What this meant in practice, however, is that the company sought to build houses as economically as possible with as little attention to amenity and comfort as it was possible to get away with.

To be fair, however, by the standards currently operative the Throckley Coal Company was a generous one. A series of reports on "Our Colliery Villages" in the early 1870s by the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, Joseph Cowen's radical paper, had exposed throughout the coal field some very poor housing conditions. But the Throckley report was very complimentary. The report (on November 16th 1872) described the coal company as

"rapidly developing into a first class concern." And of the houses erected just to the north of the turnpike road i.e. Pine Street and Maple Street, it said that they were:

... the best kind as yet erected for pitmen and have all the proper conveniences. The privvies and the coal houses are close together, under one roof; but the former have their doors turned towards the gardens and are approached by a little side gate, while the latter face to the rows. There is a row of double houses, for large families, by which colliery owners understand, large grown up families of lads who can and do work in their pits. But all the houses are excellent, commodious and well built. Some of them are too recent to permit of their having obtained the air of smugness essential to an Englishman's idea of a home, but by the time they get their garden land into form, they will look a little more homely and less like accidental rows of houses in a field. So healthy is the spot - and so true is it that ozone is the real antidote to rheumatism - that although the families have rushed into these houses before the plaster was half dry there has been no spot in the whole district so free from disease of any kind as Throckley has been since it became a comparatively populous place. (page 4)

Two years later, however, a letter to the Weekly Chronicle from Mr. Mark Ferguson, a Throckley miner, indicates that some aspects of this housing were clearly deficient, particularly the water supply. Writing "on behalf of the workmen of Throckley" Mr. Ferguson complained about the volume of water coming through to Throckley from the Whittle Dean ponds. He referred to an Assay Office Report which referred to the water as 'diluted poison' and urged on sanitary officials "a better and more liberal supply of water for our own use, and not let us be forced to the unpleasant alternative of drinking adulterated beer in preference to the Whittle Dean mixture. We have a population of 671, all depending on one tap for water supply. Can it be possible that a 1 inch or $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch pipe can give us sufficient water for our use? For days together there is scarcely any at all." (Newcastle Weekly Chronicle June 27th 1874)

A far more serious problem, however, was the problem of sewerage. As late as 1893 the Medical Officer of Health for the Newburn District pointed out that:

The sewerage of the district is of a very rudimentary character, with the exception of the new buildings at Newburn and Lemington. At the Bank Top, Throckley the extreme west of the district, there is an open channel in front of the houses, into which all the slop waters are put and these various channels empty into one main channel and this again empties itself into the open in a field in close proximity with one of the rows of houses.

This sewage is a source of annoyance to the inhabitants, and in summer the nuisance is intensified. The whole of the village of Throckley is drained by these open channels, some of them being made of bricks, without any bed of cement, thus allowing the sewage to percolate through and make the surrounding area very damp, and in no instance does the sewage receive any treatment whatsoever."

(page 3) (Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health; Newburn Urban District Council; Tyne-Wear Archive)

I shall come later to the effects of this on illness and infant mortality rates. It is sufficient to note for the moment that Throckley grew up rapidly as a mining village and while by our standards now the quality of the housing was poor, by the standards then operative the colliery rows represented decent accommodation.

Tenants of the Throckley coal company faced certain restrictions and they were made very well aware of the need to respect the property of the company. They could not, for example, keep dogs. This was the consequence of a resolution passed by the company on March 25th 1869. Being farmers as well as coalowners, the Stephensons were worried about trespassers and poachers, both of whom might find dogs useful, the one for the pleasure of walking them, the other for their use retrieving game. John Stephenson explained the reasoning more fully:

In the olden days my grandfather used to like shooting. My father liked shooting and no one was allowed to live in Throckley who had a dog. They had to live in Blucher We had a game-keeper ... it is autocratic; but I like shooting and you get better results ... if people aren't chasing around with dogs.

Certainly, the first reference in their records to the fact that the company actually employed men was two months previous to the no-dogs resolution and concerned the issue of trespass, linking it quite clearly to the prospect of dismissal from work:

Information having reached the Co. that several of the workmen had been found trespassing on the Throckley and other farms, it was Resolved to hand every workman a printed notice, to the effect that he would be fined for the first and second offence and dismissed for further offences.

(Throckley Colliery Records NR0/407 January 23rd 1869)

And in the following year, on October 6th the company passed a resolution to station a policeman in Throckley:

It was resolved to apply to the Chief Constable of Northumberland for a policeman to reside at Throckley. The Coal Co. finding him house and firing.

The Chief Constable did not, in fact, meet their request and in May 1872 they resolved to have a policeman at

Throckley and pay for him themselves. In 1893 they asked the Chief Constable again to take over the policeman and in January 1900 asked him to station a policeman at the colliery itself "owing to the destruction caused by boys at the colliery."

The period of the great evictions in the 1840s and 1860s when the owners used the housing weapon to break strikes employing the hated 'candymen' to turn the pitmen from their homes, was long past even before the Throckley coal company began operations. That the possibility of their doing so nonetheless still existed was not something which was lost to the older miners for in 1871 the company had issued precisely such a threat. The Colliery Records for October 5th 1871 contain the following resolution made in response to a demand from the men for a 3d per ton advance on the Brockwell seam:

It was resolved to resist that, and to issue a notice that, at the end of one month from the 6th instant, there will be a reduction per ton throughout the Brockwell seam; ... also to state that in consequence of the unreasonable demands of the men, who have already almost 7 pence per day above the average wages of the district, we are determined at the end of this notice to stop the colliery and to take possession of their Houses unless the above terms are complied with.

(Throckley Colliery Records NR0/407)

The outcome of this particular dispute was a lock-out which lasted seven days. By 1900, however, evictions only took place when men retired from, were killed in, or were lamed out of, the pit.

John Stephenson insists that the company were proud of the houses they had built and eager to maintain good relationships with tenants. He pointed out for instance, that they would sometimes exert pressure to get rid of unsatisfactory tenants mainly because they were upsetting to their neighbours and they certainly encouraged the gardeners. Allotments were available for virtually all who wanted them for as John Stephenson says, "One liked people who had good gardens. If he had a good garden he was probably a conscientious workman."

But the company's policy on eviction and re-letting was tacitly accepted by most of the miners. Again John Stephenson raises an important point:

I don't remember any police proceedings to get a workman out. I think perhaps pressure was used. And I think that workmen expected that when he was not working for the coal company he would have to move to let the house.

Paternalism in Action: Chapel and School

Throckley was not just houses. As leading Methodists in the Newcastle West circuit the Stephenson family, the principal coalowners, were interested in religion, education and the welfare of the community.

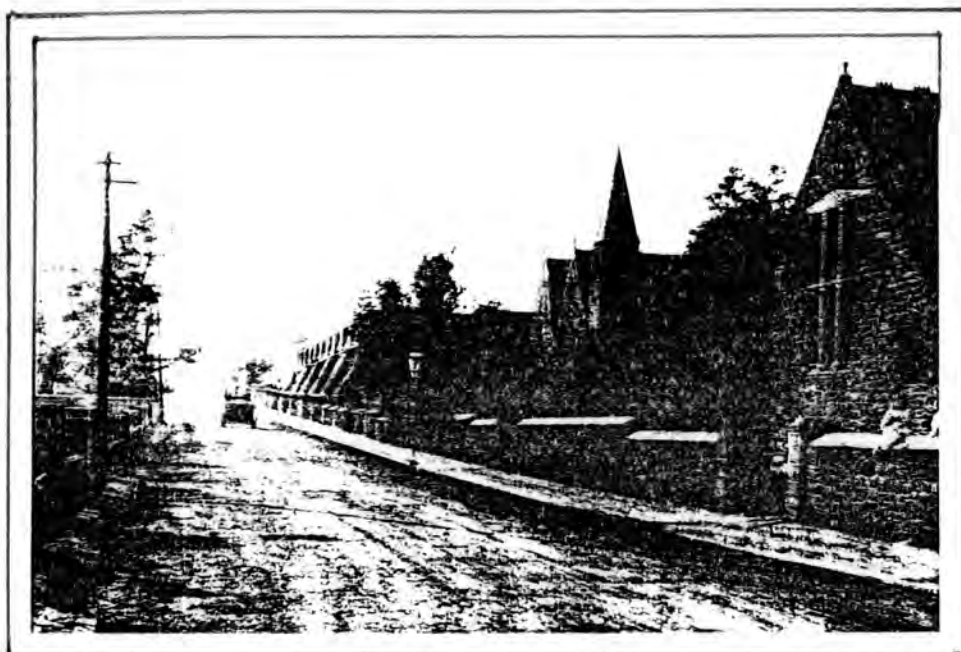
They were, in short, a paternalistic company. Their involvement in the life of the village can be compared with that of other coalowners believing, as did Arthur Pease, of the Durham firm of Pease and Partners that "to have a body of intelligent, sober and well-conducted men must ever tend to the prosperity of the works." (quoted R. Moore 1974)

The grandfather of one of the shareholders W. H. Stephenson was the man who had sold the site of a church to John Wesley in central Newcastle. In 1870 William Stephenson erected a Wesleyan chapel in the village. It is described in the Weekly Chronicle report as 'a little gem of a sanctuary' which boasted 'of one marble monument to the good lady whose genial devoutness must unquestionably have had something to do with the building of this beautiful fane.' This is a reference to W. H. Stephenson's wife. In addition to the memorial to Mrs Stephenson, the family arranged three raised pews for their own use at the back of the chapel and retained in these pews their own prayer books and bibles. The pews were a good vantage point to supervise the congregation at prayer.

Of the two chapels in the village the Wesleyan one was by far the most elegant and ornate and the communion was an important part of the Temperance movement in Throckley. This explains why it was not until after the turn of the century that a working man's club emerged in Throckley and there was certainly no pub in the village. The coal company simply vetoed drink and fought against the Workman's Club even after it had been established

in 1908. The Company Minutes for September 1st 1910 note, for example:

It was reported that a request had been sent to the Duke of Northumberland to sell a site at Throckley for the purpose of building a workman's social club, and that his Grace had consented to meet a



Weslyan Chapel and School Throckley

deputation of those in favour and against at his office in Eldon Square, Newcastle on Monday Sept 5th at four p.m. Sir William Stephenson was instructed to attend on behalf of the Company and to enter strenuous opposition against such an undertaking. (Throckley Colliery Records; NRO/407)

The intervention was clearly successful for the new premises the men were looking for were not acquired until 1920 but for the men at the pit it meant that they had to walk over a mile for their beer.

When, on the other hand, the men from the Blucher pit asked the company for a donation towards the cost of a Temperance Hall, five guineas was promptly given. (Throckley Colliery Records NRO/407 October 24th 1901) Reference to the Blucher (a small village just east of Throckley which the company also owned) prompts another point. The Stephenson's involvement with Methodism was widely known and widely reported. But quite apart from religious conviction which was the rationale of their involvement it paid dividends, too, especially in the form of a good press and therefore, in good public relations.

In March 1905 it was announced in one of the local papers, the Blaydon Courier that Sir William Stephenson had donated £3,500 to the Elswick Wesleyan Circuit for extensions to the chapels at Blucher. This prompted the Editor to write: "I would like to throw out a suggestion to the Blucher people. It is that their chapel should bear the name of him who has nobly come to their aid Nothing I am sure would be more fitting. Few have done so much for Methodism on Tyneside as Sir William..". And later that year at the dedication of the new chapel the Reverend Whitehead, referring in his address to the wealth of Sir William is reported as saying:

He said they looked upon Sir William Stephenson as a representative public man and a man of very high standing in the life of the city and the country in which he lived. To them, no doubt, he was rich but to his (the speaker's) mind he

realised that what he had he had at the hands of the Great Master, and held it in solemn stewardship to use not for himself and his family alone.

(Blaydon Courier December 2nd 1905)

For a fleeting moment, and to a small congregation, Sir Williams' wealth was cloaked with the dignity of the Almighty. Just how rich he was I shall discuss later.

Behind Sir William's civic and religious commitments was a basic confidence in and optimism about the thrusting industrial society of which he felt himself to be an integral part. It was he who donated the money to build the imposing statue of Queen Victoria outside Newcastle Cathedral and he was a great believer in Empire and his views on this reflect another feature of his social perception - a belief in the ladder of social opportunity.

At the inaugural meeting of the Tyne Commercial Exchange Debating Society he spoke eloquently of the Empire:

"In the whole history of mankind, there is nothing so marvellous, as the growth of British rule and dominion ...". He spoke of imposing on the "barbarians and the savages" the securities of law and order "and to carry the blessings of civilization and the consolations of religion to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Thus it is that our flag floats in every sea, that the sound of our pick and shovel is heard in every land, and the throb of our engines is echoed from every shore." And he attributed much of Britain's

success in this enterprise to "the happy blending in this country of the various classes of society." "With us" he said "the aristocracy has never become a mere caste it is not a preserve of the diplomatist, the soldier or even the landowner. It is recruited from all ranks and professions."

(Stephenson Family Scrap Book)

The school was opened shortly after the pit. It was founded in 1871 and opened in the Easter of 1873. The school was built well before the colliery was fully developed and well before the house building programme was complete. The school, therefore, played a key role in the recruitment of labour. The issue of controlling labour may have entered their calculations, just as it had influenced the provision of schools elsewhere in the coalfield. (see R. Colls 1977) Again, the Throckley coal company was typical of other companies in this respect. The provision of schooling was seen by the coalowners from the 1844 strike onwards as a way of suppressing discontent. (R. Moore 1974: 80)

Some support for this idea comes from some comments by Sir William Stephenson. He was a founder member of the Newcastle School Board. At the opening of Westgate Road School in 1899 he had the following to say stressing the need for schools to have the co-operation of parents:

It is palpable to every observer who walked the streets of Newcastle that there was a want of restraint and observance of social amenities on the part of the children of the city. He did not like to

see such wanton destruction of trees and flowers,
and so much gambling among the boys There
was much rudeness observable, especially to ladies.

(Press Cutting: Stephenson Family Scrap Book)

Schooling was in part, a corrective to such aberrant
behaviour in the first instance, however. Throckley coal
company provided a school to attract a respectable
labour force.

John Stephenson emphasised this when talking about
the fact that the company, in 1877, provided the school
with an harmonium:

That was to teach them to sing and then they would
go into the Methodist choir. Let's face it, we were
a plantation. We didn't have slaves but one had to
make the people reasonably happy so that they would
go on working. If you had a whole lot of people
you had to educate them because otherwise the
children you wouldn't have had any workmen.
If someone got married, had children, the children
had to go to school. The wife would make jolly
sure they lived somewhere near the school. And
now they'd think, well, there's no school at
Throckley I think naturally the coal company
would put up the school to keep the workmen happy
.... I'm sufficiently cynical to think that they
would not have provided education unless they
thought it was worth their while ... so they could
keep the people happy. If you've got contented
workers you get a better output. You don't get
so much labour trouble.

The coal company constituted themselves as the Board of Managers and Mr. Stephenson himself appointed the first Headmaster, Mr. Cowen. Mr. Cowen subsequently became Chairman of the Throckley branch of the Good Templars so we might surmise that his appointment was to some extent at least influenced by his views on the drink question. The Management Committee of the school was made up, in 1874, of the following: Messrs. Colin Spencer, J. B. Simpson, C. Stephenson and W. H. Stephenson. They could from the beginning confer prestige and moral authority on the school and since it was built next door to the chapel the association of learning and respectable worship was an easy one to make.

The Spencers, in any case, were well-known in the area for their interest in education. They were trustees of a workingmen's club in Newburn which provided evening classes in science, mechanics and steam. They organised concerts and general lectures and they, too, were pillars of the local religious establishment being the principal benefactors of Newburn Church. (Newburn Church Magazine 1885: The Vicarage, Newburn) And J. B. Simpson was a major supporter of Armstrong's College (later Newcastle University) in Newcastle. Sir William Stephenson also founded public libraries in Elswick and Heaton, two suburbs of Newcastle.

The second appointment to the school staff was Miss Cowen, the daughter of the Head. She was appointed at a salary of £20 per annum to teach sowing. In March 1876 the company resolved to build an Infant school at

the colliery. The school as a whole was designed to accommodate 200 children. It was to be run on the British system and was therefore, seen from the beginning as part of the non conformist tradition which throughout the nineteenth century had sought to provide education for labourers outside the control of the established Church. Provision of the school followed from the religious convictions of the Stephenson family although clearly there was, too, a problem of providing basic facilities for a rapidly growing population of pitmen.

The company took a direct role in the daily running of the school with the pit manager being a regular visitor to the Headmaster and having general supervisory responsibilities over the school. School matters came up regularly at the monthly meetings of shareholders and it is clear from the school log books that the recurring problems of the school were the same as those at Heddon school; how to establish the authority of the school and the routines of regular attendance on parents and children for whom school was often experienced as punishment and which led to nowhere in particular.

A despairing entry in the log book for November 9th 1876 notes that: 'Having had to give over sending the classes out to be taught in the play ground the children are very much crowded together. Therefore it is almost impossible to keep order.' (Throckley School Log Book NRO) And in a reference to the parents the Head noted on November 29th 'The children are attentive to their

lessons but we cannot get the parents to provide them with books.' School fees were something of a deterrent to attendance, just as they were at Heddon. Nor was it simply a question of wrong priorities among careless parents. A log book entry for November 16th 1877 notes:

Made out a list of absentees today. A good many sent word that their children were in want of Books and Clothes. Some had not their school money. Not a few of those who have respectable parents are anxious for their children to get on with their learning cannot afford to send them. Consequently many of the best scholars are kept at home.

The Company's response to this was to deduct school fees direct from paypackets. In June 1880 they resolved that:

It having been reported that the School Fees are in arrears a considerable sum: It was resolved that arrangements be made for all men to pay a fixed amount every fortnight, the same to be deducted from wages. (Throckley Colliery Records NRO/407 June 17th 1880)

There is no evidence that this device worked for the problem of attendance, and particularly that of girls who frequently stayed home to help their mothers, remained a constant worry for the Head and his managers.

The company, and the Stephensons in particular penetrated the village life of Throckley in other smaller ways. They made a special virtue of being in the village believing that bitterness between themselves and their employees would be avoided if their presence was seen

to be more than that of the main employer. In this respect the company drew on the pervasive ideology of community and locality which was such a central component of late Victorian paternalism. (H. Newby 1977)

John Stephenson says in this respect:

I think why we didn't get bitterness in Throckley was because the coalowners always lived in the village. My grandfather lived there. My great grandfather lived there. My father lived there and I lived there. And always the back door was open. And if anyone had any grievance they could come to the back door. And I think we were felt to be part of the community. We might have a motor car or something or a carriage and pair and that sort of thing but the people didn't mind that. It was very much the rich man at his castle and the poor man at his gate. No one minded it.

We were there if there was any disease or anything. My aunt used to go and help. One had too. As I say, it was the old plantation.

Although the Stephensons had most of their food delivered from a Newcastle store - Pumphrey, Carrick and Watson - they did some local shopping. They went to the chapel. Mrs. Stephenson was President of the Womens' Institute at Throckley and she took it as one of her duties to visit young mothers to give them help and advice in bringing up their babies. So whereas most of the men of Throckley were in direct contact with the company through their work, the company struck up its

relations with the women through the informal organisations of the village and also in the school.

Major Stephenson, the nephew of Sir William and subsequent managing director played football with the local Throckley team on occasions. Matt Cheesman, the pit undermanager was an ardent pigeon fancier. The company cultivated some of the hobbies of the men. In 1876 they gave the men £20 to buy instruments to set up the colliery band although they were careful to point out in the minutes that the instruments would remain the property of the company. They refused in 1898 a further request from the workmen for a further £60 to develop the band but at this point the band was well established. On Coronation Day in 1902 the company provided the children of Throckley with a tea at school.

Then there were occasional acts of what were invariably reported as acts of great generosity. The most significant and well-staged of these was the provision of a row of aged miner's homes by J. B. Simpson in 1906. At that point an Alderman of Durham County Council Mr. Simpson, out of his own pocket built these houses at Throckley bank top. He had clearly decided to contribute in this way as early as 1902 for the company minutes record the following: "Hearty congratulations were accorded to Mr. Simpson for his liberal offer to build 10 cottages at Throckley for infirm miners." (February 13th 1902) The foundation stone was laid in October 1906 by Mr. Simpson himself the event being reported in the Blaydon Courier this way:

Ald. Simpson has always taken a great interest in the well-being of the people in the district and has generously supported movements aiming at the betterment of the condition of the workers.

(Oct 20th 1906)

The stone laying ceremony was led by Miss Simpson and by Thomas Burt M.P. The procession was led by the colliery brass band playing on this occasion alongside Spencer's brass band and a tea for everyone was held in the co-operative store hall.

But there were smaller acts of generosity which became widely known in the area. In 1888 they gave £5 to the family of a young boy who had been injured by one of their locomotives at Newburn. This particular payment is recorded in the company minute books. I myself was told of a similar compensation payment to a boy who lost his arm playing around the colliery machinery. This same boy was later employed by the company on light work at the colliery.

Such actions underlined the broader social concern of the company; none of them were strictly necessary or required by law. But a wide recognition that the company could be expected, on occasion, to act generously was something the company aimed to bring about; it fitted in with their own image of themselves as public benefactors and it took the raw edge off their relationships with their employees.

The significance of such events and ceremonies is, if taken in isolation, rather small. But cumulatively,

over time, such events lend general credence to the view that the interests of the company and those of the miners in the village were ultimately identical. In this respect the character of the social relationships built up between the company and the man outside of the pit were felt to have important consequences for the nature of their relationships in the pit. It is to the management of those relations that I now turn.

Managing Men

As employers of labour the company was governed by the economic circumstances of the times, their membership of the Northumberland Coalowner's Association and by the general ideological climate. Yet one theme emerges very strongly; the company insisted on its own absolute right to manage its own affairs and sought to retain that right through its contact with the employer's association, the Unionist interest in local politics and through its broader ideological and educational influence to deflect criticisms of that right. The company allied itself from the beginning with the interests of the coalowners. In 1898, for instance, they 'resolved to contribute £60 to the Welsh Coalowners on account of the late strike,' (Company Records August 1889 NRO) and they were themselves quite prominent in the Northumberland Coalowners Association.

The company switched its membership from the Durham Coalowners to the Northumberland Coalowners in 1872.

What this meant of course is that they were committed to the mechanisms of wage determination and arbitration which the Northumberland Masters had negotiated with the Northumberland Miners. This was a framework of joint committees and from 1879, of sliding scales, opposition to the idea of a minimum wage and of methods of allocating work to particular groups of miners known as the cavilling system. As a company therefore, they could not pursue a unilateral policy of labour relations. But that framework of wage determination contributed greatly to the stability of labour relations in the coalfield since it linked wages directly to the selling price of coal thereby rendering automatic any wage reductions which were thought necessary as a result of falling prices. In an exporting district this was an essential feature with which to head off industrial conflict. But what it meant for the company and its relations with the Throckley miners was this: any conflicts arising out of price changes or wage levels could be deflected as arising from within the coalfield as a whole and not being specific in any way to Throckley itself.

This ability to deflect the issue elsewhere was reinforced in Throckley by another deliberate piece of company policy, namely, to leave the day to day matters of pit bargaining with the underground management, the coalowners themselves remaining largely aloof from such matters and through that, rarely becoming the object of industrial aggression. The role they left for themselves

was that of conciliator. John Stephenson explained this in the following way:

My father and I, neither of us were qualified mining engineers We were interested in the profits. Its a dirty word nowadays but we had to have profits to keep the colliery going. We didn't know whether we should work certain seams. You relied on your managers ...

And in reply to a question about daily bargaining he said emphatically:

That we never dealt with. It was just the way it worked out because we'd never had to. Uncle Willy was in Newcastle and my father - he worked with the brickworks ... We relied on the managers and anyhow it was all sorted out by the county - the robber's den; it was known as the robber's den. If they ever had any trouble, if they couldn't get over troubles they would come to us.

I shall discuss in the next chapter how the relationships of management and the men underground were handled. Sufficient to note for the moment that while conflict did occur the Stephenson's themselves were, in a real sense, above it.

On occasion, however, the company could be tough. I have already reported how the threat of eviction was once used to settle an industrial dispute. After the 1870s, however, other techniques of labour control were used. The company always aimed to be selective

in its recruitment of men. It sought a good class of reliable workers who would appreciate what the company was doing for Throckley. They also sought to ensure that trouble makers would not remain long at the pit. One feature of this aspect of their policy was to refuse to re-employ people whom they thought had been active in industrial disputes. They refused to give a job to a well-known activist in the district, Frank McKay who, while in their employment had played an active role in the 1887 dispute which had lasted seventeen weeks. When the strike was over he was simply not taken on again. Even as late as 1925 they were adamant that they would take only those men on who they themselves wanted. After a period of closure due to a fire the company came into dispute with the union over which men would be allowed back. The union wanted to cavill for this but the manager insisted that "he intended to select such men as he required even if they had secured work at another colliery." (Minute Book 22. Northumberland Coal Owners Association 1925. NRO/DL/C)

The tactic of taking on only those men whom they themselves thought reliable was a common enough practice throughout the coalfield and the fear that such practices produced of the 'blacklist' was real enough. The Throckley Coal Company was not generally thought of by its workmen, however, as being harsh employers. Indeed, within the broad framework of the conditions and rules of the time, it was thought to be a good employer and

and its directors were thought of as gentlemen.

The company's view of the labour question was not, however, simply a rationalisation of its practice. In formulating what their views were they drew upon the broader ideological position of their class and on the conventions of political economy dominant at the time. There is a remarkable document by J. B. Simpson which brings this out very clearly. It brings out what modern sociologists, following Fox (1971) sometimes call a 'unitary view' of the relationship between employer and workers.

The text is that of a lecture given by J. B. Simpson to the Newcastle Economic Society on March 9th 1898. (J. B. Simpson 1900) Using a mass of evidence drawn from both Coal Trade and Government sources he seeks to show that during the recent economic history of the industry that returns to capital have been low and that miners have advanced considerably in their standard of living. This is the theme of the embattled employer who deserves understanding. As he puts it:

... if the average profits on mines assessed to income tax over the period of ten years ending 1890 were made in coal alone, they would not have paid 6 per cent on the capital embarked in that industry ... This, for all the risks and responsibilities, many of which occur in other industries, seems an inadequate return ... (1900: 25)

Then, pointing to figures on changes in hewer's wages and noting that all such figures should be bigger since the hewer receives both his house and his coal, he seeks to show that the hourly payment of the hewer has increased dramatically. The starting date for this analysis is 1700 so it is clear that Mr. Simpson was operating with a long timescale of progress. He sums up his analysis thus:

It would appear from what we have said that capitalists have on the whole had no great return from their money invested; and, if we may judge from all that we can learn, especially during the last century and a good proportion of this, the miners' lot must have been an arduous one - unhealthy, and dangerous, with long hours and no great wages. But still both labour and capital have been attainable, and except in very few instances there has been no difficulties in getting a supply of coal when it was wanted ... This would lead to the conclusion that capital has been satisfied with its return and labour with its wages.

(1900: 40)

Despite the close attention to detailed analysis of facts which characterises the whole paper the conclusion about rewards is based on the comforting fiction of the market.

His views on industrial conflict reflect his basic belief that the interests of the worker and those of

the employers are, in the end, if they would both just recognise it, identical. Noting that conflict in the industry had at times been bitter and that conflict occurred mainly in times of falling coal prices he draws the conclusion that what is necessary is a framework of sliding scales with wages being tied to the selling price of coal as the most sensible way of avoiding such conflict. Such scales, he suggested, would "enable us to obliterate from our commercial dictionaries the terms 'strike and Lock-Out'." (1900: 48) But this would only occur if all those involved in the industry understood its economics. And to this end he used the metaphor of the boat:

.... there are practically four men in the boat representing Profit, Rent, Repairs and Wages, each wanting as much space as they can get. When the boat is large they can get on comfortably enough but when they are obliged to get into a much smaller one compression must take place Profit says to Wages, "the boat is mine, and I intend to remain in it although I am willing to be squeezed, somewhat proportionately to my size, and you must do the same or the boat will go to pieces". (1900: 47)

The argument seems reasonable and only begins to smack of sectional interest when it is realised that Mr. Simpson wants sliding scales to be firmly based on selling prices and not profits which, it could be argued, would be a more equitable interpretation of the men in

the boat metaphor. In fact, it was one of the key themes of Frank McKay's radicalism - although his union did not support him in this - that sliding scale agreements should be based on profits and not prices and he campaigned vigorously on this theme during the Minimum Wage disputes which dominated the year 1912.

J. B. Simpson represented the company on the executive of the Northumberland Coal Owners Association. He was a director of the Coal Owners Mutual Protection Association and a leading member of the joint committee with the Northumberland Miners which regulated labour questions in the coalfield. His views reflected those of the Coal Owners but he himself had helped to shape those views.

What such views mean, is that the company could claim that anything they did for their men outside their formal obligations set by the labour contract was a kind of bonus and that the wages they paid were scrupulously fair, consistent with the laws of economics and unavoidable. They needed to have no qualms about what they paid out in the pit; payment rates were justified by reference to considerations which went beyond Throckley and the ability of the coal company itself to have much say in the matter. And it is such considerations which perhaps lay behind the remarks of Major Stephenson when, being asked a special favour by a workman who had prefaced his remarks with the comment, "I've worked well for you for over thirty years," replied, even before

the request was made "But we've paid you, haven't we?" This story was told to me by Charlton Thompson, the last engineer at the Isobella pit. And it was told to underline the point he was making to me at the time; the Stephensons were good employers; they were fair and would listen to people. But they were not in the least sentimental. Workmen were, in the end, workmen and their obligation extended no further than to pay them a wage.

The company were quite prepared, however, to recognise special efforts on the part of the workmen and to reward such effort appropriately. In 1903 the company paid a special bonus to the men who had repaired the pumping engine at the pit. The Company Records state: 'Noting that the repairs to the pumping engine were completed and working satisfactorily it was resolved to show our appreciation to the men's work by voting them £10.' (Company Records September 24th 1903 NRO/407) This is only one small example of a more general philosophy which the company adhered to, one small step in building up of a much larger reputation as being a decent company to work for.

Having said something on the social organisation of the company it is appropriate now to discuss its commercial fortunes. Although a relatively small company it was nonetheless a successful one; it grew rapidly; it absorbed other companies in the district and before the collapse of export markets in the early 1920s it paid out richly to its principal shareholders.

The initial capital was, as explained earlier, £18-20,000. In 1872 they began to pay themselves their first dividends of £100 per share. Quarterly dividend payments ceased in 1875 and payments were not resumed again until 1882 when they were resumed at the old rate. This decision was made in May but by December of that year the figure was reduced to £75. This represents a rate of 21 per cent of capital invested being distributed as dividend. There is no indication given in the company minutes of what retained profits were for this period. Until 1891 when they increased the capital of the company to £119,000 and simultaneously formed themselves into a limited liability company with a share issue of 1190 shares, they were making a very high return on their invested capital. The company records indicate that by 1888 the company had made more than 15 per cent on paid up capital. By 1890 the company accountant, Fred Goddard, was able to return the following figures of the company's performance, the figures having been assembled, to assess the level of bonus to be paid to Messrs Stephenson.

Amount of Capital Invested

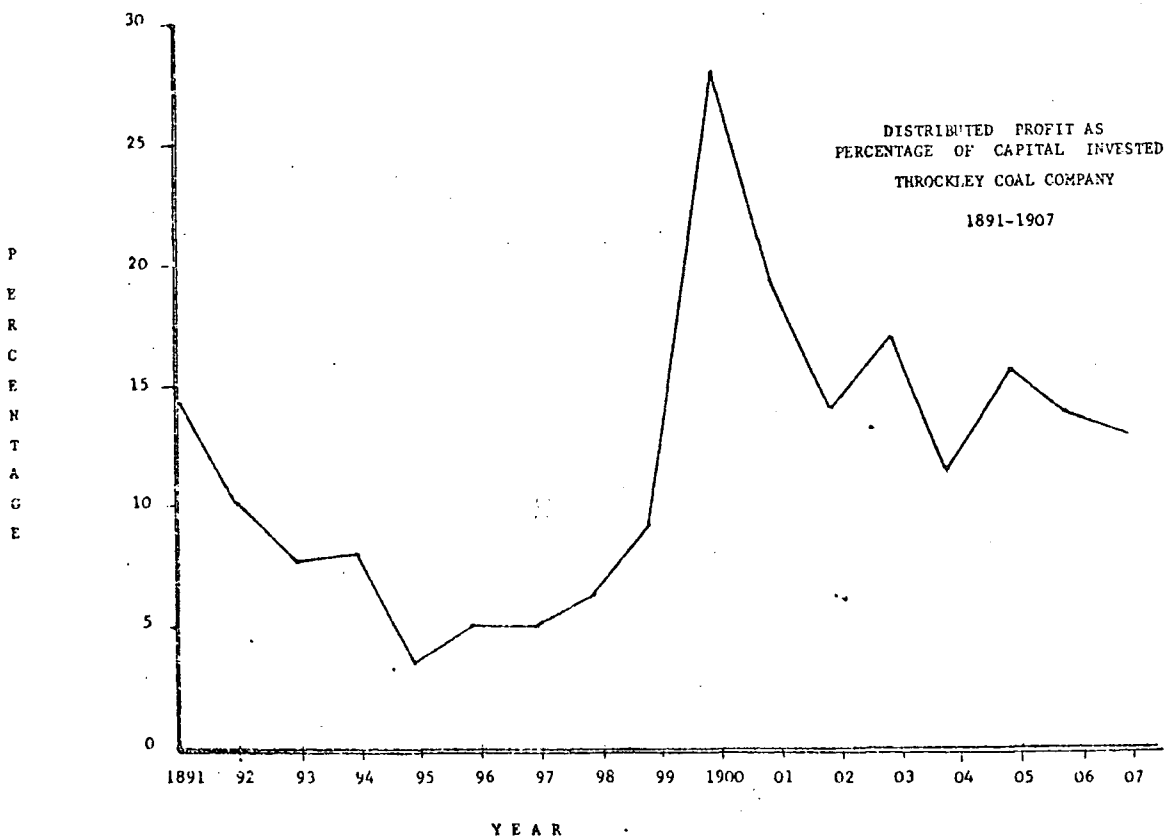
December 1888	49,151

The profits showed by the certified accounts are as follows:

Half year ending 30th June 1888	2,799
Half year ending 31st Dec. 1888	4,227
	7,026

Total profit for 1889, 7,860

These figures represent a 15.9 per cent return on capital invested. Company records indicate, at each monthly meeting what was to be paid out in dividends. From this data, which is unfortunately only available for the period up to 1907 I have calculated changes in distributed profits as a proportion of the total capital invested in the company. It is impossible to distinguish what proportion of this dividend derives from different areas of the company's operations but since, as I have already shown, the separate interests of the company in Throckley cannot be separated from coal production, it can be assumed that these figures represent the performance of their pits. The figures are given in the following graph.

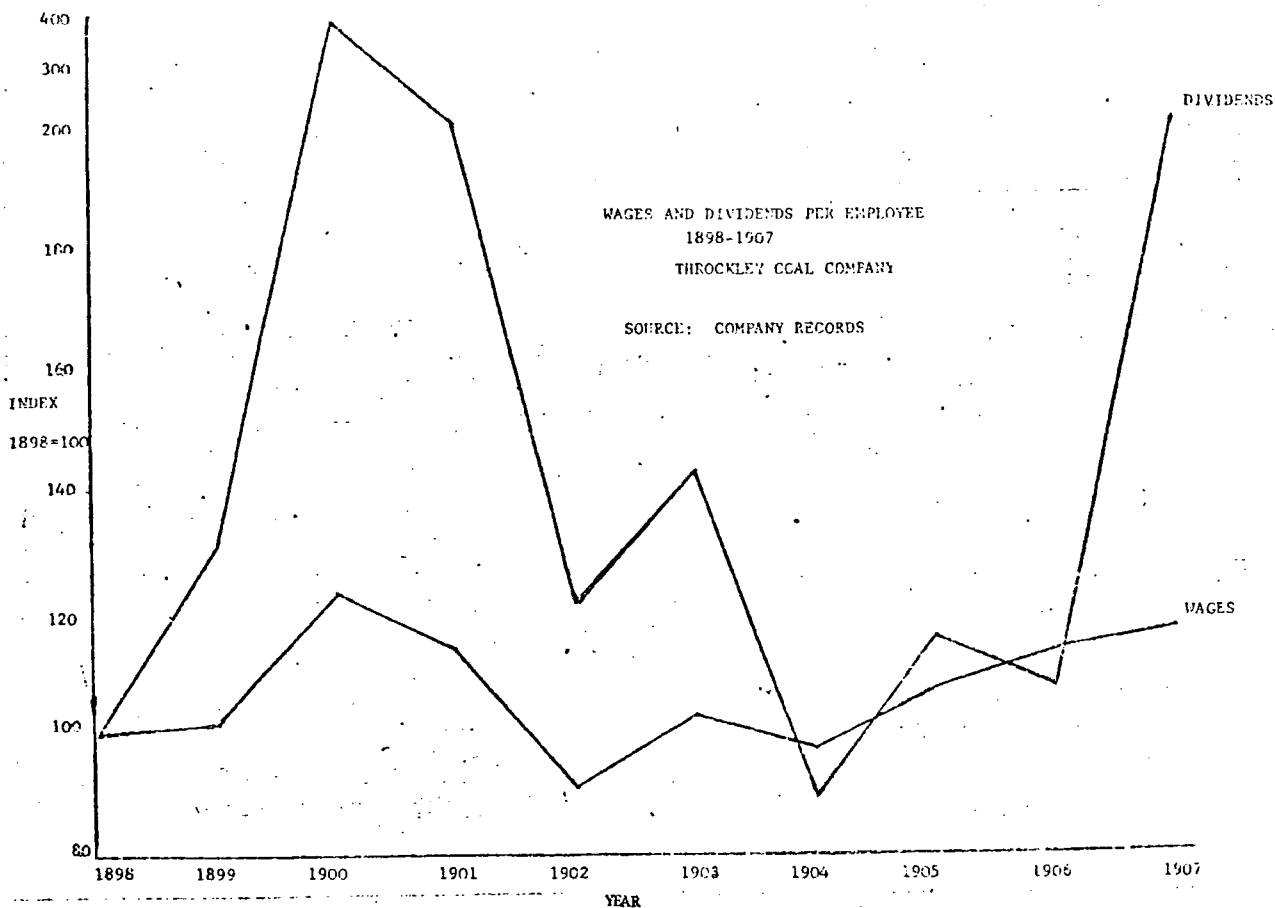


What they illustrate is an initially high rate of return up to 1891 which was only reached again by the end of the 1890s. A very lucrative two years spanning the Boer War were followed by a decline in dividends but the decline never resulted in returns lower than had been received during the second half of the 1890s.

For the company this was a period of rapid expansion. In 1898 they employed 724 men. By 1904 this had doubled to 1,484. From 1881 onwards they had pursued an expansionist policy attempting to buy out the neighbouring Heddon colliery to increase their quote of the coal vend. In 1896 they attempted unsuccessfully to take over Walbottle colliery having been offered it at a price of 30,000 pounds. They valued it at £16,000 in 1896 and subsequently, in 1898 revised their offer to £23,000. These deals were never successfully completed and it was always felt in the Throckley Coal Company that the dealings were in some way underhand, the estimates of coal in the royalty being falsified by the agent who did the drilling.

In 1902 they did, however, take over Heddon just as they had the Blucher pit in 1900. In 1905 the Brickworks was incorporated as part of the coal company and in 1906 they opened up another pit, the Maria. A small indication, perhaps, of how successful the company was at this point is the attempt by John Spencer and Company, already a major shareholder, to take it over completely. This offer came in 1899 but it was turned down.

One interesting feature of the commercial fortunes of the company during this period which might explain J. B. Simpson's interest in sliding scales was that dividends, while growing were, taken in relation to the number of employees on the payroll, erratic. This can be seen in the following diagram which charts changes in the level of both dividends and wages per employee for the period 1889 to 1907. During this whole period wages remained quite stable, at least in comparison to dividends. Both fell from 1900 onwards but profits (measured by dividends) fell faster than wages and, after 1905 rose much faster, too. Such as it is, however, the data suggests that, in the period before the First World War the company was doing very well indeed.



Dividends are not, however, the only source of income from the company for the shareholders. They all received a director's allowance and some of them, being employees of the company as well received a salary. In 1868, for example, J. B. Simpson, as Viewer, was paid a salary of £350. In 1874 William Stephenson's salary was £400 per annum. This was increased in 1890 to £600: in 1894 to £700 and he reached £1,000 in 1903. During this same period J. B. Simpson's salary was increased to £450. Then they received director's attendance allowances. In 1861 this was £12 60s per year; in 1874 it was raised to £25 20s. In 1900 they paid themselves £300 and in 1903, £650 per year, almost ten times the amount they paid their miners.

These high earnings are, of course, what sustained their elegant life style and it was this life style, modelled on that of a much older class of industrialists and landowners which symbolised vividly the great gap which existed between them and the people of the village and which gave definition to their own self image as men of property and distinction. Their public roles were possible because of their private wealth. The two together reinforce their sense of noblesse oblige.

Community: Structure and Division

It is a central theme of this book that the mining village is a constructed community. In the remainder of this chapter I want to examine briefly some of the institutions of the village which were constructed by the miners themselves and which were central to the life of the community as a whole. It is quite impossible, however, to disentangle cleanly that which reflected the action of the coal company and that which evolved from the men. It is also impossible to distinguish those institutions which are or were uniquely of the village itself. As I have explained in the Introduction to this book the model of the mining community as an isolated community is entirely misleading.

The ostensible community in Throckley was rich and varied. What I hope to show is that there was a pattern to this which must be grasped in the context of the problems people faced and the subtle ways in which they distinguished themselves from one another. The image of the mining community as the 'archetypal proletarian community' (M. Bulmer 1975) is equally misleading. The social mosaic of the life in Throckley reflected a great diversity among the people who lived there. And it is essential to understand that diversity and the structures which produced it if the attitudes and actions of my grandparents are to be explained.

Settling down in Throckley meant to them coming to know and participate in (although selectively) the associational life of the village, a life built around

the major institutions of the village. There was a brass band subsidised by the pit, a football team, Throckley Villa, a cricket team, a Mechanic's Institute with books and a billiard table (this, too, having been provided by the coal company). As early as 1872 the Weekly Chronicle had noted that the Institute possessed a 'pretty fair library' and was 'modestly supplied with papers.' The same report, however, detected a major lack in the village of a proper working man's club and noted that the fifty members of the Institute looked forward to having such a facility. The paper adds: 'The way to these blessings do not seem just now very clear; but the men of Throckley are hopeful, cheerful, patient and persevering, or they would not be such good miners as they are.' (Weekly Chronicle November 16th 1872) They had to wait, in fact, another thirty-five years before that particular aspiration was realised.

In 1905 the Throckley Rechabites - the 'Pride of Throckley' Tent of the Independent Order of Rechabites, the main Temperance body of the village - boasted a membership of 588 people, 208 adult members, 28 members' wives, a female tent of 32 and a juvenile tent of 320. Mr. M. Heslop ran a Home Reading Union circle, William King a Cycle Club which, apart from planning outings raised money for charity. Local pubs in nearby villages ran annual Leek and Vegetable shows offering modestly practical prizes such as blankets to the winners. The union ran social events too. In 1905, for instance, the union organised a 'novelty football match' in aid of

the Sick and Accident Fund. The colliery band paraded around the village and they organised a public tea in the store hall in the evening.

The church and the chapels were at the centre of other organised activities. Attached to the church there was a branch of the Mother's Union. There were Sunday schools and, less seriously regular evenings of dancing, the chapels of the area being important social centres, a meeting point for boys and girls. A fair visited the village every Easter - the 'hoppings' - and there were occasional concerts given by local choirs and brass bands. Among the men there were pigeon fancying clubs and whippet racing meetings along the back-lonnen behind the pit. Woven into the leisure time of Throckley families these local groups made their own contribution to the flow of everyday life reinforcing the prevailing sense of belonging to a particular place and a particular class. To come from Throckley meant precisely this; to be recognised as someone who shared in the associational life of the village. How my grandparents participated is something I discuss in subsequent chapters.

Social Conditions

Social conditions in the village were, however, very poor. And with respect to such conditions the reports of the Medical Officer of Health for the District are remarkable. They show a village with high infant mortality rates, poor sanitation, inadequate housing and overcrowding. The fundamental problem was, however, housing; poor housing, he felt, lay behind the high

incidence of preventable disease, and infant mortality. Of health, he writes in his 1906 report:

The health of the community is now largely in the hands of the capitalist and the architect, and as Medical Officer of Health I can only lay down general hygeine principles. (Tyne Wear Archive)

Of the architecture he had this to say:

There are in every part of the district beams and brickbats thrown together in the shape of houses. Naturally they are damp, many ill lighted, badly ventilated ... which go to make them unfit for habitation. As for the tenants

Alas their sorrows in their bosoms dwell
They've much to suffer but
have nought to tell

This was written in 1906. In 1910 his report was much concerned with overcrowding:

The housing accommodation for this large population is one of the least satisfactory features of the district. Eighty-four per cent of the people were lodged in houses of less than five rooms at the last census.

And in this same report the MOH sets out his diagnosis:

The cause of it all? Not ignorance, we know better; and the builder is not to blame, for the law allows it. It is disheartening at times to feel, that after all these tons of reports of Royal Commission, Medical Officers and Sanitarians, cartloads of books and pamphlets which have been written since the days of Cobbett to the present time, we still go on in the

same way. Possibly Tennyson's old farmer would make his pony give a shrewd guess at the reason why we do not progress.

"Proputty, proputty, proputty, that's what I 'ears them saay."

In 1912 he sounded a note of warning about the recent budget from the Chancellor of the Exchequer:

The increase of wealth as shown by the Budget is in the large fortunes of the few, rather than in the diffusion of nobler possibilities of happiness among the masses. In spite of the booming trade the vast mass are no better, and there is always the liability to forget this under the hypnotic influence of big figures.

Dr. Messer's reports to the health committee played an important role in fashioning the outlook of local labour councillors and the man himself, for a while after the First World War, became a labour member of Northumberland County Council. They are remarkable reports, however, because they cut through a great deal of the complacency surrounding public welfare in the area and they locate the root causes of poor housing and high infant mortality rates in the capitalist system itself.

With a terrible irony it must be noted that the conditions which Dr. Messer describes re-appear again in the subtle structures of hierarchy in Throckley which allowed people to distinguish themselves from one another. The obvious dangers in conditions such as these (Dr. Messer referred in his 1917 report to 'the state of overcrowding in many houses is deplorable, a terrible menace to moral

and physical well-being') were simultaneously an opportunity for others to prove their respectability. In 1916 the Health Visitor for the district, following a survey of 1,444 homes reported to the Health Committee in the following way:

A small percentage of homes visited were found to be very dirty, a disgrace to the housewife and a peril to the inmates and to the neighbours. On the other hand, many houses are always beautifully clean, making one realise that the real heroines of England are the mothers who, day by day, are faithfully fighting dirt and disease sometimes under heavy odds. (MOH Reports West Denton Library)

Overcrowding was a serious problem. So was the threat of loss of earnings. That threat was poverty. I have no data for Throckley on the extent of poverty but Throckley was covered under the Poor Law by the Castle Ward Union. There is evidence, therefore, of official attitudes towards it. The Castle Ward Union in 1901 covered 32,357 people of whom 12,500 were in the Newburn area. (Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress. Appendix No CXVI Vol V 1909) Outdoor relief in 1901 was paid at a rate of 2s 6d for adults, 1s 6d for children. To the 'really destitute old people' it rose to 3s.

In his statement of evidence to the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws the secretary of the Northern Poor Law Conference, describing the policy of the Castle Ward

Union, the Reverend Canon Walker of Whalton pointed out that:

The proportion of paupers to population is little more than 1.3 per cent, and this is found mostly in the industrial areas where the higher wages prevail with high rents.

He went on to note that:

The classes applying for relief are mostly labourers who have been employed about the pits or factories, disabled by age or infirmity; and young widows with children.

These were the precise categories into which all the men of Throckley could so easily have fitted but for their own good luck and the care they took with their work.

Canon Walker was touching on issues which preoccupied Dr. Messer, the Medical Officer of Health. But the two men did, in fact, arrive at quite different explanations of poverty and the good Canon gives us some clue to the way in which Poor Law Guardians were encouraged to view the plight of claimants:

The causes of pauperism are extravagance, money spent on dress, in pleasure and amusements; improvident habits, especially amongst the girls and young women and a feeling often expressed that there is a right to Poor Law Relief; improvident marriages, pthisis and it may be high rents. The housing question has a serious bearing on pauperism.

This curious remark moves from explanations of pauperism based on the moral worthlessness of the individual to

those centred on poor social and occupational conditions. That the latter might explain the former is not something which occurs to the Reverend Canon. He does point out, however, that the Guardians are not severe people:

We do not try experiments in this union. The majority of the guardians are rather inclined to give out relief in preference to in-maintenance. It is only in the case of old and infirm people, or where a man is a well-known loafer or wastrel that an order to the house is given.

But the Reverend Canon is not himself wholly in agreement with this policy administered as it is by miners, colliery managers and retired tradesmen, "men" he says "who are well acquainted with the people of their districts and are all the best of their class, men of good judgement." "Even the miners" he says, as if anyone might doubt it, "who represent their unions are considerate, prudent, and desirous of administering the Poor Law with equity." The Canon himself, however, was more in favour of the workhouse and the only constraint on him was lack of space:

Personally, I advocate a more frequent use of an "order of the house", but we could not exercise it with any freedom except at great expenditure on buildings.

Even so, when we turn to Census reports we find that in 1911 there were 3,374 people in workhouses in Northumberland, 96 of whom were in the Castle Ward Union. Even as late as 1931 the figures were 1,411 and 54 respectively.

Right through the course of my grandfather's working life although less so near the end of it, he felt the threat of the workhouse was ever present if misfortune were to overtake him. His mother was born in a workhouse. Would he die in one? And my grandmother did really worry about it communicating a fear to her children which they have never forgotten.

Social conditions and social attitudes of the sort outlined are simultaneously constraints on and conditions for social change. They represent a field for action, both for the individual and for the community as a whole. For the individual they prompt efforts at self improvement self protection and change; for the community they prompt neighbourly self help, political and industrial action.

Social Differentiation: Perception and Paradox

It would be too simplistic to say that such experiences and feelings give rise to a uniformity of political viewpoint. There were clear political divisions in the village reflecting cleavages in the labour movement and social division on Throckley itself. Throckley was not an homogeneous community. There were several lines of social fissure despite the fact that most of the families were connected with the pit. There were, firstly, territorial divisions. The people who lived north of the West Road in the so-called "High Rows" leading to the Maria pit saw themselves as a distinct group separate from those in Mount Pleasant and the Leazes.

These divisions generated a mild social rivalry, particularly for young people which found expression in football competitions and, among the boys, in what Albert Matthewson calls "sham fights" with poles! After the First World War new territorial divisions emerged along with the house building programme.

Alongside these were the religious differences. Church people and chapel people are said to have been quite distinct and to have kept themselves apart from one another. Even within the non-conformist group there was a division between the Wesleyans and the Primitives. These divisions had no great political importance and for most practical purpose did not matter at all. Indeed my family were always connected with the church but my mother and her brothers and sisters joined in with the chapel people in whist drives, dances and outings, there being no personal animosities involved.

Class was a potent principle. The barriers which it implied circumscribed completely how people felt their social position. C. F. G. Masterman, the great Liberal MP and social reformer of Edwardian England commented on class in the following way revealing the great chasm which separated the different classes:

We are gradually learning that 'the people of England' are as different from, and as unknown to, the classes that investigate, observe and record, as the people of China and Peru. Living amongst us, never becoming articulate, finding even in their

directly elected representatives types remote from their own, these people grow and flourish and die with their own codes of humour, their special beliefs and moralities, their judgement and their condemnation of the classes to whom has been given leisure and material advantage. (1911: 98)

And he goes on to quote one observer commenting on the high walls which divide the classes: "There is not one high wall but two high walls between the classes and the masses and that erected in self defence by the exploited is the higher and more difficult to climb." (1911: 99) How far these divisions were breached is a profound measure of social change. For the moment I want only to add that there were strong and subtle differences among workers themselves.

Throckley was dominated by the big house and the Stephenson family and the pit itself produced other divisions. The gap between the pitmen and the pit officials was an important one. Officials not only had more money and power, they had better houses and closer contacts with the Stephensons. But even among workmen themselves there were the subtle divisions between hewers and datal men, underground workers and surface workers, differences which translated themselves not only into different wages, but also into social status. There were also divisions between miners and other groups of workers. Albert Matthewson told me that some of the steel men from Newburn who were earning good money at Spencers thought the miners "beneath contempt."

Overriding the differences among the miners themselves and other working men there was, of course, the bigger gulf between the miners and the local white collar workers of various kinds. The traditional professionals, the vicar, the minister, the doctor were, of course, accorded a great deal of respect. This was not so true of the shopkeepers or the clerical workers who worked for the coal company, the store, or the urban district council. A typical reaction to such people among miners was to deny them their basic masculinity. Several people have reported to me a form of abuse which goes: "He couldn't hew himself out of a paper bag." This was always deployed against ostentatious shows of clerical superiority or arrogance. My grandfather's favourite comment for such cases was: "If they paid him his wages in coppers he wouldn't be strong enough to carry them." Given their education pitmen could hardly make a claim to status by appeals to knowledge; they could have claimed a greater right to respect on the basis of their underground skills. But since, in Throckley, these skills were not in any case regarded as special the only recourse was to stress their toughness as what, in the end had to be respected.

In the competition for the hallmarks of status miners in Throckley were seriously handicapped, because they shared much in common; there were few ways in which they could easily distinguish themselves from one another. Mark Benney had made much of this fact and drawn from it an important conclusion:

The income of every mining family, insofar as it is derived from the mine, was known to everybody. The pretensions of urban living were impossible here. No family could assume higher standards than its income warranted without incurring ridicule. Here, perhaps, part of the reason why miners made their demands on life as a community, not as individuals. (1946: 24)

Ironically, to some, paradoxically, perhaps, it was by acting as a community that another division appeared in Throckley, that between natives of the place and 'outsiders.' It was always evident, of course; but in the 1930s, as I shall show, it coloured the policy of the union lodges on questions of employment and unemployment. They sought to give men from Throckley priority in all matters to do with the pit. Locality under certain conditions was a far more potent symbol of belonging than class.

That there were few differences among Throckley miners in respect of social and economic position had another, almost paradoxical effect. Claims to be different had to be based on more abstract qualities such as respectability, bearing, honesty, integrity, learning.

Among women the criteria which operated involved such notions as propriety i.e. whether or not a woman moved outside the strict limits both in her work and leisure, which defined the respectable wife. Tidiness, cleanliness, keeping children under control were also of great significance. Women who let their houses

become dirty or did not see to their children were looked down on. Albert Matthewson, reflecting on the difficulties faced by women in Throckley and noting "I don't know how they survived" told me that "some just didn't care. There houses were like middens."

Some families came to be labelled as particularly scruffy or unrespectable. They were not cut off socially but they represented a kind of benchmark against which the social status of the rest could be measured.

The paradoxical effect is this: since it was assumed that everyone was in the same boat, any evidence of falling behind, of slovenliness or of poor standards of work any failure, in fact, to meet the current standards of respectability, was taken as an indictment of the individuals concerned and not as a reflection of prevailing social conditions. Among other effects perhaps the main effect of such views was to stigmatise those who would demean themselves by going to the 'Guardians' for financial help and to look down on those who persistently borrowed or scrounged off others.

The same sense that much was held in common operated, too, to censure those who sought to stand above everybody else and claim social distinction. Whenever this happened the person in question would be immediately reminded of their past and questioned aggressively with "And who do you think ye are?" An upward change in social status which did not incur the contempt of others was only possible if it involved an explicit acknowledgment by those affected that they were still part of the

community and in many other respects were just the same as anybody else. Here, perhaps, is the clue to why those with sufficient detachment from the village with some ability to see its faults and sense its improvements sought office in the union or, after the First World War, in the Labour Party or the co-operative store rather than in personal aggrandizement. Public political life brought the rewards of status and respect of others and avoided the acrimony of individual social climbing. As Mark Benney says, they made their demands as a community and not as individuals.

Political Parties

The political mood of the village at the turn of the century and of the Wansbeck Divisional constituency of which it was a part, was Liberal. Charles Fenwick, Thomas Burt's good friend and parliamentary colleague, a miner himself, was the M.P. The active political force in the village was the Throckley-Walbottle Liberal Association, presided over in 1905 by Councillor Kirton. James Bestford was secretary and Thomas King the treasurer, all of them leading co-operators. There was a small local branch of the Conservative and Unionist Party with political representation on the Urban District Council. In 1914 its president was Mayor Stephenson, the managing director of the coal company. The active political group, at least until 1905-6 was, however, the Liberals, the Party of Gladstone, Free Trade, Home Rule for Ireland and Social Reform.

Something of their political preoccupations comes out from local newspaper reports of their meetings in 1905 and 1906, the time of the great Liberal election victory. The Blaydon Courier reported a meeting of the branch in 1905 when it was addressed by a Mr. Vietch of Newcastle and the parliamentary candidate for the Tynedale Division, Mr. Robertson, in the following way, noting the former's comments that the present government (i.e. of Mr. Balfour) was "a menace to good government and the dignity and efficiency of the House of Commons", the report goes on:

The influence of the private member in the House of Commons had been reduced to nil. The government did not like men to express their own minds but wanted them to follow simply as hacks at the heels of Mr. Balfour.

He went on to hope that the next Liberal government would reduce taxation and have clearly thought out policies. The meeting was then addressed by Mr. J. M. Robertson, the prospective M.P. His main point was:

It was the business of a government of a great industrial country to take scientific measures for dealing with unemployment as a more or less permanent fact.

His own solution involved measures such as technical education and public works and more effective taxation of landlords. This particular mark has a clear radical thrust and he followed it with an appeal to the labour question:

The test that a practical working man would put to any party was: What are they going to do for the betterment of the condition of labour? Any government in this country ought to be prepared to stand or fall by that test. (Blaydon Courier October 21st 1905)

Robinson was successful in the 1906 General Election and as an M.P. addressed the Throckley Liberals the following October in 1906. His theme this time was to distinguish the Liberals from the Labour Party. In retrospect his address was a timely one for 1906 was a turning point; the Liberals were at their zenith but poised for a long term demise undermined by the growing Labour Party formed in that year.

There were more socialists in the Liberal Party than in the Labour Party - that was, men who believed that the evolution of society was in a Socialistic direction. But these men were what might be called philosophical Socialists and were not disposed to make attacks on property or confiscate wealth. They were Liberals who saw ahead. (Applause) (Blaydon Courier October 13th 1906)

There were, however, other voices to be heard. This was a period of great activity for the Independent Labour Party and this movement established many branches throughout the Northumberland and Durham Coalfield during this period (R. Gregory 1968)

In April 1905 there were only four I.L.P. branches in Northumberland. These were in Newcastle, North Shields, Ashington and Wallsend. (A. W. Purdue 1974) By 1906 there were branches at Bedlington, Benwell, Pegswood, Blyth, Walker, Seaton Delaval, Cramlington and Throckley. In the Throckley branch the active members were Richard (Dick or Dickie) Browell, from Blucher, Dan Dawson, J. H. ("Henna") Brown from Throckley and George Curwin. They were all miners and later became officials in their lodges. Browell and Dawson were staunch Methodists and they maintained a very active branch. Mrs Gibb of Morpeth, an old Labour stalwart and north regional organiser of the Labour Party in the inter-war period, told me that the meetings they organised were "terrifically well attended." Dan Dawson, she said, was "politically obsessed." He was a very effective organiser with the power to make branch members feel very obliged to attend meetings. The I.L.P. she told me was very effective among ordinary miners both in Throckley and district and throughout the coalfield. The Throckley branch meetings in the co-operative hall were held on Sunday evenings and they were, as Mrs Gibb says, "packed". "I can recall the atmosphere of that packed co-op hall. It was like a well-attended church."

The Throckley ILP went on until the 1930s; it was this organisation, in fact, which gave precise definition to the Labour politics of the Throckley activists and when, after the First World War, Labour Parties were formed in the area (i.e. in the Wansbeck Division and

the Newburn District) the principal officers were ILP men. The ILP directly shaped the character of the Labour Party in the area and were active in the union lodges.

The ILP campaigned in this period for Labour representation in Parliament, a demand which brought them into conflict with the Liberals. The tone of their political engagement with the Liberals can be gauged from a report of an address to an ILP meeting given by Philip Snowden in Benwell, four miles east of Throckley near Newcastle. His address concerned unemployment:

They had had something like 80 years of Liberalism and Toryism, and what was the position of the working people of the country to-day? They had nothing to conserve to be liberal with, and therefore, they owed no gratitude to either party for anything that had in the past been done for them.

He went on:

The agitation on behalf of the unemployed had been carried on exclusively by the Socialists and the Labour Party in this country (applause) ... All the industrial and social reforms secured during the last thirty or forty years had been won from the Liberals and Tory Governments by Trades Unions.

(Applause)

He finished with a savage criticism of the House of Lords and after his speech the meeting ended with songs from a local choir and a violin solo.

The rise of the ILP brought conflict, too, within the union which directly threatened the position of Thomas Burt and Charles Fenwick, the ageing leaders of the miners. (R. Gregory 1968) The union leadership tried to portray the ILP as 'outsiders' whose influence was resented. (NMA Executive Minutes 1908 NRO 759/68) The ILP response, articulated by Philip Snowden at the Northumberland Miners' Picnic in 1908 was that: "The differences which had existed between trades unionists and socialists were very small. In fact the trades unionists had been a socialist all the time without knowing it." (NMA Minutes 1908 NRO 759/68) The union decided finally in 1911 to sponsor only Labour candidates. Under the leadership of William Straker, Burt's successor as General Secretary, this change was completed. The union had, therefore, between 1906 and 1911 switched its allegiance from the Liberals to Labour. How this shift was experienced on the lodges is a question yet to be researched. It is likely that older miners never lost their attachment to the Lib-Lab politics of Burt and Fenwick. "Ye monna say nowt agyen Burt and Fenwick" was the advice given to Matt Simm, the ILP activist when he launched their monthly newspaper, the Northern Democrat. (R. Gregory 1968: 74)

In the Throckley case, however, the socialists were strong and effective but the Liberals were, too. My uncle Bill insists that in this period my grandfather clung to the older traditions and even helped the

Liberals at election times. For him it was still the party of the working man. Liberalism forms an important link for this period with another key institution of the village, the Co-operative Store.

The Co-operative Store

When my grandparents moved to Throckley one of their first acts was to join the co-operative store. Going to work brought my grandfather into contact with the union; feeding the family was his link with the store. That the meaning and purpose of particular institutions change over time reflecting larger shifts in the political temper of the working class as a whole, is a theme very well illustrated in the case of this institution.

G. D. H. Cole notes in his history of the co-operative movement, that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a period of very rapid growth in the movement, the attachment of the movement to Free Trade ensured that "the effective weight of the Movement was as much on the side of Liberalism as was the weight of Non-conformity. Religious Dissent and Consumer's Co-operation were twin props of Liberalism; and the young men who had embraced Socialism and were struggling to convert the working class movement to the Socialist faith found the going very much heavier in the Co-operative societies than in the Trades Unions." (G. D. H. Cole 1944: 192)

The movement, he says, "had not passed through the same evolutionary experience as the Trades Unions." Unlike them it was not involved in direct class struggle; it

was more concerned with consumer's interests and in the period of expansion both of unions (particularly for the unskilled) and of co-operation they drifted further apart, the earlier connection which had existed between them and which had been based on Owenite Socialism and Christian Socialism becoming a mere dull echo of a receding past.

Between 1881 and 1900, the period in which Throckley store was founded, national membership of retailing societies increased from 547,000 to 1,707,000. (G. D. H. Cole 1944: 212) In two main ways the Throckley store was typical of the movement in this period. The first is that its executive committee was entirely male and its active leaders were also active in the local Liberal Association. This situation did not alter substantially until after the First World War. In both respects the character of the store reflected not just the position of the movement but the order of late Victorian society as a whole both in relation to the position of women and the state of working class politics. G. D. H. Cole says of the former that, "it was still a very common notion in all classes that women were unfitted for the conduct of business and ought not to take part in public discussion." (1944: 184)

"The stores", as it was and still is referred to, was founded in 1887 and became an independent society in 1892. Prior to that people in Throckley had to shop either in the small shop leased to Mr. Henderson by the

coal company or travel to Lemington, Newburn or even over the river to Blaydon to shop at the co-operative stores there. The bi-centenary brochure of the society puts it glowingly:

After years of weary trudging down the COLLIERY WAGONWAY to LEMINGTON for their groceries and provisions - some of whom, we are told, took with them handbarrows - an opinion was apparent that their PARENT SOCIETY should provide shopping facilities in their own district.

This was ultimately achieved in 1887.

Having now tasted the fruits of actual shopping facilities and realised the benefits of co-operation in their own little village, it was not long before the IDEALISTS, imbued with the spirit of co-operation and dreams of self preservation, visualised the possibility of a VILLAGE STORE of their own.

(Throckley District Co-operative Society. Souvenir Report and Balance Sheet 1942)

As the main commercial retail store it gained the custom of nearly everyone in the village. But from the beginning it offered other services. The Tailoring Department, no doubt in recognition of the fact that it was serving a mining community, used to advertise itself for instance with the slogan, "Mourning orders executed on the shortest notice." It offered a burial service an insurance service and, above all, it acted as a building society and even provided houses itself.

Before the turn of the century it had built sixty-three houses - in Hilda Terrace, Orchard Terrace and Victoria Terrace - and sold them to co-operative members at cost price. Such houses were thought of in the village as being superior to colliery houses and even now they are still in good repair, many of the colliery houses having been demolished. In 1910 they built a further nineteen houses at Throckley, allocating them by ballot among those members who had applied for them. For the moment, however, the point is this: the hegemony of the coal company was breached considerably by the co-operative store and during the inter-war period, as I shall show later, particularly during the troubles of 1921 and 1926 it performed a vital function in extending credit to families without any income at all.

The meetings of the co-operative were well-attended and very lively. Mr. Stobart, a well-known centenarian in Throckley told me that the quarterly meetings "were better than a Saturday night out. Everybody wanted their say to argue with the committee." The reason, of course, was that the store controlled a great deal of resources and job opportunities and was one of the few institutions in the village (apart from the union) which was properly accountable to ordinary people themselves, an accountability which they were reluctant to see slip through their hands.

Membership of the store was easily achieved although it was confined to men. The initial cost was five pounds, the price of five one pound shares in the business which

members could either pay at once or, as most of them did, in installments. The benefits of membership were wide. Profits were returned to members as quarterly dividends and the store did provide a wide range of services apart from shopping including such things as dressmaking and dentistry and an optician called round each month. The store ran an education department which offered entertainment and reading facilities in the store hall and it organised annual excursions. In 1908, for example, they organised their excursions to Edinburgh making a charge of 5s 6d for adults and 2s 9p for children. They occasionally ran competitions, too. In 1912 they offered prizes of £5, £4 and £2 in a pipe colouring competition. They opened, in 1917 a penny savings bank for members at 4 per cent interest and one of the major services they provided was the extension of credit. They ran a delivery service around the neighbouring villages and up and down the pit rows making shopping a very convenient business for the wives of Throckley.

As a business enterprise the store was very successful as the following figures indicate.

Business Records
Throckley Co-op. 1904-1920

	Membership	Average Quarterly sales	Quarterly profit	Accounts owing	Accounts owing per member	Dividend in the pound
	£	£	£	£	£	£
1904	1207	13565	2624	575	0.47	3/4
1908	1403	20,739	3820	931	0.66	3/7
1912	1657	39,594	6440	1717	0.96	3/4
1916	2071	33,504	9726	2357	1.13	3/-
1920	2433	110,947	11091	1639	0.67	2/-

Source. Balance Sheets of Throckley District Co-operative Society Ltd., North Eastern Cooperative Society, Gateshead.

In the sixteen years leading up to 1920 membership doubled, sales increased eightfold, profit increased fourfold. By 1920 the store held £46,785 worth of investments in other companies as investment capital in addition to its own assets and was making annual subscriptions to a wide range of organisations such as the National Life Boat Institution, National Council of Civil Liberties and the Central Labour College.

Membership of the store executive committee was a mark of some honour and, particularly in the period after the war, a matter of local political concern. Some of the Labour men, George Curwen and Billy King, for instance, were on the co-operative committee in 1905 although the Liberals, lead by John Eggie were still the dominant group. By 1913 the position was reversed.

Work in the local store was eagerly sought by many believing it to be secure and respectable. Indeed, my grandmother's niece and later her own daughter, Eva, worked for a while "in the stores" and so did Francy, aunt Maggie's daughter. My grandfather's view of the store was mildly cynical. He used to say, "One son in store is worth ten down the pit" implying that the scope for fiddling was great but his views were not sufficiently strong to incline him to leave.

The significance and meaning of the store goes well beyond the service it provided, however. Co-operation for the activists was much more than simply a way of shopping; it implied a whole social philosophy.

The Lib-Lab M.P. for the area, Charles Fenwick, addressed the sister store to Throckley, Newburn store, at its annual meeting in 1905 in the following way:

They were making handsome - too handsome he thought returns to the members each quarter. He was not a believer in big dividends. (cheers) By having reduced their tariff they enabled working people



Throckley Co-op Staff 1907

to continue their connection with the Society when times were bad.... He would like to see the productive side of the movement develop more ...

We are a long way from the realisation of State Socialism in this country, but in the co-operative movement they had a form of voluntary socialism which interfered with no man's liberty and did no injustice to any man, and yet tended to increase the material resources of the working classes,

and thereby to considerably encourage their opportunities for enjoyment.

He wanted to see more attention given to the educational side of the movement, particularly among young people. Instead of devoting so much time to football, let them give more attention to education. (my emphasis - W.W.) (Blaydon Courier April 8th 1905)

That same year John Wilson, the Durham Miners' M.P. addressed the annual general meeting of the Throckley store. He spoke after the acting chairman, school teacher and local Liberal activist, John Eggie, had referred to Throckley as "one of the best little societies in the North of England."

He thought he was a poor man who worked, as some co-operators worked, for dividend.

Co-operation, in his view had a wider ameliorative social purpose:

Dividend was a sweet thing but he believed this to be the mercenary side of co-operation, and not the real side ... There was a higher ideal - a force to remedy the social disabilities under which they were labouring. (Blaydon Courier October 14th 1905)

The paper notes that, at the end of the meeting, "songs were rendered" by Miss Todd of Haydon Bridge.

Dividend accumulation was the only form of saving available to people in Throckley. In 1913 average purchases amounted to £24.00 per quarter and dividend was paid out at a rate of 3s 4p in the pound.

This means that an average customer would accumulate approximately £5 each quarter, £20 each year, a considerable sum of money before the First World War. This was a time when the store advertised mens' suits at £2.5s, cycles for £4.19s 6d, a grey overblanket for 10s 6p and a "Genuine Grandfather Clock for £3.

My grandparents were members of the store from the time they arrived in Throckley and through his pig-rearing my grandfather did business with it, selling his pigs to the store butcher. He was not, however, a co-operative ideologue; the store for him was a means of saving, a source of credit and supplier of reasonably priced good. It was not, however, just a shop. He took an interest in its affairs and he supported strongly the idea of distributed profits through dividend and the provision of a wide range of services for the community.

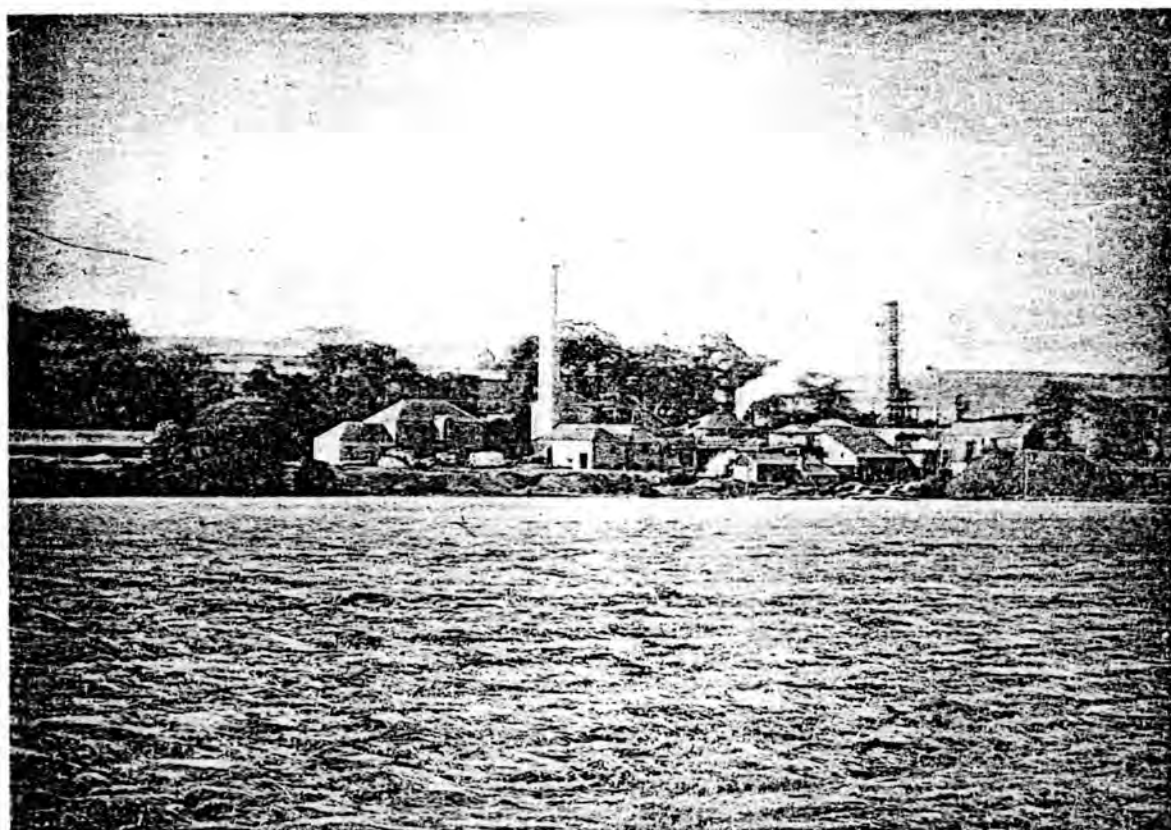
I conclude this chapter with a point of theory. The institutions described, the coal company, the churches, the school, the political parties, the co-operative store and the various clubs and events which were the warp and weft of Throckley's associational life can not be understood as fixed structures in a metaphorical social landscape. For the people who lived in Throckley these institutions were woven into the daily patterns of their everyday lives. They carried a distinctive significance for precisely that reason. The meanings which were attached to this institutional mosaic represent the symbolic perimeters of Throckley as a community.

(c.f. E. Thorpe 1970) From this perspective, Throckley was not a community bounded by the dilly line and the fell road; its boundaries were much less evident. They were defined by the shared system of meaning and values which people from Throckley could draw upon to give a coherent account of their social life.

In the next four chapters, through a discussion of my grandparents, I seek to show how that pattern of meaning was maintained in the daily routines of everyday life, at work in the pit and in the home, at play, and in the character of relationships in the family itself. But what the account shows, necessarily, is that the mosaic was a changing one; Throckley was a constructed community but unlike a building, it was never finished. It was always, as it were, in the process of construction and, to press the metaphor, under the guidance of different architects at different points in time.

Chapter Six

PIT WORK



Throckley Colliery 1908

Throckley colliery was started in 1869. It stands where the old flood plain of the Tyne gives way to the rising valley at the base of the Well Field. The pit had two shafts, the Isobella, named, as I explained previously after the daughter of one of the coal owners, and the Derwentwater, named, perhaps, after the Earl of Derwentwater, a former landowner in the area.

The expansion of the colliery in the last decades of the nineteenth century was what lay behind the growth of Throckley itself and it is to a great extent the nature of the work which went on there which explains the character of the community which the pit spawned. Here I am in full agreement with George Evans who perceptively noted, '... to understand the basic structure of the social relations in a working community we have, first and foremost, to study the work itself in some detail; in other words we have to know the material culture at least moderately well.... For a man's attitude to his fellows grows, at least in part, out of the terms and conditions under which he works.' (1976: 152)

In what follows I seek to describe the pit, the work done in it and the kind of men who worked there revealing, I hope, something of the reality of pit work and, by that token, a major part of the experience and class position of my grandfather and men like him. What the account shows is that work in the pit opened up questions of politics and economics which went far beyond the immediate setting of Throckley. The union was a critical means of political education opening the eyes of miners to the larger world around them, forging from their immediate experience of work a consciousness of class and social affairs which nourished the Labour Party and which ultimately eroded the dominant position of the coal owners.

Class, as explained in the introduction to this book is a relationship between men. According to circumstance and opportunity it is a relationship marked at one extreme by harmony and co-operation and at the other by conflict, acrimony and struggle. I show in this chapter that while conflicts borne in the act of winning coal were carried through at different levels in the social structure e.g. in union negotiations with employers or in campaigns to influence Government policy, the politics of such conflicts cannot be understood apart from the character of graft underground.

Pit work shapes the men who have to do it, casting their characters in a special mould. It builds a self respect and social status around such values as toughness endurance and underground skill. 'It is clear' write Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter 'that the work a miner does and the wage he receives both express concretely his status as a man and as a member of his profession.' (1956: 74) The work builds up, too, a basic attitude of helping others; it devalues competitiveness for the conditions are too dangerous. It fashions a distinctive pattern of social relationships both in families and in communities which must be understood if the more obvious political and industrial attitudes of miners are to be explained.

Pit work must not be seen, however, in isolation from the organisation of the companies which employed the men, the markets for which they produced coal, or the specific geological problems faced in particular pits.

Finally, it cannot be divorced from the character of economic life in the areas where the pits are found. Coal mining, as I explained, is a variable process and pit work differs from one pit to the next. The point that Royden Harrison made with respect to the study of mining trades unionism i.e. 'that we need more historical micro-comparative studies of coal mining communities if we are to return again, with profit, to histories of coal mining trades unionism', applies equally forcefully to pit work itself. (1979: 14)

Throckley Pitmen

Like the Heddon Margaret, Throckley was essentially a local pit recruiting the bulk of its labour from the immediate vicinity. From the census enumeration sheets of 1871 for the Throckley district the birth place of those describing themselves as miners can be calculated as follows:

THROCKLEY MINERS 1871

X BIRTH PLACE

Place of Birth	Number	Per cent of Total
Throckley	0	0
Villages Nearby	55	34.1
Villages or Towns in Northumberland	51	31.6
Elsewhere in England	37	22.9
Scotland	9	5.5
Ireland	9	5.5

Source: 1871 Census

Only about one third of the work force came from outside Northumberland and a very small proportion of those came from Scotland or Ireland. As I have already indicated (in chapter five) they were housed by the coal company in accommodation thought at the time to be of a high standard.

Group of Throckley Pitmen

(circa 1900)



The Coal Company had a clear policy of recruiting what they thought of as 'good workmen.' They were interested in respectable family men and particularly in those with Methodist convictions and abstemious habits. A report of 1897 describes something of the character of the men found at Throckley, commenting especially on the drink question:

It is estimated that the number of inhabitants now reaches close upon 2,000 and for a pit village it is claimed that in the orderliness and prosperity of its people it is second to no other in Northumberland and Durham. More than half of the miners are total abstainers, for the prohibition of drink, dogs, and pigeons keeps away those that are inclined thereto, and the result of the repulsion of these free-livers is a sort of artificial selection of steady workmen, who have in the course of years formed themselves into an industrious, peaceable and thriving community, as is evidenced on every hand. (from the Newcastle Daily Chronicle, quoted G. Hayler 1897: 25)

The report goes on to note that both chapels in the village were well attended and that the number of men attending morning service in the chapels was exceptional. The report goes on:

The miners are equally good in turning up for work in an efficient condition on Monday mornings - guiltless of "after-damp" from any Saturday and Sunday potations - and it is said that Throckley Colliery leads all the collieries of the county in this respect. (G. Hayler 1897: 25)

And in reference to the fact that the Board of Guardians for the district were only required to meet the school fees of three out of five hundred pupils the report concluded: 'Pinching poverty is almost unknown in this

healthy and well-conducted village.' The enthusiasm of this account must be tempered by the acknowledged facts of high infant mortality rates, insanitary drainage and cramped living conditions described earlier. But it does seem, nonetheless, that, given the standards of the time, Throckley was a good mining village, recruiting a respectable class of workmen attracted, we might surmise, amongst other things by steady work and comparatively good social facilities.

The pit produced for an inland, largely local market and up to 1914 expanded steadily free of the intermittent periods of expansion and contraction which affected those collieries elsewhere in Northumberland which were much more dependent on the export trade. This expansion is seen in the following table:

Numbers Employed by Throckley Coal Company
in Throckley Colliery

Hewers: Days Worked: 1898-1914

	Men Employed	Hewers Employed (in March of) each year	Average No of Days per Pay Worked
1898	724	-	-
1899	798	-	-
1900	850	321	11
1901	852	332	11
1902	835	328	11
1903	833	319	11
1904	873	343	11
1905	944	343	11
1906	874	370	11
1907	917	-	-
1908	906	-	-
1909	912	-	-
1910	874	-	-
1911	896	-	-
1912	901	-	-
1913	921	-	-
1914	772	-	-

Source: Northumberland Coal Owners Association:

Statistical Information. NRO/NC8/C/1

N.B. The statistical records are incomplete and no
colliery records exist.

The figures show that for every hewer there were at least two other men (or boys) employed. Other classes of workmen included putters, pit officials, engineers, blacksmiths, stable hands and transport men as well as those who worked on the small coke ovens attached to the pit.

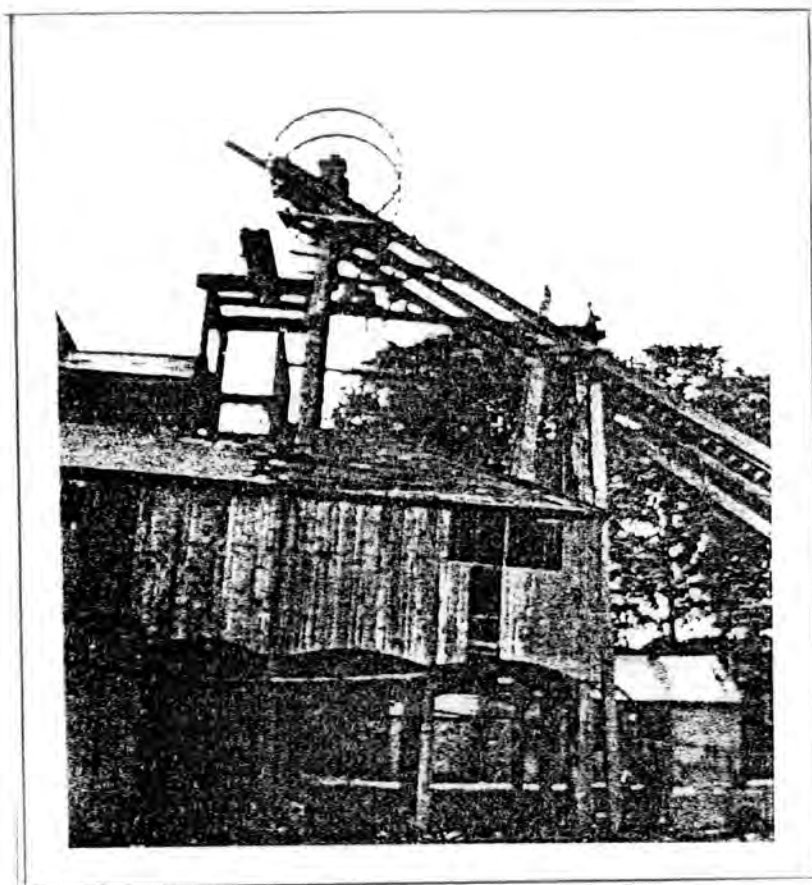
Steady employment means above all, steady wages and a sense of security and an ability to plan ahead. But it also implied that the coal company was a good one to work for, a factor contributing directly to that subtle balance of reciprocity between the owners and the men in which in return for a steady job the men gave a certain loyalty to the company. Other factors were, of course, involved, particularly the way in which the men were actually treated, but the steadiness of employment in Throckley was one of the pillars of a rather harmonious structure of industrial relations.

The unwillingness of Throckley men to strike and their general view that this was a good company to work for might also be explained, partly at least, by the fact that labour turnover in the pit was comparatively low; Throckley men, in contrast to those in pits further north in the county had, because of good facilities in the village, a vested interest in stability. Sam Scott the present General Secretary of the Northumberland Miners suggested this to me while making a comparison with pits in the Ashington area. Miners in that area were, he said, "just like gypsies, moving from one pit to the next." "Even the chickens and geese," he said, "used to lie on their backs every three months with their feet in the air ready to be tied up, put in a poke, and moved on to the next job." In addition, Throckley was a comparatively small colliery so that pitmen could much more easily get to know one another well. There were few strangers in Throckley.

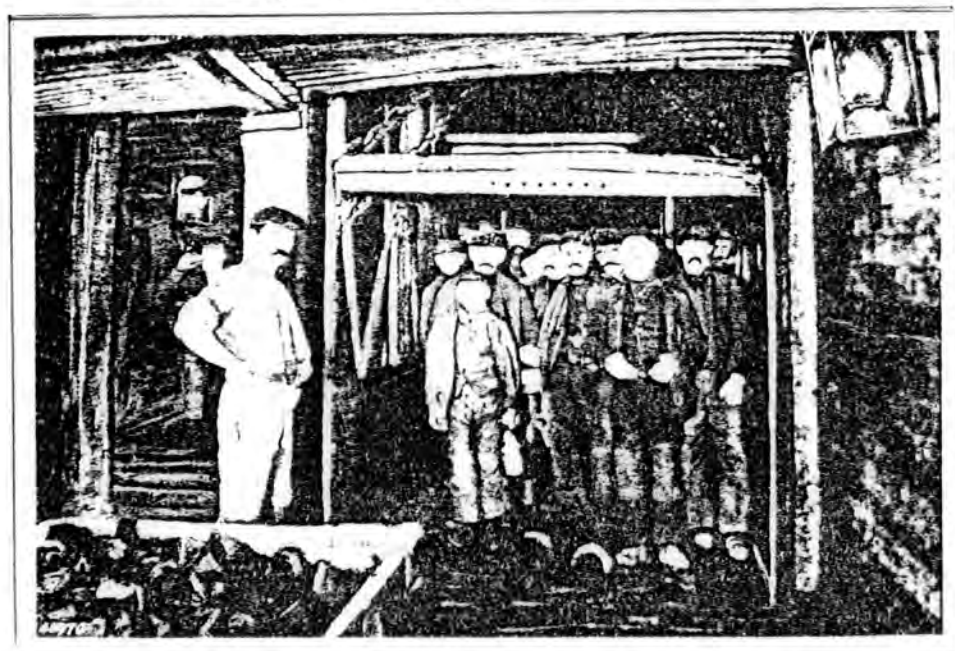
Work Underground

The pit was well placed geologically to work most of the main seams in the western district of the coal-field. It produced coals from the Harvey seam (known to the pitmen of Throckley as the Engine seam and always pronounced with a long stress on the 'i') the Hodge seam, the Tilley, the top and bottom Busty, the three-quarter seam and the Brockwell. This range of seams gave them access to several different markets. They produced mainly household coals which were sent to London, some coking coal, and steam coal which they sold to Spencer's steel works and to the railway company. Some gas coal was produced and sold to the Elswick Gas Works of which Sir William Stephenson was the Chairman.

The pit presented no special geological problems. It was in an area peppered by old and even ancient coal workings which the men would occasionally break into (hole into). It was a wet pit lying low in the valley and 1,200 gallons of water an hour had to be pumped out draining away through the pit pond down the 'burn' to the Tyne. To the west of the pit the coal measures outcropped; to the east, below Newburn they gave way to deep sand and gravel; to the north they were displaced by the igneous intrusion of the Whyn Dyke, a massive fault with a seventy foot displacement. The seams themselves varied in thickness from 18 inches to 3 feet and although the pit was wet, working conditions were not considered to be too bad.



Throckley Colliery Winding Gear 1930s



Shaft Bottom - Late Nineteenth Century

The geological information was given to me by one of the former Engineers of the colliery, Bob Reay of the Leazes; but the same facts concerning the dampness of the pit were interpreted for me in quite a different light by Mrs. Thompson, the daughter of the union compensation secretary, Jack Ritson. She remembers as a girl watching miners returning from work in the winter with their wet clothes freezing as they walked and throughout the year pit clothes having to be dried each day around the fireplace.

The system of mining coal in the Isabella right up to the 1930s was the traditional pillar and bord system with ponies being used for haulage. This was a system of working in which miners achieved a great deal of functional independence and in which small groups of mates or 'marras' could work together determining within wide limits the level of their own output and, therefore, their own earnings. A description of this system has been given by Eric Wade, a former mining engineer turned sociologist. I have drawn a rather full quotation from Wade since this method of working required of the miners a special range of skills and since the payment system underground was based on the different kinds of work task this system of coal winning implied, it is important to be aware precisely what the system was.

In the Northumberland and Durham coalfield there were two basic methods of working that required the use of putters. First, there was the Bord and Pillar system pioneered in the Tyneside coal basin

and secondly the Longwall Gateway System. The Bord and Pillar system was at the first stage of working a partial extraction system. From the main roadway entries were made into the coal seam to form a flat or district. These entries were driven at such a dimension as to allow the passage of a tub. These entries were known as tramways. There were two kinds of tramway (a) the Bords, and (b) the Headways. The Bords were driven at a greater width than the Headways. Coal has a basic cleavage plane known as a cleat. Hewers on working the coal found it easier to work in a direction at right-angles to the cleat than in a direction parallel to the cleat. Consequently for a given period of time more coal could be won in a working place in a Bordways direction than in a Headways direction. The Bords were driven, usually at least one yard wider than a tramway travelling in the Headways direction. At the first stage of working an area of coal would be locked out, leaving pillars, the dimensions of which were determined by the depth of the coal-seam from the surface, and the strength of the surrounding rock and the strength of the coal. As a rule of thumb between 40% to 50% of the coal was obtained in the first stage. This was known as working the 'whole.' When a predetermined boundary

was reached, the pillars were removed retreating towards the original entry point of the flat.

This was known as working the "brokens."

(E. Wade 1978: 24-26)

As a method of mining the pillar and bord system gave rise to little dust and it was relatively quiet. It was, however, very wasteful of coal since pillars of coal had to be left for safety reasons and it did involve taking out a lot of the roof to expose the coal. In the absence of mechanical conveyors and continuous coal cutters it was, however, the most technically efficient system of winning coal.

Reliant on physical labour the system shaped the sequence of tasks (or task structure) the miners were required to perform. A brief description of these tasks and the skills required for their performance indicates the complexity of the miner's skill.

Once the 'district' or 'flats' had been mapped out the miner's task was to drive the roadways, the headways and the bords. This involves taking up bottom stone and taking down roof space. Once the space is cleared supports have to be fitted, the wood needing to be precisely cut and shaped and tramways laid down.

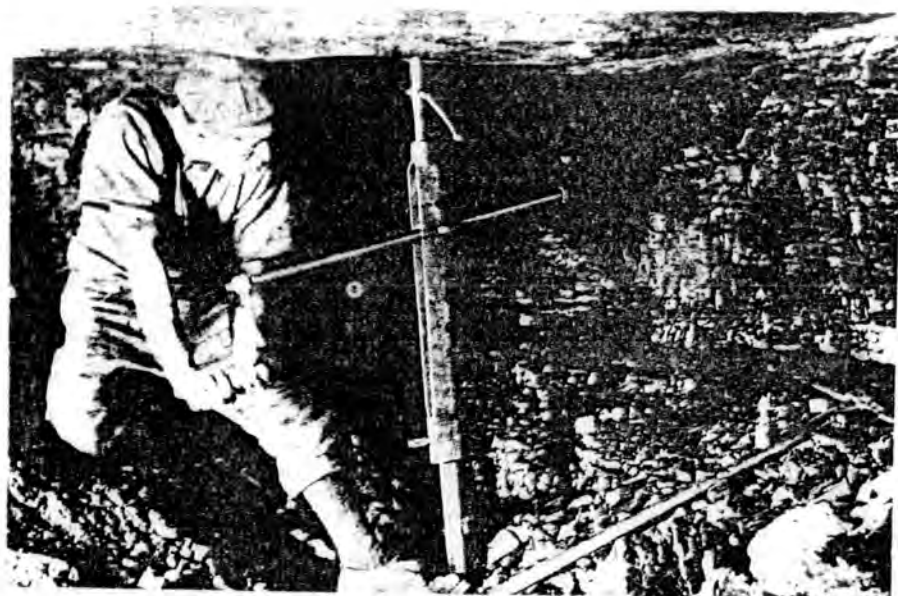
Working the coal itself involved drilling, the controlled use of explosives, heavy and inconvenient work with a pick, undercutting the seam of coal (the 'jud') and either shooting it down or hacking it away. This process of undercutting was



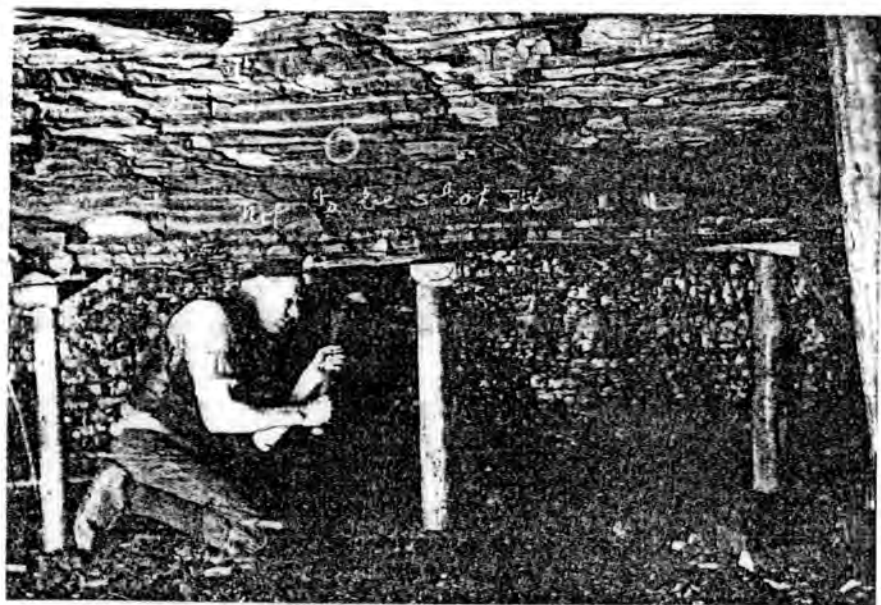
Coal Hewing Linton Colliery 1921



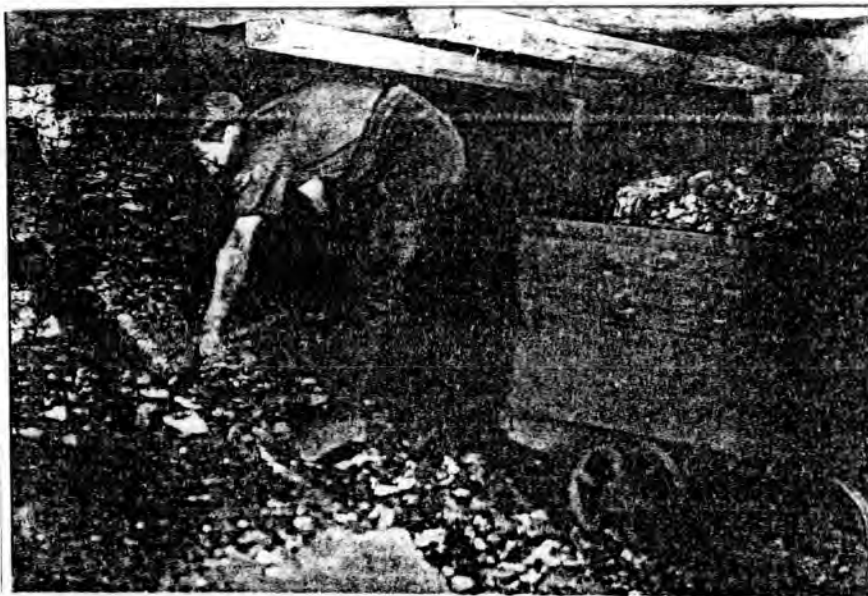
Coal Hewing Seaton Delaval Colliery 1926



Drilling Ashington Colliery 1911



Fitting Props Ashington Colliery 1911



Filling Ashington Colliery 1911



Putting Mickley Colliery 1880s

known as 'kurving.' Once cut the coals had to be 'filled' using a large pan-shaped shovel (always referred to in the Throckley area as the 'pan shull'). The filled tubs of coal were then pushed to the main tramways by the putter and transported to the pit shaft. After haulage the tubs were weighed by the master's checkweighman and the miners' checkweighman, a man whose wages were made up by the men themselves.

Since payment for his work depended upon how much coal was produced it is clear that varying geological conditions e.g. faults or hard coals, crumbling walls or hard stone floors, could affect output seriously. To make the distribution of working places equitable they were 'cavilled' for each quarter, a random allocation of work places among hewers and putters. And to acknowledge that a great deal of preparatory work is necessary before coals could be won the agreements struck between workmen and employers contained separate prices for different kinds of job.

Pit work is highly skilled with a finely graded career structure from trapper to putter and then, at the age of twenty-one to hewer. There was, of course, no formal training; essential skills were picked up often being passed on by fathers to their sons. The first thing he had to learn was the geography of the pit. Miners were never too sure exactly where they were underground in relation to the surface. Time and distance are distorted by darkness and it takes time to know the way underground although it is essential to get to know it if only for escape.

They had to get to know about the flow of air, the problems of gas building up and the dangers of naked flame. This was a matter, in fact, of knowing the law. Under the Coal Mines Regulations Act of 1872 many working practices were illegal. Boys under eighteen could not be in charge of dangerous machinery, pit cages had to be properly covered, travelling roads had to be provided with man holes, pit props had to be fitted properly, water levels regularly inspected and so on. These rules were for the general safety of the pit and had been hard won by miners themselves but their violation resulted in court enforced penalties for both employers and men. Since these regulations were enforced by the Mines Inspectorate they had to be learned and understood.

Pit work is a strenuous art requiring not so much that a man should be physically well built but that he should be sinewy and capable of sustained effort over long periods. My grandfather was, in fact, uncharacteristically tall. He stood over six feet but he was always lithe and strong with huge working hands. Pitmen have to be agile, too. To get to a coal face a man has to walk slightly stooped for often up to a mile; he has to dodge rock protrusions and perform a number of actions - swinging a pick, shovelling, ramming props into place - in very cramped conditions.

Finally, they need to understand the precise roles of other pitmen, to know what to expect from other men, to learn that men can be trusted and to acquire, as a matter of almost instinctive response, an ability and

willingness to help others below ground. Without that no pit can properly function.

It is difficult for non-miners to appreciate that such work, despite its difficulties, can bring satisfactions. My grandfather, like many others, was proud of his skills as a pitman. He enjoyed the company of other men. He liked the conversation - 'the crack', as he called it. He took great care in his work and enjoyed seeing jobs done properly, with precision. And he valued too, his autonomy. Eric Trist and his colleagues have referred to the miner under the pillar and bord system as a 'complete miner' performing a 'composite work role.' (E. L. Trist et. al. 1963: 33) It is this composite work role which 'has established the tradition and reality of faceworker autonomy.' (E. L. Trist et. al. 1963: 33) Since the same degree of autonomy was not available to putters in the pit, they being much more strictly controlled by the underground officials, it is understandable that the coal hewer, having experienced close and unwelcome supervision as a young man, would value his freedom and the underground status that freedom brought.

Accidents and Risk

Miners also need to acquire that uncanny knack (in other professions it would be called art) to anticipate dangers and balance their efforts at winning coal to the contingencies of the immediate situation. My Uncle Jim emphasised this to me in this way speaking of the fear in the pit:

No, you didn't have fears; you get used to it.
You are nervous at times. If it's dangerous you protect yourself because you know you've got to, and you keep her well timbered. Otherwise when it's good you seem to neglect it, you must go on you know, she's alright. And that's where people get hurt. You get a fall when you are not expecting one. But when it's bad and you know it's going to fall you timber it up to stop it, where when it's good you never think about it. That's where people gets lamed.

The subtlety of such interpretation is lost on miners themselves; they live in a taken-for-granted-world in which everybody knows much the same thing but they are practicing an art, nevertheless. The risk of fatal accident may not have been high but the risks of serious minor injury which could interrupt earning was high. The following figures from the Northumberland Coal Owners Association Mutual Protection Association indicate what the risk really was.

Accidents in the Northumberland

Coal Field

1899-1933

Date	No of Fatal Accidents	Proportion per 1,000 Miners	No Non Fatal Accidents	Proportion per 1,000 Miners
1899	30	.79	3174	84.2
1900	52	1.30	3107	77.4
1905	47	1.04	4961	109.9
1910	42	.75	8107	144.2
1915	47	1.15	6305	154.4
1920	36	.59	5168	84.4
1925	82	1.51	8635	159.1
1930	49	1.06	8525	184.9
1933	34	1.13	5840	194.3

Source: Northumberland Coal Owners Association Mutual
Protection Association 36th Annual Report 1933
NRO

The more effectively the art is performed the lower are the inherent risks of working underground. But there are risks, nevertheless, and they had to be faced. Harold Heslop in The Earth Beneath, the coalfield novel mentioned in a previous chapter noted a feature of the character of many miners when he wrote: 'Fearless contempt is the basic attribute of all those who chisel from the earth any of her treasures.' (1946: 27) Without some belief in fate and a resigned acceptance of danger it is not possible to work underground; fears need to be repressed and the miner needs to trust his own abilities. Small accidents were regular occurrences, bruised back-bones, cracked shins, cuts, scrapes - all of them

leaving the characteristic blue scars which are to be found on the skin of anyone who worked underground. Fatal accidents were less frequent but happened often enough to be a worry.

My grandfather himself had an almost fatal accident in 1913 which laid him up in bed for a while and left him with several permanent scars on his hands, arms and back. Jim described the accident to me in this way:

He was hewing and a jud fell on top of him. That's how he had all the blue marks on him. He would have been dead. There was an old fellow called Tommy Urwin - he went by the name of Barmy. If it hadn't been for him he would have been a dead man. But me father can remember seeing the light coming around the turn to come into his place then the jud came over. Barmy heard the jud and he run and he scratched down among the coals. He got him out and saved his life. He was cut all over. But he was off work a canny bit.

My grandfather said no more about it than he was lucky; he was grateful to Barmy Urwin but he never felt obliged to him in any way as a result of it. He himself would have done the same had the occasion arisen.

My uncle Bill, a schoolboy at the time, heard of his father's accident before my grandfather had reached home on the back of the colliery cart; the news had spread up the coach road and reached the schoolyard. This

- underlines starkly that what went on in the pit was very close to everyone, a point brought out even more vividly in the case of fatal accidents.

If there was a fatal accident at the pit it was customary for the pit to cease production and there was always a collection among the men to help the widow. If there had been a fatal accident the pit buzzer blew so that everyone knew about it immediately. What nobody could know, however, was who had been killed; that news came later. For a while, therefore, that buzzer sounded doom for everybody and symbolised in a fearful way the presence of the pit and its dangers.

The effect of death in the pit was a profound one; it forced everyone to consider their own personal position thereby underwriting the commonly heard phrase, "There but for the grace of God go I" and it symbolised starkly the collective interests of the whole community and its dependence on the pit. More profoundly still, by interrupting the busy flow of routines, a death in the pit gave people a chance to reflect and to compare, to distance themselves from their everyday life, if only for a while, and to see it in a new light, connecting it up with the past and relating it to the collective history of miners as a class. Harold Heslop notes of the Hartley disaster, for instance, that it 'enriched their conception of death.' (1946: 161) The disaster he said, helped the miners to identify with the role of 'the maligned creature of injustice.' 'Hartley' he writes, 'urged an inward pity which evoked a newer and more palpable resolution.... A conception of justice springs from lowly imaginings.' (1946: 161)

In my grandfather's lifetime there had been terrible disasters at Seaham and the 'death pit' at Stanley. Both of these he knew about and talking about them often gave him the opportunity to emphasise his view that it would be a "good job" as he used to put it "if nobody ever had to work doon a pit." This ambivalence towards work underground has played a major role in coal-field politics weakening the resistance of miners to pit closures. It is nonetheless something which death in the pit always reinforced.

It was reinforced further for my grandfather when, in 1906, William Brecons, his nephew the son of his sister Alvina was killed at Heddon. The funeral performed an important function too. It brought families together and strengthened communal ties in the village. My mother told me:

We took death seriously then, much more seriously than now. There were big funerals led by two "white hoods" - I was one once - and the procession walked to the church. People went into mourning for a long time ... for often up to three months, even the children wore black armbands.

If the death resulted in the pit the cortege was often led by the pit brass band. Funerals are occasions for reflection on the ultimate significance of our being on this earth and an opportunity to consider how important particular relationships have been and to re-think basic questions of religion.

My uncle Bill told me that he and my grandfather went to a funeral in the pit village across the river, Clara Vale. The day was wet and the ground very muddy. The lowering of the coffin into a sludgy grave upset Bill and afterwards, angry at the meanness of it all, he said to my grandfather that it would have been just as appropriate to leave the body in the pit. My grandfather reacted badly to this, saying, "If they did that we'd be no better than animals; you've got to have a proper burial." Bill says he felt humbled by this reaction but it did not change his sense of disgust. Death in the pit is very close; pitmen could identify with it and project themselves in the role of the dead man.

Again, the records of the Northumberland Coal Owners Mutual Protection Association coldly records cases which would almost certainly have been discussed by my grandparents and about which they would feel "There but for the grace of God go I":

Case No 387 Throckley

Matthew Hope, 43, deputy. Died on May 21st 1907 from acute pleurisy.

The doctor who attended Hope certifies that death was the result of injuries received on April 8th 1907 when Hope was crushed by a fall of stone.

Deceased leaves a daughter aged 10 who is the only dependent.

Three years earnings £27⁴ 7s 3d

House and coals £ 39 0s 0d

Deceased received weekly sum of £4 in the form of weekly payments of compensation prior to death.

Claim made.

Full liability admitted £296

Or, a case much closer to my grandfather's condition:

Case No 463 Throckley

Matthew Nixon, 31, hewer. Killed on September 52th 1908, by a fall of stone.

Deceased leaves a widow and one daughter aged 5, wholly dependent

Three years earnings £277 0s 8d

House and coals £ 33 16s 8d

Claim made by widow. Full liability admitted £300

The widow in each case would as a matter of course have to forfeit the house.

In the case of minor accidents there were compensation payments but the real problem here was the inadequacy of medical treatment. Throckley colliery did not acquire an ambulance until 1907; before that stretcher cases were taken along the West road to Newcastle General Hospital on the back of a flat cart pulled by a horse. If there was an accident requiring such transport the horse had first to be untethered and brought down from the Well field to the pit. In 1907 the Coal Company donated £150 towards the setting up of a small local hospital (which itself had been set up on the initiative of a group of local doctors and which was supported, too, by miner's union funds) but urgently needed treatment could not be guaranteed.

Miners needed to be conscious of their health; it related directly to their output and therefore their wages. They placed a value on being big and strong and fit for precisely this reason. As I shall show, these same values were held by their wives.

Relations Underground

Relationships underground were of two sorts, those concerned with other miners and those involving officials. Among the men themselves in Throckley where was a general friendliness and basic solidarity; the pit was thought to be a happy one and most men were known to one another for, as I have explained, there was little labour turn-over there. There was nonetheless a subtle hierarchy among the men and many of the social differences of the the surface, such as church affiliation or views on drink, particularly the differences of where men came from, reappeared underground in an attenuated form but in a form, nevertheless, which had a powerful influence on who became workmates. There were some men my grandfather would not work with because he thought them too lazy or too unreliable.

Before his sons started work my grandfather worked at Throckley pit with three 'marras', Mr. Guthrie from the Leazes, Watty Barnes from Blucher and Mr. Watson from the high rows. Like most other groups of men they worked together over many years building up a relationship of trust and mutual respect. They had to rely on one another for their output and safety. Their earnings, depended upon each one pulling his weight, turning in for work, making the place safe and getting out the coals. The men were paid as a group and the foreshift pair would get the wage every fortnight and share it out among the others. The pay out was on an equal shares basis unless there were adjustments to be made for absences.



James Brown (far right, back row) and Marras
circa 1914

These men were good friends of my grandfather; Mr. Guthrie had an allotment next to his so they met regularly socially. But their friendship was a functional one for the pit and the coal company for the relationships they had within the group itself acted as a great force for discipline at work. Any slackening, any unwarranted absence, any slipshod work would bring the appropriate response from the others, either a mild chivying or a severe rebuke. It was knowing that, though, which kept them all together working hard for their own collective good and valuing

greatly being able to work with others who worked well. There was a subtle hierarchy here based on ability to work which reinforced among the men themselves those qualities of effort and practical perseverance which the company valued in their employees. As a pitman my grandfather valued men who would "pull their weight." Doing what was expected of him at work was for him a positive value and he expected others to do the same. This was an attitude which carried over from the pit into other areas of his life, his avoidance of charity, his dislike of "scivers" and his determination to be independent. He placed great faith in what he took to be the fact that if he did his job well he could be free of carping control underground, that his own hard work was ultimately his best defense.

But there is one relationship which, above all others, deserves special note in the pit, that between father and son. There was no formal apprenticeship in mining although clearly much to learn, and this learning was frequently passed on from father to son. Fathers had an additional role, however, that of controlling their sons in the pit and of making sure the basic discipline of working - getting up on time, being ready for work, obeying the rules and giving their effort - were all maintained. In 1902 the Executive Committee of the Northumberland Miners Association discussed a case from Throckley of a miner being dismissed because of his son's behaviour. The Minute reads:

We are unable to entertain the case of the member of this colliery who has been discharged in consequence of a misdemeanour committed in the mine by his son. (NMA: Executive Minutes 1902: NRO/759/68)

What seems clear is that the union tactically agreed with the right of management to act in this way. In doing so the union was acquiescing in a form of management control which exploited kinship to achieve its end of regulating men at work. The way this worked out in my grandfather's case comes out clearly with my uncle Bill commenting on smoking down the pit, an offence punishable by gaol.

You weren't allowed to smoke in lamp flats ... but there'd be a lamp flat with a great strong current of air. We as miners knew that it was impossible for gas to lie and we'd maybe smuggled some dumpers in and smoked them in the airway. If my father heard about it! I remember once, me father an me. He said, "You've been smoking." I said, "No." Whey he could smell it! He didn't half give me a bloody lesson. He was strict, lad.

And uncle Jim reinforced this point saying:

He played war with ye. Aa've seen him come into a place after we've went oot like and he's followed us in. If it hesn't been timbered properly he's played war with us coming hyem at night aboot the way we've left the place, left dangerous. He'd play war.

When I raised the question of attendance and absenteeism with them they both answered, almost in unison, "Absenteeism! There was none!" And Bill went on to relate the following tale which gives a vivid account of my grandfather's attitude to work:

I was once on the back of a motor bike and we hit a drove of horses. I knocked me thumb oot. He was sitting with his pit clothes on when I come in. "You're late." I'll never forget this. He was sitting with that bloody pipe in. I said "Aye, a cannot gan, father." "Bloody pleasure, loss of work." He started at about twelve o'clock at neet. And here's me thumb oot. I went to the doctors next morning and he asked how long I had had that and how did I suffer it. I said "Ye want to gan and ask me father. He wanted me to gan to work." Work was first with father, pleasure second. If there was only time for work there was no time for pleasure. It was as simple as that.

Underground working was governed by a very complex system of payments and appeals and is well illustrated in the following agreement in the Joint Committee between the coal company and the workmen at Throckley in 1908. I have quoted it in full because it illustrates both the terms of the employment contract and, through that, the kind of issues about which the miner had to keep his wits vis a vis the underground management.

All seams, except Hodge seam, to be worked by curving juds and nicking and to be wedged and shot down. No jud will be allowed to be shot down unless it has been nicked and curved to a depth of not less than 30 inches. Scalloping will not be permitted in any of the seams except the Hodge seam. Best coal to be filled by itself and splints and top coal may be filled together.

Nicking, kurving, scalloping, wedging and shooting are the basic processes of cutting the coal from the seam and were all carefully regulated for reasons both of safety and coal quality.

Hours Foreshift hewers will go down pit at 4.0 a.m. Back-shift hewers at 10.0 a.m. All hewers to change at face. Lads to go down pit at 6.30 a.m. and ride at 4.30 p.m. Back-shift men to ride after lads. Pit to commence to draw coals immediately lads are down and cease at 4.30 p.m. On Baff Saturdays, pit will hang on at 4.0 a.m. and cease at 2.0 p.m.

Throckley men worked a six hour shift underground and the lads an eight hour shift.

Rent Hewers in rented houses and working ten days per fortnight will be paid 2s per week house rent and hewers working less than ten days in a fortnight will be paid at rate 4d per shift.

Deductions Coal leading 6d per fortnight. Water rate 4d per fortnight. Broken lamp glasses 6d each. Broken window panes cost of same. Repairs to drilling machines, cost of same. Lost tokens $\frac{1}{2}$ p each.

There were, in addition, deductions for the union and the cottage hospital; the men had to pay themselves for pick sharpening by the pit blacksmith and they had to buy their own powder from the company. Coal produced was paid for at given rates per ton and each particular task e.g. winning headways was paid for separately, the manager measuring the yardage won by each man and agreeing a price there and then to be paid for the job. Putters were paid partly by the distance they had to push their tubs. Some faces were a long way from the main roadways and this distance had to be compensated for both by the cavelling rules and the price arrangements.

The point about these complex pricing systems is that they invited conflict underground with a constant haggling over distances and whether particular places were too difficult to work profitably. In Northumberland those differences which could not be solved at pit level were referred to the Joint Committee of owners and men, which then had the right to appoint 'referees' who would go to the pit and investigate the dispute having in many instances the power to settle it. Most of the time, however, the problems were handled at pit level.

It is this bargaining which above all else sharpens the consciousness of miners about the broader context of their work and which forced them to acquire, in addition to their technical skills an economic wit and negotiating expertise which was vital to their earning power. George Ewart Evans has noted the consequences of such arrangements:

Negotiation, skill in bargaining, was ... vital to them in order to avoid the sharp edge of exploitation. They had a long and hard training in this, and in countering the numerous kinds of manipulation that were used in an attempt to sell them an agreement that was not basically in their interest. This is the reason why the miners have so often become a stumbling block to an unsympathetic government.

(1976: 157)

The whole system led to subterfuge, collusion, double standards, mutual manipulation and conflict, each intensifying or decreasing according to the market price of coal and the capitalist's sense of his profit. For the working miner, however, knowledge of the agreements and an acute awareness of his entitlements was an essential part of his skill and of his sense of his whole social position. His education in political economy was hard won in the literally black business of getting coals.

Relationships with management were of two sorts, those with the coal owners themselves and those with pit officials. As already explained the Throckley Coal Company, like many others, and certainly like the large landowners of England, delegated the responsibility of running the colliery itself to their agents. This policy was for them very functional; it meant that work-generated conflicts were always absorbed in the first instance by the underground management or the Viewer leaving the coal owners to bask in the glory

of their paternalism. And the fact that the owners themselves did not own the land or the coal, only buying, through royalty payments, the right to mine it, meant, in addition that they could always project with some credibility the idea of a commonality of interests between themselves and their workmen as against the royalty owners. Playing very much the role of the third party in industrial relations at Throckley the Stephensons also managed to cast themselves in the role of peacemaker. Several company employers have stressed for me the fact that men would often go over the heads of the manager of the pit to take their grievances to the Major finding him to be invariably fair and willing to listen.

The relationship between owner and workman contrasts sharply between that of workman and manager or underground official. Miners in Throckley just did not accord underground officials the same respect or tolerance. The underground staff were invariably the butt of the miner's discontent and filled this role for two reasons, one concerned with the social relations of employment, the other with the nature of a miner's work. The agreements struck between the Northumberland Miners Association and the Northumberland Coal Owners Association, agreements which reflected the general state of the coal industry as a whole and the relative power of the two groups, actually made some form of conflict underground inevitable. Conflict was built into the way in which different aspects of the miner's job was priced. But the work itself, under the pillar and bord system, produced in the men a

powerful resentment of supervision. Being highly skilled work and paid according to output and, above all, carried out by independent groups of 'marras', the men required 'neither instruction nor co-ordination.' (J. Goldthorpe 1959: 215 see also C Goodrich 1910) As Goldthorpe further emphasises: 'Not surprisingly, therefore, the colliers resented close supervision very strongly; there was a traditional hatred of being 'stood over'.' (1959: 215)

This dislike of supervision was clearly reinforced by the capricious way in which authority underground could be exercised. Miners could be sacked for using bad language to an official or for breaking many of the safety rules which the officials were required to enforce. It was in the interests of miners, therefore, to so act underground that no charge could be brought against them. If they worked within the rules they could keep the underground officials at a safe distance and avoid any personal contact of a demeaning kind.

Something of the hostility which did exist towards some of the underground officials is indicated in two quite separate accounts of different incidents underground which involved ponies. Old Tom Stobbart, speaking of Matt Foster, the Throckley overman, related a tale in which a miner was involved in an accident with a 'tickley-back' pony (pronounced powny in Throckley) where the bolting animal had derailed its tub and trapped the driver in a tunnel. Foster's first question on investigating the scene was, "Is the powny allreet?" Tom Stobbart

told me this to emphasise that they were, in his view, as miners, often treated worse than animals. My uncle Bill told me a similar story involving Matt Cheesman, the Throckley manager, shortly after he became manager at Throckley Maria pit where Bill was working. Speaking of Cheesman, a man he detested intensely, uncle Bill said:

He was a horror, a bloody stinker. I'll give you a tale of Matt Cheesman. This was when he came up to the Maria where we were working. Well, there was myself, Joe Wade and Togo Thompson putting at the Maria pit. I was first on and where I was some were going left, some first right, some straight down you know. Well, I was going straight down. It was heavy and we could only pull one tub out. And I had a great big horse called Nipper. I came out onto the West Brockwell flat.

If we were going to have our baits we would put choppy in the boxes for the ponies. First of all we would stop and give them a drink and then choppy. Well, I went to the choppy bag and had to shake it out into the box; hardly any in and I just put it down to Nipper. Joe Wade followed me out with his little pony called Mick. Joe said, "Any choppy, Billy", I said "No, there's none, Joe," so Togo Thompson followed out just the same and we sat down at the Deputy's kist. Matt Cheesman came in. I said, "Oh here it comes." I heard him going around the boxes. Well, mine had choppy in. There was a little in mine. So he came down and

he says, "Who's puttin' wi' Mick?" Joe Wade says, "Me". He just picked Joe Wade's bait up and dropped it into Mick's choppy box.

I was always a hot-headed bugger and didn't care if I got the sack or nowt. And, as I say, I was a bloody big lad. There was a water trough standing at the side and Aaa says, "Matt Cheesman, if ye had done that to me I would have ducked you in that bloody water trough." "What"? "I would have pushed you in that bloody water trough. That lad's walked from Violet Street, Benwell, this morning, to this bloody rotten hole and you do that for a bloody pony. I would have put you in that bloody trough and I would have drown you."

Not all Throckley miners saw Cheesman in the same light. Tom Stobbart told me he thought Cheesman was a fair man, a man who he used to go "fleein' pigeons with." The point here, of course, is that through education and life style, being little different from miners themselves, pit officials were caught up in all the normal cross currents of social relationships in the village; some were liked, others not. Whatever the feelings involved, however, underground officials were a focal point of conflict simply because of the employment relationship itself, a point brought out vividly again by my uncle Bill:

I was twenty-one and a half and coal hewing. My father was in a heading and I was in a bord. We were taking a bottom canch up and pulling the tubs through. We hit iron stone. They had us measured

that we were getting so much a yard for taking it up. We either had to rob the coal company or the coal company robbed us. I was drilling just top of the iron stone lifting clay. And, of course, that meant I was taking less bottom up than I should have been. I bet I was fifteen yards. The putter had been in and saw the pony scrape the top a little bit.

Cheesman came in, and with my hack, he pulled all the rails up. I'm in bye hewing. So he comes, sets himself down. I turned around and says "And you know what you can do? You can go and lay every one down." He says "You're not taking your height". I says "Look Matt Cheesman. You are paying us wrong. You pay us to take out underneath that iron. You know we can't drill iron stone. It's impossible. Either you've got to rob me or me rob you. This bord will only go so far in and it'll be stopped. Which is best?" Him and me were tooth and nail. My father hears us. He comes up. "What's on here?" "See what that bugga's done father? Mind the bugga will lay it down himself. I don't. Or he'll set the nightshift in because I don't." He says "I'll sack you." I says "Ye can bloody do that with pleasure." Me father got on well with him. "Now Matt, its no good talking to him like that because he'll welcome being sacked. So don't talk that way to him."

After my grandfather's intervention the dispute was patched up and Bill and my grandfather re-laid the rails. But that was the pit, a daily experience of conflict and acrimony built into the normal business of winning coal.

The Union

It is for the reasons just described that trades unionism for miners in this period was not something removed from their daily experience and organised by strangers; it was a major part of that experience. And just as my grandfather insisted on his sons going to work he made sure they attended union meetings. These were held in Throckley Co-operative store hall every fortnight or, in emergencies, on the side of the pit heap at any time. The fact that the coal company was careful in its labour recruitment is partly reflected in the figures for union membership at Throckley. Since the lodge records prior to 1934 do not exist the affairs of the pit have to be reconstructed from the minutes of the union as a whole. It is clearly an unsatisfactory procedure but no other is available.

At the turn of the century just over half of the men employed at Throckley were in the union. But by 1914 the figure was just on three quarters with recruitment increasing rapidly during the troubled period in the few years just before the war. The figures are as follows:

Union Membership as Percentage of the
Total Labour Force: Throckley Colliery

% 1898-1914			
	%		%
1898	43.3	1906	59.4
1899	57.1	1907	58.5
1900	55.4	1908	61.0
1901	55.7	1909	-
1902	57.1	1910	59.0
1903	57.2	1911	59.5
1904	53.7	1912	62.5
1905	59.4	1913	63.1
		1914	74.8

Source: From Northumberland Coal Owners Statistical Annual Accounts of the Northumberland Miners Association.

The union as a whole grew rapidly during this period. In 1898 it had 19,000 members and by 1914 this figure had risen to 37,000. Despite this growth there was always a problem, as the union saw it, of non members.

The period from 1900 to 1914 was an important one, for the Northumberland miners shifted their allegiance from the Lib-Lab politics associated with Thomas Burt to an explicit support of the Labour Party; they joined the Miners Federation of Great Britain and, in 1912, joined in the first national strike of miners over the Minimum Wage issue. Industrial struggles in the docks and on the railways, the formation of the Triple Alliance, the rise of the shop stewards movement, the growth of syndicalist ideas and the maturation of the Labour Party

are merely the surface manifestations of a great groundswell of protest and discontent throughout the Labour movement which severely challenged the whole fabric of Edwardian society. It is not necessary to agree with Walter Kendall that "In retrospect the unprecedented struggles of the years 1911-1914 seem the head of a lance probing the vitals of capitalist society, demanding recognition of the labour movement's new found strength and power." (1973: 192); but it is clear that during this period the veils which concealed the exploitative character of capitalism were for millions of workers torn away.

For the Northumberland miners this broad transformation in the position of the working class was crystallised around very specific struggles around the Eight Hours Act and the Minimum Wage dispute of 1912, both questions opening up the question of whether Northumberland should join the Miners Federation of Great Britain and face, in doing so, the prospect of dismantling the whole apparatus of district bargaining and, given the militant stance of the South Wales miners, a long tradition of conciliatory industrial relations. They were forced to consider simultaneously their economic position as miners and their political position as unionists.

The early part of this period up to about 1906 was for Throckley colliery an uneventful one; union recruitment was rising steadily alongside the numbers

employed at the pit and real wages were rising, too. The only resolution the lodge sent in to the Executive Committee of the union as a whole was about the keeping of dogs in colliery houses:

Seeing that the owners at several collieries in the county are forcing workmen either to do away with their dogs or remove from the colliery, we suggest that wherever such proceedings are taking place that if a majority of the workmen as per rule for strike, be in favour of resisting this encroachment of their personal liberty, they be supported by the county. (Executive Minutes 1901: NRO 759/68)

The resolution was, in fact, ruled out of order but it does perhaps represent some determination to resist a long-standing element of the social policy of the Throckley Coal Company.

Throckley lodge had no representation on the Executive Committee at this time but was represented on the Council of the Northumberland Miners by George Curwin and Bob Hutchinson. Through them the wider pre-occupations of the union were discussed at Throckley. Reading the minutes of the union for this period it is quite evident that the affairs of the mining industry could never be discussed aside from larger questions of politics and the State itself and here, surely, is the reason why later demands for the nationalisation of the mines can be seen to have arisen almost naturally out of the workaday experience of pitmen.

In 1901, for example, the union began a protracted battle against the Coal Duty which the Chancellor of the Exchequer had imposed in his budget. The duty of one shilling per ton export tax was seen by the Northumberland Executive as something which would lead to 'the extinction of our industry in the North.' They objected to it as a direct attack on free trade and called for a national conference of miners to discuss the option of 'a complete national stoppage of the coal mines in England, Scotland and Wales until the tax was withdrawn.' It was eventually withdrawn in 1906.

The campaign for the Eight Hour Day Act which was passed in 1909 after years of agitation and against which the coal owners had fought a long campaign, had finally made it possible for Northumberland to join the Miners Federation of Great Britain leading them to accept the case for nationally negotiated agreements in the mining industry. Throckley had, in fact, voted against joining the MFGB and had voted, too, against the Eight Hours Act, interpreting this measure, no doubt, as something likely to lead to an increase in the numbers of hours they had traditionally worked from six to eight. In the 1906 ballot on this question 131 Throckley men voted for the eight hour day and 304 voted against it.

The reason, perhaps, was that the coal owners had tried to link the passing of the Act to the abolition of the system of free house and coals, a central element of the employment contract in Northumberland to which the union was strongly committed. But what the struggle showed was that against the opposition of coal owners

the State itself could, through industrial action or the threat of it, be coerced to act on the miners behalf.

Precisely this sentiment was heavily confirmed in the coal stoppage of 1912 over the minimum wage question. Arising out of a dispute in South Wales, a ten-month-long strike beginning at the Ely pit of the Cambrian Coal Combine, the 1912 stoppage consolidated the Miners Federation of Great Britain, radicalised many miners, especially in South Wales and finally established the view that wages were a proper charge to the cost of the industry as a whole and should be freed from their dependence on the selling price of coal.

The strike lasted six weeks from March 1st to April 10th and was very well supported. It was a crucial strike, not so much for the victory gained in establishing a minimum wage, but for the way it helped the miners cut through the logic of coal owners that the living standards of workmen should depend entirely on the market position of the industry. The coal owners, for instance, were quite emphatic that minimum wages would wreck the industry. They told a deputation from the miners on October 21st 1911, that:

... the request for a minimum of 30 per cent above the basis would have led in past years to the closing of a very considerable proportion of the collieries in the county, and in some years, possibly the whole of them. (Minutes of the Northumberland Coal Owners Association: Book 11. NRO)

And in an open letter to the main newspapers in the area the secretary to the Northumberland Coal Owners, Mr. R. Guthrie, warned of the consequences of granting minimum wages insisting that it "would, if adopted, be detrimental to the workmen generally and fatal to the employment of old and weak men." (Blaydon Courier; January 1912)

This position was countered by many miners with the argument that, if the industry was more efficiently organised - and this could only be done through nationalisation - then the costs of decent wages could be met in higher productivity and greater efficiency. There is a very moving letter to the Blaydon Courier in the March 2nd issue of that year from a Walbottle pitman making precisely these points.

The strike was successful only insofar as a principle was conceded; in terms of income it is unlikely that the miners gained much since the final amounts payable, a five shilling per shift minimum, was below average earnings in many districts anyway. (see J. W. F. Rowe 1923) It was, however, as the first national strike of miners, a new kind of strike and although many miners felt cheated by the settlement which, among other things set up district boards to negotiate wage matters, there was to be no turning back from the idea that the State itself had a key role to play in running the industry, a further argument reinforcing the growing demand for nationalisation. (see W. Kirby 1977) Since government vacillation was associated with a Liberal administration this was further proof, too, that

politically, the miners needed greater clout and that their interests in parliament would be better served by a Labour government.

There was also a recognition among some miners that they needed their own newspaper to make their voice heard. The lodge of the Maria pit at Throckley urged the following resolution on the union:

Seeing that the press have been fighting against the interests of the miners in the late strike, we move that the Council Meeting put every effort forward in order to have a paper of our own in

co-partnership with Durham. (NMA Minutes 1912 NRO 759/68)

At that same council meeting a resolution was passed advising branches to co-operate in the setting up of local Labour Party branches 'so that political propaganda work on Labour Party lines may be carried out preparatory to contesting Parliamentary seats.

The union had, during this period, a distinctively internationalist outlook. They maintained their links, for example, with the international miners federation and in 1905 donated £500 to striking German miners; they supported free trade; they attacked labour conditions in the mines of South Africa; they criticised government policies towards China and they maintained a strong interest in domestic politics particularly in free school meals and pensions. It is not surprising, therefore, that given growing competition from Germany in world markets, the acceleration of the naval building

programmes and the darkening clouds of war, the union should speak out against militarism. In 1905 Thomas Burt condemned militarism in one of his monthly circulars, connecting it explicitly to pauperism:

Our extravagant national expenditure, much of it on armaments ... and the heavy taxation falling largely on the prime necessities of life, all must throw increased burdens on the poorest of the poor.
(November 1905)

And in 1906 the Executive passed a very definite anti-war resolution:

Recognising that war destroys life and wealth, that it arrests the consideration of social politics and the development of industry, and that it brings untold misery upon the human race, the members of this Association desire to raise their protest against the expansion of armaments; the encouragement of militarism; the loaning of money to belligerents, and the tactics of contracting syndicates who for selfish purposes promote colonial conquests.
(Executive Minutes: 1906 NMA NRO 759/68)

I mention this to underline that through their participation in the union Northumberland miners were led to an awareness of politics in such a way that their unionism was not merely politicised but that it was politicised within an internationalist outlook. The consequence of this was that in the slide to war thousands of Northumberland miners could not see Germans, in the abstract, as

the enemy; the enemy was militarism and the economic conditions which support it. More concretely, however, I mention the broader political environment because my grandfather always said that Britain should never go to war with Germany. With Gordon Graham, the boy he brought up, in the volunteer battalion of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers and several of his nephews, although not his own children, of military age, war was something likely to affect him directly.

But this takes the account too far forward. And the form of exposition itself perhaps communicates too close a connection between everyday life and the great transformation of politics. It is important to grasp such connections; but it is equally true that throughout these years my grandfather experienced his work as a matter of routine. It was simply part of the humdrum of every day interrupted by the weekends and occasional public holidays. He went to the pit because he had to. His family was growing up and the pit was all he knew. The change from the time he was a young man in the pit, was however, great, and change itself much more uncertain.

Chapter Seven

TIME OFF

One way of getting an idea of our fellow-countryman's miseries is to go and look at their pleasures.

George Eliot Felix Holt

In contrast to the dark congestion and sour atmosphere of the pit the open countryside suggests freedom and beauty, space in which to breath and a basic safety in which to relax and to forget. Jack Lawson puts it nicely writing about his time off on pay Saturday:

It was pay Saturday. I was free to go where I liked and do what I liked all the day. A whole day with the blue sky and fleecy clouds above. Free! Free! If you have risen at four or five on a summer morning and later walked up the village street on your way to the pit, you will understand what that meant. The morning air is exhilarating, the flowers in the little gardens so fragrant, the twittering of the sparrows sweet music - why, the very long commonplace colliery streets seem almost beautiful. And you are going to the pit.... Never does the scent of the flowers possess you, never does the sky seem so beautiful and the birds so much to be envied, as on such a morning. A miner has his compensations. He sees the gloom and he knows grim toil, but he sees the rich, rare morning and he drinks it in.

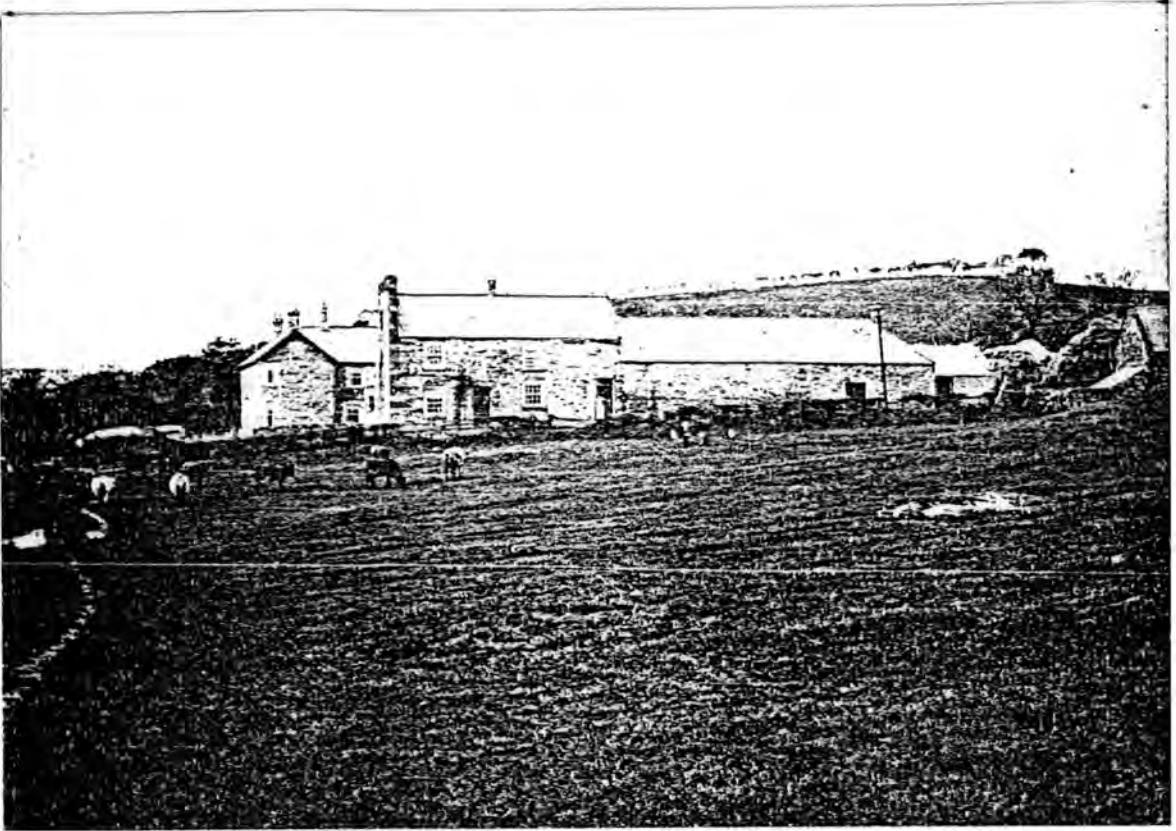
(1949: 78)

Jack Lawson, a by no means typical pitman, took his books with him when he went walking - Carlyle, Thomas a Kempis and St. Thomas Aquinas. My grandfather never bothered with books but he did seize every chance to walk through the fields and he especially liked walking on clear, frosty nights when he could marvel at the big sky and breathe the crisp clean air. He especially liked his walks to Heddon; no matter which way he went, along the riverside or through the fields, this was his favourite route retracing the steps of his boyhood, perhaps reliving a memory and meeting his old friends.

Walking was for him a special pleasure since, like everybody else in Throckley, he had so little time in which to do it. Until 1938 there were no holidays outside Bank Holidays, Easter and Christmas and while Saturdays and Sundays were days off from the pit, he still had much to do both at home and in his allotment. Uncle Jim told me, in fact, like many of the older pitmen, his father did not like holidays; they saw them as days without pay!

Most of my grandfather's waking hours were fully committed between work in the pit and work on the land. In what time was left he relaxed at home and, at weekends, depending on how much money he had, he went for a drink. Drinking and gardening brought him into contact with competitive leek-growing and flower and vegetable shows. In summer he would, if the chance was there, watch a cricket match, a game he thoroughly enjoyed and one which had been well supported in Heddon under the general patronage of Calverly Bewicke, the village squire.

It was, indeed, a game well supported throughout the coal-field before the First World War. The annual visit of the fair, the village picnic, concerts given by the pit brass band or local male voice choirs, perhaps a trip to the coast, were additional opportunities for a bit of fun and enjoyment.



Lamb's Farm Throckley

Among the things which gave him excitement as opposed to pleasure, were his occasional forays with the ferrets from Lamb's Farm. He sometimes took Jim ferreting no doubt recalling some of the illicit nights of his youth poaching the Bewicke estate at Heddou. But his main preoccupations were not in the least diversions from the daily routines of work; they were part of those routines

and his straining to be as self sufficient as possible in food so that his wages were supplemented by his garden, left little time for leisure.

In this chapter I want to show that my grandfather's use of his time off work was constrained by the resources and opportunities of the village and shaped by his own determination to be as independent as possible from the pit; it expressed his basic sense of himself and reflected his priorities, interests and values. His activities away from the pit may have marked him as a miner and member of a particular social class and in so doing indicate something of the 'moral character of a style of life' (see B.M. Berger 1968 :28) but they were simultaneously saying much about the man himself.

Tom Burns has argued that 'structures of leisure exist as repositories of meaning, value and reassurance for everyday life.' (1967 :742) Seen in this light, Burns argues, leisure cannot be understood simply as a compensation for the deprivations of work. Rather it reflects the way in which people organise their lives, express their autonomy and create meaning and significance for their actions. It is something which must be understood in an historical context too, for the activities which confer meaning and significance in everyday life change through time. My approach to my grandfather's use of his time off work follows that of Burns. In essence this is to treat his actions not just as an aspect of a style of life but as something reflecting

the structure of the community and society in which he lived. That community was both a setting and a resource.

As a setting it sustained very different interpretations of the meaning and significance of different kinds of leisure activity. Such differences reflected long-standing social divisions in the community. But they also reflected long-standing divisions in society as a whole for recreational provision in the village and throughout the district reflected, as I shall show, the aims of nineteenth century social reformers to domesticate the urban working classes. In this way the theme of leisure connects closely with that of class and the changing significance of particular institutions becomes an artifact of changing clan relationships. As a resource the community placed real constraints on what men and women could do; low and uncertain incomes from the pit determined that, whatever Throckley people did, it had to be cheap.

How men spent their time was something which had always preoccupied the coal company in Throckley. As I explained in an earlier chapter the school, the chapel, the reading room and institute, the support they gave to the pit brass band and the prohibition they imposed on keeping dogs were all part of the company's social policy and paternalism. Their opposition to the building of a working men's club and their refusal to allow public houses in the village is particularly noteworthy. Temperance, piety, loyalty and hard work were the values they sought to nurture in their employees.

In this respect they were, of course, drawing on powerful images of the responsible employer which were the ideological currency of a whole social class extending deeply backwards into the nineteenth century history of industrialism and social reform.

A good example of this and one highly pertinent to my account of my grandfather in the provision of allotments and gardens in Throckley. The company provided allotments in the belief that gardening both encourages and sustained 'good workmen'; this was a belief which goes back certainly to the late nineteenth century. (see J. L. and B. Hammond 1920: 18-19) During this latter period gardening was encouraged as 'rational recreation' for the poor having been, during the earlier part of the century a middle class hobby emulating the life style of aristocratic elites. (see S. Constantine 1979) Such men as Edwin Chadwick, Ebenezer Howard and General Booth of the Salvation Army all held gardening out as a form of recreation to neutralise the lure of the pub. The Throckley coal company did not have to justify their provision of allotments; by the end of the century it was simply a taken-for-granted mark of a good employer. Having good gardens was something too the men themselves valued and it was, indeed, one of the reasons behind my grandfather's move to Throckley.

But the significance of institutions and resources changes through time and varies among different social groups. The meaning of drinking or gardening to the men of Throckley (or, at least, the majority of them) was not

the same as for the coal company. In building their own lives they ascribed to these activities a quite different significance. Their leisure may have been shaped by its context gradually widening the scope of control they exercised over their own lives. My grandfather's own activities must be seen in this light and the study of those activities becomes, therefore, as I have argued elsewhere, 'the study of the interpenetration of biography and social structure, of world building and social control.' (B. Williamson 1976)

Home, Hearth and Pipe

Apart from going for walks when he could be entirely alone my grandfather sought his main relaxation in his own home with his family. Being a family man was a central part of his self image and a role he accepted with ease. It was by simply being at home that he found recuperation from work. For him, the house was where he rested. The family created an enormous amount of work, but the time he could spare for simply being in the house was time he used for rest.

He rested by his fireside with his pipe and his paper and if the weather was good he sat outside on the bench seat beneath the window overlooking his garden. He liked being in the house. The general busyness of the place, the bairns, the smell of baking bread, the steady reassuring tick of the grandfather clock and the comfort of a well-banked fire pleased him greatly. The whole scene, including the brass on the fireplace,

the leaded range and the neat mats on the floor symbolised for him what he valued in his family life - security, success continuity and cohesion - for they were the visible product of my grandmother's work and of his own achievements as a pitman and man.

In that room his worries were few; here he could sit and think and he did so always with a pipe in his mouth. His pipe was for him a special pleasure. Apart from a cigar at Christmas, or an occasional cigarette he smoked nothing else other than his clay pipe and then only when he rested. Over the years, quite unconsciously, his pipe smoking had acquired a ritual character which, temporarily, insulated him from the clamour of his busy home. Sat in his wing-backed chair facing the fire he cut his 'baccy' with his knife and rolled it slowly with a grinding motion in the cupped palms of his huge hands, all the while, usually, gazing thoughtfully into the fire, totally untouched by the bustle around him. He filled the pipe carefully and deliberately building the baccy up in layers and lit it with a taper drawn from a box stood in the hearth. He pressed the curling baccy back into the pipe slowly - all these actions were slow - put a small metal lid on top. The rising smoke was brushed gently aside and with his knees crossed, his arms folded, he used to sit and stare, his gaze lost in the blaze of the big open fire, his only movements an occasional almost unconscious check on the pipe.

He preferred his clay pipes to be old. He used to leave them outside in the gutter to age a bit, plugged at one end with a cleaner and filled at the other with a spoonful of whisky. That, he used to say "seasoned them" and took the dryness off the white clay. The pipe, I am convinced, having watched him many times smoking it this way, was of only minor significance, it was the preparations which was important, a kind of ritual as of before prayer, a way of clearing his mind, slowing it down to the immediate task, contemplation. Years of smoking left that room with a characteristic odour fused into the fibres of curtains, clothes and floor coverings. It announced powerfully my grandfather's presence in the room.

He read, too. Not novels; he had no interest and even less time. He read his papers, Reynolds News the Blaydon Courier and the Evening Chronicle, monthly circulars from the union and anything that was light and took up no real time. Talking was much more enjoyable to him. Talking about nothing in particular, reviewing the day's gossip, retailing the news from the pit, listening to the children, thinking through his plans. He helped his children to read, but only if they were stuck on something; there were no books in the house. His reading was very much a private affair; he didn't read out aloud to the rest of the family, he just kept it to himself. In fact, my grandmother used to clear the floor for him when he rested, urging the kids out

to the street or to the wash-house: "Go on. Get yourselves outside to play while you father has a bit rest" was what she used to say.

Drinking and The Working Men's Club.

At weekends he went for a drink. Drinking was of course, the chief means of escape from routine for the working classes of Edwardian England (P. Thompson 1977) and something my grandfather had done since he was a boy in Heddon. Drinking for him, however, was not a thoughtless indulgence, expensive or even ruinous to his family. It was not at all like the portraits of drinkers and drinking which filled the pages of the Temperance magazines of the time. Quite the opposite - it was a strictly controlled activity, almost solemn and he took pride in being able to 'take a drink' sensibly distinguishing himself and his friends from the less respectable boozers in the district. For him, being able to take a drink properly was a small but significant part of his sense of his social status.

He was not a heavy drinker; he could not afford to be but if the occasion allowed he could drink a lot. Since the coal company would not allow public houses in the village Throckley men before 1908 had to drink in Heddon, Newburn or Walbottle. My grandfather usually drank at Heddon in the Three Tuns, the haunt of his youth. For the sake of his old friends he went sometimes to the White Swan, Bertha's place, just opposite the Church, the pub everyone went to when there was a

funeral in Heddon, and if he had time he used to call back on his way home to the Frenchman's Arms on the road down to Throckley.

On summer Sundays in the long afternoons before the First World War he sometimes took the children and my grandmother to Heddon in his horse and trap, stopping first at Bertha's, then the Three Tuns and finally at the Frenchman's Arms. He went into each pub for a drink and bought the horse one, too. He teased his children with the idea that the horse was so well trained it knew the time to go on to the next pub for its next drink. My grandmother never went into the pubs, however; she, said she was too proud for that.

Drinking is a highly ritualised pastime. For my grandfather it was always something of an occasion to go out for a drink. He dressed rather stiffly in his best suit, put on his best boots and always wore his pocket watch and chain and best cloth cap. On such nights he left the house by the front door and if it was frosty he would sometimes take his silver-topped walking stick with him. Not for him the silk muffler and cloth cap traditionally worn in the pit villages to look smart; he liked to be really smart and substantially dressed. His clothes announced that out of his pit gear he was as good as anybody else and being smart allowed him, I think, to indulge his own sense of personal dignity without being in any way supercilious. His clothes were a small prop to his own widely acknowledged respectability. Keeping this clothes smart however, as I shall

was an important element of my grandmother's work.

The Three Tuns was a singing pub which had always been something of a community centre; everybody joined in and late of a weekend the whole place was filled with lilting naughty, sentimental, sometimes crazy but always eminently singable songs of the gay nineties drawn straight from the music halls and made available to millions through cheap sheet music and pub pianos, or, as in the Three Tuns through a harmonium.

My grandfather always stayed in male company when he was drinking; he mildly disapproved of women in pubs, an attitude, I think, which he took from my grandmother and her sense of what was respectable. It is an attitude too, which explained his late preference for drinking in the working mens clubs. After 1908 it was possible for Throckley men to drink in their own social club. The club was formed in that year and joined the Club and Institute Union in 1911. The premises for the club were, ironically, in a street called Stephenson Terrace in a house owned by George Curwen, a union man and active member of the Independent Labour Party. He owned the land on which his property was built and for this reason could circumvent the social policy of the coal company. My grandfather was one of the founder members of the club although never a member of its committee. He was much too busy for that. The club did play however, an important part in his life and in the village as a whole and as an institution it illustrates an important

feature of social change, the rise of organised labour extending to ordinary people greater control of their own lives, through winning control of institutions designed originally to contain them.

Working men's clubs, began in a most inauspicious way in Victorian England under the guiding hand of a former Unitarian Minister and graduate of London University, Henry Solly. With the help of Lord Lyttleton and Lord Brougham he managed to extract moral support and finance from a crop of aristocratic benefactors to support a movement which was designed to educate and reform the working classes. (see J. Taylor 1973 and B. Jackson 1968) The Club and Institute Union was the child of this endeavour. It was formed in July 1862. In the manifesto which Solly drew up to describe the aims of the Union it is stated quite clearly that:

This Union is formed for the purpose of helping working men to establish clubs and institutes where they can meet for conversation, business and mental improvement, with the means of recreation and refreshment, free from intoxicating drinks.

(his emphasis) (G. Tremlett 1962: 8)

The clubs were seen by Solly and his colleagues as instruments for education, the reclamation of drunkards and prophylactics to the indiscriminate use of beer shops and public houses.

The club rooms in every locality will form the strongest counteraction to the allurements of the Public House. The desire for social enjoyment and

the love of excitement are the impulses that habitually drive the working classes to visit the beer shop. These instincts also form a great temptation to reclaimed drunkards.

G. Tremlett (1962: 10)

It is clear that the idea for such clubs stems, at least in the case of Solly and Brougham from a view that earlier attempts to induce civility and decorum into the working classes had failed. Brougham had been associated with the Mechanics Institutes and felt that their impact had not been sufficient. The working men's clubs, by their focus on leisure time might conceivably be more effective. Without a doubt, therefore, the Club and Institute Union was one of many late Victorian devices which attempted to penetrate the culture of the working classes with a view to changing it.

The underlying historical forces which in the end produced the Clubs Union are well known. A rapidly urbanising society such as Victorian England was inevitably produces social dislocations and can readily generate social conflict. Poor housing conditions, low wages and unemployment, rapid population turnover in the great cities, few facilities for education all combined to generate the kinds of social problems Solly set out to relieve. The most pressing evil was, however, drink. To the Victorian and Edwardian middle class mind, drink was tied up inextricably with poverty, indolence and crime. (see J. J. Tobias 1967, P. Thompson 1977) Indeed, it was often thought to be the cause underlying the condition of the poor and they were concerned

about that condition. In the first place they knew about it. As Asa Briggs has shown; the literate Victorians from the 1840's onwards were very well aware of poverty and deprivation. The local statistical societies which sprang up during the early Victorian period were able to document the extent of poverty with great sophistication, and the reading public was adequately plied with the results of such enquiries. (A. Briggs 1968: 71)

The drink question had however, been discussed for a very long time prior to the 1860's. In 1844 Engels had pointed to a curious dialectic in working class culture. Quoting from contemporary sources he pointed to the very powerful currents of self help and communal feeling to be found in working class districts. Dr. Parkinson, Canon of Manchester had noted that: 'The poor give one another more than the rich give the poor' and he went on to note that begging occurs most frequently in the poor quarters of the cities. Engels offered the explanation that: 'They have experienced hard times themselves, and can therefore, feel for those in trouble.' (F. Engels 1844: 158)

But this pattern of communal response was set against what Engels took to be the 'unfavourable' side of the working class character - 'drunkenness, sexual irregularities, brutality and disregard for the rights of property.' (F. Engels 1844: 158) And he notes a characteristic of the 'mining proletariat':

The categories of religion are known to them only from the terms of their oaths. Their morality is destroyed by the work itself. That the overwork of all miners must engender drunkenness is self-evident. (F. Engels 1844: 287)

Several forces changed this. Not the least of these was Methodism imposing social discipline on working people which penetrated all aspects of life. (see E. P. Thompson 1968:442. R. Moore 1947) By the end of the century the penetration of Methodism into the trades union movement, labour politics and the miner's lodge had become, as Robert Colls emphasised, something of a cliché. (R. Colls 1977) If Methodism worked, as it were, from the inside of working class communities, social reformers worked from without. But some of the ends they sought were identical. As I have shown, the Methodist presence in Throckley was a pervasive one and being an upright chapel man was a widely acknowledged mark of respectability.

The solution to the drink question had been conceived over a long period of time as the need to find and alternative to the public house where working men could find sensible and formative recreation. As far back as the 1830s Edwin Chadwick in evidence to the Select Committee on Drunkenness had suggested that 'public parks and zoos, museums and theatres be provided to replace the volume of drink being consumed.' (quoted J. J. Tobias 1967: 213) The provision of social clubs

for working men therefore, was just one part of such long-standing attempts at social amelioration.

From the early 1870s, however, there was, as John Taylor put it, a 'revolt against patronage.' (1973:17) Working men's clubs began increasingly to demand drink and working men gradually transformed the nature of the clubs themselves although still retaining some of the values of rational recreation and improvement. For example B. T. Hall, the national secretary of the CIU pointed out in his famous pamphlet which in the early years of this century was the bible of the movement that, in contrast to the public house where 'the worker must associate with all whom chance may bring... the loafer, the blackleg, the soaker and the rowdy', in the club he would find a selected group of companions and 'congenial company.' (B. T. Hall 1908: 6) Hall actually goes on to define the central purpose of clubs as 'character building' and to argue that through 'continuous association, the constant practice of deference to others, the willing obedience to self-made rules... the conscious widening of thought and habit' clubs directly contribute to the formation and maintenance of a democratic state. And as if to force the point there were regular articles throughout the 1920s pointing to the numbers of clubmen who were elected to public bodies and active in the wider community. These values were reflected locally in the leadership of the club and its rules. In Throckley the management committee of the club included many of those well-

known for their work in the union and Labour politics and the co-operative movement.

The club itself was not in any way political, however. It was strictly organised around the theme of entertainment. Apart from drinking the club held whist-drives, gardening competitions and weekend concerts. The main sport, however, was quoits. The club had a quoits square and held regular competitions and sent its team of players to other clubs for similar competitions elsewhere. That streak in the club tradition which in the 1880s had been concerned with politics and education (see J. Taylor 1973) was exemplified in Throckley through occasional lectures by the Worker's Educational Association and their annual subscription to Ruskin College, Oxford. They had a reading room and a supply of books and one of the committee was Librarian. No record of the holdings of the Library exists but I have been told that Jack London was a popular author.

The club itself was small and decorated like a house. Tight controls were exercised over excessive drinking, bad language, violence and betting. It was, in fact, a club rule that bookmakers were not to be allowed on the premises. The club subscribed to the CIU network of convalescent homes and regularly recommended members to use these facilities. The club was run by a committee elected to implement the policy of the annual general meeting. The legitimating rhetoric of this was a democratic one. An article in the CIU journal in September 1925 puts it nicely comparing

clubs to the state. 'The club' it says, 'may be taken as the microcosm of the state. It is a perfect model of of self-contained community. In it all men are equal and none hold position or exercise authority except by the will and pleasure of his fellows.' (CIU Journal 1925: 8)

The club, therefore, was free of any damaging association with drunkenness and the public house; it was a focal point for men in Throckley with a stable membership of about five hundred. Being open all day in the period before 1914 it was almost a community centre and being a member was a small token of a man's respectability.

How effective the club was in curtailing the evils of excessive drink is impossible to tell. In the period before the First World War the quarterly report of the Chief Constable of Northumberland show clearly that the most common offence the police dealt with was drunkenness. In each of his reports from 1900 to 1916 drunkenness is almost six times more common than the next most serious offences. (Standing Joint Committee Minutes. NRO CC/CM/SJ) This squares with the observations of the German miner who worked in the area in the late 1890s. His observations make clear, too, why my grandmother distanced herself so far from women who took a drink. What Duckershoff said was this:

Drunkards are as plentiful here, I believe as in Germany. Among women they are more numerous in

in spite of the many temperance societies....

Tipsy women are as plentiful as tipsy men on

Saturday nights. (E. Duckershoff 1899)

He went on to express the view, accurately, in fact, that drunkenness was the commonest offence the constable had to deal with and that the pawnshop facilitated the habit.

The next most frequent offences were committed against the Education Act, the Gaming Acts and the Highways Acts. We can now only speculate whether these offences were interconnected, whether, for example the drunkards did not send their children to school, gambled and loitered on the highway!

When my grandfather came home from the club he had a cooked supper and, mildly drunk - he was never incapably drunk; he was, as an adult, too controlled for that to happen - he indulged his other great pleasure, singing around the piano at home. Left to sing by himself he sang hymns, learned in his childhood and never forgotten his favourite being, 'Eternal Father', the fisherman's hymn with its special and deeply emotional plea 'for those in peril on the sea.' Aunt Eva says he liked 'Lead kindly light' and 'Abide with me,' too. The weekend sing-song was something of an institution in that house; Jimmy and Ginny, grandmother's relatives, used to come over from Gateshead. Maggie and Harry were always there, of course, as was Bob, my grandfather's younger brother. When the children were older they stayed up too. Drinking, then, was in many ways, a

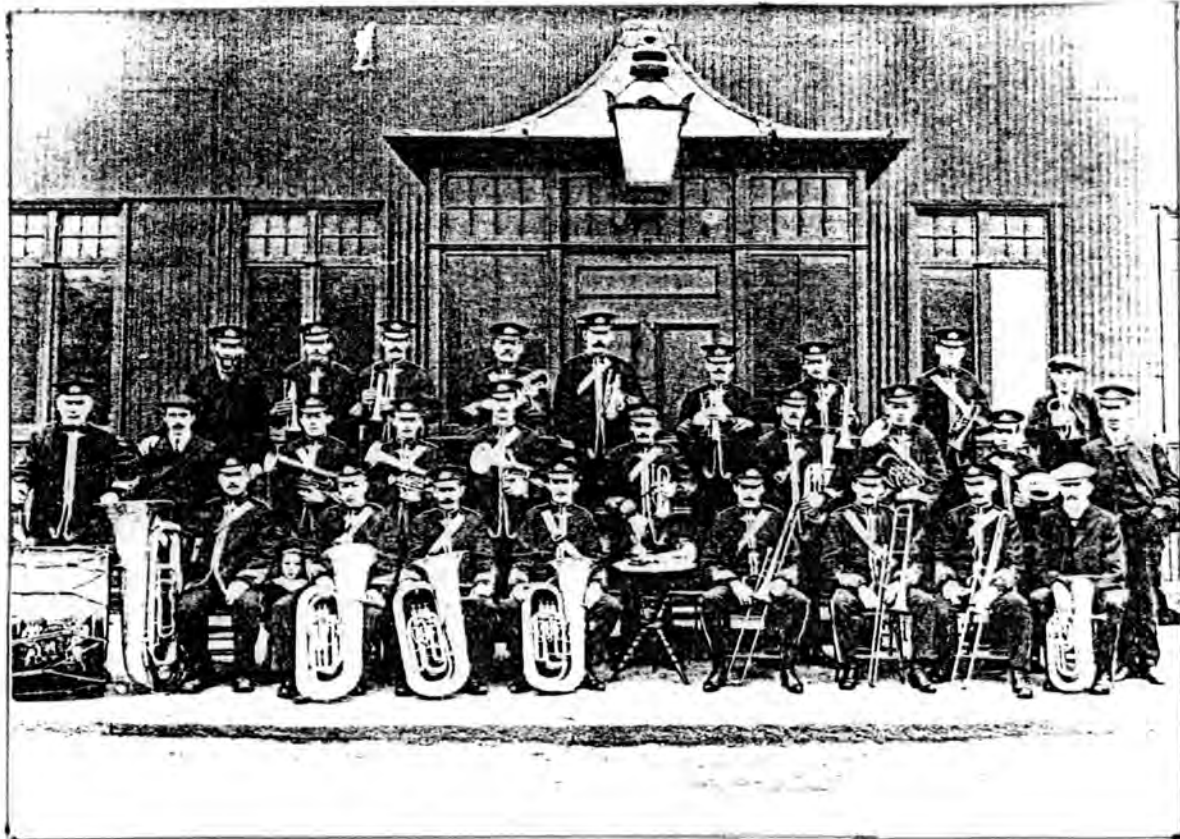
family occasion, a point developed in a subsequent chapter on domestic work.



Newburn Hoppings 1906

Throckley, like Heddon, held an annual picnic and flower show which my grandfather invariably attended. There was an annual visit of the fair or 'hoppings.' At the picnic the pit brass band used to perform and there were regular performances of an evening of male voice choirs in the district, such as Spencer's Gleeman choir or the Co-operative Choral Society. During the summer there were frequent parades in support of various charities such as aged miners homes and the Throckley Colliery Sick and Accident Fund. Throckley had a football team (Throckley Villa) and a cricket team. During the summer events such as these, offered some chance of entertainment and diversion. My grandfather used always to go to the picnics and as often as he could to performances of

the band. He helped out Tommy Lamb, a local farmer, to exhibit his cows and since, on the day of the picnic the cows still needed milking my grandfather used to milk



Throckley Colliery Band 1914

them retaining the milk for his own use.

On the periphery of his interests although, of course, central to those of other people there were illicit gambling schools up the back lannen, a good deal of pigeon fancying and for the younger men a cycling club organised by Billy King, activist in the co-operative store. Few of these activities interested my grandfather although he did take something of an interest in pigeons since his brother Bob, just up the street, was a keen 'fancier.' Like many pitmen he kept an eye open on the skies; flights of pigeons indicated who was in the gardens and

what they were doing and pigeon talk with its uniquely arcane jargon was a stable currency of conversation among the men.

Then there were the chapels, the Church and much more cerebral activities like the Throckley Home Reading Union Circle organised, before, 1914, by Mr. Heslop. My grandfather avoided most of these, particularly anything to do with gambling, but he did encourage his children to involve themselves in the Church and the chapels. Indeed the only moral tale my grandfather told his children concerned gambling. He told them that he had once been persuaded while working at Heddon pit to put his week's wages on a horse. The horse, of course, lost and he used this cautionary tale to warn his sons off betting.

Gardening

Beyond seasonal diversions and the purely personal indulgence of a weekend drink my grandfather's time was wholly committed to his allotments and the mild rivalries of showing vegetables which gardening spawned. And this commitment to gardening, arising from wholly utilitarian motives, indicates a great deal, not only of my grandfather's own personality, particularly his deep rooted determination to be independent of the pit, but also something of the social organisation of the community as a whole and the values embedded in it.

My grandfather's work in his gardens and the high priority which he gave to it displays all the features

of what Becker has called 'commitment.' (H. Becker 1970) Firstly he chose to spend a great deal of time gardening. Secondly, his gardening had important consequences for many of his other interests. It directly affected the standard of living of his family but it was also part of the currency of his own self respect as a good workman and a man and of his relationships with his friends in the village. These features are what Becker would call 'side bets' i.e. interests or actions which have become part of the original commitment. To give up gardening would have been expensive both in real economic terms but also in terms of the quality and kind of social recognition he was accorded in the village. His gardening, paradoxically, was part of those complex forces which kept him as a pitman. It was one factor which made him unwilling to countenance moving out of the pits or even to seek a council house. These 'side bets' helped shape therefore, his priorities and his self respect. It would trivialise completely the significance of gardening for him if it were to be thought of simply as his relaxation or a contrast to his work.

Until the early thirties my grandfather rented three allotments which he kept cultivated in addition to the long front garden of the house. Until 1914 he kept a horse, a trap and a flat cart and in the gardens he kept hens, geese, sometimes ducks, and rabbits. He did not keep any cattle because it was not necessary. He worked as often as he could on Lamb's farm and was paid for

that work largely in kind. He grew a full range of vegetables and potatoes in particular, storing them over the winter in his garden shed. Because of his heavy commitments in the garden and with the animals he tried to arrange it that he always worked fore-shift from 3.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. This gave him most of the afternoon and the early part of the evening to get through his chores.

Bill says of his father that "He was almost a bloody farmer" and my grandmother often, knowing full well the impossibility of it, used to say to him "Jim, you should have been a farmer." The benefits for the family of his gardening were obvious. Jim told me:

I've known me father go to the garden and fetch the whole dinner in. Howk the tetties, cabbage, and kill a hen. That was our dinner. It didn't cost a ha'penny, just out of the garden. We had about two or three chains.

But he did, nonetheless enjoy this work. He enjoyed working with and caring for animals. Not that he was sentimental about it. He could pull a chicken or break a rabbit's neck with a clinical precision and without sympathy for the animal. Cruelty was another matter; he would not tolerate that. He enjoyed particularly work with horses. This was, of course something he had done since boyhood and during his days as a driver in Heddon pit. His horse, in fact, took a great deal of his time with feeding, grooming, cleaning and exercising. Talk of horses prompted uncle Bill to recall a very early

memory of his childhood. Playing in deep snow at the bottom of the street in the winter before the First World War Bill remembers my grandfather leading his horse to the 'three cornered field' opposite Mount Pleasant. When Bill asked him why he had the horse trotting hard in the snow he got the crisp answer, with no further explanation: "It's good for its fetlocks." "That" said Bill "was me father all over. Always bloody busy."

Garden work forced him into regular routines and brought with it various sorts of obligations and commitments to other people which he repaid in kind. It also involved his family, especially the boys and brought him into direct contact with the co-operative store since he used to sell his pigs to the butcher's department there. Garden work must therefore be understood in its own context just like work in the pit; it had its own constraints and opportunities and it, too, over the years, helped shape my grandgather's whole outlook.

Keeping Pigs

His pig keeping illustrates these points very well. Shortly after moving to Throckley he started to keep pigs. The equipment was simple. His wash-house shed housed the boiler to prepare the pig swill and was at the same time a place where the slaughtered carcass could be jointed and temporarily stored. The pig cree in the garden was a simple cement structure which he built himself. His experience both at home, as a boy, when his father kept

pigs and on Law's farm at Heddon served him well in keeping pigs. He knew about them and was confident about keeping them.

Feeding pigs is a problem; my grandfather solved it by regularly collecting waste food, peelings, cabbage leaves and the like, from neighbours and acquaintances. When his sons grew strong enough collecting the 'peelins' was one of their key tasks. Bill explained:

We used to come home from school, this is true, and get the barrow and go away to Newburn and Walbottle to seek peelings.

We had a barrow the size of a settee with great big iron mangle wheels on it. One or two kept pigs but not like us. Me father was nearly a farmer. Pigs and Hens. The pan was never off the fire in our house, a great big pan. As soon as me mother took the kettle off the fire me father used to put the big pan on, boiling for the pigs. Me mother used to go mad. I've seen us kids pinch the tetties he'd boiled, too.

Jim explained that he kept four or five pigs at a time. He used to kill a couple for bacon, one about Christmas the other in March and he used to buy in others to fatten up for sale to the co-operative butcher. The pigs brought him in a bit of cash but better than that they gave the family an almost continuous supply of ham; the salted hams used to hang on meat hooks in the cool of the stair bottom.

Pigs are extremely productive; they give a high grade nitrogenous fertilizer and at pig killing time black pudding (made from pigs blood), sausage and broth were in plentiful supply, so much so that a lot of it could be given away to those neighbours who had put up with the inconvenience of storing their waste food. Pig killing was a great social occasion in Mount Pleasant. Mrs. Allen used to come in and help make the sausage and prepare 'pig's cheek' from the pig's head and potted meat. The children looked forward to it because they could have the pig's bladder which, dried and inflated becomes a very useful toy, a cross between a balloon and a football.

For my grandmother pig killing brought conflicting emotions. Involved occasionally with the feeding of the pigs she could not stop herself thinking of them as pets. And to avoid the frenzied squealing of the pig as it was struck by the heavy mallet of the store butcher she made certain that the children were always well out of the way, usually at school and that she herself had as little to do with the actual killing as possible.

Unlike the work he did with his vegetables, which was seasonal, pigs had to be fed all the year round, even in Winter and at this time my grandfather used to carry his pails of swill down Mount Pleasant and along to his garden with his children carrying hurricane lamps to lead the way. In fact, my mother told me, he often had to work in the dark in the garden by the light of his lamp, a chore, she emphasised, which presented him

with few problems since he was very used to work in the dark! But the payoff was worth the effort, a secure supply of meat and a bit of cash, too, just a small contribution to the independence he strived for. It was an independence, however, which incurred obligations and which presupposed a network of friends who helped him feed the animals. The successful keeping of pigs measures my grandfather's success in the community.

The problems of the pigs and his garden framed his sense of what was urgent and what was important and what his priorities were and they certainly left him little time for other kinds of commitment. The time scales which, apart from those of the pit, preoccupied him were relatively short ones of pig fattening, planting and harvesting and these translated themselves into daily commitments and the need for predictable routines.

Leek Growing

Gardening brought him into a mild rivalry with other gardeners through the leek and vegetable shows which took place every year in almost every village throughout the coalfield. My grandfather's leek growing was the only non utilitarian aspect of his gardening and he spent a lot of time doing it as did many other pitmen. Like keeping pigs, leek growing is something of an institution which can only be grasped in its social context.

The basis of competitive leek growing is simple; gardeners compete with one another to grow the longest

and fattest leeks - although, in the period before the First World War they were mainly interested in the length - and the winners received a simple prize. Growing huge vegetables for show was a popular pastime throughout the district and in 1902 Dr. Messer, the Medical Officer of Health was moved to comment on the fact. Rising to a fine irony and writing explicitly about the great lack in the district of public provision for play space for children he notes:

Herbert Spencer says that had Gulliver narrated to the Lilliputians that the men vied with each other in learning how best to rear the offspring of other creatures and were careless of how best to rear their own offspring, he would have paralleled any of the absurdities he relates to them.

(Annual Reports of the MOH Newburn Urban District Tyne Wear Archives)

For the growers, however, there was no contradictions in what they did; leek growing was a mild form of rivalry which thrived on and presupposed friendship among men.

Lying behind this rivalry was and still is however, a rather complex social network which regulated the distribution of good 'breeds' of leek and a body of knowledge of how to grow big leeks which is so exclusive and esoteric that the uninitiated could never hope to succeed in winning shows. (see B. Williamson 1973)

Leek growing was organised from the public houses and, after the First World War, from Working men's Clubs. It is exclusively male activity financed by a weekly



Blucher Leek Club Outside Throckley Store Hall Pre-1914

lotteries and it is deadly serious. Before 1914 the prizes were simple. In 1905, for example the first prize at the Frenchman's Arms, one of my grandfather's shows, was a blanket. The prizes were, and still are, invariably something for the home; this is a sop to the wives which justified the amount of time the husband spent in the garden tending his leeks. Leek growing is a male thing, though, and each grower has his own views on what will make the big leeks grow; in this respect it is a secretive pastime. Families do have an opportunity however, to become part of it. It was traditional for there to be a leek supper after the show for which broth would be made and distributed freely to everyone and the women and children could come

into the pubs and clubs to see the display of leeks. For the young boys this was often an occasion for an illicit sip of their father's beer and for the wives a chance to pour mild but jovial scorn on their husbands horticultural skills.



James Brown and Leeks

My grandfather always grew leeks in his front garden; they were safer there and the only potent for growing big leeks that he swore by was the scrapings of a baby's nappy. Like all leek growers he enjoyed the elliptical discussions of how to grow leeks which always failed to extract from 'the big growers' just what their secrets really were. In this sense what was important about growing leeks was

not the leeks themselves - indeed, they are often so force-fed as to be inedible - but the social contacts of the sport which gave the drudge of gardening a mild competitive edge of fun.

My grandfather was an active competitor but not a successful one. Old Tom Stobbart says he was not a patch on him at growing leeks. It is hardly surprising for successful leek growing takes an enormous amount of time, the one thing my grandfather did not have. For in addition to his garden and his job he had his family and his repairs to see to. He looked after his horse; he built his own hen crees and sheds; he cobbled the family shoes in the wash house; he cut a great deal of his own grass for hay and even he needed rest and sleep.

Where he was really successful, I think, was in so arranging his time and his activities that his hobbies were absorbed in his work and there was no inconsistency between what he did and his family life. When his children talk about their relationship with him they always do so in terms of such things as helping in the garden, riding in the trap, caring for the animals, sorting potatoes in the shed and of being dispatched outside when he needed rest. He absorbed his kids into his hobbies effortlessly and in so doing taught them how to work.

In Coal is Our Life the leisure of miners is described as 'vigorous' and 'predominantly frivolous' which the authors define as 'in the sense of "giving no thought for the tomorrow"'. (N. Dennis et. al. 1956: 130) This is a claim, of course, made often enough about

working class leisure as a whole. (see S. Meacham 1977)
 They attribute the frivolity of it to the insecurity
 of pit work which encourages miner to 'live only for
 today.'

Such an interpretation makes little sense of how
 my grandfather spent his time. Their general theme that
 the solidarity of the men underground is reinforced by
 their social relationships on the surface, fits the case
 well enough. My grandfather was totally absorbed in a
 male world where helping, sharing, working hard, being
 strong and upright were all heavily reinforced social
 values. And the busyness of it, I am sure, kept him so
 preoccupied with the flow of everyday details that he
 rarely stood back to take a critical look at his job
 and his conditions. As with his work, there was little
 in his leisure to produce a 'reflective awareness' which
 would have distanced him from the taken-for-grantedness
 of his daily life to see its limitations. He was far
 too preoccupied with what Richard Hoggart has called
 'the concrete' and 'the personal' to be reflective.
 (1957: 87) By not contradicting the dominant assumptions
 about work or the standards of respectability which pre-
 vailed in the village, his leisure actually reinforced
 his work status as a pitman. (c.f. N. Dennis et. al. 1956)
 But he was no mere victim of social control. He also
 found in his leisure, as I have shown, autonomy, self-
 respect, some independence and greater security,
 qualities of his life and social values his work alone
 could never have confirmed.

In respect of standing back from his position he was very different from my grandmother. Living in the shadows of his life she did the worrying and bore the psychological risks of working underground, a fact, I think, which underlines heavily, as I shall show in the next chapter, that the costs of exploitation are not always borne where they are incurred. The taken-for-grantedness of his daily life was almost total and he was extremely content.

But it could not be said that his leisure was frivolous, and he was by no means unique. His 'leisure' was purposive and useful and through it he realised a basic self respect and gave his family greater security.

Dennis and his colleagues were not wrong in their judgement however, they were merely describing a mining community fifty years into the future from the time I have been concerned with in a society framework of social security which, while hardly adequate, was nonetheless politically light years from the one my grandfather had to cope with.

Chapter Eight

DOMESTIC WORK

There was a big discrepancy, when I was a boy, between the collier who saw, at the best, only a few hours of daylight - often no daylight at all during the winter weeks - and the collier's wife, who had all day to herself when the man was down the pit. The great fallacy is, to pity the man.

D. H. Lawrence 'Nottingham and the Mining Country'

Without women mining communities would not exist; they would be labour camps. Yet the history of mining communities has been distorted by an almost exclusive emphasis on pit work although pit work in the form we know it for the nineteenth and early twentieth century was only possible because of the way in which women worked in the home. Housework was as central to the winning of coal as the graft of the miner underground. It was through housework that the miner could be prepared day in and day out to return to his work. It is the home which supplied the pitman with his main rationale for working. And it was the home, in a cruelly ironic way, which tightened those bonds between families and pits which tied the miner's children to their father's way of life seeking in their own right work underground.

Just as the social structure of the industry defines the class position of the miner the organisation of pit production defined the family position of the miner's wife. What the miner's wife was able to achieve in her own life, what satisfactions she found and what hopes she

could nourish, were all limited by her own expectations born of her education, the predictable routines of the pit, the resources of the village and the attitudes and expectations of the men. Lacking the kind of upbringing which, in the men, developed a devil-may-care attitude to the pit or a fatalistic tolerance of its risks, and insulated from that supportive framework of workmates and pit talk, unable to find employment in their own right the women were left to bear the psychological risks of the pit and the precariousness of their own and their children's security. The only real way to avoid the anxiety their condition produced was to be immersed in routines, not to think too far ahead and to value immediate blessings. (see F. L. Davidoff 1974)

And with small incomes, a total dependence, in fact, on a fortnightly wage, the immediate blessings were not material ones but concerned the quality of personal relationships. And here, I think, lies the key to the almost total preoccupation of miner's wives with the unfolding patterns of family life, with their children, grandchildren, and their husbands and their far-flung kin. And here, too, is the source of the nostalgic mother-centred family image of the past which anyone studying such communities encounters so frequently. In this chapter I shall examine only the work of the house; relations in the family are discussed in the following chapter.

Housework and Routine

Viewed as work, housework for my grandmother had a number of characteristics. (see F. A. Oakley 1977) It was physically hard, relentless, monotonous and largely unacknowledged as requiring any special aptitudes. In addition it was considered both in the family and by those around the village to be properly woman's work, a fact she herself also accepted. (see J. M. Benney 1946 and N. Dennis et al 1956) It gave her little freedom of choice about how she could use her time and it was extremely repetitive. It was carried out in a very confined space and brought her into contact with very few people. It was repetitive but carried out, nonetheless, in a context which was often uncertain. Her responsibility for planning the family budget was not made easy by the unpredictable size of the fortnightly pay so there was always an underlying uncertainty to her work which created worries for which there was no easy solution. Nor was there ever any real prospect that the work might change in significant ways. She was basically a very contented woman but in the circumstances no other attitude would have been psychologically tolerable. She was in any case, well prepared for it. Her education had led her to expect nothing more and her own upbringing in a mining area of Durham had taught her what she needed to know.

She acknowledged her 'blessings' readily and found great comfort in small things, a quiet hour with her magazines, tea with a neighbour, finishing a piece of clothing and so on. She rarely complained; she simply,

as she used to say, "got on with it" rendering the acceptance of her lot a kind of value in itself. In any case, because of the acknowledged fact that men worked hard in the pit, there were few ways in which women could legitimately claim that their work was especially onerous. (N. Dennis et. al. 1956) Her real task, as she saw it, was to create comfortable conditions for her husband, not because he in some patriarchal way demanded this but because she thought that this was where her duty lay. This attitude of acceptance and forbearance does not signify in her an uncritical view of her social position; she was, in fact, acutely aware of the limitations of her life in Throckley. Rather it is a way of making her life bearable, of adjusting her expectations to resources and obligations so that her satisfactions, such as they were, could actually be realised. The qualities of patience, forbearance and contentment which she exemplified are not, therefore, simply aspects of her personality; they have to be seen as personal qualities shaped considerably by the work she was compelled to do. Her work, in short, must be seen in the appropriate historical context.

She was not, however, a passive victim of circumstance. She brought to her work her own unique style and commitment and found in it considerable satisfaction and the key to understand that lies in the way, through the strict control of her work she created spaces in which she could be free of it and through that freedom find personal autonomy. (see F. L. Davidoff 1974) Here, then, in the

paradox of routine; through ordered routines she found her freedoms. The setting for her work was the house itself. Inside they had one main living-room with a bed alcove and a black-leaded fire range and oven. Upstairs there were two bedrooms. The kitchen was at the back of the house, its only real facility a sink with a cold-water tap. At the left of the window, beside the settee stood the grandfather clock aloof from the room. On the alcove wall stood a piano. Opposite the window was a sideboard. Right in the middle of the room caught in the light of the hanging gas mantel, was the table, oil cloth covered and surrounded by chairs. The fourth wall was dominated by the big black range and brass fender. The floors were covered in oil cloth and 'clippy mats'. The whole room was hopelessly congested. When the fire was 'bleezing' it was suffocatingly hot and even in summer the fire was kept on for cooking.

The work done in the house followed directly the routine of the pit and its different shifts. The needs of the family itself, for meals, clean, new and mended clothes and relaxation were all met within the basic task of getting grandfather out to work and settled back in again when his work was done. My grandmother brought some order into these tasks by evolving certain routines and a weekly division of labour. These routines were vital to her; through them she achieved control of her work and some freedom. Precisely what these routines were has been fully described to me in writing by my mother and it is on this document that my account is

largely based. Firstly, the weekly routines:

'Monday', my mother writes, was always called 'Cobbler's Monday.' Why? I don't know. Mother made our breakfasts - no such things as cereals, or fruit juices - the main course was porridge or bready boiley (that is bread cut into cubes, swollen with boiling water, then strained off and boiling milk poured over and sweetened with sugar, lovely it was) then bacon sandwich or a boiled egg and toast, toasted in front of a big fire, no fancy toasters, then off to school.

My mother is here recalling the period of the First World War and the early twenties.

Mother got cracking then. First she brushed my dad's Sunday clothes and the family's, folded them and put them away for the next weekend. The dinner on a Monday was always called 'cold warmed up', everything left off Sunday dinner was fried up and served on Monday. Tea was cakes and scones that were cooked on Sunday, supper sometimes a kipper or a few chips or an egg or anything left over from the weekend.

The bread bin was never empty, mother baked all her own bread, tea cakes (stotty cakes). They were lovely when they were first made. No such thing as calories, no one minded being fat. My mother used to say, 'The thicker the meat the stronger the man' and 'pack the food into the bairns when they are small and they grow up to work for all the luxuries later in life.' Mother did not do much housework on a Monday. I think that is why she said 'cobbler's Monday.' The house was nice and clean after the weekend clean up and not much cooking. She kept Monday to catch up with the mending of garments, darning socks, making new clothes out of old ones. She made our clothes. She knitted all the socks and stockings. She made my dad's shirts, cut up the old

ones and made small ones for my brothers. Dad repaired all our shoes.

Monday, then, left my grandmother with a little more time than usual there being little or no cooking to do. It also gave her a chance to make clothes a task, while born of necessity was nonetheless one which she enjoyed.

'Tuesday was washing day':

Mother always made a big pan of broth. That was prepared on Monday. All the produce was grown in our own garden, except the barley. So broth on a wash day was handy. She used to say "It is just ready for the floaters to go in." (Floaters was dumplings) After the broth and floaters we got meat sliced, served with potatoes or sandwiched in stotty cake and tea. After a meal like that we were all satisfied. So tea was not important, bread, home-made-jam, or cheese was all we needed. Supper again, a patch up, but always tasty and good. My mother always said, "Never go to bed hungry." We always got something.

It is noteworthy that in her written account of washing day my mother mentioned nothing of washing itself or the disruption to the house which it brought (a disruption celebrated in the famous Tyneside song, 'Weshin' Day' with its opening line, "Of all the plagues a poor man meets A-lang life's weary way. Thor's nyen among them aall that beats a rainy weshin' day")

Washing was done in a poss tub. "We used to double poss. One on either side; one went up the other went down." My mother then explained that the poss tub itself was acquired from a local fish and chip shop.

The shop used to buy in its frying fat in big barrels which, washed out and scrubbed clean were ideal. But they were not just for possing. My mother says that she had many a bath in the poss tub. My grandfather used to fill it up with hot water, stand it in the kitchen, draw the curtains and send the girls in to get their bath. They came out and dried themselves in front of the fire in the main room. "I used to love it; nice and warm in front of a blazing fire."

The pleasant memory should not, however, conceal the inconvenience. The water had to be heated both in the outhouse boiler and on the kitchen fire and had to be carried from the one cold tap in the kitchen. The fires had to be kept going and the dirty water poured down the gutter in the back lane. On dark, damp days the room was steamy and congested and if the clothes could not be dried on the garden line they had to hang in the shed and in the living room detracting either way from the basic comfort of the living room.

"Wednesday" my mother says "was another busy day"

Piles of ironing. Clothes were a big heavy task.

Mother always got the coal oven going, it helped to air the clothes after they got ironed and hung over the big brass line. So the oven had to be put in use. Usually that day, she would make a great big taty-pot (potatoes, onion, veg, a few roasted dumplings) that was working while she was ironing. The coal fire had to be kept bright for the iron flat irons. After the hot pot came out of the oven a dish full of herrings was popped in.

Mother always said 'Never eat herrings until they flow through May waters, never eat rabbits until there was an R in the month, same with pork.' So the diet was always watched.

Still dealing with Wednesday and ironing, my mother's account then moves on to an entirely new theme although in her reconstruction of the events the issues are clearly connected. And what it illustrates, I think, is this: it is quite impossible to classify the separate components of housework as independent tasks. Housework has its many layers and different tasks are done simultaneously. The new theme in my mother's account was mat-making and knitting.

Mother always had a mat on the frames, so if she had a spare few minutes at all, down to the mat she went. She always had socks on the needles. She kept her knitting behind the piano lid, if she sat one minute out came the knitting.

I shall have more to say about mat-making later since this particularly activity quite apart from its intrinsic importance to the household was a focal point for neighbourly contact.

Thursday was a full baking day, bread, tea cakes, a stone of flour at a time, tarts, meat tarts, pies.

The cooked food was kept in the cold pantry and although great care was needed in the summer to see that food was alright, little went off. There were plenty of eggs from the chickens. There was always bacon from the pigs my grandfather kept so the basic materials for baking were in good supply. The work, however, was hard and

skilful since the oven temperature was difficult to regulate and because any cooking involved carrying coal.

Friday, like the others was 'a very busy day' but it was one they looked forward to in that it marked the end of the week and Friday evening was an important social occasion for the whole family:

In fact, every day was hard as our house was an old-fashioned colliery house, a big open fire, coal oven water heated at the side of the fire place (which held about four pails of hot water), but Friday was a hard day. The fireplace was all cleaned out, reset, bars and stove black-leaded - that was put on and brushed off to make it shine. The fire irons and fender were all polished with Brasso, the big brass line polished, the hearth whitened with a brush - it was sparkling when finished. The plush mantle mirror around the top, that was the pride of the house. Then the floor washed, no carpets just oilcloth on the floor; then down went the lovely mats, the furniture polished with a wash leather, washed in vinegar and water, clean covers put on. By a Friday night our house was sparkling. For supper, out came the pies that had been made on Thursday, peas pudding, home-made black pudding if a pig had been killed - Mam made it herself, or else we kids called at the killing shop at the Co-op and got a can of blood, she made the black pudding from that.

Friday, then, was a day of preparation. After the retirement of my grandfather it was also the main social night of the week but during the time he worked it was a mere herald to Saturday, pay day and the last day of the working week.

Saturday, well, the house was nice, so it was a day Mam could relax. Her only luxury was her weekly Welcome Book (2d) and her knitting. She liked us bringing in our friends. Saturday the lads went out. Dad at the pub. By then I had learned to play the piano, so I brought my friends home, boys and girls, we had a nice sing song, supper and a chat. By then my Dad came in from the club. He loved to see us happy and singing.

I always remember my Mam saying on a Saturday night, "I will sleep tonight... because none of them are down the pit." Those words played on my young brain. I used to say, "Mam, I will never marry a pitman if it causes so much worry."

My mother then turns to another theme which, while not directly connected with domestic work nonetheless bears directly on the psychological costs of being a pitman's wife:

My mother watched the clock and kept going to the door to watch for the lads and my Dad coming down the street and she always said, "Thank God, here they come," and out came the dinner. That stuck in my mind as a child. I was scared for my mother.

A further aspect of this underlining just how far my grandmother's life was lived in the shadow of the pit. Like other wives in Throckley she was extremely attentive to outside noises. The bustle of the street, the crunch of hob-nailed boots, children playing, the calls of the hawkers and the intermittent clanking of tubs from the 'dilly line,' the throb of the pumping engines of the pit all implied normality. But an unexpected blow from the pit buzzer could penetrate the normal noise immediately,

spreading alarm and anxiety through every house.

Saturday and Sunday were the only days when she was free of that subliminal threat; only then could she feel she was safe.

Saturday evening was clearly a high spot; apart from my grandmother everybody went out but my mother, after a busy week, used to like to stay in then:

Saturday, the night I loved, sitting in with my mother, our two selves. The lads went out, my Dad was at the club, and above all, our Eva was out with her kids - she always visited her mother-in-law on Saturdays. Mother always sat and knit, she loved to listen to me playing the piano.

Sunday finished the weekend; it was another day of cooking and cleaning although only for the women:

We all helped in the house, I should say, the girls. One made the beds, one washed dishes, one cleaned up the house. Mam cooked the dinner, made cakes, tarts, scones, so again we had a full table. At night, again our friends came home after church, again the piano played. As always Dad came home from the pub and at once he sang; he loved the piano and he loved his family.

Sunday morning was a regular time for a very serious family ritual. This was when the grandfather clock was wound up and set, a task for my grandfather alone. No one else dared touch the clock. He used to give the mechanism a brush with a cockerel feather and carefully wind up the clock. His private name for it - and this was something of a family joke - was Hannah. The Sunday ritual with Hannah often prompted my grandmother to exclaim "You think more of that clock than you do of me." And she

told him more than once that she 'would have his coffin made from it.' The clock was his prize possession and as a small child I can remember vividly feeling awestruck by this ominous old thing, hardly daring to go near it, an attitude passed on to me by my mother. It was exactly the same for her and all the other children in Mount Pleasant.

The house was always untidy again by the end of Sunday night. The important things for the next day were, however, always ready. Pit boots had been dubbined, pit clothes were ready and dry and there was plenty of food for the baits.

My mother's account of housework covers a wide range of different tasks so some small elaboration is necessary. 'Cleaning up the house' involved dusting, polishing, washing floors, scrubbing and everything was done with simple equipment. My mother explains:

No hoovers, just brooms, brushes, buckets of water and scrubbing brushes, wash leathers, elbow grease. Outside steps were washed every week and sandy stone rubbed on them. We got sandy stone off the ragman for old rags. Mother was choosy with that. She liked soft stone. It had to stand in water first, then rubbed on the steps. Rain did not wash it off but rain washed chalk off so sandy stone was the stuff. In later years white paint did the job but everyone down Mount Pleasant liked their steps bright with sandy stone.

Also the windows was the pride and joy, nice lace curtains. Mother was lucky to have a niece in the second-hand trade so Aunt Maggie and mother got the best curtains and our windows were the envy of lots of neighbours.

My mother used to say, 'People knew the inside was clean when the outside was good.'

A vital part of the outside were the middens and the gutter. My grandmother, like her neighbours, made sure the main open drainage gutter was kept clean and well weeded and that the midden and toilet were kept smart. Both were in a real sense public, the family got to them by crossing the back lane. At night they had to use a candle or my grandfather's pit lamp. And as if to make a virtue out of necessity my grandfather always argued that inside lavatories were not healthy. But since, too, these were areas where the children played - of which more later - they had to be kept clean.

It seems hard to avoid the view that my grandmother's life was dominated by a kind of "compulsive domesticity"; (see C. Rosser and Harris 1965) she did little else but work; housework was her life. But through housework she found a basis for her own self respect and the recognition of others. And this really does need emphasis. Many have noted the uniformities of mining communities - men had much the same wages; they lived in the same houses; they knew each other's affairs intimately. (see e.g. N. Dennis et. al. 1956 M. Benney 1945) Any outward sign of a claim to be different, particularly a claim to be different, particularly a claim to be in any way superior, was looked down upon and would invite gossip and adverse comment. Phrases like, 'She's got a nose above her mouth', 'She's getting above herself' or derogatory words like 'posh' 'la-ti-da' and the like

could all be savagely applied bringing in their tow the social isolation which would make life impossible in communities which depended so much on mutual co-operation. Any claim to a special self respect had to be based, therefore, on an obvious claim to possess in some acknowledgeable way those qualities which all women in Throckley possessed but to do so in such a way that no insult to others or feelings of superiority over others was implied.

My grandmother found that self respect in her diligent housework and the visible signs of that - the bright windows, the sanded steps, the line of white washing, the well turned out kids - each a simple yet powerful symbol of a personal dignity which much in her environment threatened to destroy and each amply compensating in their symbolic force for the deficiencies of their material worth.

Within these weekly routines that have been described there were the daily tasks - making up the feather beds, tidying away clothes and, as if to seal the connection between her and the pit, making ready for the men to return home from work. Hot water had to be boiled ready for their bath and every day my grandmother had to make sure there was some fruit loaf in the house, because when my grandfather came from the pit he liked a slice of fruit loaf - eating that before anything else, even before his bath. Food from the pit and in the pit is said - and was said - to have a distinctive taste. Indeed, my mother occasionally arranged for my grandfather to take

bread and sugar sandwiches down the pit with him only to bring them up again for the children to eat. The pit was thought in some way to add a special flavour to the bread. But it was perhaps to get the taste of the pit out of his mouth that my grandfather had the fruit loaf, a curious contrast to his women folk who, perhaps unconsciously were seeking some closer contact with the underground world from which in every other respect they were totally excluded.

The time before his return was always an anxious one. But routine took away the sting. His bath was always ready and after he had dadded his clothes on the outside wall and put them in the oven to dry he took his bath in front of the fire and was followed, as they grew older by his sons, each using the same water. And as if to make yet another virtue of yet another necessity my grandmother used a phrase which my grandmother used to use when my brother and I complained of the need to use the same water, 'dirty water washes cleanest' - the perfect rationalisation!

Despite the hectic housework the pit pressed in on the home. Damp boots cluttered the small passage in from the back door and as my mother once told me, almost despairingly, "Our house was never tidy, you know, always pit clothes around the place."

Spring was a time for a huge clean out and redecoration. Wallpapering and painting were all done by my grandmother although, as the girls got older, they helped too. And since spring cleaning was the occasion to lay new mats,

the mat making had to be planned well in advance. Mat making is an excellent example of a necessary activity transformed into a pleasurable hobby, involving the whole family, and often the neighbours, too. From simple ingredients elaborate floor coverings were made. My mother has described in this way:

The hessian sometimes was plain, some were patterned, but the patterned ones were expensive so most people bought the plain. For a fireside mat it had to be $2\frac{1}{2}$ by $1\frac{1}{2}$ yards. My Mam made her own patterns. She marked it with a blue pencil - I can remember quite well about that, I thought she was clever and artistic - she placed dinner plates around the edge first, marked around with pencil and then she traced patterns with cups in the centre. Before the mat was stitched onto the frames all the clippings were ready, she had them cut months beforehand - that was another pastime, cutting clippings, all put into separate bags. Old white blankets were dyed, red, green and yellow for tracing the outside lines. Then the middle filled up with bonny assorted colours. I remember she measured the short pieces with a matchbox. The final part cutting out the mat was well rewarded. The neighbours popped in to see the mat and we kids loved rolling on the new mat so when the cleaning was done and new mats down, it was lovely.

The neighbours helped with the mats. A casual visit for a cup of tea would often be the occasion for friends to sit down and work at the mat for a few minutes and kids, of course, could always fill up a little time cutting clippings.

The resources of the village, its shops, its water supply, its transport and its services also served to fashion domestic work in particular ways. Most of my grandmother's shopping, for instance, was done in the Cooperative Store, there being few alternatives. But shopping or, rather, purchasing goods was not confined to the Throckley shops themselves. There was a considerable traffic of hawkers and cart traders up and down the pit rows from which people could buy a wide range of goods. These added to the limited variety of the local shops. And they added a good deal of colour to the drab streets. Shopping, however, had to be carefully planned and budgeted for and the main responsibility for this was my grandmother's. Here again it is the women bearing the burden of the uncertainty of the fortnightly wage and the necessary credit they needed to manage. My mother explains:

All the people in our village had to purchase clothes, footwear, bedding, on weekly payments. the Co-op was the main stores, but sometimes a bit pricey.

But she goes on to show how street traders offered some alternatives:

I remember a traveller coming to our house, a Mr. Soloman. My Dad liked good suits. He was tall and in no way could he get a suit ready made, so a good tailor had to do the job. When Soloman left, another man called Mr. James took over. After he left Walter Proudlock started a workroom in a hut behind Curwen's garage. He canvassed and got orders. By then my brothers wanted good tailored suits, so we were considered good customers, a regular big payment each week. He was the tailor for years after. I also remember a chap called Mr. Green. He travelled the street every Friday. He had a huge cart driven by a big draught horse. He always had two big hurricane lamps hanging each side of his cart. Also he rang a big heavy bell and he always shouted, "Lamp oil." He sold gallons of paraffin but also hardware, tins pots and pans; in fact, everybody said that Green sold everything from a pin to an elephant.

Jack Miller, he lived beside Throckley school, he used to go around in a little tub cart, pulled by a horse. He sold farm butter and fresh eggs. His face was red and weather beaten but his butter and eggs were good. Mother liked his butter; we had our own eggs.

Another man called Mr. Bone used to come around with a basket selling bread, tea cakes, muffins and crumpets. He had a shop where the chemist is

at Throckley. His daughter served in the shop. They were two crabby old people. He never sold much in Mount Pleasant, as everyone made their own bread.

My grandmother had to deal with these people; to know the times of their rounds and to be ready, if necessary to drop what she was doing to go out, usually among others, to buy things from the carts.

The herring men came around regular. Herring, forty for one shilling. That was my job as I got older, clean the Harn (as they were called). Kipper men also were regular callers. Annie Marsh came around selling fish. She carried the basket on her head. After she left George Bradney was the fish merchant. He did well until he became a money lender. Poor George, that was the end of fish. He got done.

Mother never had that habit, attending money lenders. She was the opposite. She would give rather than take.

Hugh Coffee from Newburn hawked fruit and veg. He was a rough-neck those days. He joined the army, married a widow and then set up a drapers shop in Newburn. My mother used to say, "Hinny, its not brains you want; its plenty of brawn and brass." How right she was in those days, but not now.

Life has changed.

In addition to the travellers there were many smaller scale attempts among the people themselves to set up small

shops and some did actually flourish. What they represented, I think, was a means of making a little money and of providing something other than housework for some of the women to do.

I remember also in Mount Pleasant and other colliery rows, little shops. Some were huts in a garden; some were in an outhouse in the yard. One was owned By Mrs. Barry, one by Cecil March, one by Mrs. Donnison. one by Mrs. Liddle. These shops were useful for small items. They sold haberdashery, sweets, also food. Most of these people bought stuff from the Co-op, put on coppers, but they did get the dividend from the Co-op for their purchases and in those days dividends were the only means of saving money. And it was all cash. No credit so they had nothing to lose. No shop inspectors, no rents, no leases and no taxes. So they did pick a living from their little shops. In fact, years later my twin brother turned our wash-house into a shop. He also sold draperies. Our Eva and mother made ginger beer, sold it a tuppence a bottle. Summer Sundays they did a good trade.

I remember a fish and chip shop, the very top house of Mount Pleasant owned by Mr. Haslam. He had a good shop. He put a big window in the outside wall. People queued up for his fish and chips.

These activities were economically very marginal to my grandparents. As my mother says:

It made no difference to us. We were never any richer. We lived from day to day, week to week and hoped for the best.

They were, however, part of the whole setting of Mount Pleasant and represented for my grandmother various possibilities for different kinds of shopping or of ways of stretching her budget further.

My grandparents once took in a lodger and managed to accommodate him by packing my mother off up the street to stay with her Aunt Maggie. The episode indicates that they were quick to seize opportunities to earn a bit more if those opportunities presented themselves.

We once had a lodger called Tommy Lynch. Dad brought him home for a night or two, but he liked our home so much mother kept him. I remember him paying thirty shillings a week board money - that was a big help to our family income. He was homeless, a bachelor and his brother put him out. I was young at the time. I went to sleep at my Aunt Maggie's up the street so I did not care what happened at home. Where they all slept I do not know....

Such opportunities were rare; the real income of the family was increased not by more money, but by work in the garden or on Tommy Lamb's farm.

Managing money was my grandmother's job and it involved careful planning. There was no scope for impulse buying and major item of expenditure had to be met, like the suits, on an installment plan. Budgeting was, however, an uncertain business since my grandfather's

wage depended in a large part on the quality of the work place he had been allocated in the quarterly cavilling.

Pit work was a worry to us all and cavelling days were very anxious ones. Poor Dad. We knew the minute he entered what cavel he'd got. His face showed sadness. I think the weeks were counted until the next cabling (in Throckley cavilling was pronounced cabling - W. W.)

If he had been lucky enough to get a good place where he could make a lot of money all was well; if not then the family budget was cut back and my grandmother had to plan her outlays more carefully. Mrs. Thompson, Jack Ritson's daughter, told me that if her father came home with a bad cable her mother would just go upstairs and cry. As a child she remembers this happening often.

The quality of the cable governed whether or not my grandfather got any pocket money. He used to give over his wages on pay day and was given back his pocket money - rarely more than two shillings and sixpence per week. If the wage was low then he did without. His pipe tobacco - his baccy - was, however, bought from the household income and if he managed to make any money doing odd jobs at Lamb's farm then that was considered his.

Housework itself determined the routines of my grandmother's day but within those routines she had other matters to attend to, particularly with regard to children and, in her case, her relatives, too.

For bringing up children was the central motif of her life; the housework was a mere adjunct, albeit a major one, to this central task. It was her task, too, especially as her children grew older to iron out the frictions which congested living produced and to hold the family together. As the children grew up they each took their part in domestic chores but while they were young in the period before the end of the First World War they were a major worry for her yet, at the same time, the source of her deepest satisfactions.

Again, however, the external conditions of the family shaped the problem of bringing up children; it set the financial constraints determining, therefore, that my grandmother made most of her childrens' clothes. But more important still the general social conditions, the quality of health care, the state of the drainage and the way of waste disposal all conspired to create worries that no mother in Throckley could have been free from. Premature death, illness and epidemics were common enough occurrences. My grandmother was lucky; her children were all healthy but she knew many more who were not and since death was close to them - a theme I shall take up in a later chapter - it was a real enough worry for her that she might have to face it, too. That she did not was something she put down to the quality of her child care and to fate.

Her main object was to keep the children well fed. Her cooking was therefore, not something which took her away from children; it was a key part of bringing them up.

But if she did face illness then she felt well prepared. My mother has set out quite clearly what my grandmothers policies were in this respect:

When any of the family were ill, first we were put into the bed in the kitchen. It was always warm and we could get attention without mother having to go upstairs.

The old cure for a cold was castor oil or syrup of figs. As she said, "Clean out the system first." Chest colds were treated with goose grease rubbed on the chest, hot drinks and sleep. She used to say, "Don't worry about food; sickness feeds itself.

Once they get the fever out of them they will eat. Let them sleep it off." Then the cod liver oil and malt, or Scott's emulsion. I hated both. Parrishes chemical food was given us. That made us eat.

She used to say "Feed a cold, starve a fever."

The sore throat remedy was awful, sulphur blown down our throats, then washed down with milk. She also used to mix equal parts of honey, olive oil and rum. A teaspoon of that for a cough or a black mint soaked in vinegar. And if any cash to spare at all, a bottle of sherry bought. Each day a fresh egg beat up, add 1 teaspoon of sugar, 1 glass of sherry and fill up with milk. Best pick-me-up there was.

With measles the curtains were drawn in case the light hurt our eyes. So we always got good attention. Sore throats - gargle with salt and water.

Sore throats - rub with glycerine and honey.

Sore eyes - bathe them with boracic and warm milk.

The medical armoury was hopelessly inadequate but it brought a high quality of personal care and a feeling of security in a situation where self help was far more important than the doctor.

These medical skills were not practised only on her own family. She helped her neighbours and was in turn helped by them. She attended at births and was attended in her own turn when her own children were born. She helped lay out the dead, too. Since, for her, such activities were part of a taken-for-granted-world, and, in themselves, of no special note, it is difficult to discover what her involvement with them meant for her deeper views about life and death and the significance of family life. It always strikes me that her life was led close to the basic problems which concern all human beings; her involvement with people, her neighbours, was direct and very close to their most intimate concerns and not just at the sad times. She, like many others, helped at weddings, at christenings, and, of course, at funerals, and she was helped in return.

Maintaining the links of neighbourliness and friendship was a central theme in her working life, part of the business of being a pitman's wife. Thinking about these things, worrying about them, being concerned about them was therefore another essential part of being a housewife; without those contacts her life would have been considerably impoverished and insecure.

The final force shaping domestic work was the prevailing social attitudes about the place of women. There was no work for women in mining communities outside of the home. My grandmother had worked as a shop girl but gave that up when she married. There was, too, a clear sexual division of labour in the family. In my grandparent's home, for example, the women did nearly all the domestic work. They even dadded the pit clothes on the outside wall to get the dust and loose muck off them. The regular deliveries of house coal from the pit had to be shovelled into the coalhouse. Even the women helped with that. Cooking, cleaning, looking after children, washing shopping etc were all thought of as women's work. But were it not for the fact that, looking back, we can understand why this was so, that the whole position of women in mining communities fashioned this outlook, it would be hard to avoid the conclusion that the women preferred it that way in any case.

My grandmother did not champ at the bit about housework; she got on with it and would, I am sure, have felt it strange if anyone thought things should be otherwise. And here, perhaps, is the tragedy of it. Standish Meacham has stressed the 'traditional character of working class' in the period before the First World War, its fatalism, its pre-occupation with the familiar and the concrete. (1977) This description fits. There was little in the routines of my grandmother's life to contradict her whole feeling of the inevitablity of it

and the price to be paid for work of this kind saw, as Leonore Davidoff has perceptively noted, 'the narrowness of horizons, the closing in of the woman's world.'

(1974: 419) Just as men passed on to their sons the values of work in the pit, the women passed on to their daughters those precise qualities which made a miner's wife. The social mechanisms of this are examined in the next chapter.

There were few opportunities for any kind of release from the recurring demands of the house. For most of the time her work and her leisure were completely fused. As her children grew older - particularly the girls - and could help there was some easing of the burden, but never any release. On occasions, before the First World War when my grandfather owned a horse and trap she would go for a ride in the trap, usually up to Heddon-on-the-Wall. My grandfather would have a drink but my grandmother refused to go into the pub. She stayed with the children outside. Once a year she went on the Sunday school trip to the seaside. She rarely went for walks with my grandfather although he used to walk quite a lot. Indeed, in response to suggestions that she should go out she used to say that the fresh air made her 'intoxicated' and she would only trip up!

The only occasions when she could step back from the flow of inevitable chores were the great ritual occasions of Easter, Christmas and New Year's Eve and the great changes in her life occurred at times of crisis as, for example, when she took in Gordon Brown's

children, or when her own children married, or had christenings. For most of the time she worked.

I cannot remember my grandmother wearing anything else other than her pinny and her dress. There were occasions when she put on her Sunday best, but for most of her life she kept to her working clothes, a fact which states powerfully her basic view of what her role was and how she conceived it completely in terms of the house. Her hands were working hands and while she kept herself neat she was not fastidious about her appearance.

My mother notes in passing:

Mam never wanted clothes as she never went far, just local shops. They took us to the Sunday school trip, that was a treat to us all. But Dad insisted on going long walks. He walked with us but not Mam. She was always too tired and she liked the house quiet just for a few hours to herself. (my emphasis).

Within these constraints she evolved a basic attitude of acceptance; she did not complain; she found her pleasures where she could and she did not fret about what she did not have. Her philosophy she often expressed in proverbs and these she passed on to her children as if they distilled for her in a precise way what she had taken a lifetime to discover for herself. As my mother says:

My parents always said, 'The only way to get money is to work for it.' 'If you want anything done do it yourself and you know it gets done.' 'Never put off for tomorrow what should be done today otherwise you get in a muddle.' So every day had its chores.

'Do good and good comes out of it.' They were both good with proverbs. I carry them through myself. They always said, 'Hard work never killed anybody.' So we all had to work.

Work then, was the motif of her whole life, the source of her self respect, her access to the community around her, the opportunity for her deepest self expression and the quality above all others what her husband valued. It seems to me it was also a kind of imprisonment, a grinding necessity but one which, nonetheless, could have been differently organised. But this view is that of an outsider; for her, work was her life; she knew no other and could not afford the luxury of dreams she could never realise. Commenting on the position of miners' wives in his account of working class women before 1914 Peter Stearns makes exactly this point: '... because there was little sense of alternatives there was little visible despair....' (1972: 108)

Unions and the Labour Party offered a glimpse of a different future for the men. What did they offer the women?

Chapter Nine

FAMILY LIFE: THE EARLY YEARS

The routines of housework were the scaffold of my grandmother's busy life; but what interested her ultimately was her children. In her scheme of priorities the children came first, her husband next and her close relatives not far behind. This basic commitment she shared with my grandfather although their tolerances were different. In small ways he was much firmer with the boys. He objected less than she did to the prospect that her sons might go down the pit. He was less aware than she was of the wearing effects of continuous work although nothing in her background encouraged her to stand back from her life far enough to be too critical of it. Her sensitivity and awareness of a different way of living were, however, greater than his and stemmed, I think, from something I have been told often enough by her children. She detested the pits. She was more aware of the basic limitations of life in Throckley whereas my grandfather, much more fully involved in activities outside the home where he could indulge his interests, was less critical. In fact, as I have shown he valued much of his work, his home and his family life; the contrast between what he had achieved for himself and what he had experienced as a boy was sharp enough to convince him he was much better off. And in any case, coming from the area he



The Brown Family in 1905



The Twins 1915

felt at home; he was well known; he had many valuable contacts, at work, on the farm, in the village and there was nothing in his experience, at least up to the First World War, which had prompted him to stand back from the normal flow of his life to look at it afresh.

I shall illustrate in this chapter following the logic of the argument about domestic work and leisure, that the pattern of family life in Mount Pleasant was shaped directly by the routines of the pit and the prevailing assumptions in Throckley about the respective roles of, and relationships among men, women and children. As an institution, as I shall show, the family played a key role in reproducing those relationships, at least during the period up to the late 1920s when the village retained its character as a mining community providing few opportunities for employment outside the pit.

Probing where I can the character of relationships inside the family, I want to illustrate further one of the central themes of this book, that private experiences of people have a social shape. The character of relationships in the family, between my grandparents themselves, between them and their children and among the children, shaped their feelings towards one another their sensitivities and self images. These feelings are compounded now into a nostalgic image of a close-knit family life. Some aspects of the image are idealized. But the family was for them all the most significant reference group and it gave precise

definition to certain character traits and values which, in my view, all my relations share in a clearly recognisable way.

My grandparents' tolerance of small children is remarkable. Four years after they moved down from Heddon to Throckley, during which time their family had increased to three children and my grandmother had recovered from the emotional pain of the loss of her second child in childbirth, they were presented with a problem; it illustrates both their attitudes to children and the significance they attached to ties of family and kin. Just before the birth of their fourth child, Bill, they had to decide whether or not to take in and look after the children of my grandmother's half brother. He had re-married having met his new wife in a pub at Benwell, a suburb of Newcastle. As the tale is filtered through family recollections - and these, in themselves, of course, are based on the story as it was told, and re-told by my grandmother - my grandmother said to him, "Gordon, hinny, that's not the place to get yourself a wife." This remark is a small indication of the distance my grandmother, like many other people from Throckley, put between herself and people from "doon the toon", or "toonas", those who lived in the jerry-built flatlets which stretched across Tyneside and with whom she had had to deal in her days as a shop assistant in a second-hand store along the Scotswood Road. Gordon's new wife clearly fitted the stereotype for it is also said that she badly used his four young children, her

indifference towards them turning, at times, to downright cruelty.

The decision to take the four children into her own home was forced on her, so it is said, by the children themselves. Feeling unloved and neglected, and led by Lotte, the eldest, eight-years-old at the time, the four of them walked from Benwell to Throckley, a distance of some four miles, having sneaked out of their room in the cover of darkness. They were determined to live with my grandmother, their aunt Sally, and, they were taken in. Maggie, my grandmother's sister took two of them, my grandmother kept the other two and both were brought up as her own with the full agreement of her brother and, of course, my grandfather.

By 1905 then she had three children of her own and, pregnant again was boarding two others. Their were seven people living in a two-bedroomed house, a clear case of overcrowding although, on that count, quite typical for the district. From the beginning of their married life, therefore, their sphere of the personal and the private was quite severely circumscribed. This entered into the relationship between the adult and among the children directly; there were few secrets and no expectation that any of them should have any right to much privacy. Secretiveness, reserve and circumspection in these circumstances brought censure. Openness and being forthright were the qualities which were really valued. And both my grandparents had a functional tolerance of noise and clamour without which

their family life would have been unbearable. They simply enjoyed the company of children. They had their own; they lived close to Maggie and to Bob and Alvina Brown so there were always lots of young relatives around, too.

But in 1912, at the age of forty tragedy struck. My grandmother became pregnant again and gave birth to twins, Louie, my mother (christened Margaret Louisa after aunt Maggie) and Jack. My grandfather celebrated the occasion by getting thoroughly drunk and on the way back from the pub he actually wore out the knees of his trousers through crawling on the ground. The birth of the twins gives a brief glimpse into the relationship between my grandparents. It was never evident to their children, despite their close congested living that there was any sexual relations between their parents - such things, in any case hidden from children, were not even discussed when, much later, the daughters themselves were approaching marriage. But my grandmother did once note to my mother that her husband was a strong healthy man and that if she could - meaning if it were possible at all, which, by then, it wasn't - she would "still be having bairns."

Their own relationship, like that of other couples with large families in pit houses, had to be worked through in conditions where there was very little privacy and where long hours of work left little time in the day when they could be completely by themselves. If he was on foreshift - 3.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. - there would

have been an opportunity to be alone with his wife, assuming the children to be at school. My grandmother always got up with him and saw him out to work whatever shift he was on and she always waited up for him whatever time he was due to come home. This was very typical behaviour. Jack Lawson calls it "the old law of the colliery woman", "based on grim, sad experience", which urged them to see their husbands and sons out lest she never see them again. (1949: 34) Whatever real intimacy there was between them had to be snatched from a pitiless round of commitments, clamour and growing tiredness. But they found it, my mother supposes, late in the evening when everyone else had gone to bed when they themselves had the room to themselves or turned into their own bed tucked in the alcove under the stairs. My aunt Eva has told me that, in her view, "there was more love on his side than hers; she used to often refer to him as 'ye owld bugga'." They seemed rarely to argue with one another apparently accepting each others interests and not making demands on each others company. Except on the few occasions when, for example, my grandmother shovelled coal in or my grandfather made the jam, or the butter, they maintained a clear division of labour in the family with his work and her work quite distinctly separate.

Several writers and Mark Benney in particular (1946) have suggested that miners, feeling themselves to be of a low social status - a feeling not without foundation since they were looked down on by many people

- experienced many difficulties in their relationship with women, particularly so since many girls in mining areas were determined not to marry a pitman. Jealousies, uncertainties about the real reasons for being accepted by women, their ignorance of women born of the highly insulated male world in which most of them grew up - the only women they knew well, and then only in a dependant way, were their own mothers - all conspired to force men back into the security of traditional roles which clearly separated the male and the female world. (c.f. S. Meacham 1977) This is, of course, speculation although, with respect to the business of being looked down on, as I have shown, pitmen were looked down on in area.

Whether such feelings entered into my grandfather's relationship with his wife, I do not know. His children say he worshipped the ground she walked on and that he was absolutely content. I suspect he felt that he had done well for himself. Their marriage was in fact, conducted in very much a traditional manner with each of them falling back on fairly typical expectations of what married life was supposed to be like and both of them having a conventional sense of what their respective roles were.

Eva told me once in illustration of this, that she remembers a sharp comment from my grandfather which upset her at the time. He was working in a bad cable; his wages were low. One Saturday he put his wages down and my grandmother had said, wearily, that she did not know

how she was going to manage on that. He retorted angrily "Well that's all I've got and there's no more to get; you'll just have to manage." This, surely, was a common enough exchange but it does indicate a clear sense of who had responsibility for what. In his case, too, given his very strong views about people standing on their own two feet and getting on with what they had to do, there may have been the suggestion that she should stop moaning and get on with her job.

When they recall their childhoods my relatives do not think readily about conflicts between their parents. They did exchange harsh words on occasion; they did have their rows. But they were never serious and they were always quickly forgotten, an observation which leads to an important point about marital conflict in mining. Conflicts between man and wife in mining communities carry risks which are very different to those in less dangerous work conditions. Here, I think, is the importance of the 'Row' as a social institution. Family rows were issue specific, short in duration, in some families violent but always recovered from quickly. The explanation for this does not lie in the personalities of the people involved; it is in the logic of working underground. To have a man go to the pit simmering grudges and acrimony is to incur the serious risk that he might lessen his attention to his work and through that suffer accident or even death. The row clears up an issue quickly; it leaves no grudge.

Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter comment in their study of family life in Ashton that 'the development of deep and intense personal relationships of an all-round character, is highly improbable, and observations confirm the absence of any marriage corresponding to the ideals of romantic love and companionship.' (1956: 228) They affirm even more strongly that many marriages simply carry on: 'So long as the man works and gives his wife and family sufficient, and the woman uses the family's 'wages' wisely and gives her husband the few things he demands, the marriage will carry on.' (228) And what lies behind this, they say, is that the family 'is a system of relationships torn by a major contradiction at its heart; husband and wife live separate, and in a sense, secret lives.' (228)

My grandfather was not a demonstratively affectionate man and nor did my grandmother expect such affection; their relationship was, however, based on a considerable respect for one another and a fundamental trust. They shared the view that the children mattered most and on this basis remained stably married into old age.

Kinship

One of the main attractions of Mount Pleasant for my grandmother was that her sister, Maggie, lived there. My grandfather's brother, Bob, the pit blacksmith lived there, too. They were in close contact with both relatives and although their other brothers and sisters lived away from Throckley they maintained regular contact

with them. Apart from his younger brother, George, who was a cobbler, all the Browns were connected with pits in the area. This meant, of course, that my grandfather was greatly aware, quite apart from his own experience in Throckley pit, of the imminent danger of all pit work. His younger brother Joseph, for instance, was killed in Clara Vale pit in 1914 at the age of twenty-three. Recently married, though without children his death was particularly cruel since his move to Clara Vale was entirely the result of falling foul of the pit management at Throckley.

My grandfather felt Joe's death badly because this was the second of his younger brothers killed accidentally. Harry, the tearaway, the one expelled from Heddon school was drowned in the Tyne at Wylam trying to save a friend who could not swim. This was in 1904. He was twenty-two, totally drunk and attempting, on a prank, to swim the river.

His relationship with his own family was not really close, however, and he did not actively seek to build up close relationships between his own children and those of his brothers and sisters or, indeed, to have much to do with his own parents. From my mother's account of it there is clearly some trace of social hierarchy here albeit of a very subtle kind:

My mother was more of a town woman, more refined, not a rough country woman. She spoke nice and didn't swear. I think dad saw a lot of quality in her that his in-laws did not have. Our house

was nice and he was proud It did not bother my dad's people very much ... in fact, dad's brothers thought I was stuck up until they properly got to know me. They were all rough and ready but very kind.

The significant relative was, Maggie; the two sisters worked closely together, they shared their children. My mother, in fact, says she spent more time in Maggie's house than she did in her own. Since her husband was a pit official they were slightly better off than my grandparents and with only one daughter, Francy, they often were able to help my grandparents financially. They sometimes bought boots for the Brown children for example. And since the coal they had delivered to them was of a superior quality they often shared their coal, too, so that my grandmother could get her oven up to the higher temperatures for some of her cooking. Their relationship was built up of a thousand sharing trivia of this kind, of daily contact and great concern for one another. The two families were, in fact, quite indistinguishable.

This kind of neighbourliness was not, however, unique. When Throckley people talk of the past, neighbourliness is one of their main themes. Not only were good neighbours inescapable, they were necessary. A community without the means to buy in the help it needed from the outside must meet its needs from within. Neighbourliness is what made such help possible. It functioned, too, to provide a framework of social contact

for the wives of Throckley. (c.f. N. Dennis et al 1956)
 Albert Matthewson captured both points when he told me
 about his mother:

My mother used to sick visit. I remember the
 Armstrong family ... three children died of the
 plague (that's dysentry). There had to be a street
 by street collection to bury the kiddies because
 the parents could not afford it. Living in streets
 friendly ... There's an atmosphere you don't
 find now. The doors would never be locked. They
 used to knock through the walls to the neighbours
 to see they were alright.

Parents and Children: "Having Bairns"

To have children in Throckley before the First
 World War was to run a very high risk that children
 might die; in 1905 the infant mortality rate for the
 district was 191 deaths per thousand births. Nearly
 two out of every ten children born died during the first
 year of life. The national figure for such deaths
 between 1901 and 1910 was 128. (C. Dyhouse 1978)
 The birth rate figures and infant mortality figures
 for the district are as follows for the period when
 my grandparents were having their children:

Birth Rates and Infant Mortality Rates

Throckley 1896 - 1912

Date	Birth Rate	Infant Mortality Rate
	Live births per 1,000 population	Deaths per 1,000 during first year
1896	35.3	123
1897	38.9	141
1898	43.8	140
1899	-	163
1900	40.02	209
1901	38	173
1902	38.6	170
1903	41.4	152.9
1904	40.6	135
1905	38.3	191
1906	35	111
1907	35.1	93
1908	39.6	142
1910	33.1	103
1911	30.89	-
1912	30.13	13.5

Source: Calculated from the Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health, Newburn Urban District.
Tyne Wear Archive and West Denton Library.

Throckley, clearly like many other mining villages had special difficulties. Carol Dyhouse has suggested that a quite prevalent explanation of high rates of infant mortality in working class families was that of the ignorance and incompetence of working class mothers. She says of the report of the Physical Deterioration Committee that "its pages (were) littered with references to a new generation of women ignorant of domestic management and disinclined towards their duties in the home." (1978: 257)

The M.O.H. for the District, Dr Messer, attributed the very high infantile mortality rates to two sets of interacting factors, child rearing habits and housing conditions, but before illustrating his argument it is important to take note of one of his points about the figures themselves. They are clearly very high but the M.O.H. added a further cautionary note in 1905:

Just think of it. 191 out of every 1,000 children born are buried within the twelve months. I have just hinted above that besides this dreadful holocaust we are liable to overlook the damaged ones ... If it gets bad food, impure air and water to drink, if it is cramped in space or cradled in dirt, how can it become anything else than a stunted creature continually dependent on others for help?

As to child rearing habits the M.O.H. was already to point out a self reinforcing cycle of poor diets leading to undernourishment, retarded development and child rearing practices in a later generation which themselves are inadequate. In 1902 he wrote despairingly of carelessness among some mothers in the district:

As soon as possible, after birth, the child is put onto the bottle, and whilst milk is said to be firm a considerable proportion of the food thus substituted for mother milk, my experience is that very little milk enters in to its composition and in its stead the most unwholesome, unnutritious,

undigestable messes are resorted to. Common foods are soured milk out of dirty bottles; bread and water; arrowroot, sometimes with milk, cornflour starch and similar substances

And of standards of cleanliness in some homes he wrote:

Some of the houses I visited when I was enquiring into these deaths under one year were simply in an appalling condition of filth. Evil smelling, doors and windows kept carefully shut, and all manner of filth on the floor was not uncommonly met with.

He was quite clear in his own mind what caused such conditions although he looked behind the immediate causes to far deeper ones; the immediate cause was drink:

Perhaps at the bottom of much of this vice and misery is drink, for the parents who develop this craving and spend on it what should go to the purchase of the necessities for the life of the children ... and I should be inclined to put down to this cause many of the dirty slatternly homes that one sees.

In Dr Messer's view the problems of child neglect were an artefact of ignorance.

Carole Dyhouse finds little evidence in support of this theory but like Dr Messer, regards the behaviour of some parents as a symptom rather than the cause of high rates of infant mortality and that much that was written about working class family life in late Victorian England was "accusatory rather than descriptive", revealing more

"about the viewpoint and values of the observer than about those being observed." (1978:267)

If the business of giving birth is seen from the working class mother's point of view a different picture emerges. In my grandmother's case it is a picture of great care being taken to protect the health of the child and also of the birth of children being part of the life of the community as a whole revealing much of the character of family life and the position of women. And one feature of that position is the matter of respectability. Dr Messer's descriptions of the poorer more brutalised families may be coloured somewhat by prejudice, though I doubt it, but they do at least convey something of the range of standards of family life against which women in Throckley could measure themselves. For my grandmother cleanliness was almost next to Godliness and treating "the bairns" properly was a central component of her self respect.

Prompted by such considerations my mother set out for me what preparations were made for new babies in Mount Pleasant. My grandmother's guide to baby care and her own experience are described as follows:

Even in the poor days, the coming of babies was prepared at the first sign of pregnancy. The layette consisted of three day gowns, three night-gowns, three vests, three barrow coats, three binders (they were long pieces of white cloth or three inch bandages; they were wrapped around a baby's stomach to keep the navel intact until

firm and set), three liberty bodices. They were to strengthen the spine and keep the chest warm. Cot blankets were wrapped round them - they were made out of old blankets or bought ones if money could be spared to buy them. Babies' heads were covered with their day gowns, that was to protect the opening of their heads. No light got to their eyes until they were about a month old.

Birth, then, had to be carefully anticipated; not to do so well in advance would have been to incur very high costs all at once. Birth itself must also be seen in its social context. My grandmother gave birth to all her children in her own home and all of them were delivered by her friend and neighbour, Mrs Allen. Mrs Allen also helped with funerals and pig killings and weddings, it being inconceivable in Mount Pleasant that any of these things might take place without her. But more of that later. My grandmother's sister, Maggie, was also there at the births and during each one my grandfather was despatched out of the house away up the street to sit and await the result. Birth was a matter for the women alone. If a doctor was needed then he would have been called but in none of my grandmother's confinements was this necessary. After the birth it was usual for women to stay in bed for ten days to recover. One aspect of this recovery was to wrap the mother's stomach quite tightly with a bed sheet in the belief that this would help the figure back into shape again.

Christenings

Births are public occasions celebrated in distinctive ways in all societies. In Throckley the period after the birth was one of much visiting leading up to the christening and the churching of the mother. My mother's account of Mount Pleasant explains:

Babies wore the long gowns and barrow coats until they got christened at the age of four to six weeks. Then they were shortened (that was dresses, all babies, girls or boys, wore dresses and petticoats, napkins and matinee coats and bootees, always no less than three each.)

There was always a cake baked and a bottle of something to drink, even if it was ginger wine. Everyone that came to visit a new baby got a piece of cake and a glass of wine. It was called "to wet the babies head." And everyone was expected to hansom the baby with a silver coin, a threepenny piece, a sixpence or even a shilling if one could afford it. If one did not do that, that passed for bad luck to the baby.

If anyone did not acknowledge the new baby in this way they would have been thought of as very mean indeed and not too close to the family.

The christening meal was always a nice tea, all home made, that was prepared for months in advance.

In fact, it was like Christmas preparations.

Here was the chance for celebration, to have friends and relatives to the house, to eat, drink and talk.

But beneath the revelry there was a strict rule about the churching of the mother and the christening itself which indicates much about the position of women, and the ways in which they could stage their respectability.

After the christening the mother could go out and visit but it was reckoned to be bad luck for a mother and baby to go into any house before the mother was churched and the baby christened. The mother was supposed to be unclean until she was blessed at Church.

It is clear that many women actually did feel themselves to be in some way unclean having, as the birth of the baby unambiguously testified, given themselves to a man. Even within marriage therefore, sex, given the strength of this tradition was thought of as being in some way dirty.

Then again, the first three houses that were visited, the occupant had to give a parcel to the baby, containing three articles, either food, garments, mostly it was a candle, a box of matches, tea, sugar etc. just traditions.

Also, at the christening, the Godmother that carried the baby had a parcel made up of eats (a sandwich, cake, biscuits and always a silver coin put in).

After leaving the house, if it was a boy baby, the first female they met, young or old, got the parcel.

If it was a girl baby, the first male got it.

It was considered lucky to receive christening bread.

Such practices can be interpreted, as my mother herself interprets them, as just tradition; but they can also be understood as bearing a much greater significance. Churching is a ritual way of bringing the mother back into society, back into the world of the known and the understood since through child birth, the giving of life, she had been close to the unknown and the ultimate mystery of life itself. Churching reflects that feeling by putting birth into a distinctively religious mode and offers at the same time a symbolically powerful way of giving thanks for a successful birth, a fact, even today, which cannot be attributed entirely to medical science and which then, with very high levels of infant mortality, was something to be truly grateful for. This ritual, too, underwrites the new status of the woman from that of woman with a child - a biological fact - to that of mother, a social role of great significance and responsibility.

While people who were not particularly religious might not have articulated such reasons themselves as the reasons for keeping close to the traditions, it would certainly have required an act of great courage to consciously stand outside them and perhaps, too, a scepticism which only strangers can possess. The respect which my grandparents showed to such traditions is taken as evidence by my mother that they were, indeed, religious people despite the fact that they were not regular churchgoers.

High infantile mortality rates and high child mortality rates are good indicators of social conditions. But they signal, too, some terrible, essentially private tragedies and bring in their tow anxieties which no family with small children could be entirely free of, especially so in communities which are relatively small and socially cohesive. My grandparents brought up their children at a time when medical treatment for some childhood epidemics was nothing better than isolation policies such as closing the school. The prospect was always a real one that their children might not survive. A school log book entry for May 17th 1907 speaks volumes:

This school is closed by order of the Medical Officer of Health for this district, on account of the Epidemic (Diphtheria and Whooping Cough) for a fortnight.

June 20th. One little girl aged 5 yrs died this morning in the Hospital - Annie Aager.

(Throckley School Log Book NRO)

My grandmother's eldest child, Olive, was a pupil at the school at this time and knew Annie Aager well. Even children were acutely aware of death. My mother recalled for me some of her early memories of this theme:

In Mount Pleasant all neighbours helped each other, with deaths, births weddings and parties. A death was a morbid affair, what I can remember. The corner where the bed was ... the wall was draped with a white sheet. The body was put on the bed. That was draped in white sheets. The beds were

black and brass, big balls on the corners and big bows of black ribbon were tied around the bed ends. No tressles those days. Fires had to be put out, wash-house fires lit and the wash-house used the time the body was in the house. Blinds drawn. It was awful. Later years, things got better, more modern methods.

The World of Children

With little space and several children a constant problem is keeping the children in order so as not to be totally undermined by their demands or distracted by their behaviour. Both my grandparents were very indulgent to children; they had time for them - my grandfather more so than my grandmother - and liked their company. If, on the other hand, they felt that children were intruding too far into their adult world they would promptly despatch them to the street. "Get away and divvent cock your lugs here" was, as my mother says, a common remark if any of them tried to listen in to adult conversations.

The world of the children was, in Mount Pleasant, quite separate from that of the adults. It was, however, just as constrained by the resources of the village as the position of the family was by the pit and was just as powerfully shaped by prevailing attitudes about the respective roles of men and women. It was, then, a constructed world and its nuances reveal much of my grandparents' attitude to their children and of how they interpreted their own roles as parents.

She shared my grandfather's views about authority and in deciding, as all parents must, where she would stand on the question of how much autonomy children should be given, she opted for a policy of close supervision. Being always at home the children, as small children, were always aware of the presence of their mother.

For the children themselves the world was bounded by the street and the neighbours, the street being their main playground. My mother once again explains:

As children we got very little entertainment, just what we made ourselves. In Mount Pleasant, plenty of kids, two long streets to play in, street lamps on either side, so around these lamps we played, that is in the dark nights until about seven o'clock. If wet we gathered in our wash houses with a big fire on. We played games (Guess What) very simple entertainment, dominoes, card games and always under the eyes of our parents.

Their play changed by the season of the year and given the complete lack of any special facilities for children's play in the village, their ingenuity had to express itself in meagre surroundings:

In the summer nights we played in the burn, a gutter behind the Lyric Picture Hall. It was walled up on each side. We used to pile sticks and stones to dam the water. That was our bathing pool. Each girl had their own pool. We used to wash the stones, sandstone them and very proud we were.

My grandfather had his indiosyncracies. Like many working men of his generation (see H. Pelling 1968) he objected to his children being vaccinated and was threatened with court action for his stance on this matter. He was always firm but never, his children say, stern. In many ways he was a bit soft with "bairns" and appeared to the children to have had more time for them than their mother had. He was not ambitious for his children; he wanted them to find decent jobs but he had no expectation that they should lead a life much different to his own. The values he did expect them to realise in their own lives were primarily those of security and independence. He detested the idea of charity and could not see any point in pining for what he could not have and both these attitudes he encouraged in his children.

What he expected from them was co-operation in the home and a respect of his authority although, as I have said, he was not severe about this. In fact, he was an extremely gentle man and objected to children being treated to blows. Discipline from him was given as a disapproving look and he expected that to suffice. In the long run, of course, such an attitude to discipline brings rich results; without feeling in any way frightened of him his children were always aware of what he expected of them and were, on the whole, well behaved. Children were at the centre of my grandmother's life; she was not sentimental about them and as the girls got older they were expected to play their part with housework.

There is a connection here, clearly, between the girls' play and the housework routines of the home, a subtle form of anticipation which acted out in play their fate as housewives. One of the favourite pastimes for the girls was to take babies out for walks in their prams. My mother says they used to knock on doors when they knew there were babies and ask to take them out, anticipating in play a common enough task for mothers. The sexual division of labour, clearly, was in part reproduced in the play of children.

Unlike in the case of the boys, there was no expectation operating that girls would work when they grew up. Apart from casual domestic work, some posts as shop assistants there was no work for women in the village. Just how difficult things were is revealed in a minute of the Co-operative Store Committee in 1895. It reads:

Annie Scott be appointed apprentice in the drapers' shop:

Conditions:- 12 months without wages (my emphasis W.W.)

to learn millinery

to serve in shop whenever required

One month's trial on either side.

(Minutes of the Throckley Co-op Society. Tyne Wear Archive 1062/1 Sept 30th 1895)

That same month sixty applicants were received for the post of grocery assistant. For the girls, the key role was that of wife and mother.

The absence of proper play facilities often led the children to dangerous areas. My mother went on to relate that, above the burn there was a "big cundy", a large open pipe.

I don't know where the water came from but it was fresh and clean, never stagnant. The cundy must have been miles long and we used to crawl up it with a candle lit. That happened often until my father heard about it. A good telling off I got. He said, "Bairn, don't go up there. That water is from the pit. Rats will come down." I think he said 'rats' to scare me; never again did I go up the cundy.

There may have been a very special reason behind my grandfather's warning. Throckley miners had suspected for a long time a close connection between pit rats and Weil's disease, otherwise known as rat jaundice. Local doctors confirmed the connection in the 1930s.

They regularly went for walks. "Summer nights we roamed the Dene, paddled in the burn, walks up the river side." During the winter nights,

we played at the lamp - ball, skipping ropes, boys, leapfrog, Jack shine the lamp, block, knocky-nine-door, but our parents were always popping out to see if we were O.K.

For the boys the pattern was slightly different. They were destined for work, a fact at once reflected in my grandfather's attitude towards them and to the kind of qualities which their play valued. For them childhood

was ended when they started work and if they were to work in the pit it ended at fourteen years of age.

My grandfather made certain that his sons made some contribution to the work of the family, especially in the garden. And Jim, his eldest son remembers, as a boy in 1913 having to look after all the gardens while his father lay in bed recovering from an accident.

I used to go to the garden with my father lying in bed. He'd cry out: 'How many tetties have you set today? Divvent do over much.'

By his own example he sought to instill in the boys the supreme value of work. He himself, as I have already explained, worked, when he could, part-time at Law's farm. He was always busy. Work, for him was something to be got on with without complaint. Bill and Jim discussed this with me talking about when they themselves worked with him down the pit. Bill began:

We never lost any time.

Work was first with father. If there was no time for work there was no time for pleasure. It was as simple as that.

And Jim added, in agreement, "Aye, there was no idle time." He used to tell his boys that if they had not got a job before they were fourteen then they would have to go down the pit.

This particular attitude was reflected in his views on their education. He made sure they went to school but he did not expect much to come of their schooling. Nothing in his experience had led him to value school

and as the boys got older he tolerated their staying away from school to do a job for someone and even allowed Bill to leave school prematurely to secure a job at the Throckley laundry.

Albert Matthewson's comments on his own youth confirm what my uncles have told me about their own. The boys played billiards in the store hall. In the summer they played pitch and toss at the "hoyin' skeul" by the muck heap on the back lonnen. This always brought them into trouble with the police and they went to elaborate lengths to create an advance warning system to avoid detection by the police.

Football, pigeons, fishing or simply hanging around corner ends were all part of the boys' lives. It mattered greatly whether particular boys could hold their own in fights; to be thought a "cissy" was a profound tragedy. The qualities which were valued were toughness, daring and an ability to model adults in an authentic way. Being able to take a hammering like a man and to do battle fairly were important qualities. In that fore-shortened boyhood it was a crime to tell tales, to blab to parents or teachers. And to make the transition from the boyhood world to the rituals of courtship was a chancy business. To do it too soon would risk ridicule or of being spied on by a stealthy group of mates eager to announce their presence at critical moments. To do it too late brought other kinds of sanctions, accusations which questioned a lad's basic manhood. Shyness, reserve, and sensitivity were not qualities which brought much

respect although they could be tolerated. As in the case of Heddon, the coal company could rely on the habits of the boys themselves to build up in their employees those qualities of toughness and masculinity without which work underground cannot be undertaken.

Chapel Life and Children

Chapel life was important for the Brown children although they were not formally members considering themselves to be Church of England people. They did, however, go to chapel Sunday schools and were on occasion members of the Independent Order of Good Templars which, in Throckley, was supported strongly by both chapels. The chapels were, in fact, important institutions to most children in Throckley and had been so since they were first built. From 1891 onwards, the year in which the Primitive Methodist Chapel was built at the top end of Mount Pleasant, there were two chapel circuits active in the area and both made a special appeal to children through their Sunday schools and support of either the Band of Hope or the Good Templars the Primitives actively proselytised through the Christian Endeavour. The Sunday schools were very well attended, there being something of a tradition of Sunday school attending. As early as 1877 over 150 children on a Sunday afternoon and sometimes more than 200. (Throckley Wesleyan Sunday School Minutes Tyne Wear Archive) In 1900 the Primitive Methodist chapel regularly attracted 155 scholars. Both circuits organised 'socials' for children and young people.

The values which, in general, Methodist Sunday schools sought to uphold have been discussed by Robert Moore. (1974) They include sobriety, self respect - obedience to those in authority, hard work leading to individual fulfillment, truthfulness, forbearance and, of course, the love of God and a practical application of the faith. And what lies behind the teaching of such values is a vision of society which is disciplined, caring, sober, chaste and honest in which men and women live their lives in an unostentatious way in the sight of God contributing to their communities.

What the transmission of such values actually involved is partly revealed in my mother's account of her involvement with the Good Templars. The theme of speaking in public comes out nicely in these comments. The organisation she says, was "simple and quiet":

It was always on a Tuesday night, held in a classroom in Throckley school from 6 to 9 p.m. It was run by a man called Mr. Graham and a Mr. Cook.

It was a mixed meeting, boys and girls aged 10 to 14. Incidentally, the fact that it was run by two men is not surprising. Sunday school teachers in Throckley were almost all male. As early as 1877, from a total of fifty-three named teachers in the Wesleyan chapel, forty-five were men. In 1893 in the Primitive chapel eight of the nine teachers were male.

The main part was a service like a chapel or church, more chapel, as Mr. Graham run the chapel at the top of Mount Pleasant.

We were selected as officers. I was the chaplin. I was a good clear reader so I read out the prayers. We all wore regalia around our shoulders. That showed we had a position. One person arranged games, another conducted to our hymn singing, another arranged entertainments, concerts, socials. A small collection was taken to keep up expenses. If we made a little party our parents baked cakes and made a few sandwiches. Some nights we just had a good sing song, all sacred songs. Mr. Graham gave us talks.

But at the heart of this religious activity was a central social message and a core ritual:

We all signed a pledge when we joined. This is the pledge: We promise by divine assistance to abstain from all intoxicating liquors, tobacco, gambling and all bad language.

Mr. Graham brainwashed us that to do all the things I have mentioned caused poverty, trouble and made broken homes, money spent unwisely. Bad language was disgusting and very bad for children to hear. Also stealing and telling lies was very bad.

I remember Mr. Graham had a short arm and he held a gavel in his hand and he always shouted, "Silence" and hit a wood block with his gavel. At once he got silence. We all jumped to attention. We thought he was the most wonderful man in the world.

The only tangible evidence of her few years in the Good Templars that my mother retains is a battered old lead

medal which she refers to often enough jokingly as the only formal honour she ever got in her childhood.

The chapels were not unique in having an extensive social presence in the village. The church, too, ran its Sunday schools and socials, the Mother's Union and even a sewing class which children were encouraged to attend. These were, then, important institutions in the lives of children and, as my mother insists, most children in the village joined in the activities of the chapel. To do so was, she told me, "a kind of duty; just like going to school." And they all went in their best clothes changing back into their "glad rags" when the services were finished.

The amount of care lavished on children and the extent to which the child's life was regulated, particularly by Sunday schools, is something which the German miner, Duckershoff commented on especially. The fact that children attended day school impressed him immensely since it gave women more time to themselves, a contrast to Germany. And of the children themselves he had this to say:

Children are nicely dressed, for the workman is properly proud of his bairns. On a Sunday they are not to be distinguished from those of the well-to-do. A great deal is done for them. Almost all attend Sunday school, and during the summer joint excursions are arranged by these schools, generally on Saturday afternoons. (1899: 54)

Duckershoff is sensing here what was involved locally in "doing right by the bairns." And I think, too, he is raising implicitly another aspect of the way in which miners and their wives could stage publicly their claims of the respect of others. Adults could, in a sense, project themselves through their children. To have well turned out children who went to church or chapel was a sign that within the privacy of the family there were high standards which were announced unambiguously in the polished shoes or the carefully ironed dress of the children.

Images and Expectations.

When my relatives talk about their early childhood they evoke a picture of a contented, happy family. They do not recall their childhoods as being strictly regulated. Nor do they regard themselves as being any different from anybody else in Throckley. I have pressed them firmly on this with always the same response. The Browns, they insist, were just an ordinary family; they did not feel themselves to be different. They remember being busy, the girls, especially. By the time she was thirteen Olive baked the bread in the family. Both Olive and Eva helped a great deal with the twins and the housework. The older girls were drafted quickly into the work routines of the home. They recall too, Olive playing the piano and quiet evenings when they simply sat indoors, my grandmother busy knitting and the old man sitting with his clay pipe. Olive's piano routine always ended with the "Blaze Away March" and my grandfather saying,

"We've had it now; thats the finish."

Despite the image, however, there were divisions. Eva and Bill bickered constantly. Jim fell easily into the role of eldest son and spent a lot of time with his father. My mother spent as much time as she could at aunt Maggie's to avoid the congestion of home. The boys and the girls did not play with one another. The twins did and they all felt protective towards Jack whom they regarded as a delicate child. The older girls had separate groups of friends and so to did the boys. Olive and Bill spent more time in the house than the others and they quarelled among themselves over whose friends could visit.

There was, as I have shown, a clear sexual division of labour in the family and the respective male and female roles in the community appeared clearly in the relationships between my grandparents and their children.

The Bottom Drawer

The boys were expected to work in the gardens and to 'hold their own' against others. The girls were expected to prepare for marriage. Here is the importance of the so-called "bottom drawer", the method of saving up for married life those articles of soft furnishing or decoration which would be difficult to provide in the early stages of setting up a home. The bottom drawer is a key part of the girls' memories of their childhood and youth, something around which they themselves acquired an image of their own married lives.

Like most other women in the village my grandmother kept a bottom drawer for her daughters although not for her sons. In her case the drawer was quite literally the lower drawer of the wardrobe but that is not important; it is the concept of the bottom drawer that matters. From childhood onwards she collected items of household furnishings like pillow cases, sheets, tablecloths or embroidered head rests for chairs which her daughters would need when they set up their own homes.

As the girls grew older they themselves added to the collection of items lavishing great care on embroidery work or crocheted pieces such as the surrounds to a linen tablecloth. Carefully ironed and with either moth balls or lavender bags these items were stored to be taken out only when the drawer needed tidying or, in aimless days when the girls took them out to anticipate in holding them the days when they themselves would be married. The bottom drawer was a focal point in the relationship between my grandmother and her daughters in which marriage could be discussed in a practical way, an opportunity for her to give advice and to consolidate in her daughters' minds those subtle values of decency and respectability which could be symbolised in neatly embroidered covers or clean well-ironed sheets. It had, too, a clear economic rationale. The bottom drawer was built up of necessities and luxuries but always of the smaller things which it would take the daughter some time to assemble after she had married.

I wondered whether discussions about the bottom drawer ever led to questions about sex. My mother assures me they did not; that was not discussed. "We learned about that" she told me "the hard way." My grandmother was clearly prepared to advance her opinion. She told her daughters often enough if they heard of anyone falling pregnant that "it just happens to the good ones", and, invariably added, "she's not the first and she'll not be the last." But she never discussed the matter in any detail with her daughters.

Generally, however, their lives were lived with an intense immediacy responsive to the varied routines of the family and the village, totally unburdened by any expectations that they themselves should aim for a life different to that of their parents. This, as I show in subsequent chapters : changed, and in this respect was part of the subtle metamorphosis of Throckley itself from a mining community to an urban village. Under the impact of war, the long term decline of the pits, political change and industrial diversification, Throckley acquired a new character. In the period being discussed, however, it was still very much a mining village with its values and relationships intact.

One final point: the picture of their early family life my relatives now reconstruct has at its centre a powerfully nostalgic image of their parents. The family, it seems, revolved around the parents; the children were devoted to them, especially the girls. This "home-centredness" had quite tangible consequences, as I shall

show. For the moment it is sufficient to note the image; it is central to their sense of the past and it gave meaning to the pattern of kin relationships which developed as they all grew up. It still feeds, as it always has done, their sense of what had been lost as the price of social change.

Chapter Ten

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

At the outbreak of war in August 1914 my grandfather was forty-two years of age, too old for military service and with too many dependants to contemplate volunteering for the army. Of his six children the eldest was only fourteen and the twins had just turned two years of age. He was, literally, at the peak of his powers and fully occupied with his work and his gardens. Since his sons helped him a bit and his eldest daughters helped out in the house he could see the way forward to being a lot better off than he had ever been before.

Not only did he not want the war he thought it was unnecessary. Like many other people he expected war and had, through his union, been led from as early as 1905 to appose any such developments and to condemn militarism. Perhaps, then, he agreed with Willaim Straker's July circular where a stance of 'absolute neutrality' was demanded:

We have no quarrel with any of the great nations of the world that would justify the shedding of a single drop of human blood, and yet while I am writing, the cloud hangs black and threatening over our land, as it does over all Europe, and may burst at any moment in a deluge of blood, unequalled in the world's history.

Straker attributed the international position to capitalist interests and corrupt diplomacy and, calling for

both neutrality and a conference of the Triple Alliance and the Miner's International Conference to condemn war, he warned,

Just as suddenly as war has broken out in Europe, revolution may break out in Great Britain.

It did not take long for the tensions and anxieties of July to evaporate in the jingoistic certainties of August and for many miners to join up in the Army and for Straker himself to find himself somewhat isolated and criticised for his stance against the war and for mixing up his trades unionism with politics. In his August circular, war having been declared, Straker made an appeal to national unity and:

... the necessity of all differences of opinion being dropped; of civic and party strife being ended; of industrial disputes being settled; of the terms 'employer and employed', 'rich and poor' being forgotten; and only that we were Britains being remembered.

These sentiments were to evaporate as the war dragged on but for the early part of it were sufficiently strong to command wide support. Local newspapers for this time reported extensively on recruiting campaigns and recruitment in the mining districts was, indeed, brisk. The Report of the Inspector of Mines for 1914 notes:

Since the British Empire became involved in war, the miners of the Northern counties have responded to the Call to Arms in a manner which has kindled very pardonable local pride; and the large numbers

which have joined the Forces and the enthusiasm which they have displayed in the work of training will be remembered with very keen satisfaction for many a year to come. (1914: 32)

Fifty-two thousand men left to become soldiers from the Northern Division as a whole of whom thirteen thousand were from Northumberland of whom a high proportion were married men.

Two factors specific to the coal industry in the North helped military recruitment among miners. The Mines Inspector noted one of them affecting married men particularly:

The way has been made clear for them by the munificence of the colliery proprietors who undertook to make such provision for those their own workmen left behind as would ensure them being able to live in comfort. (1914: 33)

They noted one firm from which so many men had been enlisted that it was costing £70,000 per annum to maintain the families left behind.

Throckley Coal Company was no exception. On August 13th 1914 at their monthly meeting they made arrangements to remunerate the wives of miners who left for service at the rate of seven shillings per week and one shilling per week for each child under sixteen. In the first wave of recruitment from Throckley eighty-one men of whom thirty-seven were married left the pit. (Throckley Coal Company Records NRO 407) The Inspector of Mines summed up his report on recruitment with an observation

which has great significance for understanding the long term decline in labour productivity in the pits which the war did little to reverse. 'One must admit', he wrote 'that, as a rule, it was the flower of the various classes of labour which offered its services to the country.'

(1914: 33)

The second factor helping the recruitment of miners was the virtual collapse of the export trade in coal. (Sir R. A. S. Redmayne 1923: 9) In his September circular William Straker showed that, among other effects, this market collapse caused a great deal of short time working. In 1913 in Northumberland the average number of days per week worked was 5.42; in August 1914 it was 2.72. (September Monthly Circular. NMA Minutes 1914, NRO 759/68) In some pits unemployment was high as well and these factors contributed directly to encourage men to leave the pits, especially when at that point, there was no expectation of a protracted war of attrition in the mud of Flanders.

Gordon Brown, the lad my grandfather had helped to bring up was quick to join up having been a member of the Northumberland Fusilier Territorials. Jack and Jim Brecons, my grandfather's nephews whose younger brother William had been killed at Heddon pit also joined up. Many of those who went were good friends of his but he thought of Gordon as a son. Uncle Bill remembers Gordon leaving. He had received the call to go to Newburn barracks very early. Bill remembers him leaving aunt Maggie's house in his uniform carrying his kit bag

saying, as he kissed them all goodbye and shook hands with the men, "Don't worry, this lot won't last long." "And that" said Bill, "was the last we saw of him." Eva recalls he took with him from the top of the piano a photograph of his sister Sady, saying that if he was 'knocked out' they would find the photograph and think it was his 'pretty girlfriend.' He died in France at Ypres in 1915 seven days after leaving home. Aunt Maggie got the telegram informing them of his death on the same day that a letter from him had arrived saying he was well. Aunt Eva says she remembers being in the house with her mother and aunt Maggie when the news came. My grandmother, she remembers, sat 'rocking her chair with grief and wringing her hands.' They heard later that he was not killed outright. Badly wounded he was moved on a stretcher to the sanctuary of a church near the front. Moments later the church was obliterated by heavy artillery fire. "This news", said my uncle Jim "nearly killed Maggie." The boy from two doors away was killed in action. Mrs Allen's two sons, Hughy and Billy were killed. And so it went on. They tried, so my uncle Jim says, "to mek the best on it."

The First World War was a turning point for my grandfather just as it was for the village, the pit, and the whole mining industry. I want to show in this and the following chapter that the war reinforced demands among the miners for the nationalisation of the pits, that it stripped politics of its respectable aristocrat veils and spawned, both nationally and locally, a

Labour leadership bent on social reform and rooted in a determined and radical working class confident of its political and industrial strength. In Throckley the most enduring and positive effect of it was to create a very determined local labour party, which, pressing for control of the urban district council managed to persuade the council to build houses on a massive scale. I shall show, too, however, that the confidence which the strength of their war time position gave the miners and which resulted in what they took to be the great victory of the Sankey Commission with its recommendation that the pits should be nationalised, was short-lived. For in the longer term the war did little to strengthen the bargaining power of miners and much to weaken it. And for many ordinary miners, my grandfather included, the broad based optimism for the future which the ending of hostilities gave vent to quickly evaporated into a cynical despair that none of it had been worthwhile.

The first six months of the war were lived out in an almost atmosphere of business as usual as if nothing had changed very much. Indeed, the local newspapers for this period still devoted more space to local items and sporting events than they did to war reporting. The September leek shows were unaffected by hostilities as was the tail end of the cricket season. Yet much was already changing. The columns of the Blaydon Courier were filled almost immediately by complaints from readers about the actions of some local traders in putting up prices, actions which were unanimously condemned as

unpatriotic. The harvest festival at Throckley school was that year celebrated with the aim of sending its proceeds, together with satchels and bandages, to the Armstrong hospital for wounded soldiers. The newspapers were already publishing horrific accounts of the experiences of the British Expeditionary Forces and early in November began publishing a roll of honour listing the deaths of local heroes. In Throckley and elsewhere in the urban district street collections were organised by the local War Relief Fund and by October £376 had been raised.

Fund raising went on throughout the war. The Throckley colliery band held regular socials and concerts in the store hall in aid of the Throckley soldiers Relief Fund and there were occasional visits of male voice choirs as in July 1917 when Wallsend male voice choir sang to 'a large audience' in the store hall to raise cash for the Relief Fund. Groups of women were organised by Mrs W. F. Stephenson, the wife of one of the Coal Company Directors, to knit and sew for the comfort of the troops and my grandmother regularly contributed wool socks to the supply.

A small but significant blow to my grandfather came with the requisitioning of his horse by the army. He willingly gave it up and although not having to look after it eased his commitments it made some of his work harder, particularly feeding the pigs and it took away some of his pleasures, like the Sunday ride out with the family in the trap. Along with shortages, requisitions,

changes in working hours, not to mention the terrible news from the front, the war closed in on people quickly and completely. Throckley school was used in the Easter of 1916 to billet soldiers from the Tyneside Scottish battalion and when they left they were given teas at the Wesleyan chapel. Aunt Eva says that the soldiers' were no bother in Throckley. They marched and drilled and the children imitated them. And of course, 'the lasses loved it: they lapped it up.' Similar occasions elsewhere in the district and throughout the war brought many soldiers to the village and those returning on leave added to their number.

It was of course those returning who could confirm with graphic immediacy the full horror of the front. Albert Matthewson told me that his brother George came back and before he could get into the house he had to be deloused and from being initially unwilling, like thousands of others who returned, to talk about it or even to make contact with his old pals - such soldiers were pained to be asked the obvious question, "when are you going back?" - he gradually let them all know the full awfulness of it. And soldiers tales did nothing to give anyone confidence in the quality of leadership traditionally claimed by the upper class military personnel of the Imperial Army either in Generals or dashing subalterns. Bob Curwen, an old Throckley miner who fought in France and returned to the pit afterwards to become a union official told me often in long conversations about the war that the officer class were beneath contempt.

In Bob's case this view carried over from the men to the whole social order they symbolised. And it was not an uncommon reaction; it had a wider political credence in the way Lloyd George replaced Asquith over the military mismanagement of the Dardanelles. (see A. Marwick 1967)

My grandfather could never find words strong enough to sum up just how he viewed the First World War. "Bye hinny", he once said to me with that momentary expression on his face which clearly showed him back in time recalling it all, "we divvent want ti gan through all that again...." And while much remained for him the same after the war, it had nonetheless had a profound effect on him. He was not a demonstrative person and he kept his feelings well under control; he went to the street parties in Mount Pleasant which celebrated the Armistice and he attended, as an onlooker, the Remembrance Day parades which followed annually after the war, but he never released his emotional grip on the sickening feeling of disgust and cynicism which displays of shallow patriotism induced in him. He never developed unpatriotic attitudes; that residual pride in his country which his education had instilled in him was never abandoned. And he certainly did not succumb to the wartime myths of the evil Hun. If the war did anything at all to the national stereotypes he held it reinforced his view (and in this he may well have been influenced by returning soldiers) that the French were a spineless lot and totally unreliable as allies.

What disturbed him was warmongering; he used to say, for example, that Churchill was "nowt but a warmonger" and it was one of his main criticisms of the Tory Party as a whole that its public patriotism concealed a lust for war. Aunt Eva is convinced that it was the First World War which explained my grandfather's intense dislike of Tory politicians. How deep and long lasting that dislike was came out when, as a very old man, he watched Churchill's funeral on television. "Instead of a state funeral" he said, "they should have tipped the bopper over the bridge." It was the war, I think, which through the way in which it affected the patterns of daily life, clarified in a quite unambiguous way which social groups in the order of society were really vital - the direct producers of real wealth - and reinforced the work of the unions and the Labour Party of the period up to 1914, in stripping the respectable veneers off Edwardian society, revealing a mechanism which could no longer command anyone's respect. For my grandfather the experience was a profound one; through war he saw more clearly than his earlier and somewhat unconscious attachment to the Liberal Party had ever allowed that progress for the likes of him presupposed a much more fundamental change in the order of things than he had ever previously imagined. What he was not too sure about was how the needed changes could come.

The prices question was one of the factors which fed his disenchantment. In the early days of the war there was a great deal of resentment about price rises

in the shops giving rise to the charge of profiteering. (see A. Marwick 1967) And as the war went on and the basic cost of living increased these charges found concrete political expression. In May 1915, for example, in his monthly circular Bill Straker connected rising prices to rising profits and pointed out:

Shipping profits have been enormous; profits in mining, although badly hit in some districts at the beginning of the war, are now following close on the heels of shipping. Armament manufacturers scarcely know how to dispose of their profits, and wholesale dealers in foodstuffs are in the same position and all the while there are hundreds of thousands of the poor, especially in our large cities, lacking the necessaries of life because of enhanced prices. (Northumberland Miners Records NRO)

By 1916 this concern, at least in some quarters, had developed into a full blown criticism of the management of the war. In the Blaydon Courier of February 13th 1916, H. Blakey of Winlaton, a regular correspondent and miners' sympathiser had the following to say in response to proposals to increase the length of the miner's working day:

I am willing that sacrifices should be made, but I am not willing that all the sacrifices should be made by the industrial classes, and particularly by the mining portion of them, while others, as those, for instance, who are gambling with peoples' stomachs in wheat markets make fortunes out of the

sacrifices. Let the strain of war be equally distributed all round and if it is to be felt anywhere more severely, let it fall on those who are best able to bear it, and by those whose sordid interests all through the world's history have been the cause of war.

On November 11th 1917 Newburn Urban District Council discussed the price of foodstuffs with Councillor Browell, the miner's Checkweightman from Blucher pit and leading Labour activist in the area moving a resolution 'viewing with alarm the ever-increasing cost of the people's food' and demanding action immediately to regulate prices and food distribution 'so as to minimise the possibilities of exploitation.' The food distribution question had another aspect which created some local difficulties in Throckley. In 1916, under Government pressure, the Co-operative store terminated all credit on payments for foodstuffs thereby removing one means of overcoming temporary hardships for some families.

It was, indeed, the prices question in the North East which qualified the general conclusion of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest that, on the whole, the working classes in the area had taken up a 'sane and patriotic view' of the war. (1917)

What they said was this:

Joined to the sense of actual hardship, there is undoubtedly a deep-seated conviction in the minds of the working classes that the prices of food have risen not only through scarcity but as a

the result of manipulation of prices by unscrupulous producers and traders who, it is alleged, owing to lack of courageous action on the part of the Government, have succeeded in making fabulous profits at the expense of the consumer. (1917: 2)

Set alongside the daily reports from the front line the evidence on price rises and profiteering caused great bitterness which developed outwards into a questioning of the whole political management of the war and from that, to the organisation of political life itself.

The issues of conscription for military service which became acute in 1916, (in May of that year universal conscription was introduced following the failure of the earlier voluntary schemes) taxation and the gut politics of injustice can be mentioned here for they illustrate the connection between the immediate experience of war and changes in political consciousness. They are all related to one another. As early as 1915 Bill Straker had bitterly attacked Lord Northcliffe (and his press) for 'creating distrust, fear and hatred between the nations in order to produce war' and in 1916, again on the question of conscription, Straker contrasted the risks which the wealthy faced in the war with those faced by the common soldier. Should not wealth, he asked, 'share the same fate instead of being only borrowed to be fully paid back with a substantial increase in the shape of interest. The slain men can never be given back to those from whom they were taken.' Straker's campaign against conscription was a hopeless one; in

August 1917 he had to inform the lodges that the Coal Controller had agreed that 21,000 young miners should be recruited for the war office of which Northumberland's share was 955 to be drawn from each pit according to the number of men employed. Fifteen young men from Throckley were conscripted under this arrangement.

The conscription question was linked by the union to the proposals to increase income taxes in 1917. There was a meeting organised by the Throckley and District Miners Federation in the Co-operative store hall, October, to campaign explicitly 'against the imposition of income tax on workmen' (Blaydon Courier October 13th 1917). The meeting was chaired by Dick Browell and was addressed by the indefatigable Mr. Straker. Two resolutions were submitted and adopted: 'That as the measure of all taxation ought to be the ability to pay, we protest against the taxation of workmen's wages under £15 per annum.' And 'Moreover,'

in the face of the conscription of men, we assert that all war expenditure ought to be met by the conscription of excessive wealth, and ask the Government to pass into law at the earliest possible date a 'Conscription of Wealth Bill.'

Here, then, is some evidence of the escalating anger of miners against the conduct of the war which led to a sharp consciousness of class divisions. And this consciousness, fuelled by a growing anger about questions of politics, was reinforced for the miners by their experience in the pits.

Right from the very beginning miners were encouraged to see themselves in a new light as playing a vital role in the whole war effort. In October 1914 there was a national appeal by the War Savings Committee to persuade people to Save Coal and Light on the grounds that, 'For the purposes of the war coal is an asset of supreme value.' (Blaydon Courier October 14th 1914) Within such a climate it is particularly galling, therefore, for men to have to face unemployment and pit closures. A letter from a 'patriot' to the Newcastle Evening Chronicle on August 7th 1914 articulates this theme very well and indicates, too, something of the criticism which was levelled at mine owners and which grew in the course of the war to demands for the outright nationalisation of the pits:

No class in this country has made greater fortunes during the past few years than the mine owners of the North, yet, at the first sign of trouble and additional expense, they must needs shut down the mines and pay off their men. Why cannot they face the situation patriotically, keep the pits open, even if only partly worked, and stock supplies for a time? I think the action of the Northern mine owners is scandalous and displays an entire lack of patriotism at a critical period.

Because of the firm local market Throckley colliery did not suffer like some of the coastal pits although there were redundancies and some short time working. The figures for Throckley are as follows:

Numbers Employed and Union Membership

Throckley Colliery 1913-1919

	Numbers Employed	Percentage of Employees in Union
1913	921	63.1
1914	772	74.8
1915	677	75.7
1916	716	72.6
1917	724	71.8
1918	543	96.1
1919	656	80.1

Source: From Northumberland Coal Owners Statistical Returns and Minutes Account of the Northumberland Miners Association.

Employment at the Throckley Maria colliery remained a little more stable but for the company as a whole the number of employees dropped from 2,290 in 1913 to 1,813 in 1915. What did remain among the men was a determination to maintain and even improve the level of union membership.

In 1916 the Executive of the Northumberland Miners discussed a request from the Throckley lodge 'for leave to come out on strike in order to force non-union members into the Association' and while the executive could not support them they nonetheless decided to exert pressure on the Throckley management to secure a full union membership at the pit.

Work in the pit did not change much during the war except that it got harder and was being done by men with a higher average age than before the war and throughout the industry output per man fell heavily. (W.H.B. Court 1951)

like many other small undertakings of this period the management at Throckley did not respond to the wartime demand for coal by adding more machinery to their capital. (see Report of the Technical Advisory Committee Cmnd 6610 1945) Indeed, the only technical innovation the company introduced was to build up the sides of the coal tubs by another four inches so they could carry more coal. Despite the growing use of mechanical coal cutters and conveyor haulage the Throckley coal company used traditional mining methods well into the 1930s. The general change in wages, particularly for coal hewers, was upward with war bonuses which the Miner's Federation secured at 1s 6d a day in 1917 being paid to all miners. But, as Rowe had pointed out, the increase in wages was not as great as increases in the cost of living during the war period. (J. W. F. Rowe 1923: 90)

Until the last year of the war, relationships of authority and power in the pits themselves did not change substantially although many miners did build up a resolve that at the end of hostilities the mines would never return to the old style of pre-war management. In 1915, for instance, it was still possible for the Throckley management to act severely for the most trivial of offences. The Executive Minutes of the NMA show that George Mitford was sacked in 1915 'for using abusive language to the undermanager'. He was subsequently reinstated but the incident is a revealing one. And in 1916 the coal owners still retained the right to evict widows from colliery houses and to withhold compensation

payments to the wives of miners until they actually left the property. In addition to the normal controls on miners to keep to their work diligently there was, from 1916 onwards considerable pressure from the Government, filtered through local managements and, in 1918, enforced by pit production committees, to avoid any absenteeism, the threat being that the persistently absent would be called up for service in the army. What had changed in the pits, however, were the legal, political and ideological conditions of coal production. By the end of the war the Government, in response largely to labour unrest in South Wales and the need to maintain coal supplies, had virtually taken over the running of the whole industry. (see M. Kirby 1977) On the miner's part the pre-war resolve to win the wholesale nationalisation of the industry had become an urgent political demand. This was clearly the policy of the Miners Federation of Great Britain and it was widely supported. In 1917 the Northumberland Miners Council meeting of November passed the following resolution from the Throckley branch:

That we continue to press for the nationalisation of mines and royalties and the abolition of way leaves, so as to relieve our industry from an unjust impost and to secure to the nation the value of its own natural resources.

And the gradual extension of state power throughout the war prompted Straker to give his members some general political advice:

We are evidently becoming more Socialistic - with a difference. The difference lies in the fact that the state does not belong to the people, as it would under socialism; but that the people belong to the state, and as the state is made up of only a part of the people the danger is that one part will be enslaved by the other part. (Monthly Circular, March 1917 Minutes of the NMA 759/68)

The following month Straker responded to the events in Russia: 'In the name of Freedom we greet the revolution in Russia' and, later in the year, worried about how the burden of war debt might be paid off he forewarned his members that such debts might be erased by reducing wages and creating inflation. He raised the spectre of 'the inevitable seething discontent which will take possession of the working classes, when, a few years after the end of the war, severe depression sets in and hunger is gnawing at their vitals.' This same mood was maintained by the union throughout 1918 and in December of that year they widely circulated the membership with the advice of the Miners Federation of Great Britain:

Remember. The Coalition is a coalition of land-lords and capitalists - a coalition of Wealth against Labour - a coalition which will do its best to prevent Labour realising its aim.

The news of the Armistice, although expected, came with the force of a surprise on the afternoon of November 11th. Many people from Throckley went off to Newcastle by tram (they could do so now, the tramlines having been completed in 1916) to join in the celebrations. In the days and weeks that followed there were street parties, memorial services in the chapels and the church and the Christmas of that year was particularly solemn. During this period, too, a war memorial committee was formed with Mrs W. E. Stephenson in the chair. In the Spring of 1919, with a parade of troops led by the colliery brass band the war memorial was officially unveiled with fifty-one names inscribed in gold letters.

Amid the hectic uncertainty of the immediate post war world but not in the least persuaded that the world would ever settle down again, my grandfather picked up again some of his earlier plans. Jim, his eldest son was just about to leave school and under pressure from my grandfather they sought him work, not in the pit, but at Spencer's steel works in Newburn. Olive was eighteen, in service again (having like thousands of others, worked in a munitions factory at Blaydon) and courting a lad from Crawcrook over the river. Eva, having left school without a job earned a little of her keep doing housework as a 'day girl' for various neighbours, succeeded in getting a job in the store. Both girls, then, were earning some money and, in Olive's case, were in sight of being married. Since the twins were just six years old life went on much as before for my grandmother and my grandfather had still to go to the pit.



War Memorial Procession 1918



War Memorial Procession 1918



Throckley War Memorial Committee 1918



The Opening of the
War Memorial 1918

But one small fact highlights just how much had changed, as it were, beneath the surface and this was my grandfather's absolute refusal to allow his sons, both of whom were of an age to do so by the end of the war, to join the local Boy Scouts. He told them it was just a training in militarism and that it didn't matter that it had something to do with the Church. Perhaps he was here again taking his cue from Bill Straker who, at the beginning of the war attacked the National Service League and the Church itself for using patriotism to discipline men. What Straker said was this:

The snares of this movement are laid for the feet of the children, and many parents, deceived by the glamour of it, allow their lads to join Boy Scouts and Church Lads' Brigades utterly unaware of the real purpose the military party in this country have in view.

He writes of these organisations seeking 'to exploit the worker's sense of patriotism and appeal to his fighting instincts; to discipline him to absolute obedience by making a soldier of him.' Finally, and very bitterly he says:

In the churches where the Prince of Peace is supposed to be worshipped they conduct their blasphemous parades.

And he ends quoting Shelley writing against the idea of the natural depravity of man, which these youth movements sought to overcome through their discipline:

Nature? - No!

Kings, priests, and statesmen blast the human flower
Even in its tender bud: their influence darts
Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins
of desolate society.

The mood, then, was one of disenchantment and cynicism and the feeling was strong that the post war world would have to be very different. The evidence all points in support of a Newburn district councillor who, speaking of the need to remove the tolls from the Newburn bridge across the Tyne warned his colleagues, most of them, at that time, being Liberal: 'The public conscience of the district has been quickened to a sense of justice.'

(Blaydon Courier July 7th 1917)

This feeling that things must change was widespread. Jack Lawson put it well in 1945 writing somewhat cynically about the unredeemed promise of the first war that those returning would never go back 'to the old evil conditions under which the masses had existed.' when he said:

We did at least learn that the gentleness which makes men great is neither the handmaid of wealth nor social standing. If the war did nothing else, it pricked that bubble - and the gentlemen whom we call the worker knows it too. They may have returned to the old conditions, but the old superstition of a superior people who are entitled to a superior life has gone forever. (1945: 146)

The ideological atmosphere to which Jack Lawson alludes was, of course, not without its contradictions. In the General Election which followed the war the coalition government with Lloyd George as Prime Minister was able to carry on capitalising on end of war euphoria and promises of a land 'fit for heroes' and backed by a parliament in which the majority of MPs (338) were Conservative but in which the Labour Party, with sixty members, was the largest opposition group. (R. Miliband 1973: 64)

In the Wansbeck division, the constituency for Throckley, the miner's candidate, Ebby Edwards, was defeated by a coalition Liberal, R. Mason. Among miners, however, there was a very strong feeling of resentment about the results of this election; they believed that it had been called too soon and that working people had been mislead by promises which could not be kept. In some cases discontent took a distinctly marxist tone. George Harvey of Wardley, the firebrand checkweightman of Follonsby pit demanded much more than social reform; he wanted revolution. In a pamphlet issued at the end of the war, advertised with the injunction 'Order Them Now and Equip Yourself for the War after the War', Harvey insisted that 'Our very lives are not in the grip of the capitalist machine' and that it was time to fight for possession, control, and freedom. (1918/9) The Executive of the Northumberland Miners would have no truck with Harvey declining to buy any of his pamphlets. But although Harvey was a unique maverick

his ideas were not so far away from those of some ordinary miners, especially those schooled before the war by the Independent Labour Party. In Throckley, for instance, a lodge resolution of 1919 adopted a very radical tone:

It was unanimously agreed at a mass meeting of Throckley, Maria, Blucher and Heddon workmen that all pits be idle on Monday, July 21st, as protest of the following resolution:

1. Protest against the Government using British soldiers for the destruction of Russian Democratic Revolution.
2. Protest against the continuation of conscription.
3. Protest against the imposition of six shillings per ton being raised on the price of coal.

(Minute Book 16, Steam Collieries Defense Association, NRO)

Danny Dawson was one of the new generation of local Labour leaders, schooled in the ILP, active in the union and a founder member of the Newburn and District Local Labour Party. In passing this pro-Soviet resolution the Throckley men were clearly echoing the views of their union leadership who believed, as Straker put in his January circular in 1920 that international capitalists were 'tormenting' 'poor bleeding Russia' to restore the old rotten, traitorous, tyrannical regime of the Tzars, in order that they may have the opportunity of exploiting the natural wealth of the country and this in the name of liberty.'

Preparing for the war after the war suggested to some miners, too, that they must improve their education. A resolution from a Blucher miner, Tom McKay, to the committee of the Throckley Co-operative Store in February 1919 brings this out:

That we, the Throckley Co-operative Society Limited, affiliate with the Central Labour College with the view of sending two students every year; also starting Educational Class in the district on "Marxian Economies" (sic!) (Throckley Co-operative Store Balance Sheet: 1919. To be deposited in Tyne-Wear Archive)

And to emphasise finally that the prospect of bringing about the new social order was for many Labour activists one which threatened revolutionary politics of the sort which the end of hostilities had brought in Germany and and which the Russian revolution had itself signalled, Bill Straker can be once again quoted. In his January circular of 1920, criticising Winston Churchill and Lloyd George for their attacks on the Labour Party he wrote:

I have said that "the class war will not commence with the workers". Neither will revolution; but it may be forced upon the workers when the workers come into political place and power, and attempt to pass laws of equity and justice.

This, then, was the ideological atmosphere in which post war reconstruction began for many miners in the

coalfield and in the Newburn-Throckley area this quickened consciousness of conflict was sharpened by a small but significant group of ILP members - Danny Dawson, Dick Browell, George Curwen, and a few others less well-known - who, as co-operators, methodists, union officials and, in Browell's case, councillors, were well placed to form the local Labour Party and to focus their attention on what for them was the critical problem of the area - housing.

It would require a full study in itself to chart in detail the rise of this group to a position of very significant leadership in the area and in their broad outline the results of such a study are familiar enough already. The methodist chapel gave them their social conscience and debating skills; the Labour Party and the union sharpened their committee skills and political wit and because they were both well-known and sympathetically respected they could fill the leadership roles of the union and of the community. What they set out to do, therefore, is something which says much, not just about them themselves, but about the men who elected them and their aspirations, their sense of what was politically important. Such men embodied the political aspirations of the whole community, not always effectively, not always unanimously, but their political work cannot be seen outside the pre-occupations of the community as a whole responding to its own problems of work, housing and general living conditions.

In this sense, the Throckley leadership which the first war spawned must be seen as the expression of working class political culture in the area, of what E. P. Thompson has called (admittedly writing of a much earlier period,) the 'agency of working people, the degree to which they contributed by conscious efforts to the making of history.' (1968: 13) The essence of working class culture is not, as Harold Entwistle has recently and forcibly pointed out, to be found in recreations and pastimes, not in 'that amiable sociability which is popularly supposed to characterise working-class culture' but in solidarity and political consciousness. (1978: 120)

Recognising that, as E. P. Thompson also pointed out that the aspirations of the workers he wrote about were 'valid in terms of their own experience' (1968: 13) however fantastic or backward looking those aspirations were, it is hardly surprising that the experience of being pitmen, of living in company housing and of being controlled by the coal company, would lead the Throckley workmen, though not inevitably, to seize on council housing as the real symbol of their emancipation and of control of the local authority as their principal means of securing these ends.

Dick Browell, elected Chairman of the Newburn and District Local Labour Party on July 27th 1918 set out its aims as follows:

To further the interests of Labour in the Constituency and unify Labour generally for the emancipation of themselves, by having full representation in Parliament and Municipal Urban and Rural Councils and Boards of Guardians.

(Minute Book, Newburn and District Local Labour Party 1918-1927 NRO)

Dick Browell, a councillor since 1905 was chairman, Danny Dawson was secretary and Bill Graham treasurer. They were affiliated to the Wansbeck Divisional Labour Party and through that supported the League of Nations extending into the post-war-world their vaguely Liberal internationalism and belief in international parliaments which certainly Browell had come to believe in during the war.

Chapter Eleven

"THE VALLEY OF DARK SHADOWS"

1918-1926

The end of the First World War was followed by a short period in which it seemed that a new world would be built. The Town and Country Planning Act of 1918 offered hope of a house building programme; the Education Act of 1918 promised a raising of the school age and an extension of secondary education. The Ministry of Health Act of 1919 raised hopes of a concerted attack on ill-health and bad housing. The National Insurance Act of 1920 extended some of the benefits of earlier legislation to bring nearly all wage earners under a scheme of employment insurance.

Arguing against the almost cynical view of Philip Abrams that the spate of social reform after the war, given the rapid retrenchment of the early 1920s was a 'failure' from which only propertied middle class women derived any real benefit (1963), Arthur Marwick insists that the war 'pushed the state in the direction of collectivist social legislation undertaken on behalf of the lower sections of the community.' (1970: 120) Furthermore, by establishing new expectations it changed the 'reference groups' of the lower classes and created a whole new social mores which altered irreversibly the whole social structure. Both, in fact are right; their differences stem from their referring to different things, Abrams to the short-term measurable effects of

the war and Marwick to a much more subtle and profound transformation of political attitudes.

Britain was not at all, however, a stable society united in a programme of social reform. The Government was uncertain about the political reaction of returning soldiers; in 1919 for the first time in their history the metropolitan police went on strike; a fear of Bolshevism had animated the election which followed the war and strikes on Clydeside in early 1919 prompted the Government to set up a cabinet anti-strike committee. (A. Marwick 1970: 149) The dominant political mood, then, was one of high expectations and of uncertainty which events abroad, in Russia, in Ireland, in Germany and, in particular, Versailles, helped only to reinforce.

In this and the following two chapters I examine the way in which social change in the post-war period affected the people of Throckley and the life of my grandfather. My aim is to relate the changes which were taking place in the mining industry, the economy as a whole and in political life, both nationally and locally, to the everyday experience of my grandfather and men like him to show how both their attitudes and understanding changed as they struggled to give meaning to their experience. (c.f. C. Wright Mills 1970)

The focus of these chapters is on changes in my grandfather's work and family life. The theme, however, is conflict. What I describe is the way in which an ordinary family was mobilised to the grim business of struggle to resist the systematic attacks on their

living standards which the economic policy of post-war government implied. The struggle, because of a basic weakness in their position was, however, a defensive one and for miners it was one that they lost. That experience, at least for my grandfather, was what confirmed his views of the pointlessness of class politics. He might have been wrong. But his views and aspirations during this period, to paraphrase once again the comment of E. P. Thompson's about an earlier generation of working men, were, at least, valid in terms of his experience. (E. P. Thompson 1968: 13) My aim is to illuminate the nature of that experience and his response to it.

Post-War Reconstruction in Throckley

In Throckley, for reasons which go right back to the way the village was built, the issue which best captured the hopes of people for a better life was housing. Council housing promised not only that the difficulties of overcrowding could be alleviated but also that working people in the district would be freed from their dependence on landlords and coalowners for their homes. And under the careful campaigning of Dr. Messer, the Medical Officer of Health, housing improvement was clearly understood by the politicians of the district as a major step in the eradication of illness and disease and in building a stronger, healthier community.

In March 1917 Dick Browell emphasised the urgency of their concern.

Something is going to have to be done after the war and we should be prepared for it. We know the tremendous demand there is for dwelling houses. A number of people are undoubtedly living under conditions of overcrowding. We ought to be getting ready now to overcome the evils ... Money would possibly be found for housing schemes, and if the Newburn Authority were not prepared they would be left out. (Blaydon Courier March 10th 1917)

The Minutes of the Newburn Urban District Housing Committee cast some light on the housing difficulties of the area. In 1917, at the request of the Local Government Board to consider the issue of 'the provision of houses for persons of the working class', the following estimates of housing needs were drawn up. (Housing Committee Minutes: Newburn UDC 1917. Tyne Wear Archives)

Working Class Housing in the
Newburn Urban District

	Under £12 Rateable value	Over £12 and under £20 Rateable value	Total
Census 1911	2,885	363	3247
Erected since 1911	237	20	257
Total	3,122	382	3504
Closed down during same period	13	-	13
	3,109	382	3491

The report points out: 'On the basis of five persons per house, a population of 21,000 will require 4,200 houses. The difference between the latter number and the actual available houses i.e. 3, 688 (3,491 under £20 plus 197 over £20) shows a deficiency of 632.' Taking into account the effects of migration into the area the committee recommended the building of 432 houses.

These figures confirm that housing in the area was in short supply. In many cases it was very overcrowded too. In 1919 the committee increased the figure of the number of houses needed to 1,000.

In 1919 Dr. Messer, the MOH, noted in his annual report that in Throckley 7 per cent of the houses were occupied by more than one family and that throughout the district 8,000 people were living at more than 2 to a room. Dr. Messer quoting Carlyle writes graphically about these problems:

Where can I find language in which to clothe the facts of these poor people's lives, and yet be tolerable? The words of Herr Teufeldroch when, at midnight from his attic lodging as he looked down on the town of Weissnichtwo, will help a little. He said to his friend, "Oh under that hideous coverlet of vapours and putrefactions, and unimaginable gasses, what a fermenting vat lies simmering and hid. The joyful and the sorrowful are there, men are dying there, men are being born, men are praying, on the other side of a brick partition men are cursing and around them is all the lost

vast void night, wretchedness cowers into truckle
 beds, riot cries asound and staggers and swaggers
 in his rank dens of shame, and the mother with
 streaming hair kneels over her pallid dying infant,
 whose cracked lips only her tears now moisten.
 All these heaped and huddled with nothing but a
 little carpentry and masonry between them, crammed
 in like salted fish in a barrel - such work goes
 on under that smoky counterpane.

(Annual Report West Denton Public Library)

By 1922, however, the MOH had to report that: "In the
 last eight years about 800 houses should have been built
 and this without in any way touching the problem of
 overcrowding. Actually 520 houses have been or are being
 built." (Annual Report 1922) The aims of the housing
 committee were therefore quite quickly revised downward.

Some progress was made, however. To designs made
 by Professor S. D. Amstead of London University and
 W. Alexander Harvey of the Bournville village trust,
 the council began to build immediately after the war.
 Housing priority was given to unhoused soldiers, families
 in overcrowded conditions, the newly married and, finally,
 those under notice to quit. The house building programme
 was organised, at Professor Anstead's suggestion, to use
 as much local unemployed labour as possible.

Financial stringency and the effective collapse of
 programmes of reconstruction slowed down their efforts.
 But they never lost their determination. For labour
 activists in the area the struggle for housing was

central to their whole programme. And for many families 'having the keys to a council house' was a major ambition. Building those houses was a major step in improving life chances in the district and extending the control ordinary people exercised over their own lives. The extent of that control was, however, limited and the collapse of the housing programme after the war underlined the point precisely.

The Industrial Front

The sense that the time was ripe for change focussed the attention of miners on pressing their demands for wages and for the public ownership of the pits; a powerful feeling in the mining communities was that changes in the pits was the least they could expect for the part they had played in the war. In the short run those expectations attached to a wage demand; but the real hopes of the miners lay in the longer term prospect of a nationalised coal industry.

The irony in the miner's case, although they were not fully aware of it, was that the overall position of the industry and, therefore, their own strength had actually been weakened in the course of the war; an ageing labour force, a drop in output per man shift, the accelerating replacement of coal for oil throughout industry, the failure of the government to force reorganisation on the industry all contributed to that weakening. (M. W. Kirby 1977) The effects of these factors on the industry was disguised until the middle of 1920 by the

continuation of government controls protecting profit levels, a buoyant export market in which British coal had a temporary monopolistic position and by the implied promise of coal nationalisation on the basis of the Sankey Commission proposals which were under discussion during this period between the Mining Association, the miners and the government.

The collapse of the post-war boom in April 1920 when coal export prices fell from eighty shillings to forty shillings a ton on average left the industry with a productive capacity and cost structure far in excess of what its markets could actually sustain. With a government determined to end the system of wartime controls and subsidies and the coalowners pressing a return to district bargaining over wages conflict in the industry was inevitable and, in retrospect, necessarily serious since both miners and coalowners felt, artificially as it turned out in the miner's case, very confident in their position.

The unfolding of this conflict through the disputes of 1920, 1921 and 1926 culminating in the Trades Disputes Act of 1927, massive unemployment, disorganisation in the Labour Movement and the private tragedies of millions of lives having to cope with poverty is well known. What I want to show in this and the next three chapters is that the industrial struggles of the period left deep wounds of anger and bitterness which have never really healed and which so shaped the political consciousness of ordinary miners that their consciousness of class

was enriched far beyond what it had been before the First World War. The tragedy was, of course, that their class consciousness was sharpened in defeat and what residual bitterness was left carried men of my grandfather's generation through the struggles of the 1930s not with the determination that the next confrontation would be different but that there should be no more confrontations of that kind. The early 1920s became a kind of bench mark of what must at all costs be avoided.

Nationally, the train of events which was to lead to the struggles of 1926 began with a Miner's Federation decision in January 1919 to go for a thirty per cent advance in wages and a reduction of hours claiming that the Eight Hour Act should be a Six Hour Act. In addition, the conference demanded nationalisation of the industry. Threatened by strike action in support of this the government took the steam out of the demands by setting up a Commission of Inquiry into the industry under Mr. Justice Sankey. The committee made its not always unanimous report in several separate publications reporting finally in June 1919 and endorsing a large part of the miner's case for nationalisation. But the government rejected the Sankey proposals in August leaving a strong sense of betrayal among miners. Limited gains were exacted; a two shillings per shift wage increase (known as the Sankey award) and a reduction of hours from eight to seven. Bill Straker described the cabinet decision as a "surrender to the reactionary forces on which it depends" and claimed that, in retrospect, the government

never intended to nationalise the pits. (see J. Davison 1973: 20)

What did emerge from these circumstances was the Mining Industry Act of 1920 which set up the Mines Department of the Board of Trade, made provisions for the setting up of pit production committees in each district and made resources available through a levy on coal output to finance miner's welfare schemes. The erosion of the wage gains of 1919 through increases in the standard of living prompted further wage demands from the miners in March 1920; a twenty per cent advance in wages was conceded. Increases in coal prices pushed the cost of living higher to a point in June 152 per cent above 1914 levels and a further wage demand was submitted by the miners which they supported in October by industrial action. The so-called 'Datum Line Strike' ended in a complex settlement which linked wages to the cost of the industry and to profits and which retained a strong element of the national negotiation of wages.

Post-War Problems in Throckley

The local situation in Throckley was complex, too. The return to peacetime production brought no special difficulties; in July 1919 there was, as I have already explained a short stoppage over conscription and the Soviet Union. In May of that year the Throckley men passed a resolution complaining about the actions of men in North Walbottle refusing to support the reinstatement of men alleged to have been conscientious objectors on

the grounds that such action 'is entirely against everything for which trades unionism stands'. (Minutes of the NMA 1919 NRO 759/68) In January 1919 there was a dispute at Throckley over the width of gateways and the thickness of seams and in January 1920 two disputes about tonnage prices between different shifts and a stoppage lasting one day over cavilling rules and lines of demarcation underground. The pit production committees which were set up under the 1920 Act were set up and in the Throckley case were pre-occupied during 1920 with low productivity through the shortage of tubs and what the union regarded as poor work distribution in which coal hewers did so much of their own stonework that their output was adversely affected. (File on Output Committees: Nurthumberland Miners Association. Burt Hall 1920)

In addition to the broad questions of national policy which dominated the early 1920s there is one episode in the Throckley-Walbottle area which stands out and which, at least to the men who worked for them, suggested that the Throckley Coal Company was moving away from its pre-war policy of benevolent paternalism to a much more belligerent stance on industrial relations. The episode is known in the area as the 'Dickie Browell Strike' which lasted from February 19th to March 8th 1920 and which was a sympathy strike over the case of the Blucher pit checkweighman, Dick Browell, who, as a prominent local Labour leader and councillor was felt by many to be the target of victimisation by the coal company.

The truth of the matter may never be known but the issue was this: Richard Browell was taken to court by the Blucher pit manager, G. Bell, on a charge of altering figures in the weighing books to favour his relatives. Once the charge was laid Browell was suspended from his post. Dick Browell, as a staunch methodist, Labour councillor and Sunday school teacher was held in high regard by the Blucher workmen and believing him innocent they went on strike.

Since Blucher was part of the Throckley group of collieries the men at Throckley came out on strike in support and sympathy with the men of Blucher. The court case was conclusive to the extent that Browell was declared not guilty of the offence but what it did not clear up was the reason for the action in the first place. The suspicion still remains among many pitmen from Throckley that this was victimisation, to get rid of Browell. The pitmen of the district saw Browell's reinstatement as a great victory. The end of the court case was reported in the Illustrated Chronicle in this way noting the scene which confronted Dick Browell when he left the court:

Out, down the broad stone steps he went into the crowd-lined streets. A cheering mob of miners broke in a rush for him - up, up he went above their heads, and as he passed on, borne through the shouting spectators, who cried, "Good old Dick" a dozen burly pitmen here and there were not ashamed to wipe their streaming eyes. (quoted J. Davison 1973: 146)

Celebrations followed on Walbottle Green. But in August 1924 the Blucher colliery closed and as Jack Davison reports: "The local miners alleged that the purpose of the closure was to get rid of Browell." (1973: 147) During the strike feelings in the district against the coal company became quite bitter because in retaliation and clearly, it seems, to divide the Throckley men from those at Blucher, the company cut off the supply of fire coal to workmen at Throckley. (Executive Minutes: Northumberland Miners Association 1920 NRO 759/68)

During the time pending the court case Dick Browell had not attended any of the meetings of the local Federation of Mineworkers of which he was Chairman. But on the Sunday evening of February 29th when it was all over a welcome-back meeting of the Federation was held in Throckley store hall addressed by J. Cairns MP and by Bill Straker. The mood of that meeting is described by Bill Straker in his Monthly Circular of March and I quote from it fully, as much as anything else because of the light it casts on the emotions which animated their trades unionism:

The hall was crowded, and many could not gain admittance. Mr. J. H. Brown, of Throckley, occupied the chair at the commencement of the meeting, which was opened by the singing of the hymn beginning:-

"These things shall be; a loftier race

Than e'er the world hath known shall rise,
With flame of freedom in their souls,

And light of knowledge in their eyes."

After the singing of the hymn, Mr. Brown, in a few well chosen remarks explained the purpose of the meeting. This done he invited Mr. Browell back to the chair. As Mr. Browell did so he was greeted with warm, heart-felt applause....

It was a remarkably fine meeting, and of a semi-religious character. (W. Straker; Monthly Circular March 1920; NMA Minutes NRO 759/68)

I asked one of my respondents in Throckley whether he had been at this meeting. He said he had not so I read him the passage I have just quoted. Noticing that he was smiling I asked him whether this meeting reminded him of other meetings he had been to and whether this account "rang true." At this he laughed out aloud and said, "If they'd been singing the Red Flag I might have believed it." And he went on, insisting that I stop taking notes, to explain his view that Dick Browell, as he put it, "was guilty as hell. They didn't prosecute because of the state the country was in. If they'd done that to Dick Browell there would have been hell on." I mention this, not to cast any light on the Browell case; that would be impossible now, but to highlight that even now some of the tensions of the 1920s lie just beneath the surface, as I shall show, when the question of blacklegs is discussed during the 1926 strike. My respondent, years afterwards was very unwilling to be seen, through my writing, to be dissenting from the generally supported views about Dick Browell. My grandfather, it might be noted, liked Dick Browell and

felt they were right to strike over the issue. Aunt Eva told me that in her father's view Browell was being victimised by the pit manager and one of his clerical assistants. "Bloody scallywags" is what he called them.

Family Life at 177 Mount Pleasant

The early optimism of the 1920s in the mining industry and the district council had its parallel in the Brown family. It seemed, for a while, they could look to the future with confidence. Olive, the eldest daughter left the munitions factory in which she had worked during the war and was married in 1920. Her husband, Tommy Willis, had been a soldier but after his demob he took a job at Greenside pit. The wedding is still vividly remembered by my relatives. She was married, as they say, "from Mount Pleasant." And on the day of the wedding there was a huge 'do' or party. Neighbours helped my grandmother prepare the 'spread' a and after the service in Newburn church the fun started. Olive herself played the piano - "all the old-time songs" says aunt Eva, "Highland Flings and things" - and Jim Stobart, Francy's husband sang and played the concertina. They danced - "we did not have any carpets on the floor, you know, only lino", said Eva - but above all they drank, especially the men. My grandfather had killed a pig to pay for the drink and he and his brother-in-law, Gordon, celebrated for a full week. "They never struck a bat for a week" said Eva. "I can see him now coming down Mount Pleasant, swaying with drink and happy." I asked her whether this sort of thing was usual and

she replied without hesitation: "It was with us! We always got up a big wedding." The very words she used suggest the conscious creation of an event, a clear resolve to have a damn good time.

My grandfather liked Tommy Willis at first and Olive's marriage was a proud moment for him. It marked the beginning of the end, too, of looking after children. For my grandmother it was slightly different. She, too, liked Tommy but was just a little disappointed he worked in a pit. She wished she could have given Olive more to set up a home. The contents of a 'bottom drawer' a dinner-set and two hand-made quilts were not really much to begin a married life. And since Olive was going (rather unhappily) to 'live in' with Tommy's parents my grandmother worried about how she might settle down; particularly since Olive's mother-in-law was thought to "have a nose above her mouth" i.e. to be a bit proud and haughty. As things turned out Olive was not very happy at Greenside and they were desperately poor. My grandmother used to send groceries to her, do her washing and occasionally give her money. Tommy worked part-time as a gravedigger but there were worrying occasions when he did not pay up his earnings to his wife. Such details upset my grandmother. Her children, as she used to say "pulled at her heart strings" and Olive hankered badly to be nearer her mother.

The basic problem was Tommy's drinking. "In drink" Tommy was aggressive and sometimes violent and sometimes knocked Olive around. Olive was also having problems

with her mother-in-law over trivial domestic things. Since my grandparents were totally absorbed in Olive's life they were very worried about her and these worries did erupt into a celebrated row between my grandfather and Tommy and between the Browns and the Willises. The details of it are lost but they always kept a watchful eye on Tommy and his boozing.

Eva, his second daughter was working by this time. She had no job when she left school during the war and had filled her time in helping her mother and doing domestic work for other people. This was known as 'day work' and many young girls in Throckley were occupied as 'day girls.' At the end of the war however, she managed to get a job in the Co-operative Store millinery department, and, a little later because she was good at 'reckoning', in the cash department. She was courting too.

Jim, the eldest son had left school and through the help of Jim Stobart, Maggie's son-in-law, got a job at Spencer's steelworks in Newburn. This meant not only that there were two extra incomes (or, as they say "wages coming in") but also that my grandmother had a major ambition fulfilled. Her son was not in the pit.

Jim's career as a factory worker did not last long however. Feeling "put on" by his boss and cheated of some money he felt was due to him, he left the factory. His father was quite clear on the next step. He told Jim calmly and firmly that he had to get to the pit and "get a start there."

For my grandmother, the vulnerability of her family dramatically increased. But so did her own security; the risk of being evicted if my grandfather was killed was now removed. I doubt however, if she thought about it in that way. I doubt, too, whether either of them saw in Jim's start at the pit the almost inexorable logic of their situation and the subtle role they themselves had played in the reproduction of mining labour. But that is precisely what they had done. Jim was launched on a career identical to that of his father; he and his friends were a new generation of pitmen.

The twins Louie and Jack, were now a lot more independent and there was more for them to do, too. Apart from the Church and Chapels they now had 'the Welfare' ground. The opening up of the Welfare ground up the fell road beside the Maria pit in 1920 expanded facilities in the village considerably. The Welfare Committee which consisted of both representatives from the coal company and the Throckley Federation of Miners provided a football field, six tennis courts, a bowling green, a putting green and a pavilion capable of holding 'socials.' There was a Leek Club in the Welfare and a male voice choir. These facilities, a tangible benefit of post-war reconstruction, were a boon to the children in the village. My mother, writing at my request about her childhood, had this to say about the 'Throckley Welfare':

That was our salvation because we could play in the hall or on the courts.

But here again, an economic constraint, shortly to become very severe indeed, limited the use the children could make of the facilities:

I did not like tennis so we never learned to play.

Another snag was my mother could not afford to buy us sandshoes; we could not afford rackets. We could hire them, but again that was money. So we did without.

Nevertheless, there was sufficient change to convince my grandfather that his lot was improving. Having grown-up children was, however a double-edged sword. As the children grew older their demands for autonomy and, above all, space, increased. And here there is a clear connection between experiences in the family and my grandfather's general concern about and support for local policies to deal with overcrowding and house building.

The simple fact was that his home was hopelessly overcrowded, even after Olive had left it. This had been the case since before the twins were born in 1912 but with older children the problem took on a new meaning and affected the family life of them all, although in different ways. My grandmother coped most directly with the problem since my grandfather could so easily - although not in a wilful way specifically for this purpose - insulate himself from the congestion of the home by working in the garden. And the children themselves could scurry away to play or to their aunt Maggie's up the street. But the problem of overcrowding was always there and explains my grandparent's interest in council housing. They were not concerned for themselves or even

for that matter, with their sons. Housing was a problem for their daughters. Unless they married pitmen - something, in any case, they did not wish to happen - they could face difficulties in getting a house. In the short run, though, the problem was privacy.

There was simply nowhere for any of them to go if they wanted to be alone, no bolt hole from the normal stress of daily getting along with everybody. Bedrooms were almost public places. The children slept upstairs. The three boys slept in one double bed and the three girls slept in two double beds in the other upstairs room. If the girls wanted to wash they had to carry water upstairs to the dish and wash-stand in the bedroom. If they wanted to have a bath they had to wait till the others had gone to bed or arrange for their parents to keep the kitchen or wash-house secure from intruders.

The use of the toilet was always a semi-public event. If anyone crossed the road to the midden it was clear to the world where they were going. But through the night was a different matter. My mother elaborates the problem exactly:

Colliery houses were comfortable, but we had not to be modest in any way because there was no indoor toilets. So under the beds were chamber pots. Our toilet was much too far away to go through the night. So each morning the first job mother had to do was "empty the slops" as she used to say (one bucket of clean water to wash them, one bucket to empty them.)

At the time it was not so bad; we were used to it.

Later years, looking back it was revolting. We

girls all helped to do that job.

Under these conditions there were no secrets, no entirely private sphere and very little scope for pretence.

There were naturally, too, squabbles among the young people, particularly between Eva and Bill whose personalities seemed to clash. There were disputes about whose friends could come to the house, about who could practice the piano, about who should do what kind of jobs; in fact, the kind of arguments familiar to any parent with more than one child. My grandfather's response to this, no doubt reflecting the congested acrimony of his own childhood and his parent's response to it, was always "Divvent niggle; there's plenty room outside for that." Nevertheless, the early post-war years were optimistic ones for the Browns; the future was set fair for a change.

The 1921 Strike

The long strike of 1921 brought this phase to an early close giving them all a foretaste of difficulties yet to come.

The 'Datum Line' strike of 1920 was, in retrospect something of a pyrrhic victory for the wages settlement which followed it was short lived. During this period my grandfather acquired a dog. The coal company policy of forbidding their tenants to keep dogs had given way during the war and as if to celebrate his improving fortunes he called the dog, 'Datum.'

What followed, however, was a government announcement that the mining industry was to be decontrolled by the end of March 1921. For the miners this was a provocatively massive blow; it threatened government compliance with the coalowners' plans for a return to district wage bargaining and an inevitable cut in wages as Exchequer subsidies were withdrawn from the industry and the national profits pool dismantled. More seriously, it signalled a major step backwards from any prospect of the mines being nationalised. In March 1921 the coalowners announced their district wage rates and the reductions were massive with even the Cabinet embarrassed at the extent of them. (M. W. Kirby 1977: 58)

The early days of the lockout which followed the miner's rejection of the government terms of settlement were some of the most significant in the history of the whole British Labour movement. Both owners and miners saw this conflict as having a decisive importance in establishing who was to have the full say over the post-war mining industry. A letter to the *Evening Chronicle* (which referred to the strike as "the coal war") from the Durham company of Bolkow and Vaughan in May made it clear that the issues were not really those of wages or pooling arrangements:

The issue involved is really whether the principle of communism shall be applied to the coal industry.

(*Evening Chronicle* 24th May 1921)

The threat of the Triple Alliance controlling a national stoppage to help miners added to the owners' suspicion

that the strike was a political one; for the miners such reactions lifted the industrial problem of wage negotiation into dangerous realms of class politics. The Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers, having flexed its muscles in the early part of April threatening a national stoppage in support of the miners - a general strike - withdrew that support on the 15th of the month believing the miners to be intransigent in their refusal to countenance any compromise. "Black Friday" became a symbol of betrayal and ineffectiveness within the Labour movement itself; it left the miners bitter and isolated, a feeling reinforced by the ultimately pointless strike which dragged on until July by which time, in the collective memory of the Northumberland men "The miners had been starved into submission."

(J. Davison 1973: 44) And the man who still appears as a Judas-like figure to older miners when they recall the strike is J. H. Thomas, leader of the railwaymen. I have been told emphatically several times, that "Thomas let us down." Insofar as political action flowing from a consciousness of class presupposes, at a minimum, a strong sense of trust among different groups of working men, it is hardly surprising that many miners felt isolated and mistrustful of class politics.

Wage cuts were the main immediate consequence of the lockout - and in Northumberland the reduction was, on average, 8/2 per shift (J. Davison 1973: 51) - but the longer term effect was that the miners had lost the

battle of the decontrol of the mines and the industry, without support, was forced back to the operating assumptions of 1914 in which markets and prices would govern profits and wages. Locally, the urgent issues were those of picketing and coping with hardship. The Throckley pits produced no industrial problems indeed, the older men I have spoken to about the 1921 stoppage remember it chiefly for an event which was totally extraneous to it. Two robbers were caught in Throckley dene during the strike after having been spotted by picketing pitmen and, this caused great excitement and rich rumour. Some said that they were Russians on the run! others thought they were murderers. What everyone agrees is that without the pitmen the police would never have caught them.

Coping with hardship is intensely remembered. All over the area distress committees were organising soup kitchens of one sort or another and managed, too, despite their gruesome rationale, to organise a few carnival-like diversions both to raise funds and cheer people up. The soup kitchens at Newburn organised by The Comrades of the Great War organised in April a carnival field day with a procession of pit ponies as its central attraction in order to raise funds. And the Blucher colliery committee successfully fed three hundred and fifty children daily. (Evening Chronicle May 13th 1921) The Throckley soup kitchen, set up in the co-operative store hall was also well attended and run jointly by the co-op and the union. Curiously, as the photograph reveals



Throckley Soup Kitchen 1921

the managing committee of the soup kitchen were all men. Typically, my grandfather would not have anything to do with the soup kitchen and he expressly forbade his family to go near it. "We don't want any bloody charity in this house" is what he said to aunt Eva. They did, however, if only unwittingly, get some bread from the soup kitchen. My mother was out playing (she was only nine) and noticed a queue at the store and was told they were giving away bread. She joined the queue and was asked how many there were in her family. She told them and received seven large loaves which she carried with great difficulty. My grandmother and Eva thought it was hugely funny but my grandfather was annoyed. The only help from outside

my grandparents would countenance came from aunt Maggie but then that was not really from outside. What they did rely on, though, was the co-operative store and the credit facilities which were available through it.

The use made of these facilities is a good example of how institutions under the effective control of ordinary people could be mobilised into industrial conflict. For credit from the store carried no stigma and incurred no demeaning obligation.

In April 1921 the store made special arrangements to pay dividends early and was quick to reduce prices whenever trading conditions allowed. Throughout 1921, for example, under falling price levels the cost of most staple foodstuffs were reduced by nearly fifty per cent. (Throckley Co-operative Store Records: Balance Sheets 1921: Tyne and Wear Archive) Its main contribution to family welfare was, however, credit. The following figures for the period 1919 to 1926 illustrate well both the drop in purchasing power of Throckley families, their use of credit and the way they ate 'into' their savings. They illustrate, too, the policy of the store to maintain dividend levels in the face of declining sales. Similar patterns have been noted by J. Davison for Pegswood store in Northumberland. (1973) He adds the comment, somewhat emotively: 'This spending of savings was a great source of worry, especially to older miners and their wives, for the dread of the workhouse had instilled in them the almost fanatical desire to save ...' (1973: 45)

Purchases, Sales and CreditThrockley Co-operative Store 1919-1926

	Share Capital	Sales/ Year	Average Purchase /Member	Average Dividends in the £	Average Credit/ Member in £
1919	56932	205,073	87	2/-	1.1
1920	58388	230,563	93	1/9	1.3
1921	47702	160,244	64	1/6	5.3
1922	38286	116,302	46	1/4	3.5
1923	40502	125,942	53	2/1½	2.6
1924	45179	127,137	47	2/6	2.1
1925	47405	125,929	45	2/3½	2.1
1926	43227	113,324	41	2/2	3.2

Source: Calculated from Quarterly Balance Sheet.

Throckley Co-operative Store Records

Tyne and Wear Archive

My grandmother withdrew her small savings and bought things through credit in the 1921 strike. She paid back her credit by not claiming her dividend on goods she bought. She always felt honour bound to pay back her debt as quickly as she could but she never felt demeaned by store credit. As she saw it, offering credit was simply one of the services of the store.

The effects of hardship are difficult to measure but the experience is nonetheless real. Dr. Messer, the MOH, writing of malnutrition in the district in his report for 1921 had this to say:

So far as statistics are concerned it would hardly be possible to present a more satisfactory report than that now issued. At the same time it would

be foolish to say the condition of the people in this area was such as these figures seem to represent. Unemployment on an unprecedented scale had been the lot of the majority of the inhabitants for the greater part of the year. Malnutrition must have been the lot of many for months on end, and although the condition is not apparent to the casual observer, it is nonetheless widespread.

(Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health 1921, Newburn UDC. West Denton Public Library)

The Browns, at least, because of the gardens were well fed and two of them were working, Eva at the store and Bill, just left school, in Throckley laundry. By the end of the strike however, Bill lost his job and he too, much to my grandmother's concern, got started at the pit.

1921 is remembered by them all as a terrible year. Quite apart from the industrial troubles they had a family tragedy too. My grandfather's sister, Alvina, who lived just opposite the Maria pit, and to whom he was very attached, died in childbirth leaving a young family of six children. Four were her own and the two eldest were those of her husband from his first marriage. The two older girls simply took over the role of their stepmother and brought the children up, helped by neighbours. I expressed some surprise at this when I first heard this story but my mother assured me there was nothing really to be surprised about: "Throckley was just that sort of place."

Return To Normal

The strike ended in July and they went back to work on lower pay. The basis for the calculation of wages was changed, however, to reflect part of the miner's case that profit as well as prices should figure in the drawing up of wage rates. It was a small concession and the men were faced almost immediately with a much more direct regulation of wage costs, short time working. At a special council meeting on October 1st the union president told delegates that: "owing to the short time worked by many and the total unemployment of others" it was impossible for the union to meet its financial liabilities to its members. (NMA Minutes NRO 759/68) To deal with this they passed a resolution levying one shilling per week from those pits in work. This strategy was favoured "above that of asking and influencing local Boards of Guardians granting adequate relief to unemployed men."

My grandfather went back to work therefore, with the certain prospect of short pays and perhaps unemployment. But he went back with two sons rather than just one for by this time Bill had lost his job in the laundry. "It was the worst day of my bloody life" Bill told me. Matt Cheesman had "set him on" asking my grandfather "Is he fowerteen?" (i.e. fourteen) and nothing more. Bill hated it but complied willingly with his father. It is ironic to him in retrospect that he preferred the idea of work to school and that he had, in fact, left school early to get the job in the laundry.

Bill's early start to work reveals something of the attitude of his parents to their children's education. They did not subscribe to the view which became potent later that education mattered to get on in the world. But it also gave rise to an incident which reveals a strong element of my grandfather's character, his utter detest of arrogance and the shortness of his temper if his basic self respect was threatened.

The occasion was the visit to the house of Mr. Davison the 'School Board Man' complaining that Bill had left school too early. This fact alone reveals both their priorities and the state of the job market in Throckley. There were very few jobs outside the pits so that any job going had to be seized quickly. At the time of the visit my grandfather was in the back-kitchen stripped to the waist washing himself. He had not been long in from the pit. Mr. Davison stood at the door and questioned my grandmother about Bill in what they took to be a hostile officious manner. My mother, at that time, had just started school and remembers being quite disturbed by the seriousness of this visit and the anxious way her mother tried to cope with the questions ending in a flustered sort of way with the words "Well what can I do? He's at work and that is that."

This was not sufficient for Mr. Davison, a man, at least according to my mother, much disliked in the district. He went on with his questions till he so upset my grandmother she could no longer reply.

By this time my grandfather was dried and came to the door, angry at the treatment his wife had received and said, quite emphatically, the words precisely remembered by the frightened child; "Its a good job you earn your living with your tongue; if you had to earn it with your hands you would starve," She remembers, too, that he called the 'School Board Man' an "impitent little bugger" and threatened that if he did not get away he would throw him over the back shed. As my mother says, "He didn't like school board men, probably because he had a bit to do with them in his young days." But the point my mother was making was not one, in fact, about school. It was one about arrogance, the one human quality which he detested. He disliked one of the male assistants in the co-operative store for his assumed air of official superiority saying of him often, "If they paid him his wages in coppers he wouldn't be able to carry them." He could never bring himself to respect anyone trying to be better than anyone else.

But it is also clear that a major part of his own self respect was based on his sense of his own physical strength, that being strong for him was part of being a proper man. I mention this now because it was during this period that he must have begun to realise that physically he was failing. Having two sons in the pit was something of a comfort even if it meant for his wife a great deal of extra work and uncertainty.

For my grandmother the most taxing part of this period was as her sons saw it, the sheer unpredictability of her income. Bill told me: "Those days my mother did not know from week to week what she had coming in, poor bugger." And in 1922 and 1923 problems were compounded with illness for my grandfather developed pleurisy and had three spells off work. They did have an income from the 'Heddon Club', a friendly society to which my grandfather had subscribed from being a boy and which was organised at this time by Bob Hunter, the Checkweightman. 'Heddon Club' was a branch of the Manchester Unity Friendly Society and as such a part of the Independent Order of Oddfellows. In 1922 he was off work in total six weeks receiving payments of ten shillings per week and in 1923 he lost four weeks.

In 1923 his second daughter, Eva, married. She, too, married a miner but this time the old people were not so well-disposed to their son-in-law. Firstly, they had nowhere to live and had to 'live in'. Secondly, Joe Batey was a keen gambler and thirdly, they believed, rightly as it turned out, that he was unfaithful almost from the beginning. The marriage faltered and within three years Eva was left on her own with her daughter Olive. She had lost her job and was to all intents and purposes the responsibility of her parents. She did have rooms in the new council houses but she spent most of her time with her mother and there was considerable friction in the house which even now they are all reluctant to talk about.

Family worries and difficulties in the coal trade strengthened my grandfather's determination to be independent and to force more from the gardens. This determination took on what seems to me an almost pathological character; he actually drove himself to the limits of his endurance.

In 1924 a fire in Throckley pit caused the mine to be closed for a while and my grandfather, together with Bill and Jim was transferred to the Maria colliery. Shortly after the move my grandfather suffered a broken toe through a fall of stone. He was off work only for a few days, however, for he insisted that he could not lose any time. Bill says that they tried to dissuade him but he would hear none of it and they didn't know how he managed to get to work with a swollen, blackened toe which caused him to hobble badly when he walked. At this time he was working on number eleven flat in the Brockwell seam, a full mile away from the bottom of the shaft.

When I prompted Bill further to explain how he could actually work with the pain of it I was told, "My father was a hard man; he just ignored the pain." Bill still cannot comprehend this stoicism but puts it down to the hard upbringing my grandfather had as a boy.

In 1925 he suffered another accident, again through a fall of stone, in which the tendons of his left hand were severed. He was off work for one week and three days, just sufficient for the wound to heal but once again his stoical desperation drove him back to work.

Unwilling to declare himself seriously injured and returning to work far too soon he ironically closed off a source of income from compensation payments which would have helped a lot during the 1926 strike. As it was, it was simply assumed by the coal company and the union that he was fit again for work. The difference was, that this time he could no longer grip things with his left hand. Right into the end of his life he could not hold a table fork properly. And to hold his hewing pick he had first to close the fingers round its shaft with his right hand and then get on with hacking coal.

Shadows of Unemployment

The pressures which drove him to such desperation were both in his own make-up and in the circumstances of his family and his work. In addition the economic position of the whole area by 1923 was an uncertain one. These factors reinforced one another. A further problem for him, I suspect, was the knowledge he was growing old and that he could no longer hew the same amount of coal. These things together spelled insecurity and uncertainty.

The coal industry generally and the export districts in particular were in a strong position in the period immediately after the war since the French, Polish and, of course, the German coal industries were in disarray. By 1924, however, with the French withdrawal from the Ruhr the situation changed drastically. Bill Straker reflected this in his circular of July that year:

In all my experience I have never known such a sudden and severe slump in the coal trade as we are now in; prices having fallen 5s. to 6s. per ton, and a considerable number of our pits working very short time, some not having worked at all for two consecutive weeks.

My grandfather did not suffer personally from any unemployment having had, in retrospect, the good fortune of being able to transfer from the Throckley pit to the Maria, a pit which despite the slump managed to maintain its numbers. The following figures illustrate this point:

Number of Men Employed by Throckley Coal Company
and Percentage of Workforce Unionised 1920-1926
Throckley and Maria Collieries

	Throckley		Maria		Company Total
	Nos	% in Union	Nos	% in Union	Nos
1920	706	78.0	552	82.7	2408
1921	823	78.3	499	94.4	2378
1922	827	59.0	506	76.8	2380
1923	818	69.1	546	79.5	2553
1924	468	97.7	583	79.8	1905
1925	146	-	642	71.4	1332
1926	197	-	666	85.8	1444

Sources: Northumberland Miners Association Balance Sheets, Northumberland Coalowners Board Statistical Returns, Mines Inspectorate List of Mines.

The sudden drop in numbers at the Throckley colliery is explained by the fire which closed the pit for a while

in 1924 and the drastic reduction in the overall numbers employed by the company is a consequence of the total closure of Blucher pit. Any worries he may have entertained about his pit closing were not unrealistic for by 1924 Spencer's steel works in Newburn, a major customer for the Maria coals, was in deep trouble too. What he did experience was short time working. Jim told me: "There was a lot of short time them days. We used to wait for the buzzer to blow at six o'clock to let us know if the pit was working the next day." And my mother recollects this time of day being an anxious one where they all waited in a kind of suspense to see whether there was to be any work. "The buzzer", she told me "had an eerie sound. It used to make me shudder." By the early 1920s short pays were a serious problem for there were three men in the pit needing good food, two children still at school and Eva and her baby had to be looked after too.

Beyond short time working was the prospect of unemployment. The closure of Throckley pit and Blucher pit made this very clear and unemployment in the district was high. The following figures drawn from the Newburn Labour Exchange (the 'dole') indicates this clearly:

Number of Persons (Male) Registered as
Unemployed in the Newburn
Area: 1923 - 1926

	June	December
1923	757	986
1924	947	1799
1925	2958	1372
1926	1171	1413

Source: Unpublished Statistics:
 Department of Employment.

Since no overall figure for the insured working population exist it is not possible to calculate what percentage rate of unemployment these figures represent. Later figures suggest the rate was about 25%. Registered unemployed females never numbered more than 46.

These figures underestimate the total number of unemployed because some workers were not covered by the insurance scheme. In an area where most people knew one another well, an area which was, and in a sense still is, socially quite small, these figures illustrate a serious problem and for an ageing person, the problem they reflect was a real one. My grandfather had lots of acquaintances who were unemployed. And unemployment spelled poverty and dependency on the parish with its detested 'Means Test.'

The union operated an unemployment relief scheme but this was hardly sufficient. In October 1924 branches voted supportively on a proposal to set aside £10,000

for unemployment relief to be paid at a rate of five shillings weekly with a further allowance of five shillings rent and one shilling for each child. By December of that year the fund was totally exhausted; a further extension of £10,000 lasted only till January 1925 when it had to be extended again. Bill Straker, ever to the point, spelled out the situation in his September circular in 1924:

For a number of years we have enjoyed comparative prosperity and I am just afraid we have neglected to prepare for years of adversity Instead of building up a great fund for the relief of our unemployed members we reduced our contributions to our union funds to little more than expenses level, and so to-day we are helpless to render that aid so sorely needed by thousands of our members, their wives and children.

The threat of unemployment is a harsh form of labour discipline. Men at Throckley had to do as they were told or face the consequences. Here, of course, is the reason being the tight grip my grandfather kept on his sons in the pit and the reason, too, why he worried about Bill's strong-headedness in the mine.

The Minutes of the Executive of the Union give small clues about how labour discipline worked in practice. In January 1922 they discussed the case of a Throckley man dismissed "owing to going to the lavatory;" the best they could do in this case was to ask the management to pay the man fourteen days wages "in lieu of notice."

In September of the same year they passed the following resolution: "That we ask this branch to arrange an interview with the colliery management regarding the putter discharged owing to refusing to hew coal when he had no putting to do." This action, an insistence on the management's part that they had the right to direct labour was contrary to a tradition in the pit that putters need only hew if they themselves wanted to.

It is clear that underground working creates tension and conflict. Under the conditions of piece work, short time working and disputes about the supply of tubs, such conflicts could result in great anger and that this anger could be directed not just at management, but at fellow workers.

In my grandfather's case it happened in 1924. Shortages of tubs underground was a long-standing problem at Throckley aggravated, at least in the management's view, by shortages in railway wagons which led the coals away from the pit. Full tubs would sometimes have to stand for long periods waiting for coal wagons. For men underground these shortages meant great inconvenience and the need to wait in turn to get what tubs were available. Putters had often to stand around waiting for work and if hewers could not get their coal moved they could not be paid for it.

My Grandfather was hewing one day with his Marra, Bob Guthrie, and felt strongly that a hewer in the next stall was commanding an unfair share of the available tubs and jumping his turn. A verbal warning failed to

deter the man and as the story came back to my uncles - the pit itself had been buzzing with it with many men wondering whether my grandfather would be sacked - my grandfather, still a strong man although then in his early fifties, picked the other hewer up and dumped him in an empty tub and, angrily holding him there, said to his mate: "There, Bob. Fill this bugger up!"

Both Bill and Jim told me that my grandfather was a hard man when he was roused and could show his temper to effect; but they emphasised, too, that it took a lot to rouse him. He was normally a placid almost easy-going man and they both told me this tale not to emphasise how tough their father could be but sadly to emphasise how difficult conditions were in the pit at that time. My uncles did not say it so explicitly but it is clear from what they have said that the crisis in the whole industry penetrated directly the personal relation of the pit. The risk of such behaviour was great; the charge of being an unruly workman, like the charge of being an inefficient one, could prevent re-employment and not just in the same colliery. The 'black list' was a real threat which could drive a man away from the whole area. And the control of re-employment was one of those areas of conflict in all pits which the cavilling system did not always cope with.

The Throckley Coal Company had always been careful to select 'good workmen' and throughout the twenties came into conflict with local officials for not, as the union understood it, cavilling properly from unemployed

workmen, preferring instead to select whom they wanted to engage at their pits. It is clear from union records that older men had less of a chance of re-employment at Throckley and that the company had a clear model of the 'inefficient man' to guide them. My grandfather might have found some security in his efficiency; he could do nothing about his age. And although, in the battles at this particular 'frontier of control' (C. Goodrich 1975) the union had a strong sense of which men were entitled to work at the Throckley pits, the coal company was adamant that it could recruit whoever it liked.

An additional risk was that union policy, again because of low resources, did not allow the payment of unemployed relief to men dismissed for misconduct. This fate befell eight men at the Maria colliery in October 1925 one of whom, J. Carr, was president of the Maria lodge. Dismissed for arguing over rates for a particular class of work, the union had to inform the branch "that the eight members who were dismissed for misconduct, and consequently are not out of employment owing to a depression in the coal trade, cannot be paid out of work relief from our Association." (Executive Minutes: NMA October 1925 NRO 759/68)

The logic of this situation, therefore, was clear; being powerless they had to put up with a lot and if they were to keep their security they had, at a minimum, to keep their peace. The union provided an immediate explanation of such experiences and an outlet for them although by no means a solution. The union, by 1924,

quite simply lacked the power to effect much change and the reason for this, again quite simply, was lack of resources. The irony of the union position was that its strength was directly related to the state of the industry itself. Its membership fluctuated with employment and its resources were limited by what its potential members could afford to pay from their wages. Without resources the union's power to support adequately men who might withdraw their labour from work is simply not there.

These conditions produced in my grandfather a desperate determination to reduce his dependency on the pit. It is no accident that when his sons recall these days they think of the garden; during this time he forced the gardens to their full potential and drafted his sons to this work. For a short period he added to the congestion of his home by taking in a lodger. He spent little money; he worked as often as he could on Tommy Lamb's farm and my grandmother economised as much as she could curiously grateful that she could knit, sew, mend and cook with great economy. What had previously been 'leisure' became, out of necessity, a major part of his 'work.'

This was a period when they were, as a family, very much on the defensive; nothing could be wasted. Even my grandfather's worn pit shirts were carefully shortened and passed on to his sons. And this defensiveness expressed itself in the affairs of the union and in politics generally. In the union there was a strong

feeling that, nationalisation no longer being a realistic short term aim, everything had to be done to create stability, steady work and secure markets. This explains, for example, the lonely campaign which Bill Staker waged for trade with the Soviet Union and why in 1922 he was campaigning against the further imposition of reparation payments from Germany. "This scheme", he said "made in a spirit of revenge and forced upon a conquered Germany is coming back, upon Britain especially with a boomerang-like effect." (Monthly Circular January 1922) This same mood explains, too, why the Executive of the Northumberland miners passed a resolution in February 1920 demanding the implementation of Part Two of the Mining Industry Act of that year which was the legal basis of pit production committees. They wanted this act fully implemented because "in our judgement the machinery provided therein will not only give miners (the right) to make recommendations to the management of mines affecting the safety of miners, but will also do much to assure that peace in the mining industry which is so highly necessary in the interests of the country as a whole." In August of the same year the Executive agreed to press hard on the issue of non-unionism and to support any branch willing to come out on strike on this issue.

The Politics of Defensiveness

Defensive industrial tactics were paralleled on the political front by a general feeling both among ordinary miners and, of course, the union leadership at the pit

and executive level, that it was an urgent task to build up the strength of the Labour Party. The belief was that only through political change in parliament could the miners expect fundamental changes in the organisation of the industry which would recognise, for the first time in peace-time, that the costs and dangers of winning coal should be properly borne by the whole community.

The General Election of 1922 had been, in this respect, encouraging. The Tory campaign had been based around the theme of 'Tranquility' and in the coalfield the Labour Party campaigned hard on the need for a more equal society - Bill Straker had made much of the fact, for instance, that there were great inequalities of wealth and income in Britain - and on the need to secure a peaceful international framework based on the League of Nations.

The League of Nations was not just an abstract idea. There was an active branch formed in 1922 in Throckley which arranged a lecture programme to discuss international affairs. The branch was actively supported by the Methodist chapels and this gave rise to some concern from the Church of England vicar. Writing in the parish magazine of May 1923 he urged his flock to join the branch and pointed out: "So far our Church has not rallied round this important movement as well as our Nonconformist brethren in the district." (Newburn Church Magazine 1923 Newburn Vicarage.)

To Bill Straker however, the issue of inequality was the fundamental political one and the battle against

it, in his view, entailed cutting all links with their Liberal past. "The old Tory" he explained in his November circular dealing with the election, "stands for the power of Land; the Liberal stands for the power of Money. That is why Money and Land are calling to each other to co-operate against Labour." The election, as is well known, resulted in a victory for the Conservatives under Bonar Law but also with large Labour gains being recorded. Against a background of growing unemployment, recession and uncertainty in international affairs, particularly in Europe, an election called by Baldwin exactly one year later, resulted in a minority Labour Government under Ramsay MacDonald.

This is not the place to examine the record of this first and short-lived Labour Government or to open up again the question of why, quite apart from the famous Zinoviev letter affair which coloured the election resulting in its defeat, this government failed. It is sufficient to note that the Labour movement as a whole learned a lesson; a government in office is not necessarily a government with power.

The defeat of the government led to criticisms of the leadership of the Labour Party, especially from the communists and the Independent Labour Party. But the fact that it had been a minority government tempered the criticism of the growing mass of Labour voters.

(R. Miliband 1973) The changes which MacDonald had made in the administration of unemployment insurance and the promise of more council housing implied in the Wheatley

Housing Act, not to mention some real success on the international front over such questions as loans for Russia and persuading the French to withdraw from the Ruhr, no doubt persuaded many Labour voters that even in desperate economic conditions limited yet real gains could be made by the Labour movement. It would certainly not be surprising, given the failure of the Triple Alliance in 1921, if many ordinary voters felt that there was more hope for social change through the parliamentary mechanism than through direct industrial action.

The miners were, however, a special case in this respect and much about their situation convinced them that they could only make real gains through industrial struggle. The failure of the Sankey proposals and the withdrawal of government control of the industry were partly behind this feeling. On both counts the miners could have little faith in central government under either Liberals or Tories. More specifically, however, the post-war increase in prices and coalowner's demands from 1923 onwards to reduce production costs in the industry by increasing the hours of work convinced miners that they were once again being singled out for unfair treatment. Bill Straker reflects their mood in his February circular of 1923 when he wrote:

I believe the miners will face another disastrous struggle, of as long duration as that of 1921, rather than agree to an extension of hours.

(NMA Minutes NRO 759/68)

The unfolding of that determination into the great struggle of 1926 is something I shall discuss in the next chapter. It needs only to note here that lurking behind the shifting sands of politics and the daily problems of working in pits there was, for the miners, an ominous spectre of industrial struggle, as I shall show, which few would claim to want but which many thought unavoidable.

Images of Family Life: A Good Sing-Song

When my relatives are prompted to go back to these years their recollections are not entirely dominated by industrial troubles. They are very conscious of a family life which, despite the problems of congestion and bickering I have mentioned, they look back on very fondly. It was during this period that my grandparent's became grandparents. Olive's daughter, Francy, was born in 1921 and Eva's daughter, Olive, in 1923. Sally, Olives second child was born just a month after Olive. Their names, it will be noted, are already familiar; the rule was to name children after immediate relatives. My grandparents basked proudly in their status as grandparents and my grandmother played a direct role in helping to deliver all her grandchildren since they were all born at Mount Pleasant. From the beginning Olive brought her children to Mount Pleasant every Sunday and as soon as it was practicable the whole family went for Sunday evening walks with the children. Every weekend became a kind of gathering of the clan when, apart from walks or eating they would sing around the piano.

The weekend sing-songs stand out as the main family entertainment; for the boys this period is remembered as the time Jim started to take a drink and would often have to be smuggled upstairs to bed rather than risk my grandfather's wrath although, in fact, he was always quite indulgent towards Jim in that respect. Interestingly, Bill's memories are very different to those of Jim. Until the 1930s Bill was teetotal and spent much more time at home than Jim. When he did go out he went out with his friends on their motorbikes. He helped out more in the house and, at least so it seems to me, was much more sensitive to the difficulties of the women folk in the house. But they all agree they enjoyed a sing-song. And what they sang indicates something, too, of what changes had taken place in popular music and the forces shaping those changes.

I asked my mother what they sang and she was able to tell me precisely by referring to what surely ought to be recognised as a very important 'unobtrusive measure' not so far exploited by social historians, the family piano stool. All the sheet music they ever possessed is still there in that stool and like the fossils in rock strata those tattered sheets tell their own tale of the gradual decline of a music hall tradition of song giving way, as it did, to music from the stage and dance halls with an obvious import of new trends from America. Olive, the eldest daughter, was the principal pianist although the other girls knew how to play too. From the dances in the village and encouraged by Eva - who,

before her marriage was the one most keen on dances - Olive picked up a vast repertoire of currently popular songs and played them to the family. They had no gramophone, no radio and little opportunity to see films. They picked up their music in Throckley in the round of chapel socials and dances in the store hall. The list of songs is too long to reproduce. It includes the following:

Comrades	Be My Love
Danny Boy	Old Man River
Two Lovely Black Eyes	The Holy City
After The Ball Was Over	Beautiful Dreamer
The Sunshine Of Your Smile	The Rose Of Tralee
Why Did I Leave My Little	Horsy Keep Your Tail Up
Back Room	It's A Long Way To Tipperary

Writing about the same period Richard Hoggart classified the 'English urban popular song' into two main groups - 'the seriously emotional, and the amused and mocking.' (1957: 157) But there are clearly more varieties; Hoggart goes on to describe 'The cheeky, finger-to-the-nose - and ain't -life-jolly'songs sung 'when they are refusing to be down-hearted simply because they are working class, when they are raucously confident.' (1957: 157) Then there were the 'gay, rough, and battered old types' including, for example, 'Two Lovely Black Eyes and the 'nonsense songs which are simply excuses for a cheerful communal roar like 'Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ay'.... and 'Horsy Keep Your Tail Up.' Hoggart's argument is that these songs follow strict conventions, that they are, in the main, sentimental with a 'limited

and bold emotional equipment'; they do not pretend to be great creations of culture but they are, as he puts it, 'open-hearted and big bosomed.'

And, very importantly, and I think he is absolutely correct in this, these songs come from and reflect a time when, as he again puts it, 'it was easier to release the emotions.' (1957: 163) Having seen such singing in Mount Pleasant it is quite obvious to me that they were all prepared to be moved by the songs and did not feel in the least inhibited about singing and, sometimes, shedding a few tears. My grandfather particularly liked the Irish songs and the ones with a religious aura to them, 'The Holy City,' 'Ave Maria' but he was not too serious about it. He had no difficulty in making what Hoggart nicely calls the 'Gracie Fields switch'. a move of mood from the comic song to a 'classical religious' one without any incongruity all in the course of a good night's entertainment.

Hoggart is writing about songs which were sung in the clubs of Leeds and treats the singing of such songs as part of a theme he calls 'the full rich life' in which working class people, allowing themselves the indulgence of a 'mild hedonism' which justifies an occasional extravagance, to cope with the normally dull and ordered routines of their lives and some of the tragedies which can upset those routines. The only way, therefore, in which his account does not meet the Throckley case is that these songs were sung in the home, women there, by convention, not being part of the club at all, even

at weekends. But that does not diminish the value of his analysis of what such songs actually meant to the ordinary people who sang them.

The singing of such songs can be thought of as giving ritual support to such values as friendship, the importance of the home and family and neighbourliness, even, perhaps, as Hoggart suggests particularly with respect to those songs with a religious flavour, giving something of a feeling of the holy. There is now no way of finding out what such singing really meant; sufficient to note that all my relatives will refer back to it nostalgically as a high spot in their early family life.

One final point about singing; several organisations in Throckley - the store, the club, the churches and the British Legion - regularly organised trips and excursions in the 'charrabangs' (Buses). My grandfather did not go on these trips and excursions but my grandmother did occasionally and took the children. Singing was a key feature of such trips and some of the favourite songs were drawn from Geordie music hall. Songs like 'The Blaydon Races', 'Cushie Butterfield', 'Keep Your Feet Still Geordie Hinny' and 'Geordy's Lost 'is Penka.' They are all good eminently singable songs in the regional dialect and are expressive not just of a communal togetherness of the sort Hoggart describes but also of a distinctive regional identity as well. These are the almost tribal songs of 'Geordies', particularly the song, 'The Blaydon Races'; they locate people not

just in a particular class but in a particular area thereby, but only in a small way, signalling that despite the fact that, in the Throckley case, they were miners, they nonetheless were different from miners in the other coalfields and mildly proud of the fact.

Since, I have already shown, gardening lost something of its character as pleasure for my grandfather during this period and became a kind of work his main release from normal routines came on those weekends when he could get a drink. After 1921 he drank mainly in the Union Jack Club, an institution which had grown out of the earlier Throckley Social Club. This club had grown too large for its premises in Stephenson Terrace and one group had broken away to form a new club at Throckley Bank Top. Those remaining kept the Stephenson Terrace buildings, formed a new committee and gained a license to sell beer having selected the name, 'Throckley Union Jack,' as a gesture to the licensing magistrates. If they could show themselves to be patriotic they thought, rightly as it turned out, they would have no trouble getting a license.

My grandfather went to the club to see his friends, to pay his leek club dues and sometimes hear a sing-song. He liked it because the company was predominantly male and the place was orderly. It would be misleading however, to paint too harmonious a picture of the club; there was at times conflict over the way rules were enforced; there was occasional acrimony and there were differences in the used made of the club between older

men and younger ones. In 1925, for instance, the committee had to act to prevent some of the younger members from dancing on Sunday nights and some of the younger men were not too interested in supporting the library or the educational programmes the club tried to offer. The tension between the ideals of social improvement and cheaper beer for simple pleasures - a tension reflecting social differences in Throckley itself - was always just beneath the surface and on occasions it actually erupted. In November 1924, for instance, a vitriolic little piece appeared in the Club and Institute Journal very expressive of just such conflict. Writing of the changed character of clubs after the First World War, a period which witnessed a rapid expansion in club membership from 198,000 in 1901 to 902,000 in 1925; in the North East of England (Northumberland and Durham) the corresponding figures are 10,000 and 175,00 the writer says:

Only an invincible optimism enabled us who were left at home to live through those doleful days. We said ourselves that the comradeship of danger would impel men to the social comradeship of our clubs. We forget that every ten years gives us a new generation.

He goes on to characterise the post-war generation of members as men who had come through the 'senseless rules of the service machine' and he insists:

To them the ideals and traditions of the union are unknown. In most cases they found the clubs ready-made and have no more concern for the founders than tenants

have for the man who built the house they live in ... As members they are refractory, as committee-men they are untrained and often indolent.

(Club and Institute Journal November 1924)

This is too strong a description to apply to Throckley but there was trouble at the club on occasions. My grandfather was once dragged into a brawl coming from the club in 1922. Tommy Ankram an ex-soldier drunkenly abused my grandfather and a fight started. Bob Shield, a friend of my grandfather intervened and, to use my uncle Jim's words "brayed Ankram." The policeman Bill Davidson came and Bob Shield was eventually fined.

The most humiliating end of the tale, however, was that the policeman called later to Mount Pleasant and gave my grandfather a stern talking to saying, so Jim recalls, "Haven't you got any more sense at your age?" Jim told me this story to emphasis that my grandfather "wouldn't let anybody put on him." But in telling me this he quickly generalised the event and said of the club, "There were battles every Sunday dinner-time." It was quite common for some of the younger men to go "hoyin pennies" after they had been drinking and this often ended in fighting.

My grandfathers view's on this were basically censorious; he did not approve of gambling; he avoided conflict if he could; he had no time for people who did not work hard or look to their families and he felt mildly humiliated to be associated with people he looked down on as "randies." Going to this club was one way of distancing himself from such folk while at the same

time not cutting himself off from the community of miners he did respect. This last point is important for, as I shall show in the next chapter, the club was not just a drinking place; it was an important institution in the community of men and not just because, as I explained in an earlier chapter, it was the focus of much of their leisure, but because it related strongly also to their work and their whole social position as miners.

In this respect the image of the club which is given by Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter as a "co-operative society for the purchase and sale of beer" and of clubs in general as reflecting "in their behaviour as organisations the thriftlessness of their members" and not "seriously concerned with either 'mental and moral improvement' or 'rational recreation' " is very misleading. (1956: 142-154)

The club at Throckley did make efforts through its library and its lecture programme to educate its members and it did embody in its rules a strong sense that it had a wider social purpose than simply subsidising drink through passing back profits to its members. Once again, however, it would be incorrect to say that Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter were wrong; they are simply describing clubs in the 1950s when a very different social and economic context sustained a different rationale for club life.

Through the fruitless wage negotiations of 1925 up to the Lock-Out of 1926 the mood in the pits was defensive and uncertain. When my relatives recall this period they recall hardship, not so much for themselves

although, as Bill will always emphasise "We had no bloody money. And when you've got nowt, that's it. You can do nowt!" The Browns were, in fact, relatively well off and they never lost their self respect. They all remember with affection the rich rituals of their family life.

Not being a carefree character I suspect, however, that when he was not totally absorbed in the details of a busy life, when he sat thinking beside his fire gazing, so his children thought, quite absently into the fire, my grandfather must have felt a kind of dread for the future. Pit work was not getting any easier for him and he had severe doubts about how long he would get it anyway. And years of legislation and argument over safety had not removed the ever-present yet capricious threat of death underground. This had not worried him too much before but he had a small family again with Eva and her babies in the house. These were perhaps his thoughts at the end of March 1925 when an inrush of water from old workings took thirty-eight lives at the Montague pit three miles down river from Throckley, the worst mining disaster of the inter-war period and one which, as the enquiry which followed showed clearly, could easily have been avoided had the industry been more concerned with safety and under much stricter control of law.

Chapter Twelve

THE GENERAL STRIKE AND MINER'S LOCK-OUT

1926

The year 1926 has a special place in my account of my grandfather. It was for him a turning point. As the year unfolded, from the beginning of May and the miner's Lock-out, through the nine days of the General Strike and seven subsequent months of struggle ending in the dispirited drift to work and defeat, my grandfather became progressively embittered. The events of that summer pitched him into an awareness of his position which his busy routines had previously stifled. His consciousness of class was sharpened; his understanding of industrial action was enriched. The Lock-out brought into sharp definition the particular strengths and some of the weaknesses of the village testing severely the quality of community and family life.

The solidarity, ingenuity, tolerance and strength of Throckley people were brought to the forefront of the struggle. The collective strength of the mining community, borne of such qualities, was shown, however, in the end, not to be sufficient. For men of my grandfather's generation the experience was a profound one; it resulted, I think, in a feeling that little could be really gained through industrial action. For younger men it bred both political cynicism and a determination that Labour needed stronger political organisations.

In the short run, however, the overwhelming mood was one of defeat and despair and great bitterness. The bitterness was directed not just at Baldwin or Churchill or indeed the government as a whole and their allies the coalowners. It existed, too, among the men themselves; it turned against blacklegs; it turned against those who prolonged the Lock-out; it turned against those who in one way or another had made money from the troubles; it turned against the police. The bitterness is still recalled and is still a potent force in Throckley among older people.

For miners as a whole it helped confirm their self definition as a maligned exploited group. And that is an element of their collective biography which they have never forgotten. In this chapter I describe the course of the Miner's Lock-out paying special attention to the way in which my grandparents - and hundreds of others like them - managed to cope during those months. The account will show that the dispute stretched to the limit the resources of the village. All the institutions which the miners had built up - the union, the co-operative store, the social clubs, the Labour Party and, in some ways more importantly, the networks of neighbourly help - were mobilised to conflict. So, too, were the resources of families themselves.

The events which led up to the Miner's Lock-out and the General Strike have been partly described in the previous chapter and extensively set out in a number

of recent histories. (P. Renshaw 1975: G. Noel 1976: C. Farman 1972: G. A. Phillips 1976) The underlying causes of the General Strike and the struggles in the coal industry are clearly related to post-war attempts to stabilise the economy and restore sterling to something like its pre-war parity with the dollar. The costs of this financial orthodoxy were to be met inevitably by lowering wages and wages in the coal industry, for very specific reasons connected with the way that industry was organised, were to bear the largest part of the reduction. (see P. Renshaw 1975)

The miners were, in this sense, engineered into a conflict situation; they could not do less than protect the level of wages they had achieved after the war. The logic of the situation for the coalowners was different; to protect their investment in the face of a falling export market and government policy aimed at maintaining sterling at a high level they were forced into demanding both district agreements and wage reductions.

The result was a classic conflict situation where the parties involved would look for allies to strengthen the sanctions they could apply and to realise their interests and legitimate their position. (see J. Rex 1961 for an account of these terms) In the case of the mineowner's allies were sought in the government. The miners looked to the Triple Alliance and the TUC. The conflict groups which emerged were those of the government and the organised labour movement with both poised

to mobilise all their resources to the struggle but with neither group fully in control of the situation.

The logic of the coalowner's situation had to be traced to the post-war profitability of the industry and its organisation. The period up to 1924 had been one of rising prosperity and profits. But after the resumption of production in the Ruhr British coal was exposed, as Kirby put it, "to the realities of the long-term market situation." (1977: 68) Kirby goes on:

In the whole of the year 1925 the industry operated with a financial loss of $10\frac{3}{4}$ d per ton on average, as compared with a profit of 1s.2d per ton in 1924 During the period from September 1924 to March 1925 more than half of all collieries were operating at a loss, the proportion having grown to 67 per cent by the end of May 1925. The level of unemployment in the industry, which had amounted to 2.1 per cent in March 1924, had risen to 25 per cent by June 1925. In the following month 315,000 miners were out of work and all districts, both inland and exporting, were on the minimum wage.

(1977: 68)

The issue which had to be solved was who was to bear the costs. The coalowners wanted to transfer the costs to wages proposing on July 1st, for example, wage cuts of as much as 48 per cent for Northumberland and Durham. The miners were equally determined that there should neither be wage reductions or extensions to the working

day and that the costs of the fall-off in trade should be borne by profits and the government.

The negotiating strength of the Miner's Federation was strengthened by a promise from the TUC General Council in July 1925 that they would support the miners in their struggle to defend living conditions. And on July 25th the trades union movement pitched the conflict to a new level with the announcement that the railwaymen, transport workers and seamen would embargo the movement of coal if the lock-out notices which had been served on the miners in June were not withdrawn.

At this point a reluctant Baldwin was forced to act. Having galvanised the opposition of the TUC even further by announcing that "all workers of this Country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet," (quoted M. W. Kirby 1977: 73) Baldwin was forced, against cabinet opposition to agree to a continuation of the coal subsidy by not less than £10 million for a period of nine months during which time, yet another commission of enquiry could examine the position of the mining industry. These decisions of July 31st were thought of by the miners as a victory and the day became known as "Red Friday."

Whether the continuation of the subsidy and the effective postponement of conflict in the coal industry was the outcome of delaying-tactics pressed on Baldwin by right-wing cabinet members like Churchill or Joynson-Hicks and Lord Birkenhead to give them time to build up

a more effective emergency organisation, (see P. Renshaw 1975) or a genuine attempt by Baldwin to play a conciliatory role (see, for example, G. McDonald 1975) is not something I can resolve. It bought time, in fact, for both parties. The government used it to strengthen the Office of Maintenance and Supplies (OMS) and other emergency measures; the miners used it to mobilise both their own membership and public opinion.

The Royal Commission which the government set up to enquire into the coal industry was chaired by Sir Herbert Samuel, a senior Liberal politician and former Governor of Palestine. It included Sir William Beveridge, Kenneth Lee and Sir Herbert Lawrence, men who were, respectively, an academic, businessman and banker. In his August circular, Bill Straker described them dismissively as "men who have scarcely any knowledge of what they have to enquire into." (August 1925) While the Commission sat industrial attitudes on both sides hardened and yet more ominously the fortunes of the industry continued to deteriorate. Had there been no subsidy, the cabinet was informed in April, 90 per cent of the tonnage in Durham and Wales and 100 per cent in Northumberland would have been raised at a loss. (M. W. Kirby 1977: 77)

This same point was made by Bill Straker in his February circular and it underlines heavily that for the miners the conflict in the industry necessarily involved the state. "Without a subsidy" Straker explained "many coalmines in many districts of Great Britain would be

closed down and thousands more miners, with their families, thrown into a state of semi-starvation. This applies especially to coal exporting districts such as Northumberland." (February 1926)

The degree to which the coal dispute was politicised is indicated early in 1926 in a speech to miners given by Arthur Cook at Lanchester in County Durham on January 8th. Cook, the firebrand Secretary of the MFGB of whom Arthur Horner once said that when he spoke he "spoke for the miner and not to him" (quoted in J. M. Bellamy and J. Saville 1976: 40) told the meeting that he expected a political crisis in the course of the year. The whole speech suggested the inevitability of severe conflict:

Well might the British public ask: 'Is peace possible in the mining industry?' As representative of the men I declare emphatically: 'Yes' but only under one condition. The price of peace must be, in a few words 'Safety and economic security.' By economic security we mean a wage based upon the cost of living at least not less than 1914. Whatever else may happen during this year as in 1924 the miner's motto will be 'No retreat, no compromise in the hours and wages' and I shall advise the miners not to even meet the employers to discuss such questions.

Whatever the decision of the commission might be the miners would not consider for one moment the abolition of national agreements, increase of hours,

or reduction of wages. They could not compromise on these three points. Therefore it is quite clear that conflict seems inevitable ...

Any attempt that will be made politically to suspend the seven hours day will be met with united resistance from the whole labour movement.

(Blaydon Courier January 9th 1926)

This negotiating stance which Cook distilled into the famous words "Not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay" was something the miners clung to well into the summer and which, in defeat at the end of the year, they had to concede completely.

While the three major parties to the conflict manoeuvred, the Samuel Commission produced a report. The report was equivocal on a number of questions but it was clear that the industry needed to reduce its costs through lowering of wages and that nationalisation was not a solution to the structural problems of the industry. The proposals to municipalise the coal trade, to nationalise mineral royalties and to encourage amalgamations of collieries were not sufficiently central to either coalowner's interests or miner's demands to make much difference to the indifferent way in which the Samuel Report as a whole was received.

Negotiations between the three main parties in the period from March to the end of April were fruitless. The coalowners dominated by the export districts insisted on wage reductions; the miners would not accept this

without further suggestions being made about reorganisation in the industry. Behind the rhetoric of the different negotiating positions, the meetings between the government and the TUC and the frenzied reporting of the press the conflict inherent in the logic of a declining industry, a determined leadership among the miners and TUC support of the miner's living standards, was taking definite shape. The Lock-out of miners began on April 30th. Three days later, triggered ostensibly by the refusal of the workers on the Daily Mail to print an editorial 'for King and Country' the government broke off negotiations with the TUC turning the industrial struggle into a constitutional one to face the challenge of what had been a key element of the TUC's negotiating position, the threat of a general strike.

The General Strike in Throckley - 1926

The Throckley pits closed on April 30th. There was no excitement about that; rather there was a weary sense of the inevitability of a protracted dispute which nobody really wanted. Nobody at that stage knew, of course, what kind of conflict they were entering into. Some members of the local Labour Party clearly sensed that they needed to be well organised. In March, for example they passed a resolution committing themselves to gain control of all the co-operative societies in the area 'with a view to the closer co-ordination of the Political Labour Party and the Distributive Co-operative

movement.' (Minutes: Newburn and District Local Labour Party. NRO 527/B/1) They were quite clear, too, that they did not wish to have any contact with the Liberal Party in the struggles ahead. And on March 17th they agreed to initiate moves to set up a Trades Council for the area. No Trades Council was actually set up until after the General Strike had started and then in response, not to the Labour Party, but the Executive Committee of the miner's union. News of the General Strike, three days after the posting of lock-out notices changed the mood of people, especially the younger men. For a brief moment it seemed to many of them that they might win.

The first couple of days of the Lock-out, the Saturday and Sunday, had been just like any other weekend. On Monday the General Strike began and by Tuesday its effects was obvious. There were no trams; hardly any cars on the roads and everywhere was quiet. The ponies had been brought up from the pit and the children went along to the fields to see them and give them treats of food scraps.

By Wednesday the mood was changing, especially among some of the younger men. There was a quickening of temper and a sharpening of the need to be organised and to do something. This was happening throughout the coalfield as several calls were made to form councils of action. A famous call came from the Spen and District Trades and Labour Council in their Strike Bulletin No1 on May 4th urging miners to "Form Councils of Action:

All Behind the Miners." It insisted, under the guiding hands of Robin Page-Arnot of the Communist Party and Will Lawther of the Durham Miner's Association, that "The General Strike is ALREADY A SUCCESS. Do not believe the lies put out by the Capitalist press." (see W.R. Garside 1971: 194. See also Gateshead Public Library) It ended optimistically with the injunction: "Be of good courage, and victory is ours."

On the same day Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee was set up. Page-Arnot was active here, too, ensuring some strike organisation to cover the area of the Government Civil Commissioner. (see C. R. Flynn 1926) The first meeting of this group on which most of the larger unions of the area were represented, ended on a rather paradoxical note. The meeting, writes C. R. Flynn:

terminated with the first hint of the difficulties of a general strike in the shape of a complaint that the Miner's Clubs faced with a drink shortage were sending in motors for beer whilst Transport Workers were out on strike.

Within a few days the committee was in almost permanent session;

In Throckley the most obvious feature of the strike was the large numbers of miners, particularly younger ones, picketing transport on the main west road. The local mineworker's federation, the group composed of lodge officials from each of the Throckley pits, tried

to persuade people to keep well within the law and avoid trouble believing that disturbances would reduce the moral force of the miner's case in the eyes of the general public.

The leadership of the Throckley lodges had by this time been given over to men who were far less committed in a political sense to those who had been in control throughout the First World War and the early twenties. Danny Dawson left the pit in 1924 to become the Labour Party agent for the Wansbeck Division and Dick Browell while remaining in local politics was forced through unemployment to seek work outside the pits and resign his union duties in April 1926. Jimmy Mitford and Bill Avis were well respected but they were by no means radical in the union work.

On Thursday, May 6th, trouble did, however, break out in Throckley and it brought the strike right home to my grandfather. For the first few days he had not bothered much about the strike spending his time in his gardens. But on the Thursday uncle Jim was arrested for picketing and told he would be summonsed. The disturbances of May 6th were on the main Hexham road by the Throckley schools. In response to calls from the Joint Strike Committee and urged on by despatch riders distributing Strike Bulletins a large crowd of Throckley pitmen - police evidence gives the figure as between 400 and 500 - began picketing traffic. The picketing started early in the morning, at about 6 a.m. and went on until midday when the police were able to disperse

the group and make arrests. The picketing was in some respects spontaneous; it was not well organised and the police clearly thought it violent. In evidence to the magistrate on May 21st they argued that stones were thrown at lorries, windows broken on buses and threats issued that if drivers attempted to cross the lines their vehicles would be tipped over.

Uncle Bill told me that he had walked up to the road just to see what was going on and when he saw the crowds he came hurriedly back home to bring his brother, Jim. My grandfather would not go picketing; he said he did not want to get himself involved with "trouble makers." Jim and Bill then went back up the road and by pure bad luck - he was simply among the crowd the police swooped on - Jim was arrested along with thirty-two other men. The police were obviously looking for leaders. It is clear from instructions issued before the strike, during it and long into the Miner's Lock-out that the police were on the look-out for those described as "disaffected" and "communist agitators." (File: Official Circulars Re Emergency. Chief Constable of Northumberland NRO NC/1/20 1926) One man, Oliver Akenside was singled out in court. The police files describe him as "disaffected" and he was sentenced to one month in prison without the option of a fine.

My grandparents were very worried about these events. Miners, they knew, were being imprisoned and they feared a heavy fine. Aunt Maggie eased things a

bit saying she would help Jim pay a fine if that was what he got but this did not allay their worries. What the affair did do, however, was to make my grandfather aware of just how determined the police were in the strike; the arrest of his son brought an immediate reality to the many reports coming back to Throckley from elsewhere in the coalfield; of harrassment, arrests and the prevention of meetings.

On Friday May 7th in response to a Miners' Executive Committee request a Newburn and District Trades Union Council of Action was formed with John Carr of North Walbottle in the Chair and with "Henna" Brown and Danny Dawson from Throckley represented on it. There first meeting was preoccupied with safety men in the pit, picketing and beer supplies. They resolved:

that we approach the officials of Social Clubs in the area and ask them to refrain from ordering any further supplies of beer etc during the present stoppage. (The Dawson Papers NR0/527/B/12)

On May 9th they resolved to have a picketing committee in every village. But this determination to picket collapsed in the face of police provocation. On May 11th they heard a report that:

Pickets had been in operation at all strategic points round the district; but the leaders had brought in many reports that the police had been interfering with them, and informing that the Law did not allow pickets to stop Motor Traffic. In some cases the police had taken up a threatening attitude.

Resolved that all picketing be suspended for the present ... (The Dawson Papers NRO/527/B/12)

It was difficult for ordinary people to know quite what was happening . Two of the Newcastle newspapers managed to appear during the dispute, The Journal and The Chronicle; both were against strike and supported the government and the Chronicle was sometimes referred to in strike bulletins such as the TUC's British Worker, the Chopwell-based Northern Light and the Newcastle Trades Council's Worker's Chronicle were by no means widely available. (see A. Mason 1970) Some got through to Throckley. Most men, though, relied on word of mouth for their information and the air was thick with rumour. The rhetoric of the strike bulletins was that of class warfare although this was less true of the TUC's British Worker. The Worker's Chronicle of May 19th might have urged: "Worker's! On with the fight. Demand the Resignation of the Forger's Government. Up with a Worker's Government!" But the TUC was emphatic. On May 11th The British Worker insisted:

The workers must not be misled by Mr. Baldwin's renewed attempt last night to represent the present strike as a political issue. The trades unions are fighting for one thing, and one thing only, to protect the miners' standard of life. (Nol. May 11th Gateshead Public Library)

Because of a lack of precise information and the uniqueness of the situation many ordinary men were

simply in the dark about what was really happening. Reports of violence, arrests, communist agitators, police harrassment, black-legging volunteers and, in Northumberland, the celebrated derailing of the Flying Scotsman at Cramlington, fuelled a dark imagination of trouble and foreboding.

The view in the Brown family was that the situation was really out of control and that they could not see an end to it. And my grandfather, it seems, was very pessimistic at this stage. He believed the miners could win but he did not trust the TUC or, for that matter, as I shall explain later, Arthur Cook. But he did not want to settle on the owners' terms; he was clear on that issue.

The view of the General Council Joint Strike Committee by Friday was, a more optimistic one. "On Friday" writes C. R. Flynn:

the success of the general strike appeared completely assured. It was clear to everyone that the O.M.S. organisation was unable to cope with the task imposed upon it. The attitude of the population was favourable to the strikers and unfavourable to the government. There were no disturbances, the trades unionists maintained almost perfect discipline. There was no change from the ordinary except from the quietness in the streets and the absence of traffic. (C. R. Flynn 1926)

The quietness of the streets for my grandfather signalled uncertainty, trouble and worry and Jim's impending court case hung like a dark cloud over everything and there was no money coming in. Jack and Louie, the twins, were just about to leave school and neither had any prospect of work. He felt very much on the defensive and his poor opinion of politicians drove him further to look to his own needs and not to rely on unions and political action.

Given that the housekeeping fell on my grandmother's shoulders this was a difficult time for her particularly since she felt she had to help Eva and keep the twins fitted out with clothes. She did not want a strike but her support of my grandfather's actions was absolute. Her view was that he knew best and that it was his right to decide how best to cope with the strike. The Workers' Chronicle of the Newcastle Trades Council of Action singled out women for special praise in its 11th issue:

One of the most encouraging features of the present crisis is the glorious spirit shown by our women folk.

Everywhere they have thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the fight. At the mining centres we see them active encouraging the pickets to do their work thoroughly. Where feeding centres have already been set up, there we find them toiling merrily all day long. With the active support and help of the women we can go forward defiantly to the conquest of Capitalism. (Gateshead Public Library)

My grandmother's contribution was not obvious or outspoken; it was a calm determination to bear the burden of the budget and never to question my grandfather's reasons in sticking strictly to his union's decisions. As I shall show, although not obviously political, this support, expressing itself in a creative willingness to muddle through, to make do with nothing and to scratch resources together as best she could - and she was helped in this by the children - was central to their ability to battle through the eight months which followed and during which time they had no income whatsoever. Her experience of class conflict, as it were, in the kitchen was just as sharp as my grandfather's in the pit.

What worried her in the early stages was the court case hanging over Jim. And she worried about Olive, too. Olive's husband, Tommy Willis as I have already explained was a pitman and he, too, was on strike. By this time Olive had two daughters Francy and Sally and they were as hard up as parish mice. My grandmother often despatched my mother to Crawcrook to help Olive with the babies and to take some vegetables or home-cured ham. Her aim, in short, was to protect her family as much as she could; the political worrying she left to others.

The strike ended messily and bitterly. (see A. Mason 1970) From C. R. Flynn's account of it is clear that almost to the end victory was expected. When the reality of defeat began to dawn the reaction throughout

the North East was one of shock and anger. On May 14th the TUC's British Worker tried to interpret the ending of the strike as a kind of victory:

Fellow Trades Unionists, the General Strike is ended. It has not failed. It has made possible the resumption of negotiations in the Coal Industry and the continuance during negotiations of the financial assistance given by the Government.

(No. 4 1926 Gateshead Public Library)

The reaction of the Newcastle Trades Council was radically different, expressive of a much angrier mood of betrayal:

Never in the history of working-class struggle - with the exception of the treachery of our leaders in 1914 - has there been such a calculated betrayal of working-class interests as had overtaken us this week. (The Workers' Chronicle. No. 14 1926:

Gateshead Public Library)

The collapse of the General Strike reinforced my grandfather's view which he had expressed often enough in recent weeks that "strikes never did any good to anybody." He was bitterly disappointed at the result. He was a man who never allowed his optimism to outstrip his common sense but he had felt, for a while, that the miners might win this time. That feeling evaporated early in May. What did not change was his determination that they should, nonetheless, fight it out. The collapse of the General Strike confirmed his suspicions that the strike would be a long one and that the preparations they had

made, as a family, had been justified. His weary recollections took him right back through time; 1921, 1912, 1887 were three critical dates in a legacy of hard struggles for minor gains and sometimes major losses.

The Lock-Out

I have had several Throckley pitmen tell me that the end of the General Strike was a sell-out and that the miners were effectively betrayed. Their immediate feelings were those recalled from 1921, feelings of isolation and betrayal confirming their view that whatever the miners got they had to get by themselves. And what lies behind this is their great sense of pointless sacrifice. Bill Straker was later to refer to the Lock-out as "probably the greatest industrial conflict known to history ... a heroic struggle." (December Circular 1926 NMA Minutes NRO 759/67) And in the same circular noted, "Under the terms of settlement to which the miners of Northumberland have had to submit there will be thousands in a state of semi-starvation."

But that was a view from the end of the Lock-out; in the early weeks the outlook was less gloomy. In its May 22nd edition the Newcastle Journal noted (in a series of sketches titled "In Pit Villages") that: "The third week of the stoppage finds the average miner apparently content to leave affairs in the hands of his leaders In the main yesterday's tour of half a dozen villages failed to find signs of despondency,

although the talk of deadlock after deadlock is not inspiring." The paper quotes one North Walbottle optimist as saying, "The last six months of a strike are always the worst." Generally, however, the paper described the miners as "busy in their gardens or out on the football pitches.

My mother recalls the early days of the Lock-out by the weather:

I was 14 years old when the 1926 strike broke out ... As it happened it was May when the strike started so the days were light, bright and warm ... At first it was exciting to go along the Butcher bank to see the pit ponies. Some were blind, always been in darkness and then the sudden light. We often took crusts along to feed them.

Early in June the Newcastle Chronicle published a full account of the situation as they saw it in the Heddon, Throckley and Walbottle area. I reproduce the report in full since it does evoke a rich picture and reveals too, the implicit hostility of the local media to the miner's case.

In the Villages

How Throckley and Heddon View the Stoppages

Guardians in Reserve

The area comprising Walbottle, Throckley and Heddon-on-the-Wall makes a convenient objective for an investigator whose mission is to find out how life goes in the pit villages during the sixth week of the stoppage.

As in the case of the eastern villages, Seaton Deleval and Seghill, there seems to be little outward sign of industrial conflict except that men are to be found at convenient corners and in the open spaces.

Nobody looks ill-fed, and, with one exception to be dealt with hereafter, nobody looks despondent. In all three villages the inhabitants sat out in the sun yesterday and thankfully accepted the cooling breeze.

At Heddon especially the children were plump and rosy, and a stranger dumped down suddenly outside the Church Schoolhouse would certainly have found little grounds for suspecting there had been any cutting of rations.

In this happy little corner of Northumberland things have gone very smoothly from the first day of the stoppage. Our representative was told by three competent authorities that during the days of the hold-up of traffic the Heddon district men kept well within the law.

There are, of course, a certain number of hotheads and a few more or less 'humble disciples of Lenin', but

these are swamped by a majority of level-headed pitmen, good craftsmen at their job.

No Rush For Relief

It may well be that if the dispute lasts a few weeks more there will need to be a certain tightening of belts, but although at the moment the aid of the Guardians had not been invokd generally, the reserve is there when needed.

It was gathered that the feeling is that if appeals to the Guardians can be avoided they will be by this independent little community.

Throckley is slightly different in some respects. There seems to be a little more militancy and a frequent and free outspokenness when mining topics are on the wayside agenda.

There is, however, the same desire to carry on without undue 'grousing' although there may be a surplus of denunciatory criticism.

Yet even here the miner, apart from his mates, is not averse from acknowledging that the exporting collieries must be vitally concerned with the incidence of foreign competition.

In groups, of course, the men are likely to think in groups. The chief hope seems to be that some means will be found to maintain pre-stoppage conditions pending reorganisation and the latter will make the pits flourish exceedingly.

'Ower Mony Gaffers'

The chief 'grouse' voiced was that there were too many officials underground or 'far ower mony gaffers' in the vernacular.

Walbottle in general might be termed unconciliatory, though other people might have other names for it. The village is full of die-hards and die-oftens, if the expression be permitted.

Herbert Smith is deified and Cook canonized twice nightly and during the day. On the other hand, the general opinion held of the coalowners' officials need not be put down in cold print.

Yet meeting and talking with the men singly one finds in them a readiness to agree that nobody is likely to run pits at a loss just for the fun of the thing, and that there must be another side to the argument.

A Pessimist

There are plenty of humorists in Walbottle who take life lightly even in these hard times, and there is one prize pessimist. He was found leaning over the wall at the corner and seemed as if he had feared the worse since birth. The following dialogue ensued:-

Investigator: 'Well, there's this to be said, the pitmen can get in a store of sunlight during the dispute.'

'Aye and fowks winna' need coal and sae canna feel the pinch syem as the miner'

Investigator: 'But the pitmen are getting out into the air all day long. Surely that's something?'

'Aye and gettin' a canny appetite and sae eatin mair.'

'Well, it can't last much longer and then the pits will open and you'll be alright then.'

'Aye, but then we'll ahl hev te gan te work again!'

Verily some people are hard to please.

The Politics of Picking Coal

The image of the miner at the gatepost is, however, a false one; the lack of commitment to work which the reporter assumes is quite misleading. For pitmen in the area the whole point of the Lock-out was that they were struggling to improve the conditions in which they worked and the image of people lazing in the sun conceals the the reality of all the mining families in the district settling down into a protracted dispute and making preparations to heat their homes, feed themselves and struggle through. My mother's account of the Lock-out brings this out vividly. After referring to the weather being fine she writes:

I remember my parents to be very upset and worried. The coalhouse was stacked high with coal and wood, but the only means of cooking and heating water was a coal fire, so stocks gradually deteriorated.

That was when Jack my twin brother and I decided to look for coal. I heard of people going along the Butcher bank picking cinders. I found the cinder plot so Jack and I took the boogy and lots we got, (now they call it coke). After that we discovered we could get coal dust from the Maria pit yard. Again Jack and I went and gathered lots of it; we made eggs with our hands; we soaked the dust with soapy water. It was fun doing them, and very hot they were.

It solved the problem for a time, then my brothers and Dad discovered the coal in the Dene. Then again Jack and I took the boogy to the Dene side, and we pulled the bags of coal to Mount Pleasant.

Many people did the same things, grubbing coal from outcrops or even tunnelling in the Dene to get it. This was, of course, illegal and the police tried to prevent it. This activity gave rise to a key episode in the Lock-out.

My uncle Bill and Jim were working in a dug-out in the Dene and my grandfather was standing at the entrance pulling out the coal they had cut and keeping a watch for the police. The police did steal up on them, however, and ordered them out of the hole. My grandfather explained to the policeman what they were doing and that they needed the coal but the policeman, so my relatives report, was adamant and took a threatening attitude which angered the old man. The policeman told him that

if he did not get the lads out of the hole he would kick the props away and collapse it in on them. My grandfather, angered at this, exploded and told him with a threatening force which startled my uncles, that if he went anyway near the props he would kill him. The policeman left, presumably to get help and the men left, too,



Throckley Miners Burrowing Coal

their coal in a barrow and, if their account of it is still to be believed, their suspicions confirmed that the police were hell-bent on strike breaking.

This particular story, I might add, has now the status of a family parable. I was told it in my childhood and have heard it many times since; it conveys for my relatives all they feel about the character of my grandfather, injustice, the struggles they went through and, according to their political inclinations, the police.

It invariably ends with the comment that my grandfather always said he was too honest to be a bobby.

Picking coal carried different risks, for the union stance on the matter is clear. The Executive minutes for May 26th state: "That we condemn the action of any of our members who have produced, or may produce coal for sale, as such action is absolutely contrary to the general stoppage in which we are now involved." (NMA Minutes NRO 759/68) My mother writes on this issue: "The lads often sold a bag of coal for a little pocket money. If they got twopence for a packet of woodbines they were happy." My grandfather did not disapprove of his sons fiddling a bit this way and there is no evidence that the local lodges did either.

Perceptions of the Police

The dug-out episode and the arrest of Jim for picketing brought into question the role of the police in the strike. Mistrust and suspicion were conventional attitudes to the police but the accumulating evidence of police action in the area added a new dimension, antagonism and a sense of frustration born of powerlessness. There was another episode, in fact, at the dug-out although not involving my grandfather which involved my uncle Bill. On another police visit the clothes, including Bill's, of the men working in the hole were confiscated and never returned, a minor act of provocation.

Police strategy during the Lock-out was not based on expectation of much trouble although they knew from Lt. Colonel C.E. Maude of Northern Command that the troops were ready to be mobilised if necessary. (Official Circulars Re Emergency. Chief Constable of Northumberland NRO/NC/1/20) The general plan of the police was to call up the police reserve to police the agricultural districts of the county and move the full-time men to the mining districts. The Chief Constable writes later of this strategy that "By these means it was possible to avoid any calls on the military for any outside work." (Standing Joint Committee Minutes 1926-8 NRO CC/CM/S5).

Anticipating "a movement by Communist Agitators to stir up trouble in towns and other places" the Chief Constable directed his superintendents to use shorthand writers at strike meetings. (NC/1/20) And on June 22nd he instructed the superintendents "to place themselves personally in touch with the Managers of all pits in the division." This was to help those men who wanted to get back to work to do so under police protection. In addition to intensified regular policing, minor harrasment of the sort described and helping blacklegs, the police also sought to control meetings. On November 3rd for instance, the Chief Constable informed the Home Office that two meetings in the Throckley District (at Westerhope and Walbottle) had been banned. They were to be addressed by Will Gallagher. Two reasons were given for the ban under the Emergency regulations:

(1) The poster announcing the meeting contained the words 'Come and join the C.P. and defend your rights against the Forces of His Majesty.'

(2) The probability of intimidation of miners returning from work by the presence of a crowd at this point was also a ground for prohibiting the meeting.

We have recently had trouble in this district.

(NRO/NC/1/20)

Police tactics in this dispute were orchestrated directly from the Home Office by Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary and the use of the police in the dispute in this way necessarily raised questions about whose side they were on, the impartiality of the law and the determination of the government to bread the strike rather than find a negotiated settlement. The reputation of the police, such as it was, reached its lowest ebb and the miners' sense of being the victim of government policy was heightened.

The court case in which Jim was involved confirmed their suspicions. Oliver Akenside was fined and imprisoned for three months and refused the right of appeal. Uncle Jim told me that they were all sitting waiting to go into the court room expecting only to be fined. "Wey, lad," he told me "when we heard what Akey got we got the shock o' wa lives. We aall thowt we would gan doon. Mind ye, we would a' done it allreet." In fact, they were fined £5 and the union agreed to pay

the fine. The chairman of the bench told them that he had taken "a lenient view" (Newcastle Chronicle May 18th) but things looked different from Throckley since they felt the police had misconstrued the evidence anyway and exaggerated the size of the crowd picketing. Oliver Akenside's imprisonment was thought to be totally unjustified.

Family Mobilisation and Fun

While the Trades Council and the union pursued the struggle in the political arena, ordinary families battled it out in the home in sometimes desperate attempts to keep warm, to provide food and keep spirits up. In addition to collecting fuel some families managed to get work on the local farms. My grandfather continued with his casual work on Lamb's farm receiving payment in kind. Even the children were mobilised to work. My mother again explains:

It was a hot summer. Our Jack and I got a job picking strawberries at Mordue's farm at Heddon station. We had to be there at 6 a.m. to get the strawberries on the 9 a.m. train. All we got was 1½d for picking a 3 lb basket. Our wage was around 6s 6d a week (two weeks picking) but that was 13s. a week for my mother and she was really grateful to get it. Then Jack and I went out potato picking, I think we did a month at that; two weeks at the colliery farm, and two weeks at

Jim Hedley's at Heddon. We got 2s. a day for that and a pack of potatoes each day. That was a big help, the potatoes were big ones, so mother kept them to make chips. But our wages - I always remember her saying, "I will straighten up my insurances with the money the bairns have earned."

She was worried in case her insurances ran out. Her account goes on to describe vividly some of the inward-looking pre-occupations of the family and their different ways of coping with them and, indeed, enjoying them.

Our biggest worry was clothing and boot repairs. We often hunted for old tyres for Dad to cobble our boots as leather was impossible to buy, as we had no money. In fact, we liked the rubber on our boots. Concerts were given in the store halls, by the local talents. We enjoyed those nights out. We also enjoyed going to the Dene to gather wood. The big lads could saw the branches; we girls packed them in sacks, and brought them up to Mount Peasant in the boogy. That poor boogy worked hard. It never once let us down. Some people pulled coal and wood on sledges and the lucky people had barrows. My Dad had a lovely big barrow; he made that work overtime.

Our Eva was at home she had a little girl to bring up; her husband had run off and left them, so she applied for 'parrish money.' She got 12s. for

Olive and her; that went towards the housekeeping money. The stores sent the groceries every week (on a bill); that had to be paid for after wages came into the house. Our only means of getting pocket money was to earn it (go shopping to the Co-op, or clean someones house for a shilling) someone that had a wage earner in the house.

I remember helping to clean Mr Reay's house, ready for him to move to the Leazes, I got a few shillings for that.

My mother's account is not at all gloomy. She looks back now and recalls how difficult the times were but is clear that at the time it was not depressing all the time. In fact, the village was both busy and at times quite jovial. The men in the club organised walking competitions during the summer to fill the time in and raise a bit of money.

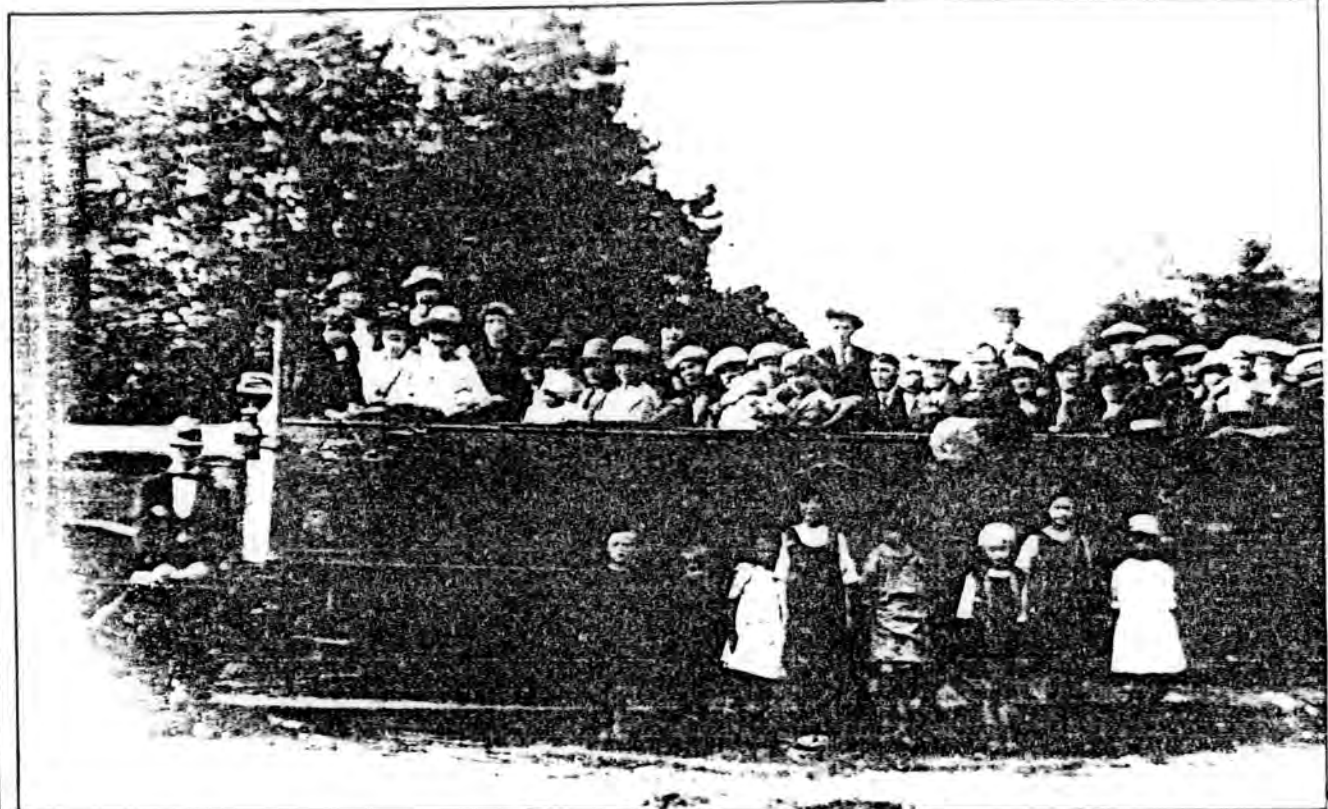
Albert Matthewson told me that in the top rows there were regular evening running competitions among the young lads and they played a lot of football. "Football teams" he told me "would turn out as late as nine o'clock at night." There were concert parties in the store hall to raise money for the soup kitchen. And there were occasional crazy football matches between men and women or just between women themselves, all designed to raise money for the soup kitchen.



Ladies Football Match Walbottle 1926



Throckley Club Walking Competition



Charabang Trip Throckley 1926



Throckley Concert Party 1926 Lock-Out

There were occasional charabang trips to the seaside in the so-called "Dollar Princess" organised by the store, or simply by a group of people themselves.

It is hardly surprising that my mother's account of these days is tinged with a sense of pleasure and enjoyment; she was, after all, quite young. It was nevertheless the case, however, that there was such a lot going on in the village.

Fund raising was not confined to Throckley. Throughout the country local Labour Parties organised help for the miners; many local parties 'adopted' pit villages and directed their efforts to a particular place. Throckley was adopted by the Hastings Women's Guild of Service. They sent clothes and donations to the Distress Committee (run by Dan Dawson) and the committee sent them a miner's lamp to raffle. They sent shoes, too, to help out the Throckley Boot and Shoe fund. In July Danny Dawson wrote to the organiser, Mrs Hickmott thanking her for clothing "to help ward off the brutal attack upon their already low living standards" and he gave her this thought:

When poor men's tables waste away to barrenness
and drought, There must be something in the way
that's worth the finding out. When surfeit one
great table bends, And numbers move along; While
scarce a crust their board extends, There must be
something wrong. (Dawson Papers NRO)

The Browns got nothing from the Distress Committee; in a sense they did not need anything. As a family they worked together; they had their gardens and pigs and a little money coming in from Eva. By mid-summer Jack was adding twelve shillings to the family budget.

Jack left school during the Lock-out and managed to get a job as an apprentice joiner under Mr Henderson, the local undertaker. It was not just work on coffins, however; the business included work on local farms and houses. He did help with funerals. "Our Jack" says my mother "made a lovely undertaker; he was cut out for it." My grandmother had always worried that Jack might have to start at the pit and she always felt quietly pleased that the strike and Lock-out had prevented this. They were all very proud of Jack's achievement in "getting a trade." My mother says, however, that she "always felt sorry for Mr Henderson. His face was bright red and his eyes were always tearful." My grandfather assured her, though, "They're not bloody tears: that's the whiskey come out of him."

The Stern Face of Charity

Beyond what families could do for themselves there were other institutions in the village mobilised to battle through. These include the Distress Committee which organised the soup kitchen, the store which extended credit, the club which funded competitions and even the district council. I shall discuss these briefly in

a moment. It is important at this stage to realise that if these resources failed then the fall-back was the Poor Law and the Castle Ward Board of Guardians. The Castle Ward Board of Guardians dispensed out-relief to claimants in a regular way; miners, on the other hand, were given money on loan. By August, however, the payments in out-relief were four times the original estimates and the secretary to the Guardians, Mr C. S. Shortt, recommended that payments on loan to miners should cease. "If the Board desires to comply with the law, all relief on loan to miners should cease."

(Blaydon Courier August 7th 1926) He went on in his report to give an account of the Board's recent finances:

Out-relief since commencement of the half year,
£21,500 i.e. weekly average of £1,104. Original
estimate for same period £5,400 and £300.

Mr Short urged the Board to consider that in contrast to the days when trades unions maintained their members on strike from their own funds:

To-day, Guardians throughout the whole country, when trades union funds are exhausted, have adopted the practice of granting to men engaged in an industrial dispute sufficient out-relief on loan to finance the trade union indirectly.

In other words, Guardians elected by and representing the general body of ratepayers use the rates levied on all classes including the employers involved to support sections of the community in

industrial disputes which devastate and must, if allowed to continue, ultimately destroy the whole country. (Blaydon Courier August 7th 1926)

He went on to point out that the miners could be dealt with under the Vagrancy Act. Reading this sort of thing in the middle of a dispute it is hardly surprising that miners detested the Poor Law and avoided it if they could. In this context the Throckley resolution to the Council of the Union in May "That a further grant of £10,000 be set aside from the funds of our Association towards the relief of our unemployed members in the county" takes on an entirely new significance. Miners were determined to be as self reliant as possible; the irony was, of course, their union funds could not stand the strain of it. An NMA survey of branches in July showed that up to that point no Guardian payments for the relief of miners' children had been paid out in Throckley. (File on Replies to Questionnaires 1924-1933 NMA Burt Hall)

The lurking threat of a demeaning application to the Guardians for 'parish money' accounts, too, for the way in which the store and the club, the Labour Party and even the District Council acted during the Lock-out. For these institutions, too, were, where possible, mobilised to conflict.

The Union Jack Club

The club was an important meeting point for the men although its drinks sales dropped. Here they could talk among themselves and assess the situation and there were, in addition, concert parties and competitions. The club played a small role directly in supporting the miners. On May 1st they protested to the Prime Minister about his handling of the miners' case. (Throckley Union Jack Club Committee Minutes) On May 29th they gave all paid up members a £1 voucher to buy goods from the store. They donated money to the Sports Committee to finance walking competitions and on September 12th paid £1 to the Distress Committee. They donated money to the Boot Fund and in October resolved that "No member who is considered a Blackleg will be allowed to play in the Tournament games."

The Co-operative Store

As in 1921 the store extended credit to its members. "The Co-op" Albert Matthewson told me, "helped a lot." People withdrew their savings or ran up debt. They were, he said "too proud to draw assistance." Average credit per member went up from £2.1 in 1925 to £3.2 in 1926 and £3.5 in 1927. Average purchases dropped from £45 in 1925 to £41. The policy of the store was not to allow people to get too much into debt and to pay back their debts by not claiming the dividend they were entitled to.

Although the figures for the strike and Lock-out period do not indicate massive changes in purchasing habits it has to be remembered that throughout the 1920s both sales and profits in the store were falling. Average purchases per member in 1920, for example, was £93. Additionally, the overall figures conceal a massive shift in the pattern of purchasing. During 1926 the sales figures for the Butcher's and Draper's departments were almost halved. Meat purchases dropped from £11,837 in 1925 to £6,488 in 1926; the respective figures for drapery are £6,755 and £3,237. It means simply that families cut back severely in their meat consumption and their renewal of clothes.

Store credit is the topic for another Brown family parable which I have heard many times. Long after the Lock-out was over my grandmother was called in to the store manager's office to be told that she had successfully paid off her debts. As the story is reconstructed all the details are richly filled in, the dialogue reported and it is told to emphasis the moral rectitude of my grandmother. She made certain that she payed her debts and was intensely proud of having done so. It is the old theme of respectability again. And it is always told against the 'knowledge' that many more never paid their debts back.

Political and Industrial Tactics

In a sense, what I have been discussing to this point is how people in Throckley, my own family in particular, coped with the conflict situation they were in. The conflict itself, however, was directed and given focus by the union and by the politicians. The Labour Party was not very active during either the General Strike or the Lock-out. Indeed, the Minutes of the Wansbeck Divisional Labour Party for the whole of 1926 do not mention the miners' struggle. Some of the officials were, of course, active in other ways, in the union, on the District Committees. The Newburn and District Party was a little more active and arranged in July for Arthur Cook, the Secretary of the MFGB to address their annual meeting. This visit is an interesting one for my account; it reveals something of the political mood of the miners and my grandfather's attitude to the union leadership. During the Lock-out Cook undertook a prodigious programme of speaking. On Monday August 3rd he addressed a meeting at Walbottle, just along the road from Throckley. The Newcastle Journal described the speech and the meeting where it was given in the following way. I reproduce the report in full:

Mr Cook Wants a Settlement.More Extravagant Speeches.Venomous Attack on Premier.Police Threatened.

'Cook's tour' - to adopt the phrase of Mr A. J. Cook himself was continued in Northumberland yesterday when the secretary of the M.F. visited Prudoe and Walbottle.

At each centre he found a crowd of men, women and children approx 10,000 in strength and an abundance of red favours in evidence; whilst the red flag was played and sung.

Introducing himself as the 'villain of the piece' he encouraged his followers to wait for the victory he predicted, and added a new lash to his whip for the benefit of the police against whom he uttered a threat. He made a venomous attack on Mr Baldwin.

No Surrender! Speech in Drenching Rain

A throng of supporters besieged Mr Cook's car when he arrived at Walbottle, and he was carried shoulder - high to the platform. Rain commenced to fall as he addressed them, but he continued until he and his audience were drenched.

'I want a settlement', he admitted 'Who doesn't?'

'But there is going to be no surrender. You stick it: we win. If you can hold out and we can feed the children, victory is as sure as the rising sun.'

'The influence of the commercial world will compel the owners very soon to open the doors to negotiations which may lead to a satisfactory settlement,' he added.

District Settlements.

'Does it look as if we are beaten when our delegates are touring all parts of the world to collect funds to help us? The only way we can be defeated is by the district settlements, and it will require all the power of local committees to prevent them being accepted.'

Mr Cook expressed himself 'sick and tired' of different organisations pulling different ways, and said the great need was for one large Federation. He was prepared to recommend a national ballot of the miners if Mr Baldwin would ballot the nation.

The rhetoric was powerful and although none of my relatives were at the meeting they certainly heard about it. Uncle Jim thinks that Cook was a fine man but my grandfather did not trust him. He felt that Cook was unpredictable and despite his rhetoric likely to sell the miners out on almost any terms. This view is partly a reflection of Cook's known position as the Lock-out continued that the miners might have to settle in the short run for unfavourable terms aiming, in the longer term, when they had greater strength to win their battle decisively. But it was more firmly based, I think, on my grandfather's assessment of Cook as a man and as a leader.

He "knew" that Cook was a communist and something of a political firebrand. He knew, too, that Cook was a powerful speaker and that he had been imprisoned for his views in 1918 and 1921. Cook, in short, represented class politics, something my grandfather was greatly suspicious of. Paradoxically, it was the powerful upsurge of class feeling in my grandfather as the Lock-out continued which turned him against any settlement in which the miners might loose and which therefore reduced his confidence in Arthur Cook.

But there were other factors; Cook was an MFGB man, a Welshman and highly political. My grandfather had been schooled himself in a union which favoured the sober politics of parliamentary reform and district agreements in industrial relations and in which union leaders had been great pillars of respectability in their own communities and in the union as a whole. Cook was clearly a leader of a new kind. And his respectability was brought into question in a direct way for my grandfather.

A. J. Cook stayed overnight in Throckley with Danny Dawson. Apparently, his shoes were so badly worn and wet they had to find him a decent pair and discard his old ones. Apocryphal or not this story found its way back to my grandfather and it confirmed his view, at least in my uncle Jim's opinion, that so far as A. J. Cook was concerned "there was something not reet": leaders it seems, had to be above reproach in their personal bearing and affairs if they were to command

his respect. Cook had clearly failed the severe test my grandfather applied to everyone else in positions of authority, the test of respectability.

He might not have respected Cook as a man but he did, nonetheless, share his views of the Lock-out. My grandfather never doubted the wisdom of sticking it out and in this he took his cue, not so much from the politicians, but his union. One final point about politics; the Lock-out strengthened the commitment of many miners to the Labour Party. The Labour Party in the district had studiously avoided any working alliance with the Liberals in the course of the dispute and looked forward to a Labour government as a way of solving the coal crisis. The passion and character of some of these beliefs comes out rather well in a letter which Danny Dawson sent to Mrs Hickmott of the Hasting Guild of Service on November 2nd thanking her for the gift of clothing which had been sent. The clothes were welcome:

as everybody is getting down very badly on clothing, and the weather is bitter cold up here. In spite of this, the spirit and determination of our people is splendid in resisting the despicable tactics of the coal owners in their endeavours to force them back by hunger and starvation, to conditions unknown in this County for 80 years. And they are faithfully backed up by honest ? Baldwin and his followers. (The Dawson Papers NRO)

He went on to express a hope that "We will soon have a

Labour Government administering the affairs of this country and breaking the power of the Dukes of Northumberland, the Earl Percys and Baldwins etc etc."

Blacklegs

The union struggle was carried out at three levels, nationally, at county level and by local branches and trade councils. These levels were not always well co-ordinated or even in agreement. In October, for example, the Council of the NMA passed a resolution favouring compromise in negotiations with the coalowners but the branches overwhelmingly rejected the idea. From August onwards, however, the union was actively trying to persuade men not to go back to work. The local press took great delight in publishing news of some pits returning to work. On August 18th men re-started at Walbottle colliery, Wylam and East Walbottle. On September 1st North Walbottle re-started. On September 28th the Newcastle Journal reported over 1,000 miners back to work in Durham. On October 2nd the Journal ran the headline "Miners Flocking Back". It was this drift which prompted the union to call for the compromise in negotiations. But when the call was rejected the following circular to branches was issued urging the men to stand firm:

Wages will be reduced to only one-fifth, or 20 per cent, higher than before the war, while the cost of living stands at nearly three fourths or 74 per cent

higher. Under these conditions, even the common necessities of life will not be possible for you. Once there is a settlement the demand for coal will be great and the price will be high. Profits will be large, while wages will be lower than the merest poverty line.

We appeal to you to stand firm until there is an honourable settlement. The struggle has been hard and long, but not so hard and long as the slave conditions and wages offered by the coal owners, if once conceded.

Stand loyally by your association. Without it what will the future be? Mines Regulations Acts, Compensation Acts, all will be altered at the will of the coal owners and other great employers. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose by your loyalty. (Newcastle Journal October 25th)

The problem of loyalty at the local level is essentially one of blacklegging. (c.f. R. Moore 1974) There was a big demonstration by many Throckley men against the return to work of men at North Walbottle pit and the Coronation pit at Blucher. Stones were thrown at men leaving work. The size of the blackleg problem was not great. As late as November 1st the NMA estimated it at 5,000 men out of a workforce of 56,000 but it was a very emotive issue. There were near riots all over the county over blacklegs; there was trouble at Ryton just

over the river and at Silkworth, Durham there were episodes of police baton charges into crowds demonstrating against blacklegs. Among the Throckley group of collieries there was trouble at Blucher pit where two hundred men, not members of the NMA and annoyed that they had received none of the so-called 'Russian money' or 'Russian gold' which had been received elsewhere, opened up negotiations to start work. That was early June and many Blucher men (thirty-five in all) did go back. In Throckley a group of blacklegs tried to form their own union, the so-called 'Blackleg's Union' but the attempt failed.

Blacklegging gave rise to an issue which affected my grandfather for the rest of his life. His 'marra', Mr Guthrie, under pressure, so it is said, from his wife, went back to work. He spoke to my grandfather about it; explaining how he could see no way out of his problems. Unable to persuade him otherwise my grandfather could only explain that he could have no more to do with him and to the end of his life he never spoke to George Guthrie again. Long after the troubles were over the issue of blacklegging still created bitterness in Throckley. Albert Matthewson told me in respect of this that "To be honest, bitterness still exists. It's never been forgotten."

Defeat

The defeat of the miners was a slow one and messy in that a growing number of pits resumed work throughout

October and early November. The collapse of the will, even, perhaps, the ability to go on occurred mostly in the last week of October and the first fortnight of November. On November the 16th the Council of the NMA discussed proposals to carry on with the fight but concluded:

The Conference had before it the number of men who had returned to work in the various districts as near as could be estimated by the reps. The position in almost every district was most unfavourable to fighting on, so that it was seen that fighting on was out of the question.

(Council Minutes NMA NRO/759/68)

On the recommendation of the MFGB negotiations with the owners on a district basis were opened up. These negotiations produced an agreement involving a reduction of one shilling per shift, the establishment of three shift systems in some areas and a two and a half extension to the working week. The Executive of the NMA referred to these as 'slave conditions.'

To everyone the conditions represented a defeat. The hardship of the Lock-out had lead to nothing but disaster. The MFGB was practically bankrupt and the unity of the union was threatened by the establishment of company unionism in some coalfields, Nottinghamshire in particular. The defeat of the miners left deep political wounds in the labour movement. Margaret Cole has argued that "what really perished in 1926 was the romantic idea, dating from before the First World War,

of the power of syndicalism, direct action and the rest of it." (1977: 14)

Arthur Cook, who had warned that if the miners were driven back to work they would start a guerilla war underground, issued a pamphlet at the end of the Lock-out referring to the way in which some leaders of the labour movement - Philip Snowden, J. H. Thomas and Arthur Pugh - had supported the ending of the dispute. In this pamphlet he revealed, quite deliberately, just how deep the wounds were in the labour movement. Writing about the leaders just mentioned Cook said:

Judas, at least, had the decency to hang himself in Alcemada. He did not write articles recommending peace and co-operation with Herod and the Romans; that work he left to the scribes and pharisees. There is no miner now, no miner's wife, no miner's child above the age of ten or younger, who does not know that in this great fight the people helped to starve them were not only the coal owners, but the policemen, the magistrates, the Boards of Guardians, the Cabinet ministers, and the whole array of the state, both in the national organs and in its local organs, and that in addition even against all this force they would have won had it not been for the open treachery of some Labour Leaders who should have been their friends.

(Newcastle Journal November 27th 1926)

The sense of betrayal was acute; it was compounded by uncertainty for although the terms for going back to work had been agreed it was not clear whether work would be available or who would get it. Christmas was approaching and nobody had any money. The Brown children got no presents that Christmas although they did feed well. In the dark days at the end of the year my mother remembers them having to be very sparing with coppers for the gas-light and very short of coals. My mothers assessment of it all now is that "our young lives were spoiled by strikes but the experience made us thrifty ... we knew how to manage properly after being short so long, a lesson we will never forget."

Most accounts of the Lock-out are rich in their descriptions of hardship. Some, too, emphasise that hardship was born and experienced both in different ways and to different degrees within the mining community itself. (see G. Noel 1976) To emphasise this I end this chapter with a comment by Dr Messer, the Newburn MOH. Writing in his annual report for 1926 he observed:

Undoubtedly the industrial depression and the crisis in the mining industry have influenced the infantile mortality. The chief causes of death were congenital malformation, debility and premature birth; diseases of the respiratory system and diarrhoea and enteritis. It is difficult to estimate the effect of the recent crisis upon the population generally. There is strong evidence that school children in the majority

of cases did not suffer but in many instances actually improved ... Up to the present there is little evidence that the males suffered at all, but it would appear that the women folk and the infants born towards the end of the year did.

(Annual Report for 1926. West Denton Public Library)

In the following chapter the consequences of the Lock-out on social relationships in Throckley and the pits are briefly discussed, the discussion being the introduction to the more protracted struggle the miners faced through the crisis of the 1930s.

Chapter Thirteen

THE DEPRESSION YEARS AND RETIREMENT

1926-1936

In the last chapter I attempted to describe something of the experience of industrial struggle. The form and course of that struggle was clearly related to the class position of miners and the conflict situation into which the economic policies of the government had engineered them. Lacking the resources and cohesion and, therefore, effectively, the power to wage a more protracted fight, the miners were defeated. The tactical battles of the conflict, the press campaigns, the negotiating positions and so on were a product of decisions contingent on the unpredictable developments of the Lock-Out and the perceptions of the miners' leaders. The underlying reality of the market situation of the men, the economic base of the industry as a whole is, however, what in the end defeated the union.

In this chapter, bringing my account of my grandfather up to the point when he left the pits, I want to examine how the class position of miners changed in relation to the shifting fortunes of the industry in the years immediately following 1926. The focus of class conflict in Britain shifted during these years away from the coal industry, although not excluding it. Unemployment, poverty and depression, particularly in the distressed areas gave class conflict a new meaning and new political

forms. Paradoxically, the period of the 1930s was also one of rising living standards, technological change and structural change in the economy. (see J. Stevenson and C. Cook 1977) But in the coal mining areas the situation was different; phrases like "the hungry thirties" remain pertinent. One of the essential hallmarks of a class society is that rewards and opportunities are unequally distributed according to power rather than need. The experience of mining communities during the depression exemplifies this only too well.

The Return to Work

The end of the Lock-out was not for many men the end of being idle. The Throckley coal company acted cannily throughout December taking back only those men they wanted. Some men were never taken back. My grandfather and Jim waited till the new year before they went back, the old man defiantly insisting that he would wait till he was called. He would not go back and beg for a job. His brother, Bob, was never asked back and had to leave his colliery house. He moved up Newburn Road to a council house and eventually to another job at Stargate colliery over the river at Ryton. Uncle Bill told me that they just waited around "kicking their heels" to see what would happen.

There is some evidence that the coal company favoured employing blacklegs and non-union men. The returns to the Northumberland Miners' Association questionnaire to branches show that at Throckley pit twenty-two men had

not been reinstated and that their places had been given to "strangers." In the Maria pit, the pit with the strongest lodge, fifty men were not reinstated. The report goes on "Twenty of the Throckley men reinstated were blacklegs and both branches reported that preference had been given to blacklegs." (File: Replies to Questionnaires 1924-1933, Burt Hall)

Bill was the first of the Browns to go back. He told me it was very difficult. The pit was in poor condition; the atmosphere was very bad among the men with those known to have blacklegged being treated as pariahs:

It was rough going back after 1926 because the pit was rough as well. You were finding falls here and there and you had to dig your way in. I was one of the first of six putters back at the Maria and you had to go in and work with the blacklegs then.

As Bill said this his voice quivered in a bitter pitch and he pointed out that he was told by his father on no condition should he co-operate with blacklegs. My grandfather and Jim were called to the pit after the turn of the year after Bill had suggested to the manager that he should contact them. For a while, however, they both contemplated moving out of the district to Lynemouth colliery where they had heard men were being taken on. This was the one and only time that my grandfather considered moving out of Throckley.

National trends after the General Strike of a fall in the number of members of trades unions were experienced

in Throckley, too. Interestingly, there were differences between the two Throckley pits with the Maria showing a much higher level of union membership among those remaining employed than the Isabella. But the Federation of Throckley collieries i.e. the joint committee of the branches of the three pits was in disarray. The Maria would have nothing to do with Blucher because so many men at Blucher black-legged during the Lock-out.

In both Throckley pits, there were immediate problems of unemployment which became more severe during 1928 and 1929. I estimate that for the urban district as a whole the proportion of the insured population unemployed in 1927 was around 35 per cent. Until the time he left the pits, unemployment in the district was never below 20 per cent although my grandfather himself was lucky to remain in work. The figures for the period are as follows:

EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNIONISATION
THROCKLEY AND MARIA COLLIERIES, NEWBURN UDC
AND NORTHUMBERLAND COAL INDUSTRY

	Throckley Colliery			Maria Colliery			Newburn UDC	Northumberland Coal Industry
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	(c)	% Unemployed	
1926	197	57.0	-	666	85.7	-	28.2*	-
1927	307	-	-	562	89.6	-	35.2*	-
1928	362	50.8	90	566	78.4	74	23.1*	-
1929	378	42.5	50	557	74.4	60	18.3*	-
1930	399	63.4	32	530	85.0	44	21.8*	15.7
1931	409	63.4	16	540	87.5	44	28.1*	21.3
1932	478	62.7	16	525	82.7	50	29.4*	23.4
1933	458	77.0	52	507	76.6	30	27.3*	19.0
1934	483	74.1	19	521	68.9	10	25.8*	16.9
1935	511	76.1	32	528	55.5	11	25.0*	14.8
1936	445	75.3	41	535	71.5	-	20.0*	-

(a) = Number employed

(b) = % in Union

(c) = Number unemployed

* = estimated figure worked from projections backwards from December unemployment totals.

Sources: Department of Employment unpublished statistics;
Northumberland Coal Owners Statistical Returns
Half-yearly balance sheets NMA; List of Miners;
Miners Department.

In the first month of the return to work the Executive Committee of the NMA agreed to finance a special pamphlet for the Throckley pits to persuade non-unionists to join the union. In February the Executive threatened legal action against some of the hewers who had blacklegged for refusing to pay their part of the checkweightman's wages. And in April there was trouble in the Throckley collieries over the management's refusal to deduct welfare fund levies from the men's wages. This was clearly a management device to maintain rifts among the men. Some of the non-union men had objected to these levies being taken without their written consent and the reason was directly connected with the fact that Danny Dawson, although no longer an employee of the pit, was secretary of the Miners' Welfare Fund Committee. (Correspondence Re Welfare Fund. Burt Hall) The company's argument was that this committee was no longer representative of the men.

Similar difficulties occurred later with respect to the Aged Miners Coal Fund which the Throckley Federation operated. This fund, financed by weekly levies paid for coal for aged miners. In 1930 the company refused to deduct the levy without written consent of the men. This infuriated the coal fund committee and their response to the company indicates just how far the reputation of the company had slipped. Pointing out that the sums involved were "so trifling no man could frame a reasonable excuse to oppose it" Bob Butterwell, the secretary went on: "Speaking personally I feel the men want to get back

to the old time when the Throckley Coal Co. was used as as a reference for good through the county." (Minute Book; Aged Miners Coal Fund. Tyne-Wear Archive 1059/1)

Bill Straker summed up the situation of the return to work in the early summer of 1927. In response to suggestions from the Mining Association that the return to district wage settlements had been smooth he noted in his April circular, "The fact is that our people, after the terrible struggle of seven months against lower wages and longer working hours, were crushed and broken by starvation." (NMA Minutes NRO) And in June he noted:

The present depressed state of the industry, with so many miners seeking work and not able to find it, has given a temporary power to colliery officialism, which I am sorry to find in too many cases being used in such a tyrannical way as to create the impression that they are glorying in the power to tyrannise over their fellows.

In Throckley such officialism was experienced in the way men were taken on or not taken on, over the levies question and over questions about paying minimum wages. The company was quite clearly prepared to respond to wage disputes (and these, I have explained in an earlier chapter arise all the time underground because of varying working conditions) by dismissal. In September 1928, for example, George Carr, the Maria branch president was sacked for claiming county average wages for working in an abnormal place.

Such actions did not always meet with a passive response. In August of 1927 the Executive Committee of the union had to counsel the putters at the Maria pit not to intimidate the management into paying minimum wages through threats to stop the pit. But anger had to be tempered with realism for as Straker pointed out to the Council of the NMA in 1928 when they discussed the possibility of industrial action over the Dodd's pay award, "the men were in a much worse position to successfully strike than they were in 1926." The feeling that nothing could be done was, perhaps, the most disheartening result of defeat and what it gave rise to was not so much militancy, but defensiveness, as I shall show a little later when I discuss the position in the early thirties.

The Mining Industry after 1926

For the ten years after the General Strike the coal industry in Britain was in decline. Stiff competition from Polish and German coalfields with their thicker seams and large coal cartels are clearly part of the reason. But the growing industrial recession itself affecting the internal demand for coal was another. The market position of the industry was adversely affected, too, by insufficient mechanisation and high costs arising from the industry being dominated by too many small, and among the older undertakings, inefficient pits. In 1929 17.8 million tons of coal produced in Northumberland and Durham were sold on the home market. By 1933 the figure was 12.3 million. (N. McCord 1979: 216) The collapse

of the export market was even more dramatic. In 1929 21 million tons of coal were shipped from the Tyne to foreign destinations. By 1932 this was reduced to 12.6 million tons.

Unemployment among miners was the direct result of these complex causes and the underlying reason for their industrial weakness. And unemployment was made worse by mechanisation. By 1929 almost 55 per cent of the coal cut in Northumberland was being cut by machine. In some of the newer pits sunk in the northern part of the district the figure reached 80 per cent. (N. McCord 1979: 216) By 1930, however, neither Throckley or the Maria colliery had conveyors although some faces had been turned over to longwall methods of coal getting. In this case, then, the decline in employment is due to the collapse of markets and to the inability of a small ageing company to modernise.

Government policy for the mining industry in the years after 1926 was to encourage amalgamations in the belief that by so doing costs could be reduced output increased and profitability be restored. Kirby, however, sums up the political dilemmas of this approach nicely:

In reviewing the Baldwin Government's policy on the coal mining industry between 1926 and 1929 the outstanding feature is the conflict between the perceived need for rationalisation and the political objections to any policy innovation which could be interpreted as a move towards public ownership.

(M. Kirby 1977: 121)

Legislation by the second Labour Government - the Coal Mines Act of 1930 - and subsequent attempts to help the industry centralise its marketing structures was rendered ineffective by depression and the structure of ownership in the industry. For such legislation did little to counteract the long term structural problems of secular decline. The miners, in any case, maintained their argument that only nationalisation would do anything for the industry. The opinion of the Northumberland Miners' Association was that despite the difficulties of the industry output per man shift had been increasing while wages had been decreasing. (NMA Minutes 1935:NR0) Between 1923 and 1934 wages per man shift fell from 9/10.39d. to 8/8.56d. But output per man shift went up from 17.52 tons to 25.17 tons. The number of man shifts worked fell from nearly 16,000,000 to just over 10,000,000. Variation among different coal companies was, of course, quite large. The Throckley group of collieries being older and less efficient than some of the modern pits, suffered higher levels of unemployment. (see previous table).

But this period of contraction and cosmetic legislation is important in a different way. The attempts of the national governments of the period to intervene in the industry is part of a much larger shift in the character of British politics and society, the increasing involvement of the state in the management of the economy. The steps may have been hesitant and ad hoc but set alongside, in retrospect, other changes such as the growing acceptance of Keynesian theories of demand management

(see P. Addison) by conservative politicians, steps towards regional planning under the Special Areas Act and so on, these moves in the coal industry were contributing to the building up of new relationships between the state and the economy.

Defensive Tactics in the Pits

The depression in the coal trade which persisted till the late 1930s shaped directly the industrial tactics of the miners by neutralising what was their most potent weapon, their ability to strike. Lodge records for the Throckley pit exist for the period from 1932 onwards and they reveal much of the weekly wrangles with the company over a large number of questions, much too numerous to list, but including such things as cavilling, dismissals, the quality of house coals, prices, coals for unemployed members and the problems of non-unionism.

But what dominates in lodge discussions is unemployment. The response of the Throckley lodges was to strengthen the membership and to attempt to regulate how the available work should be shared. What emerges from these efforts is a strong sense of locality and community, the lodges seeking to protect the employment of Throckley men as against those defined as strangers. This question was first raised in March 1933 with the Isabella lodge discussing "strangers starting at the pits and our own men still idle." (Lodge Minutes 1933) This was a problem at the Maria, too. Charlton Thompson told me that he remembers a lot of grumbles about the appointment of a

new manager from Haltwhistle for not only was he a stranger but he brought several men with him, some of whom took "staff jobs."

In 1936 the stranger issue took a new turn. The minutes read:

Secretary reported that he had interviewed the manager with respect to strangers starting at the colliery and our own men not working. When he said this man had started because he had two lads at the colliery and he was short of boys and was prepared to consider others unemployed in similar position raised by secretary. (Lodge Minutes: July 23rd 1936)
(My emphasise)

This is a revealing comment. Not only does it indicate the stronger position of management allowing them to avoid normal cavilling procedures for taking on men, it illustrates a subtle but substantial change in Throckley itself. Some of the older miners still cling to a collective image of themselves as Throckley mineworkers with special claims to employment at their own pit. But some of the younger men are unwilling to follow their fathers underground. The cycle of the reproduction of a labour force was breaking down rapidly in the 1930s transforming the character of Throckley itself from a mining village to an industrial community.

Charlton Thompson agrees with this interpretation. He told me that his father was determined to see him down the pit telling him "I'll find you a job when

you're ready" but Charlton wanted something else.

"Lots of lads" he told me, "didn't want the dirty boredom of it." He went on: "I think there was a turn away from it. Quite a lot were getting work on the buses and different industries." The irony is, then, that as the economy pulled out of recession after 1934/5 and the demand for coal increased, the social base of mining, the mining community, was disappearing.

This recruitment problem had its reflection in 177 Mount Pleasant. Jack, as I explained, had got work as a joiner. But in 1931, in an act of courageous defiance of his father, Bill worried about his health recovering from pneumonia packed in the pit announcing to his mother as he took off his clothes after his last shift, "There, you can hoy these in the fire; I divvent need them any more." The basic failure of the pit to capture Bill comes out not so much in the fact that he finally left it but in the sensitivity which he showed to its brutalising and dangerous features. Bill never felt easy about the pit; he could not take it or anything about it for granted. He detested his pit clothes; he found them coarse and itchy to wear. He detested the management, finding them more concerned with coal and machines than with the men they employed; he detested the cramped artificial world of underground. He told me once that he couldn't bear the "awful feeling" of the pit cage, after its ascent, dropping back for a split second to settle on its catches. It wasn't so much the feeling in the stomach but the thought that

if those catches were ever to break the whole thing would go crashing back down the shaft that terrified him. The likelihood of this happening was remote but he says he felt it every time. Bill left the pit into unemployment filling his time in in the gardens taking on two of his own at the bottom of Mount Pleasant.

For those remaining at the pit the prospect of unemployment and short-time working remained as possibilities. The policy of the Isabella lodge was clarified in 1933 into a six point plan prompted by the dismissal of twenty workmen in July.

- A. The sharing work with employed and unemployed effective at and including the previous dismissals.
- B. That all non-union men should be paid off first.
- C. That should any men be required cavils be put in for all men affected.
- D. That they should have first claim to any temporary work such as filling small coals etc.
- E. That all present vacancies should be cavilled for among the last batch of men who finished.
- F. Abolition of any overtime (if any) that may be worked at the colliery when we have men unemployed.

(Lodge Minutes: July 31st 1933)

The management did not agree to any of this and insisted that where only a few men were required they would choose whom they wanted agreeing to cavil for men only when "a bulk of men were required."

Images of Poverty

In its electoral appeals in the 1950s the Labour Party could use the slogan "Just ask your Dad." The aim was to evoke the image of the 1930s as the hungry thirties, the "Devil's decade" or, another popular one, "the wasted years." The picture of unemployment, poverty and waste, central to these images has its counterpart in much of the social commentary of the period itself. J. B. Priestley's English Journey (1934) paints a bleak picture of the North East. "A nightmare place" is how he described it (p 289) with Tyneside as "a warren of people living in wretched conditions, in a parody of either rural or urban life, many of them without work, wages or hope" (318) John Newsom reporting on unemployment in County Durham wrote of "apathy and despair." (1936: 109)

The Civil Lord of the Admiralty, reviewing the problems of the special areas said of the North East, "the area as a whole is losing hope." (Ministry of Labour 1934: 74) The Pilgrim Trust report, Men Without Work (1938) was a little more optimistic. The investigators found less "desperate poverty" in the northern mining town of Crook than they had found elsewhere in the country and a great determination "not to give way to unemployment and not to subsist on self pity." (1938: 74)

These descriptions reflect a shock reaction on the part of people from the south of the country encountering directly the problems of the depressed regions. There was a reality to what they describe but their perception was selective for to convey a fuller picture of the

experience of depression it is necessary to show how people fought back. Unemployment and overcrowding, the Means Test and poverty were not just accepted. The fight against them, refracted through the Labour Party and the trades unions was what built up, for a later period during the Second World War and afterwards, a positive commitment to a very different kind of social order.

The degree of poverty in Throckley is impossible to measure now; the data does not exist. Poverty in the 1930s was, however, closely associated with unemployment. (J. Stevenson 1977) Something of the fall in purchasing power in the district can, however, be calculated from the records of the co-operative store.

PROFIT, SALES AND CREDIT
Throckley Co-op Store
1926-1936

	PROFIT INDEX (1921=100)	SALES INDEX (1921=100)	ANNUAL AVERAGE PURCHASE per member £	ANNUAL AVERAGE CREDIT per member £
1926	86.9	56.5	42	3.3
1927	92.1	59.6	42	3.5
1928	93.0	59.9	41	2.9
1929	93.8	62.2	42	2.0
1930	94.4	62.9	41	1.5
1931	90.6	59.8	38	1.4
1932	82.6	56.2	35	1.3
1933	82.4	56.9	35	1.3
1934	92.9	58.1	36	1.3
1935	91.0	58.3	35	1.4
1936	87.5	59.2	36	1.5

Source: Throckley Co-op Records

The figures indicate the pattern of the depression. From 1930 onwards till 1934 profits, sales, average purchases and credit all decrease with sales falling to just over half the 1921 figure. The fall in credit reflects both store policy and belt-tightening among families.

There is no doubt, even though it might not be precisely measured, that many families in Throckley lived in poverty. But there is no necessary connection between poverty and despair or, for that matter between poverty and protest. The critical question is how people feel. I asked my aunt Eva whether they felt themselves at this time to be poor. "Wey no!", she said and went on:

Everybody thought the likes of us were well off!

People thought the Browns were wealthy. Me mother, for all that she was hard up, had a proud nature.

She was inclined like that; and so was Maggie.

Me granny used to say that "Jim's bairns are a bit proud, a bit stuck up."

My grandmother was so far from seeing herself as poor that she used to give away her hooky mats to those she thought needed them, for each year, as I explained, she made new mats for herself. And it was her pride, Eva explained, which prevented her ever suggesting to anyone else that she might be hard up. "We didn't shout stinking fish" is how Eva put it. They were not angry at their poverty either. My grandfather was generally an optimist. He used to tell my grandmother "Things 'll be alright; things 'll brighten up."

I put the same question to my mother. She said there was no "real poverty" in Throckley meaning by that, malnutrition. They were poor, she said, but they accepted it and got the best out of life in other ways. "And nearly everybody had gardens. They might have had bacon bones instead of ham but nobody wanted for vegetables."

Politics of Depression

Political activity has its roots, ultimately, in the way men experience the everyday problems of their lives. In Throckley local Labour Party politics acquired a distinctly radical tone during these years and local political activity was closely connected with the miners' lodges. And the monthly lodge meetings brought men into contact with politics. It was common practice at lodge meetings to receive a report from the lodge delegate to the local district Labour Party and to discuss questions raised. Through the Northumberland Miners' Association lodges were involved in the selection of Parliamentary candidates for the Wansbeck division. And delegates from the NMA had to report regularly back to the men in the lodges.

In addition to these opportunities to discuss matters of a political nature, lodges were obvious targets for the political propaganda of many other organisations and each political appeal had to be dealt with under the item, correspondence, on the agenda of lodge meetings. The Independent Labour Party invited lodges to all

their meetings. During the 1930s they were invited to conferences or demonstrations by the Land Nationalisation Federation, the Throckley Labour Party, the British Anti-War Council, the League of Nations, the TUC, the Spanish Foodstuff Committee, the Commissioner for Special Areas, the Labour National Housing Association, the Unemployed Council and several other organisations. Many such requests were allowed, as it says in the Minutes, "to lie on the table" but some issues, particularly connected with unemployment and the Means Test were acted on with the Throckley lodge being represented at demonstrations or meetings.

The actions of the miners with respect to these larger political questions reveals a much stronger determination to press for change than is indicated in their strictly lodge activities. Lodge activities are not themselves confined either to questions of wages or conditions of employment. The lodges took up many local issues, too. During the 1930s for instance, they worked hard to improve hospital facilities in the area. The local 'Cottage Hospital', maintained by a consortium of local doctors was clearly inadequate offering a much inferior service to the larger hospitals in Newcastle. In 1936 the local Federation withdrew their funds from this hospital and simultaneously stopped paying into a local fund to cover the costs of pay beds in the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle. The issue may seem trivial but it reflects a growing awareness of the

need - which later became a strong political demand - for a much better national health service.

In the absence of what were considered to be proper facilities for old people the lodges maintained an aged mineworkers' coal fund and they campaigned for finance for old people by canvassing round the doors for money.

Here, then, is local action within the framework of possibilities offered by the union; it may have been limited but it hardly reflects despair and hopelessness.

Labour Party

The two Throckley lodges were affiliated to the Newburn and District Local Labour Party and through that to the Wansbeck Divisional Labour Party. In the years of the Depression both organisations were much concerned with unemployment and the Means Test. By the mid 1930s and a deteriorating international situation questions of peace and war began to take prominence. The records of the Labour Party for this period reveal a well supported group of activists who, while not given to much socialist theorising nonetheless had a strong political awareness. They passed radical resolutions on the House of Lords, nationalisation and, in 1931 against those Labour cabinet ministers who joined the National Government.

From the records of the Newburn Labour Party the membership figures for the early 1930s can be calculated as follows:

Membership
Newburn Local Labour Party

	Trades Union Members	Men	Women	Total Individual Members
1931	2081	105	127	232
32	-	116	142	258
33	-	255	171	426
34	-	266	189	455
35	-	435	283	718
36	-	337	256	593

Source: (From Minutes of the Newburn and District
Local Labour Party NRO)

In comparison with present day membership figures these are very high indeed. Membership dues were collected weekly and the annual general meetings of the Party were so well attended that the minutes had to be specially printed.

The activists in the Party were clear that the Labour Party was an integral part of the trade union movement and that industrial questions could not be separated from politics. Councillor Mavin, of North Walbottle put this point nicely as early as 1927 reflecting on the defeat of the Lock-out and noting in passing that he had lost his job through his political activity:

The trade union movement and the Labour Political movements could not be separated. It (the defeat - WW) further showed that if we are defeated industrially

we must capture the political machine. The co-operative movement was also a very necessary part of the working class movement ..."

(Minutes: Feb 1st 1937 NRO)

Despite the defeat of the miners and the parlous state of the industry after 1926, the policy of the local Labour Party on the coal industry was clear. In 1928 they resolved:

That ... the only way in which the Mining Industry can be properly carried out will be on the basis of Nationalisation with no Compensation to the present owners ... We pledge ourselves to work for that object. (Minutes: March 10th 1928)

In March 1930 they resolved to urge the Parliamentary Labour Party to abolish the House of Lords as they considered it "against all the principles of Democratic Government for such a body to continue in office."

The General Election in 1929 brought a second minority Labour Government to office. It became clear early on, however, that the scope of this government's action was severely circumscribed by the economic crisis and orthodox financial policies. The Coal Mines Act of 1930 was one of its achievements. Its plans to reduce unemployment through public works schemes was also widely welcomed. The Unemployment Insurance Act of 1930 which widened the scope of entitlement to a larger number of workers and extended transitional payment to those who had exhausted their rights under the scheme was also

a strongly supported measure. As late as January 1931 the Throckley Labour Party re-affirmed "its faith in the Labour Government" and urged it "to develop the Home Market by increasing the purchasing power of the Masses, whether employed or unemployed." (Minutes: Newburn and District Local Labour Party 1931)

Such Keynesian logic found little support in the Treasury and the financial crisis of 1931 destroyed the second Labour Government. The story is well known; the version which is important here is that many felt the unemployed were being sacrificed and the whole labour movement betrayed. (R. Miliband 1973 J. Stevenson and C. Cook 1977)

At its September meeting in 1931 the Newburn Party discussed the break-up of the Labour Government. George Shield, the MP gave an outline of the events and Eddy Dowling of Westerhope moved the following resolution: "That this conference ... deplores the Government's refusal to re-consider the cuts in unemployment benefit." A marginally unsuccessful amendment from the Throckley Party was much more forceful:

That this Conference demands the expulsion of MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas and urges the withdrawal of all Labour members of Parliament from the House of Commons for the purpose of rousing the Unemployed and Employed. (Minutes: Sept. 1931 NRO)

My mother told me that many of the Labour supporters in Throckley - including my grandfather - regarded MacDonald as a traitor and many of those who had proudly displayed photographs of the Labour leader on their mantelpieces took them down and destroyed them. Taking his cue from his friends, my grandfather used to call MacDonald, "Ramsay MacBaldwin," and "a bloody traitor." At this point my mother's job involved collecting weekly payments for the draper she worked for and at all her calls she heard the same complaints about the Labour leaders who joined the National Government.

In the General Election of October 1931 George Shield the Labour man lost to Lt. Colonel Cruddas, a National Government candidate in the Wansbeck Division. In its review of the events the Wansbeck Labour Party passed resolutions to elect future Labour cabinets from the Parliamentary Labour Party, to create a state medical service and, urged by the Throckley party, to fight against the Means Test. The logic of this last resolution was distinctly Keynesian. It was explained that since transitional payments were being decreased more people were having to apply direct to the Poor Law for relief. "This in turn will mean a sharp rise in the Poor Rate, which is bound to reflect itself in increased rents for houses and add to the burden of the already harassed Working Classes, who now find it difficult to secure the bare necessities of life." (Wansbeck Divisional Labour Party Minutes Oct 1931 NRO)

Council Houses

If the national political scene was bleak with the Labour Party in disarray having suffered a massive defeat, the local opportunities for change were not so limited. The issue which illustrates this is housing. During the early 1930s the Labour Council pressed ahead with the modernisation of middens, and, when they could council house building.

Housing problems remained severe in the district during this period. As late as 1927 there were still over 2,000 privvy middens in the district and overcrowding problems persisted. In 1930 the Sanitary Inspector revealed problems of overcrowding even in the new council houses:

The present cost of house building is a serious difficulty in a district like this suffering from the effects of prolonged trade depression. The present rate of wages of the working man does not admit of him paying a high rent and this has resulted in many of the council houses being sublet, and in a number of cases even containing three families. There is a great demand for more and cheaper houses. (Annual Report 1930. Filed with MOH Report. West Denton Public Library)

Housing had always been a major focus of political activity in Throckley and throughout this period efforts were made to improve its quality. During the 1920s some council houses were sold in the district but the policy of doing

so was not considered successful and during the 1930s, under the provisions of several housings acts, the council pressed ahead with its policy which Dick Browell had described in 1927 as "plodding on trying to build houses." The problem was, he said, "how the right kind of house for the workers was required at a rent which the worker could pay." (Newburn and District Labour Party Minute Book 1918-1927. NRO) The building of houses was a central component of their notions of progress although at the height of the depression they were unable to build any at all. The figures for the housebuilding programme are as follows:

HOUSE BUILDING NEWBURN URBAN DISTRICT 1914-1925			
	COUNCIL HOUSES	PRIVATE HOUSES	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
1914-1925	446	85	531
1926	39	9	579
1927	73	24	676
1928	12	7	695
1929	76	27	798
1930	20	19	837
1931	20	19	976
1932	-	34	1010
1933	-	85	1095
1934	225	148	1468
1935	240	112	1820
1936	56	111	1987
1937	86	101	2174

Source: calculated from Medical Officer of Health Reports,
Newburn UDC: Tyne Wear Archive

The letting policy was to give priority to those in overcrowded conditions followed by those in houses with high rents and those under notice to quit colliery property. (Newburn UDC Housing Committee Minute Books Tyne Wear Archive)

As the number of available council houses increased the turnover of families in the colliery houses increased too; a growing number of people preferred the better and more secure property to a colliery house even though they had to pay rent for it. The following table indicates something of the turnover for the street my grandparents lived in.

POPULATION TURNOVER

MOUNT PLEASANT

1914-1936

Percentage residents	1914-1920	1920-1936	1914-1936
Remaining same	84.7	30.2	28.0
Changing	15.2	69.7	71.9

Source: Rate Books; Newburn UDC

Mount Pleasant had something of its own identity; it was almost like a community within a community. These crude and circumstantial data nonetheless illustrate a point; the community of the pit rows was not a stable one

from the mid 1920s onwards. The aspiration of many people, particularly the younger ones seeking homes of their own was to get out of colliery housing into something better.

This particular aspiration revealed itself in the Brown family in heated discussions between Bill and his father. My grandfather, reflecting the generation he came from, believed in colliery housing. Bill, resentful that as a young miner living in his parents' colliery house he was not entitled to a rent allowance on his wages believed such housing to be a burden. In any case, he argued, a colliery house kept a man tied to the pit. Bill told me he used "to gan hammer and tongs at me father aboot that" and that he tried often enough through the union to pass resolutions against colliery housing. Bill at this point, i.e. the late twenties was anticipating marriage; he was courting and his home was congested. The future seemed to him to be very much on his side of the argument.

Family Life

The period covered in this chapter is a very significant one for the family life of my grandparents. In 1928 my great grandmother died at Eltringham and old Norfolk John was brought to Throckley to live with his son Bob. Norfolk John lived at the top end of Mount Pleasant so he saw more of his grandchildren. But he died in 1931, his death causing some acrimony among his sons from which their friendship did not really recover.

The most severe blow was, however, the death of aunt Maggie. Harry, her husband, retired from the pit in 1929 and had to vacate his colliery house. They found a small cottage in Walbottle, disposed of most of their furniture and settled down to a retirement on ten shillings a week pension and a rent of four shillings. After two years during which time they were helped financially by Francy, their daughter and by my grandparents, Harry died. Maggie was not too well so my grandmother did her washing and helped her occasionally with the house. The main help, though, was to send my mother, now working herself in a Draper's shop in Newburn, to live with Maggie and look after her. My mother agreed willingly to this. She had stayed a lot with Maggie as a child and she wanted to get away from the growing congestion of Mount Pleasant. This arrangement lasted almost two years until Maggie became ill and had to be brought to Mount Pleasant and that is where she died. My mother says that my grandmother often said that she could "never ever repay the kindness my aunt Maggie had given us." Her death marked the end of an era for them all. Her memory evoked warm images of a cosy childhood while the future, in comparison, looked bleak. My mother told me how she felt when she came home: "I hated it more than ever. Our Eva and her kids were there, no private talks, always noise of some kind." But they all felt a deep sense of loss. Eva said that Maggie "was another mother to us."



Grandparents 1931

But these years were not all black ones for the family. Jim had married in 1926 and after a short period living in rooms in the new council houses, had secured a colliery house in Mount Pleasant, the one his aunt Maggie had lived in. In 1927 Jim's wife, Nelly, gave birth to Carrie, the fifth grandchild. My grandfather got on very well with Jim and liked to take Jim's second child - "young Jimmy" - to the gardens. Sundays were family days and in good weather they all went for walks together in the afternoon.

Bill married a girl from Hexham in 1933 shortly after he had left the pit and after a while "living in" with his brother Jim, he was able to move into a council house at Throckley. By this time, too, Olive, the eldest daughter had moved to Newburn where Tommy had a job as a gravedigger. It meant, in fact, that the old people were surrounded by their children and grandchildren. They liked that, particularly my grandmother.

Even so, in 1931 there were still eight people living in the house. The twins, Louie and Jack, were both working and bringing in wages. Eva helped in the house and looked after her two daughters, her marriage having completely collapsed. The size of this household made my grandfather's role a little ambiguous. He was still the main breadwinner, father and grandfather simultaneously. He used to say, for example, of Eva's two children that he was their father "I did everything but get them." But it worked. He carried on with his gardens and animals. At weekends he went to the club.

My grandmother carried on too with the relentless routines of domestic work. Louie and Jack spent as much time as they could away from the house. They went dancing together a lot at chapel "socials."

The really significant event of 1932, however, was an unofficial adoption when my grandparents took in the illegitimate child of my grandmother's niece, Bessy. Bessy, working as a domestic in Scarborough became pregnant. Uncertain as to what to do with the baby, considering having her adopted, she wrote to Eva from the Poor Law hospital in which she was staying, for advice. Eva discussed the matter with her mother and it was agreed that Bessy should come to Mount Pleasant with her daughter, Gloria, and stay with the family till she decided what she was going to do. She came to Throckley and stayed a few weeks. Having the baby adopted was discussed as a possibility but my grandmother solved the problem by agreeing to take Gloria herself. Bessy agreed and left, travelling to Bolton to seek domestic work. At the age of sixty-one my grandmother acquired a new baby, the second time in her life she had taken her relative's children into her own home.

"Gloria", my mother told me, "gave them a new lease of life and kept them young." Gloria was fed on milk from a goat my grandfather had at the time. She was a kind of doll to Olive and Sady, Eva's two children, and she grew up to think of them as sisters. Bessy made intermittent contact with her daughter and although Gloria knew from when she could appreciate it that her

"granny and granda" were not her parents she thought of them as such.

Gloria was not, in fact, a great burden to the family; there were several Brown grandchildren living near and plenty of immediate help in Mount Pleasant itself. Kinship, then, is what made the unofficial adoption of Gloria possible and her presence, I suspect, contributed in its own way to strengthening the central position of Mount Pleasant in the family life of all the Browns.

During this period some of the strains of congestion did surface, however, and tempers were strained. The presence of small children raised questions of who was getting more than their fair share of attention or who was being treated too leniently. Jack and Louie felt a bit marginal to the house at this point. Jack could rise quickly to anger and felt that he had little privacy. He did not interest himself in the gardens - indeed, he was not encouraged to do so; my grandfather used to tell him, "The best side of the garden for you is on the other side of the fence" - so he could not beat the same escape as my grandfather. He had to look for his relaxation outside the house. In the early 1930s he was unemployed for a while and this made him feel outside of things.

Unemployment was also a source of conflict with my mother. To earn a bit of money Jack set up a small shop in the garden shed selling home-made ginger beer, some vegetables from the garden, sweets and cigarettes. The cigarettes he bought from the co-op and through that

increased his co-op dividends. He also sold small items of drapery on a payment plan system. It was this which brought him into conflict with my mother because her job at the time was to do precisely the same thing for the draper she worked for. She thought Jack was taking work away from her and they argued about it.

None of these conflicts were irresolvable and when my relatives recall these difficult years they invariably refer to the great integrative rituals of the weekend sing-songs and Sunday evening suppers. It is difficult for them to re-live the disputes; to do so might even now open up feelings of acrimony which no mechanism now exists to control. Sufficient to note, therefore, that their family life was not always harmonious; it was lived under conditions of great stress and its source was overcrowding.

Retirement

Outside the family my grandfather was still pre-occupied with the pit. Still in his early sixties he knew he could have up to ten-years working life yet, time enough to get pulled around and keep a secure home for them all. Pit work carried the same risks as it always did, however, and from this time on he had another worry. He was starting to take "dizzy turns" in the pit. His heart would quicken to a very rapid pulse and he felt light-headed. The root cause of this tachycardia was never established but the doctor advised him to leave the pit. He did not accept the advice at

first and carried on. In every other respect he felt strong enough to do so and able to live a perfectly normal life and to relax more than in the past. In 1934, for instance, he went on a rare bus trip to Scarborough with the club. But it was also in 1934 that he had another accident. A falling stone from the roof glanced past his head nearly severing his nose from his face.



Club Trip to Scarborough 1934

Under the convalescence scheme available through the club, he spent a few weeks at Saltburn Home recovering from the blow and, he hoped, from the dizziness which affected him underground. When he returned to the pit he was put on lighter surface work. This did not suit him because the pay, at 6s 9d per day was low. He tried always to work on Sundays to get an extra day. The dizziness persisted however, and his doctor told him emphatically that if he continued to work he would be dead within a couple of

years; without working he could go on till ripe old age. At the age of sixty-three he conceded the point and left the pit. He had no pension although he did have £1.00 per fortnight from "Heddon Club", the Friendly Society into which he had contributed for the whole of his working life.



Louie, Eva, Grandparents and Gloria
Saltburn Home 1934

He had worked for fifty-two years, thirty-five of them for the Throckley Coal Company. There was no dramatic finish to his career. He had been ill and off work and he simply never returned. He used to say; "I never worked a notice and I never got a notice." He did not even bother to retrieve some of his pit gear which he had left underground. There was no collection for him, no gratuity

and a rent, as they say, was "put on him" immediately. My grandmother used to say that they would be a bit better off when they got their pension.

He had no regrets about leaving the pit. He said often enough that men should not have to work underground and that they would be better off when all the pits were closed. Such uncharacteristic equanimity was rooted, however, in illness. He was so ill at this point that my grandmother did not think he would see the Christmas out. In anticipation of an untimely death she arranged a great family party not, of course, to celebrate, but to cheer him up a bit. He recovered, though, and settled into a strict routine of visits to the garden and relying on his sons, one of whom, Jim, being at this time a committee member at the club, to take him out at weekends for a drink.

This pattern he kept up for practically another thirty-years. Illness always threatened him; he did take things a lot more easily. But my grandmother always reckoned he perked up at weekends. "Thou's always alreet at the weekend, Jim. Poorly all week till the pubs are open!" is what she used to say. The club and the garden kept him in contact with his friends. Retirement, for him, was not a great rupture to routine; after he got over his ill health, it was, at least in the early years, a period of relaxed and purposeful freedom.

Chapter Fourteen

RETIREMENT, WAR AND RIPE OLD AGE

The first few years of his retirement were built around strict routines. In contrast to a working life when he got out of bed at irregular hours he got up punctually at nine o'clock. Eva told me that his feet would touch the floor exactly the same time as the grandfather clock chimed the last beat of nine. He moved about the house slowly. "That owld bugga's too slow to catch cold" is what his wife used to say of him. Eva claims that they could practically set their clocks in Mount Pleasant watching the movements of my grandfather between his gardens and his home. Bill said of him at this time:

He was a contented man. He never grumbled. He was like that all his life. He accepted retirement.

If he wasn't at the garden he was sitting on that seat in front of the house. Mebbe he would get up to pluck a weed. He waved to people who went by.

The old men used to hang around the road ends.

But me father wouldn't go.

If there was a cat come, ten to one he'd hit the bugger. He was just content.

He was not an isolated man, however. He had three small children in his house and grandchildren nearby. He had many friends who met in the gardens and in the club. He took an active interest in his family and family gossip.

And it has to be noted that the family itself - and at this point I write as my own respondent - is an extremely introverted one. Physical proximity meant that they could maintain contact with one another and swop an endless flow of what looks from the outside to be trivial gossip. And talk! My relatives do not talk to one another; they shout. Very often they do not listen to what each other is saying. Some of my earliest memories are of congested evenings in Mount Pleasant. Through a fog of smoke in the odd, bright glow of the gas mantel across the red-tassled table, I can clearly picture the people. And amid the bending, stooping movement in and out of the kitchen, there is the overwhelming impression of talk. Everything is reported. There is no filtering process for irrelevant detail. It really did not matter whether anyone was listening; to be heard at all was a miracle and to understand it required an inside knowledge of the family and its feuds which no stranger could ever possess. I am convinced that my grandfather led such a routine retirement as a subtle form of escape from the family itself. Routines gave order to what otherwise might have been chaos; he found in his retirement what my grandmother had understood for nearly forty years.

His own life may have had predictable routines which little in the future might conceivably change, but these were hectic years for his own children. Olive, Jim and Bill had left home; Eva had returned, her marriage having failed. From 1936 onwards Louie was courting a lad from

Denton Burn, the son of a miner but a factory worker himself. Jack had several girlfriends and was likely to leave home at any time. By 1938 he had a good job on the railway having previously worked in an undertakers firm in Newcastle.

Young Olive was a teenager by the time he retired and he took stern interest in her behaviour ensuring, when he could, that she came in at nights at a reasonable time: and that she didn't play the gramophone with the dance music he disapproved of too much.

Louie, still working at the draper's shop in which she had started work, married in 1938 and took rooms in the new council houses opposite Mount Pleasant. In April 1939 she gave birth to a son, Jack named after her brother and shortly afterwards, moved to her own council house in Scotswood.

Jack, courting a girl from Gateshead married shortly afterwards and he, too, after one year in Lemington got his own council house in Throckley.

The fortunes of his family were the framework of his own life. The gossip, the problems, the visits and the "bairns" were what, apart from the garden, dominated the years immediately before the war.

The Approach of War

International news did not pre-occupy my grandfather. It was not that he was uninterested. Rather, he felt that matters of international politics were remote from the likes of him. He did discuss political matters occasionally.

Bill remembers him in a worried discussion with George Gregory asking "What's going to happen with this Hitler, George? The German re-armament's not good," And when Chamberlain came back from Munich with his piece of paper promising "Peace in Our Time" my grandfather was not in the least convinced. He once explained to Eva that Chamberlain - who he described as "An Aa'd Knave" - would not mind war and that "Ther's aalways plenty of work when the Tories are in: work for ammunitions to kill folk." In his opinion the Tories were warmongers. The Northumberland Miners' Association had always, of course, maintained a pacifist stance. And as early as 1933 raised an alarm about Hitler and Fascism. On May 20th the council of the NMA passed the following resolution:

That this meeting hereby enters, in the name of democracy, its strong protest against Hitler's crushing of trades unionism in Germany, and the atrocious treatment of old and experienced trades union leaders in that country. Further, we urge the British Government to take the necessary steps in the name of humanity, to show Germany its resentment against the atrocities committed by gangsters acting with the approval of the Hitler regime.

In his October circular of 1933 Bill Straker warned his members: "Hitler promised liberty to the German people and gave them slavery of the worst kind."

The Spanish Civil War became an important and emotional question for Labour activists in Throckley.

Nobody from Throckley joined the International Brigade but the Newburn and District Labour Party declared itself in October 1936 to be "profoundly alarmed at the present state of affairs in Spain" and urged the Labour Party itself to change its neutralist stance of non-intervention. In January 1937 the Party joined in a campaign to sell tickets for the Spanish Workers' medical relief fund and organised street collections. The Co-operative store was also involved in this fund raising, encouraging people to give their dividend over to help them and, in one campaign, to persuade people to buy milk tokens which would then be passed to the Co-operative Union to buy powdered milk for "democratic Spain."

By 1938 the League of Nations, the institution which, after the First World War, had been seen by many to be a guarantor of peace, had obviously failed. Recognising that, Sir Charles Trevelyan Bart, proposed the following successful resolution to the Wansbeck Labour Party:

That this conference ... considers that the unchecked aggression of the Fascist nations is directly due to the weakness, the Fascist sympathies, and the criminal acquiescence of the present British Government and that there is no security for the saving of democracy unless the Chamberlain government is changed at once, and replaced by a new government which believes in an alliance, within a recovered League of Nations, of Britain, France and Soviet Russia, with the support of the United States and the remaining

democratic countries, and calls on the Executive Committee of the Labour Party to summon an emergency conference to deal with the greatest crisis since August 1914. (Minutes of the Wansbeck Divisional Labour Party. March 1938 NR0)

In 1938 the Newburn Party organised a May Day demonstration addressed by Aneurin Bevan then campaigning vigorously for a Popular Front and some local speakers together with "a wounded member of the International Brigade."

Trevelyan Bart and Bevan were subsequently expelled from the Labour Party for their Popular Front views.

In March 1939, at the annual meeting of the Wansbeck Party the prospective M.P., Mr. McLean attacked the policy of appeasement of the Chamberlain government.

The Chamberlain pilgrimage of appeasement has resulted in betrayals, mad race of armaments, and the strengthening of the dictator countries.

The greatest betrayal of all is our own dead, which will ultimately lead the living to destruction.

At the same meeting two of Newburn ward's resolutions were carried, one calling for a common programme to fight fascism showing them to be greatly in sympathy with Bevan's position, the other calling for the nationalisation of the armaments in industry.

The Second World War

The Second World War was a major crisis in the sense in which that term had been defined in this book (see Introduction). It accelerated social change and without transforming British society in a fundamental way - Britain remained, after all, a capitalist society - substantial changes took place in economic and political life which modified the class position and life chances of the whole working class. This is, of course, a generalisation requiring detailed qualification for some groups benefited from change more than others. What is clear, however, at least for the first few years after the war if not for the later period, expectations were formed which altered fundamentally the political constraints of government policy. Full employment, social security, secondary education and health care as of right became part of a basic sense of citizenship.

Historians differ considerably in their assessment of the broad impact of the Second World War on the social structure of British society. An early optimistic assessment of the role of war in effecting social change was developed by Titmuss in his Problems of Social Policy (1950) Pointing to the increased range of government involvement in the social service field Titmuss comments that, "by contrast with the role of government in the nineteen thirties" the new, war-inspired position was "little short of remarkable." He goes on:

No longer did concern rest on the belief that, in respect to many social needs, it was proper to intervene only to assist the poor and those who were unable to pay for services of one kind or another. Instead, it was increasingly regarded as a proper function or even obligation of Government to ward off distress and strain among not only the poor but almost all classes of society. (1950: 506)

His explanation is a good example of the theory that the higher the participation of the general public in war, the greater are its redistributive effects:

That all were engaged in war whereas only some were afflicted with poverty and disease had much to do with the less constraining, less discriminating scope and quality of the war-time social services. (1950: 506)

T. H. Marshall follows in the Titmuss tradition when, in his Social Policy (1965) he attributes the birth of the modern welfare state to the experience of the common threat of war. The circumstances of war, he says, called for sacrifices from all and for help to be given ungrudgingly and without discrimination to all those who were in need. The idea of a welfare state thus "came to be identified with a nation fighting for its life." (1965: 75) In Marshall's view the effect of the war was to accelerate a social process of reform at revolutionary speed thereby changing profoundly the social fabric of British society and the mechanisms which govern its functioning.

Among historians the most well-known exponent of the radical change thesis is Marwick. His general thesis is that two world wars "furthered" social change in Britain. The broad reference is to macro changes in planning, the application of science and technology to production, economic management and much else besides. Specifically, however, Marwick supports the thesis that the war had important and lasting redistributive effects in favour of the underprivileged: it benefited the working class, women and children and young people:

The working classes benefited because of their strong market position when labour power was again an essential ingredient to success in the war; they benefited because the Government knew it was vital to secure their full support and cooperation; they benefited because the Government felt it necessary to recompense them for their sacrifice of life and limb in battle and of trade union privileges at home." (1970: 289-90)

Other historians are more cautious. Calvocoressi and Wint in their book Total War (1974) have argued that, despite the Governments controls, war-time developments in social policy, the increased awareness of poverty and inequality through evacuation, mobility and better communications, and despite a steady increase in the standard of living throughout the war, the effects of the war on inequality were not great:

But the gains of the working classes did not greatly disturb the economic gradations of British society. The rich and the very rich, although hard hit by direct taxation, found their compensations - the rich recovering after the war their ease and affluence through expense accounts and capital gains, and the middling and professional classes finding, somewhat to their surprise, that they were the principal beneficiaries of new social services such as subsidized further education Within the working classes the average wage of the unskilled worker rose from 70% to 80% of the basic wage of the skilled worker. (1974: 425)

Angus Calder had argued, even more forcefully, that the war did little to transform British society. In his The People's War he writes:

After 1945, it was for a long time fashionable to talk as if something of a revolution had in fact occurred. But at this distance we see clearly enough that the effect of the war was not to sweep society onto a new course, but to hasten its progress along the old grooves ... After the war the forces of wealth, bureaucracy and privilege survived with little inconvenience, recovered from their shock, and began to proceed with their old business of manoeuvre, concession and studied betrayal. (1969: 22)

The war, he claims, strengthened tyranny:

The new capitalism of paternalistic corporations meshed with the state bureaucracy was emerging clearly, along with the managerial structure which would support it. (1969: 22)

Calder is here raising questions about the longer term significance of the economic changes of war on capitalist society. In this respect, any assessment of Calder's work rests upon, or, at least, ought to rest upon, an evaluation of the nature of capitalism as a form of social system. Paul Addison makes just this point but believes the problem is a subjective one:

The problem, is, of course, largely a subjective one. The war hastened the introduction of a reformed style of capitalism. If capitalism is regarded as inherently productive of ruthless exploitation and inequality, then by definition the war changed little. But on the social democratic thesis that parliamentary democracy enables the labour movement to achieve worthwhile benefits within capitalism, the war might be regarded as radical in its effects. (1977: 276)

It is, of course, the latter view to which Addison himself adheres:

At the end of the day, political change was translated into more jobs, better medical services, higher standards of social security, greater

educational opportunity. J. M. Keynes argued that the problem of social organisation turned not on whether people should exploit one another, but on how such exploitation should be regulated; the rules could be more, or less, civilized. In this sense the war years can be understood as a phase of genuine changes in which a spirit of parsimony and caution gave way to a spirit of greater welfare and more confident management. (1977: 21)

What remains is an analytical problem; how to assess the theoretical significance of war-time changes on the functioning of a capitalist society and how to distinguish such changes from longer term changes in the society as a whole. Henry Pelling in his Britain and the Second World War raises this debate neatly when he says:

In the hectic days of 1940, it was quite common for people to suppose that the war was effecting a social revolution in Britain. (1970: 320)

He points out that the rich felt this because of the burden of taxation:

Their domestic servants had been taken from them by the demands of the factories, just at the moment when their pleasant houses in the country were being invaded by mothers and children from the slums. By contrast, the wages of nearly all manual workers rose faster than the cost of living, and with the advantages of overtime, opportunities for work

by married women, and general full employment, their families were usually better off than before the war.

Pelling himself is sceptical:

As time goes by ... we are able to get a clearer picture of the long term trends, and in many cases we then discover that what many people have ascribed to the impact of war has really more deep-rooted causes.

What is required to sort out these arguments is a whole series of studies of different industries, regions and groups of workers for the effects of war-time controls and post-war measures were not all felt in the same way.

The changes which the war brought can be seen in Throckley and in the life of my grandparents. But the north east of England benefited less from them than the country as a whole. Communities built on the traditional industries of coal, shipbuilding and engineering benefited less than those in the south of the country with new industry. And the old people benefited less than the young. The changes my grandparents valued were not so much those which affected themselves directly but those which they believed benefited their family. And with these - the health service, full employment, secondary education - they were well pleased. The Nationalisation of the pits and a majority Labour Government may not, in the end, have realised the long standing hopes of the

Labour movement. From the limited world of Throckley these were massive achievements.

War in Throckley

Paradoxically, to me, at least, my relatives find it difficult to recall much that is outstanding about the war. Their lives were highly routinised and little different to the period before the war. Throckley, of course, was affected hardly at all by bombing, and the Brown family had no one in the forces. At the beginning however, their dominant mood was uncertainty.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 following Hitler's invasion of Poland was expected but nevertheless a shock. Jim's wife, Nelly, told me: "It was Sunday morning. The sirens went at 11 o'clock. We got a shock. We didn't know what to think." What they expected was aerial bombing and perhaps gas attacks, gas masks having been issued. Bill was able to tell them more about arrangements for dealing with the casualties for he had been for a few years an active member of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. The first few months were, of course, very quiet but there was plenty of evidence of mobilisation which affected the Browns directly.

In September of 1939 there was a march past up Newburn Road of the 5th battalion of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers. My grandfather watched this from the end of his garden. Olive's boyfriend, Jack Danskin, was in the parade and they were eager to see him march by.

My mother remembers that as they stood there my grandfather said how it took him right back and he was thinking of "wor Gordon" the lad he had brought up and who had been killed early in the First World War. And he turned with tears in his eyes and looked to my mother who was holding her baby and said to the baby, although it was a comment directed to them all, "Son, you'll finish this lot off."

My grandfather expected a protracted war, a repeat of 1914. But he was not confident that Germany might be defeated. Like most other people he was simply anxious and uncertain.

The battery powered radio was a major source of information about the war as were the newspapers. In addition Olive took War Illustrated, the weekly picture magazine edited by Sir John Hammerton. They all read this thoroughly taking a keen interest in military affairs, an interest fuelled in Olive's case by her fiance's censored letters from the army.

Like every other family the war affected them directly if not dramatically. Jack was turned down for military service and classified as grade five fit on account of his damaged arm. Jim, at that time working again at Spencers, having left the pit on account of its poor pay - a shift, incidentally, indicative of the changes which had already occurred in the character of the community in Throckley - was declared to be working in a reserved occupation. Jim amplified this point for me indicating

perhaps, that the halting attempts of the Throckley coal company to modernise and install coal cutting machinery was actually driving some of the men from the pits by devaluing skills and ruining the work environment.

I left cos the money was bad. One of my marras left to the Police. They were aall trying to get oot. There was no prospect in the pit. It was bad work; it was rough. With the coal companies machines everything was a rush.

Bill was on full-time ambulance and ARP work. Young Olive was directed to work in munitions for a short period in the south of England but returned to munitions work in Vickers Armstrongs on the Tyne, milling engines for Merlin bombers.

An Anderson shelter was installed in the front garden and fitted out for air raids although my grandfather was reluctant to use it. They put the black-out curtains up but he preferred to walk up and down the garden watching the night sky to sitting in the shelter.

In the whole course of the war there were 298 bombing raids over the northern (no. 1) region covering Tyneside, Northumberland, Durham and the North Riding of Yorkshire. (Sir A. Lambert 1945) Fatalities amounted to 1,447 with over 5,000 people injured. In the Newburn Urban District only three people were killed and 20 injured. These figures, in comparison with the large cities in the midlands and south east are, of course, slight.

The regional commissioner attributed the failure of the Luftwaffe to destroy Tyneside to three factors, the quality of the defenses, the geography of the rivers in the region making them poor guides for aircraft and, finally, "the natural industrial haze constantly obscuring the vital targets was an enormous protection ..."

(Sir A. Lambert 1945: 7)

One bomb did drop in Throckley Dene causing extensive blast damage. "What a bloody noise!" said uncle Jim. It slammed his doors, broke windows. Young Jackie hid in a cupboard under the stairs. It brought the ceiling down in uncle Jack's house and really scared my grandfather. When he heard the blast he dived into the Anderson shelter shouting "Where's me hat?" My granny responded to this with "Never mind your bloody hat as long as your bloody head's on." "The next morning," Sadie told me, "we all went looking at this big crater. The kids were all looking for bits of aeroplane glass and shrapnel to make rings and bracelets. All the greenhouses were shattered." Had the bomb landed on the housing estate nearby the casualties would have been serious.

Apart from this episode the only other event which brought the war in the air close to them was a loose bomb near Walbottle and an aircraft being brought down by a barrage balloon between Walbottle and Westerhope. Uncle Jack was required to billet some airmen during the war since they had some spare accommodation.

The war directly affected working hours and life styles; long shifts, ARP work, rationing, blackouts and bombing raids forced families into highly predictable routines. And all families have their stories of bizarre events during the war. Uncle Jack, a railway worker was nearly killed near Hexham when an ammunition dump he was working near exploded. He was also once taken for a spy by a schoolmaster at a country station and was locked up in the schoolroom till the police came. After that all railway workers were required to carry identity cards.

Mainly, however, the war was not bizarre; normal life went on but under increasingly difficult conditions. Some of these difficulties come through in the half-yearly statements of the co-operative store. In April 1940 the store committee noted:

The incidence of the Great War is felt in every village. Our kindred stands on foreign soil, between us and the enslavement that would come with defeat. We at home will be called upon to sacrifice such fancies as we have indulged in and eat many kinds of things that in peace time we would refuse. We can offer for sale only the meat the Government sends us We shall not starve if we conserve our resources. Keep the home front steady and our shopping dignified. (Balance Sheets, Throckley Co-op Tyne Wear Archive)

And in January 1941 the committee returned to the same theme:

We regret the severe restrictions now operating in this department, but we are now enduring a ration much less than our customary sales per member. It is the price we are now being called upon to pay, that a speedy victory may be ours. We are fortunate that our supplies are forthcoming unaccompanied by a blitz and we ought cheerfully to accept no more than the prescribed ration ... and we urge our members to accept the situation with what cheerfulness and tolerance they can muster until victory is secured.

Sadie told me that the main shortage in Mount Pleasant was butter. They did not get any bacon ration because they kept their own pigs and the gardens kept them well supplied. Jim, Jack and Bill had gardens, as well as my grandfather and they shared among themselves. Coal was a shortage, too. The supplies of domestic coal were strictly controlled, although not rationed, from January 1942 onwards. (WHB Court 1951) Miners still received their allowance but as a retired miner my grandfather got less than previously and invariably had to buy in extra.

Typically, however, the self-reliance theme which dominated his life re-asserted itself. He began to collect coal regularly from the dilly line or from the streets themselves if a load had not been properly "shovelled in." Gloria told me that if they, the children, were playing and noticed that coal had fallen off the

dilly onto the line they always ran home to tell their grandfather and he would go straight down and get his bucket. On occasions the men on the dilly "accidentally on purpose" would make sure some coal did fall off for him to collect. And during the wartime summers he used the method of mixing coal dust with soapy water to make "duff balls" to supplement supplies, a technique, he wryly commented which they discovered in 1926 and which the government was recommending to conserve coal.

The war emerges mostly in their memories as a matter of routine. There were occasional house parties up and down Mount Pleasant to play bingo to raise money to help soldiers. Many of the women in the street, including Eva and my grandmother made knitted squares for blankets and socks. They listened to the radio, complained at Lord Haw-Haw despite Nelly's theory that he really was on their side telling them exactly where bombs would be dropped. My grandfather particularly liked "Worker's Playtime."

The political management of the war seems not to have bothered him much. He was suspicious of Churchill and wondered after he became Prime Minister in 1940 who he might turn the guns on. Jim's view is perhaps similar to his father's with respect to Churchill as a war leader. Jim told me "Attlee and Churchill worked well in the coalition although Churchill got the praise." To the miners, at least those in my grandfather's circle of friends, Churchill was a man beyond forgiveness.

What my grandfather attended to with most seriousness during the war was his family. And the main concern was children. Gloria and Sadie were still young. He had nine grandchildren living close to him by 1939. In December of that year Jack's wife, Mary gave birth to a boy but the child did not survive. The death of babies was, then, something which still haunted them; Jim's wife, Nelly, had also lost a baby in the late 1920s. Both deaths were upsetting but both reflect a much larger problem. Infant mortality on Tyneside in 1937 was 82 per thousand births, an improvement on the 1925 figure of 93 but still much worse than the figure for England and Wales as a whole which was 58. (D. M. Goodfellow 1941) Children were, however, a source of much pleasure; each was indulged. During this period my grandfather kept a few geese and used the goose down to make quilts and layettes for the babies. Each child activated the old routines of christening parties. The older ones were taken on walks, or taken to the garden.

Gloria and Sadie, both remember long walks with my grandfather. He took them down the river with Bill's dog and walked all the way back through Heddon, a route he had tramped often enough with his own children. He clearly enjoyed these walks and, a normally quiet man, used them to talk about the past. Gloria still has vivid images of the terrible stormy night when, for the one and only time in his life, my grandfather, as a young man, turned back from the pit, frightened to work

through the night. He told them about his horses, his work as a lad, his days in Heddon. He showed them how to trap rats, to help chickens to hatch, how to steal a turnip. And he told them, too, about 1926 conveying to those girls his own values and those essential elements of social awareness which were part of mining and its past. The images were not just of exploitation although he did tell Gloria how he had worked harder out the pit than in it during the 1926 strike, and all the Brown children and grandchildren will retail his dislike of Churchill and the Tories. He communicated, too, a sense of a good life of neighbourliness and co-operation and he never changed his view that the Throckley Coal Company was a good one to work for. If they saw any of the Stephensons when they were out on their walks he invariably raised his hat to them.

The girls were clearly a vehicle for a kind of life review. Gloria says that, looking back, it is clear her grandfather was totally content and keenly interested in what went on around him. He knew every ditch and tree and field and was totally happy in the open air. Bill acquired a car in 1940 as part of his growing insurance business and he sometimes took his parents out on runs into the countryside. On one such run he hit a rabbit and the old man asked him to stop the car; he got out and with his penknife gutted and skinned the animal "and that", said Bill "was a meal." He never missed a chance and remained alert right through his long life.

Post War Social Change

The end of the war was celebrated with street parties and dances. The dominant mood was one of relief. Eva told me that there was singing in the streets and they were all decorated. "It was lovely to think we could have our windows lit up again." There was no sense, however, of a new world to be built. "Not in this village" said Bill when I asked him about the high expectations that some historians described. And Mary, Jack's wife, was more emphatic: "There was nothing to be optimistic about; we were making do and mend, making coats out of blankets!" My mother says that she expected a major economic depression after the war. The result of the First World War had been depression; they did not think this one would be any different.

The ending of the war was marred for my grandparents by the deaths of two of their grandchildren. My twin brother died at the age of nine months of bronchial pneumonia and convulsions in 1945 and Jack and Mary's daughter died, too, of the same illness at the age of eighteen months. In that same year Olive gave birth to her son, John Danskin, who became the first of the great-grandchildren. Francy, Olive's daughter gave birth to Ronnie Harvey, also the son of a soldier. In both cases the marriage faltered quickly.

Politically, however, the country was poised for a period of massive social change and the exhausted coalition government gave way after the General Election

of 1945 to a Labour Government under Attlee. This prospect excited my grandfather. Gloria remembers sitting up with him through the night listening to the radio as the results of the election came in. Alf Robens was elected as Labour M.P. for the Wansbeck Division, the first Labour M.P. for the Division since 1931. The Newburn and District Labour Party worked hard for this result and looked to the repeal of the 1927 Trades Disputes Act as a first priority for a Labour Government. In 1944, the end of the war in sight, the annual meeting of the Wansbeck Labour Party passed the following resolution from the Newburn Ward indicating quite clearly that nothing less than a Labour Government afterwards would meet their demands:

That this conference feels satisfied there is no hope of this Government making any fundamental change in our economic structure to provide a reasonable standard of life with security for the people and, feeling just as satisfied that the great majority of the people desire it, and are most certainly entitled to it, we, therefore, urge the Labour Party to give a bold and determined lead for the socialisation of Land, Finance, Industry and Transport, and a guaranteed National Minimum weekly wage, believing by so doing they will give new life and hope to the toiling masses in industry and the services and at the same time awaken an enthusiasm and a faith in the party that is so urgently needed. (Minutes of the Wansbeck Divisional Labour Party 1944 NRO)

The experience of war, the need to mobilise the whole civilian population and the changes which were introduced to deal with production, casualties and labour mobilisation and the commitment of both the main political parties to economic planning, had all combined to produce an entirely new set of opportunities and circumstances for political action. In the five years after the war the framework of what came to be understood as the welfare state was set up. Leaving aside whether these were socialist measures or not, even, whether they were effective, it is important to stress that for my grandfather's generation, these measures represented the highest of their political hopes. They brought the nationalisation of the pits and the railways; the repeal of the 1927 Trades Dispute Act; they brought a universal social security scheme and abolished, so it was thought the Means Test. The National Health Service was set up. Planning and full employment were key themes in all government policy. And the most obvious change was in council house building. Lamb's fields just below Mount Pleasant were designated for housing development and from 1946 onwards a large, extremely pleasant and well-laid-out estate was built, known locally as the White City. And council housing became the key theme again of local politics with a Labour council the "natural party of local government."

During this period my grandfather was in his middle 70s, alert, but not too clear about precisely what was

happening. Gloria brought this out nicely in respect of the National Health Service:

I don't think my granda understood the change. Gladys Dailtree came collecting for the Doctor's money and the Labour money. They had a card. If she didn't come Lizzy Storey came. When they changed and health stamps started he didn't click on to that. He didn't click on that you could go to the doctors and not pay. He hadn't paid for it so he didn't think you should have it. He didn't like getting two shillings off his prescription. If he had worked and paid for it ... that would have been a different matter.

But what she is picking up here, of course, is the life-long theme of independence and his utter dislike of charity. He did not feel he had accumulated rights under the scheme and he therefore questioned his own entitlement. When he was clear about his rights he was very prepared to insist on them. If the children could not play at the Throckley Welfare ground he would say angrily, "We paid for that; We're entitled to it." It was the same after the end of the war with his ration books. For a while the store had a scheme to give Australian tinned jam to pensioners but he wouldn't go to get it.

He did, however, try to keep himself informed on politics and world affairs and he and Bill used to discuss politics quite intensely. Alf Robens the M.P. visited his house on several occasions and stayed for

meals. Nobody can remember what they talked about but Gloria says of these visits:

We had to be on our best behaviour at the table.

He was given the best.

Nationalisation of the mines was for the miners a great achievement. The mines had been under effective state control throughout the war, although, on that account, not free of conflict. The period immediately after the war was difficult for the industry. Re-organisation plans had to be drawn up in the face of labour shortages and coal shortages. But it came. It came, Kirkby says, "with confusion and disillusionment in the minds of managers and workers alike." (1977: 200) In Throckley the transfer of the pits to the NCB went smoothly, the Throckley Coal Company being compensated on assets assessed at £236,328 in 1952. The company had already been paid £138,889 by the time of this assessment of assets. What did change more quickly was the management. Jim told me echoing the views of his father, that nationalisation:

Best thing that happened when they nationalised the pit. The people got a decent wage and everything then. (But) The cars started to drive into the pit yard. They didn't know who they were.

Old Tom Stobbart told me that nationalisation was a fine thing but they did it the wrong way; some of the old gaffas were still there. Uncle Jack complained about nationalisation on the railways. He used to tell Mary

that they had more bosses than workers. Where they always used to work with new wood they got old wood and they were worse off with respect to the quality of work. The only places which got new wood were the offices of the bosses. It does not matter whether these views are accurate; they were thought to be accurate. My grandfather reserved his judgement on nationalisation and he retained for a long time a distinctly romantic notion of it. In 1956, for example, the National Coal Board modernised the houses at Mount Pleasant installing a new fire-range and electricity. My grandfather was worried about this believing, as Eva told me, "the miners were trying to do over much too quick."

Old Age

James Brown was a remarkably busy man whose family life had been unique. His own family was brought up to adulthood by 1933 but from the late 1920s onwards he took on his daughter's family. By 1950 and the break up of Olive's marriage with Jack Danskin he took in his granddaughter and her child, the third time in his life when he had taken in other people's children. Involved as a surrogate father for two successive generations it is difficult to say when he became old.

The turning point, I think, was 1948, the year of his Golden Wedding Anniversary. This was celebrated with a huge family gathering in Mount Pleasant and it was a very proud day for both of them.



Golden Wedding Anniversary
Family Gathering

By this time their worries, in fact, were few. It is clear in retrospect that during this period those who were retired were in considerable risk of poverty. Abel-Smith and Townsend found in their re-analysis of data for the early 1950s that two thirds of those families with low expenditure had a retired head. (1965) But because of the peculiar composition of the Brown household and the net addition to their real income from the gardens, they were not poor. They were, in their own words, "hard up" but not poor. Gloria, Olive and Sadie were all working and contributing to the household income. Eva helped Bill occasionally collecting for his insurance business and Bill himself was doing well in business. They felt more secure in their old age than they had done throughout the course of their whole married life.

The old were indulged, at least, the men were. The two clubs in the village organised club trips and gave annual treats to old people. It often happened that all retired club members were given a half bottle of whiskey for Christmas. The local authority had placed several sheltered seats around the district where the old men could sit and talk away the hours. My grandfather, as Bill explained, did not mix in that way. He kept his socialising for the weekend drink. In the Union Jack club he had a special seat. If it was occupied when he came in most members would know that they were expected to give it up. When this happened my grandfather simply smiled and nodded and took up his position.

The most poignant recognition of the age status came, of course, from within the family. The old people were a kind of fulcrum around which the extended family revolved. Weekend nights, New Year and Christmas Eve's were important occasions for the family to gather together. From being a small child I can remember those weekend visits to Mount Pleasant. The whole scene seemed focussed on my grandfather; people deferred to his age and just before he arrived back from the club with the men the women hurried to get the supper finally ready. Sadie and Olive hurried back from the dance to be there on time. Sadie and Olive used to stand, their backs to the fire, their skirts lifted up to get warmed. Some of us younger ones used to see if we could snatch a glimpse of their knickers. I'm not sure whether we ever did but at least we tried. But when the old man came in the fire was cleared so he got a good open view of it. He was helped off with his clothes and shoes and fussed over. This pattern of indulgence went on till the day he died increasing in intensity as he became more and more frail.

From 1950 onwards my grandmother became frail. Circulatory problems coupled with a weakening heart slowed her up; heavy colds took their toll too. She died in 1953, coronation year. It was not unexpected. Since the death in the pit of her neighbour Jack Batey, killed by a fall of stone in the Maria, she had been depressed and poorly. My mother is convinced that Jack Batey's death was the start of her mother's decline.



Grandparents

Outside Mount Pleasant 1952

She never really recovered from a dose of flu which for a while had left her in a coma. Some of the family thought she would never emerge from the coma. Eva says that Francy had told her firmly "Get the dead clothes out." She survived for a while, all the time in her own bed in the alcove of the room.

She had never wished for an ostentatious funeral, simply cremation. Her coffin stood on tressles alongside the piano in the front room and life went on around it. One of the more vivid memories of my childhood is being led to look into that coffin and to see my mother kiss my grandmother for the last time.

The old man never really recovered from her death. He tried to carry on with his gardens and he managed to do so for another four or five years. He got through it, I think, by putting Eva in the role of his wife. From this time on, however, he was confronted with a lot of death. Being so old he knew so many other old people that he was confronted with death often enough. I often thought that my grandfather's generation literally died on him.

Uncle Jim Stobbart died also in 1953. Olive his eldest daughter, now living in Whitley Bay died of cancer in 1958. That was a blow to him; he was deeply attached to her and said that he should have died instead. In 1963 Francy died. Several of his brothers or their wives had died, too, by this time. He had attended many funerals in his old age each one, I suspect, confronting him

with the imminent possibility of his own. He discussed this with Eva expressing many times a wish to be buried at Heddon-on-the-Wall.

To A Council House

My grandfather was never on the periphery of his family life. During his last few years at Mount Pleasant he was directly involved in the lives of two of his grandchildren. Young Jimmy Brown was struggling hard after his national service in Egypt to build up a small holding. His grandfather helped him with pigs and chickens. And John Danskin, Olive's son who had lived with him since a child had always been keen to raise chickens and keep animals of all kinds, rabbits, whippets, pigeons, goats and pigs. His greatgrandfather helped him a lot, too.

In 1964, however, Olive re-married and Sadie about to be married, leaving, therefore, only himself, Eva and John Danskin in the house, Eva was offered a council house. The old man was reluctant to move but Mount Pleasant was scheduled for demolition. His surviving children are agreed the move killed him; it transposed him to an unfamiliar environment and lifted him out from a complex of memories and associations which he had woven into a personal image of a full rich life. The council house had no garden to speak of. It had an inside toilet and he thought that was unhygienic. He told Eva that he thought she had a nice house, never conceding it was his, too.



James Brown Aged 92 Years At
Mount Pleasant

He was now very frail. His daughters shaved him and washed him bodily. Worried by incontinence he was reluctant to go out for a drink he remained inside, always, of course, receiving regular visitors.

Life Review and Social Change

I once asked my grandfather how he would have arranged his life if he could have lived it again. He was very old when this conversation took place living in Eva's council house but in full possession of his faculties. His reply was something like this: "If I had the chance I would do just the same again. We had some hard times but we had some good times, too." Two points arise from this. The first is the apparent irrationality of it. Knowing what he had lived through it seems inconceivable that he could choose to do it again. But in fact, that is not I think, what he meant for with respect to most aspects of his life he could be quite critical. In carrying out his "life review" (see P. Thompson 1978) he would 'naturally' review his experience selectively in such a way that he could rescue a credible and worthy biography. Society helps in this by providing conventional formulae governing how to talk about the past.

In this respect my grandfather was retailing to me a conventional cliché. It was, however, a cliché with great personal significance; I do not believe he was either lying or deceiving himself. At the point when

I asked him the question his answer was honest and authentic although I also think he was mildly surprised that anyone should ask such a stupid question; he was not a man who dwelt much in the past and nothing in his own experience or, at least, not much, encouraged him to be "reflectively aware" of his own biography. My point, then, is that old people draw on conventional ways of talking about the past when they review their own biographies.

The second point is this: in saying he would live it again in much the same way he was articulating the view that while much had been difficult in his life he could nonetheless see in it the forward march of progress. And while one 'reading' of the history of "the common people" might dispute that much of any worth was gained at all - an argument which my uncle Bill used to taunt my grandfather with, especially when Bill was being critical of the Labour Party - it is undeniable that, contrasted with his early life before the First World War, his retirement and the world around him generally were incomparably better than anything he could conceivably have imagined. It might be ironic that having lived through some of the most difficult periods of the twentieth century he could look back with such a benign view of progress.

He measured such progress by the progress of his family. In each of them, in different ways, he saw the unfolding of social change. Of his three sons, two were

totally unconnected with the pits; his family were decently housed and three of them, Bill, Olive and my mother, were running their own small businesses. Most of his grandchildren and been to secondary schools, some to the Grammar school and higher education. All of them had jobs; some of them were running around in cars. They all had television. Doctors were capable of marvelous things "these days." And with respect to himself, I suspect he felt pleased that he was still well respected in Throckley and that in the face of much that might have destroyed it, he had kept his self respect.

For the last few years, however, he did not feel that well-known. Too many new people unconnected with the pits had come to the village. One small aspect of this was his unwillingness any longer to shop at the store. The older shop assistants knew him and understood that, because of his damaged hand they had to fold his fingers around his change. The newer ones did not know this and he felt embarrassed about it so he gave up shopping.

The life review was not all rose-coloured. Throckley had changed considerably since the Second World War. The Throckley pits themselves closed in 1953 and 1954. The Newcastle Journal headline on the closure of the Maria said: "The Dying Day of a Pit. New Jobs for the Men but they mourn ...". (March 13th 1953) My grandfather's comment was that it would be a better day when all the bloody pits were closed. Although the Throckley men

transferred to other pits Throckley had lost its character as a mining village. Work was available both elsewhere and in different industries, Throckley having by this time been completely absorbed into the conurbation of industrial Tyneside. Entirely new symbols of status and self respect had replaced the old ones of respectability and hard work. It would take several more volumes to chart this argument but affluence, social mobility, private housing, the welfare state, industrial diversification had produced a subtle metamorphosis in social relations which all of us alike have still to understand properly.

But in the course of it some things, by not fitting into the increasingly idealised image of the past, were thought to be lost. Community, neighbourliness, recognition, sharing and contentment had all disappeared. Gloria articulated this for me as she tried to sum up her grandfather. "He formed his own opinions" she said, "He knew he was an ordinary man, born to be a worker and didn't expect any different. He was more of a tradition man. He didn't like us to be greedy or envious. See to your needs first, not your wants. He used to say that to us." And she amplified the point talking about how he got his coals. The coal allowance for retired miners was never quite sufficient. My grandfather had supplemented this with coal-picking but later on he had often enough to buy coal from pitmen who had had their free loads delivered. He could never bring

himself, Gloria told me to actually pay the money over. He got Eva to do that. He was disgusted that he should have to pay for coal. "I've never had to pay for coal in me life" is what he told Gloria contrasting the treatment of old people in his young day with current attitudes. But he did not complain; he simply acknowledged that times had changed, largely for the better.

There is much of his picture of social change which is, however, false, at least in the sense that the economic changes which had brought affluence in the 1950s and early 1960s were not of a type which either gave ordinary people control of their lives or which could permanently shift the north east of England from its long term dependence on declining industry or arrest its pattern of long term industrial decline. (see for example: CDP 1977. Rowntree Research Unit 1974)

The Second World War was a fulcrum of change but the long term decline of staple industry in the region was not halted. Such new industry as did arrive was in the field of semi-skilled or unskilled work, often in units which were the branch factories of larger companies many of them multi-national. (Benwell CDP 1979; T. Austrin and H. Beynon 1980) Capital from the nationalised coal industry found its way into finance, banking and insurance and property development. Ian Harford has shown how the fortunes of local capitalists in west Tyneside were re-cycled out of the area's older industry into property and multi-nationals. (Benwell CDD 1978)

In the case of the Throckley Coal Company some of the capital, it seems, at least, went into property, some to mining operations in South Africa. (CDP 1979) And with respect to a whole range of social and economic indicators the north west of England can be shown to have remained a relatively disadvantaged and depressed area. (G. Taylor and N. Ayres 1969)

Such calculations, however, were not available to him. It would take too, a great deal more research and writing to develop these points fully. For my grandfather a feeling that throughout his life much had improved was something rooted in experience and real enough.

On February 10th 1965 I received the following letter from my mother:

Dear Billy,

Just a short letter to let you know, your Granda died at 20 min to 2 this morning. Jack Brown and Sadie came to seek me at 1 a.m. He was conscious when I went in, he knew me. He asked for another pillow to be put under his head, then he took hold of my hand, held it until he died. He slept away peacefully. Uncle Jim Brown was there, too also Jack Brown, Sadie and Eva. Jim and I laid him out. He is being cremated, but when, I don't know I loved my Dad very much but I am happy he is with my mother. I saw he had changed when I was up on Mon night. He had had three falls this last week. He has died with a nasty black eye.

He had a large funeral despite the vile weather. Throughout his life he had managed to remain independent; seen in this light his death was a triumphant tilt at circumstance. Right to the end he kept that autonomy dying where he always preferred to be, in his own home with his family.

Chapter Fifteen

CONCLUSION

The life of one man can at best be but an illustration of the lives and experience of a whole social group. And since the conventions of society limit strictly which parts of ourselves, our thoughts and feelings, we can legitimately convey to others, it is inevitable that a biography, itself reflecting the selective interests of the biographer runs the risk of distorting seriously the reality it seeks to describe. There must always be gaps in the record which no research technique can fill. Equally, the conventions of society, perhaps, too, the social and psychological needs of individuals, encourage selective portrayals of the self so that people can project and maintain, although not always successfully, a positive image of themselves in the eyes of others. The record or the data around which a biography must be written, irrespective whether the data is written down or, as in this case, passed on through interviews and personal recollections, is necessarily partial and this must be taken into account in writing.

Two methods have been used in this study to control such distortions. The first is to check all accounts of the subject against other historical materials. This is the method of triangulation. It involves, at a minimum, organising the data in a strict chronology so that the personal records can be examined for their coherence and

consistency against the logic of the situation they seek to portray and other kinds of data. To think in strict chronological terms is an historian's skill. Many of the respondents I spoke to found it difficult to locate their observations precisely in time. My job was to help them to do that, to take them back through their experience to help them recall the past more accurately. This method works. But it presupposes a great deal of background knowledge on the part of the interviewer. It involves more than one visit. In fact it is a process not of interviewing, but of dialogue. This leads to the second point.

The account of the subject of the biography given here is not, in a sense, my own. The words are mine but the account itself was built up co-operatively. I have tested my interpretations out on others; we have discussed whether they 'ring true.' When none of us knew what my grandfather's thoughts or feelings on a particular issue were we attempted to imagine them, checking various possibilities against what we knew already of the man and of other men like him. The result is not the truth of the matter; rather it is a plausible account, something that those who knew him well is consistent with what they really knew of him. This process, of course, is endless and it is not without its own special results. I think all of us have learned something through this work not just about the man we discussed, but about ourselves.

The data generated in this way, for all the distortions it necessarily contains, is vital data for history. Despite its limited focus on the life of one man and the changes which took place in a small corner of a large coalfield, the larger generalisations which both history and sociology seek to make about change in society, must at least be consistent with the patterns of change in social structure, in thought, feeling and relationships described here. The reason for this is a point about the logic of generalisation itself.

James Brown is portrayed here in some ways as a symbol for a whole group of men. I have not made him out to be representative of Northumberland miners of his generation; indeed, what has interested me most are the ways in which he was unique. But uniqueness can only be recognised through comparison. The position my grandfather occupied was that of a worker; this was the basic fact of his class position. As a worker in the coal industry his experience of class was different to that of workers in other industries e.g. agriculture or shipbuilding. And he sensed himself to be different. But even as a worker in coal his experience was different to that of miners in other coalfields of Britain and certainly from other coalfields abroad. The comparative study of mining is not so well developed that we can state systematically what explains those differences. From the work of Rimmlinger (1959) and Harrison (1979) and Martin Bulmer (1975) and

M. Daunton (1979) a list of the factors explaining such differences would certainly include the following:

1. Age of the coalfield: technical methods.
2. The geological character of the coalfield.
3. Structure of Ownership of the industry.
4. Size of undertakings; company policies;
character of the coal market served.
5. The degree of isolation of the community.
6. The structure of working relationships underground.
7. The pattern of housing tenure among miners.
8. Political and ideological environment of
the labour movement.
9. Religion.
10. The structural position of the coal industry in
relation to the rest of the economy.
11. The character and commitment of local trades
union and political leaders.
12. The nature of government involvement in the industry.

These and other factors, each interdependent with the others, combine in different ways in different pits and coalfields to define subtle differences of class position and experience among different generations of pitmen.

Within the same group of men there are further differences. Some miners are or were active in politics and the union, others were not. Some men were considered respectable, others not. Some remained within the pits, others sought opportunities elsewhere. It amounts to this: Given the same task, digging coal from the ground,

men act differently. That does not render generalisations about, for example, social classes invalid; rather it makes them complex. Approached this way, however, sociologists and historians have a powerful tool to probe the rich experience of particular and different groups of men and to see in that experience the way in which the larger structures of politics, trades unionism and class have been refracted through different levels of organisation from work and family life through trades union lodges to the labour movement as a whole and through that, to changes in government and the state itself. That experience constitutes in H. Becker's sense a mosaic (1971). My account must be seen as a limited description of only one part of it.

Pursuing the argument that the attitudes and outlook of working men are valid in terms of their own experience, I have tried to show in this book how the particular generation of miners represented here, working for a relatively small, paternalistic coal company in a village which isolated and penetrated by Methodism, developed attitudes which, while supportive of a tradition of Labour (or, at least, in the nineteenth century, Lib-Lab) politics, nevertheless, largely through relatively stable market conditions peculiar to their pits, acquiesced in industrial attitudes which were conciliatory and found class-based politics dangerous and almost alien. Younger men, partly influenced by a more radical ideological tradition acted and thought differently and even within

the group of older miners, differences in the character of union leadership in the different Throckley lodges resulted in varying patterns of industrial relations. In these respects Throckley was different from other villages in the Northumberland coalfield. My work cannot prove this proposition; it at least opens up the question so that what made Throckley unique can become part of a more general understanding of the character of mining communities.

The community had been described here as a constructed community. The coal company sought to employ high quality, temperate labour and to keep them. It wanted a community and not a labour camp. The men who came to Throckley built a life for themselves, as far as they could, free of the constraints of the company and its rules and the vicissitudes of winning coal. The community which developed had 'that necessary habit of mutuality' which many writers have detected as central to working class communities. (B. Jackson 1968: 166) But its structures were not simply defensive or as isolated as this image suggests; the union lodge, the Labour Party, the co-operative store had an offensive rationale, too, displaying at different points in time changing images of a better society adjusting strategies for achieving these ends according to the opportunities they were presented with.

Solidarity through political and industrial action rather than simply through neighbourly relationships

was a central feature of the community. But it was not an homogenous community free of division and nor did the idea of community carry the same meaning for people who lived in Throckely. My grandparents were of a generation of Throckley families which had experienced the insularity, the mutuality and the interdependence of a relatively small community dominated by the coal owners. Their children, however, grew to maturity in a village which, increasingly after the First World War, responding to several different trajectories of social change, was losing its character as a mining community, and in which relationships of paternalism were breaking down. I have tried to show what larger changes in the structure of British society transformed both mining and mining communities and have offered a tentative theory of social change as a consequence of crisis and power. Again, however, the point of comparison arises. Throckley meant different things to different generations; it meant different things to men and to women. Above all, it was never a static community, its structures frozen in time.

Even its history is not static; this too, is a matter interpretation, and that interpretation, taking the form of a life review, feeds how people understand themselves and their society. History, as Robert Colls has rightly pointed out 'is not a sovereign quantity somehow trailing out behind us like a great winding-away into the distance. The past has been but it lives only as much as society is aware of it.' (1977: 198)

It has been a particular awareness of the past which has shaped this study. My account of what has been significant in the lives of my grandparents had been built up by my family itself. History had been viewed selectively but it is a selectivity revealing much of what is important to them as people and to Throckley as a community. The list of what has been left out is infinite. But it is what has been put in that matters. The First World War, the 1926 strike, family life and so on; these are the themes important to their collective image of the past and their attitude to them is a measure of how far British society has changed. For there is double image; on the one hand a nostalgic picture of family and community. On the other a picture of poverty and squalor which they are glad to forget.

This ambiguity was a strong element of my grandfather's view of his past. In the main, however, despite the difficulties and the defeats his view of it was one of progress. His historical imagination extended back further than his own experience; it travelled far into rural Norfolk in the nineteenth century and measured against his image of the past the present was an improvement. But he was not a reflective man. Little in his education or his daily routines prompted him to be so. And in the end what he felt most content about was that he maintained over a long life his own self respect. That, for him, is what mattered most about class. It was a question of dignity and the recognition of others.

And it is the recognition of others which is at the core of the idea of culture which has been used in this book. To understand people from Throckley - or anywhere else - it is essential to grasp the totality of their way of life and the meanings which attach to their actions and to the social institutions which are the framework of those actions.

Re-reading this book I have been very conscious of many omissions. But what struck me most forcibly was that despite the difficult conditions in which my grandparents lived and worked, they were never brutalised. Theories of alienation, of men being less than what they could be because of their circumstances, seem, in retrospect to say little about a man who took a firm grip on his own life and never lost his self respect.

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