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**To Mark the Closure  
of the Last Pit  
in Rhondda**

**A  
Tribute  
to  
the**

**"Black Diamond"**

## A TRIBUTE TO THE ' BLACK DIAMOND '

To mark the closure, at Mardy, on 21st, December, 1990, of the Last Pit in Rhondda. This Commemorative Book aims to reflect, in their own words and photographs, the feelings of Rhondda people ..... the only people qualified to comment on the effects, good and bad, of the 150 year history of Coal Mining in Rhondda and the final disappearance of an Industry which brought dignity, tragedy, fame, comradeship, character and a true community spirit to our Valleys.

Produced by  
Rhondda Borough Council in conjunction with Mardy Lodge of the N.U.M.

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## **In Tribute to**

All Rhondda's Miners, past and present, their families and their communities.

All of whom knew the true cost of coal.

Rhondda was "born" out of coal and, since the 19th century, our communities have grown in stature. Raised on hardship and tragedy, Miners and their families forged the true community spirit which has become synonymous with the name of RHONDDA.

**Foreword**  
**from the Mayor of Rhondda Cllr. (Mrs) M. E. Chard**

Rhondda Borough Council are proud to be associated with the publication of this Commemorative Book, marking the end of coal mining in the Valleys. The literary and photographic contributions have come mainly from Rhondda people, giving them an opportunity to 'voice' their feelings, memories of the past and hopes for the future. The sensitivity, respect, creativity, foresight and down to earth common sense, which abound in the pages of this book, form a fitting tribute to every miner, all miners' families and each of Rhondda's mining communities throughout the 150 year mining history of Rhondda.

The honour I have felt representing the Borough of Rhondda during my Mayoral year has been, to me, a real privilege. So many official and unofficial engagements have brought with them a full range of emotions. All these occasions have left me with lasting memories.

I am, however, sure that no occasion will stand out in my memories of this eventful year more so than this day, Friday 21st December 1990. The closure, today, of Mardy Colliery, the last pit in Rhondda, marks the end of an historic era.

I am sure I speak, not only for myself, but also for my fellow Councillors and the people of Rhondda when I say that this will be a day of very mixed emotions. The 150 year history of Coal Mining in the Rhondda Valleys has brought our communities hardship and tragedy, but the spirit of the people has always risen above these trials. The World-wide fame of the "Black Diamond" is a tribute to the very people who endured so much with great pride, dignity and courage.

Rhondda's greatest asset has always been and will continue to be it's people. Their strength of character, resilience and community spirit, born out of the harsh living and working conditions of the past, will continue to support our communities in defiance of the total shut down of the industry which made Rhondda what it is today.

Underpinning this spirit of defiance the Rhondda Borough Council will continue, unabated, to apply pressure and argument to all relevant organisations and Governmental Bodies to secure maximum investment in the economic regeneration of our Valleys. Notable successes have been achieved to date, and the soon to be published "Economic Development Strategy", catalogues further, major plans for the future.

Rhondda's mining history, which ends today, will never be forgotten, least of all by the people of the Valleys. We owe a great debt to our forefathers, they entrusted to us a solid community foundation. I hereby pledge the commitment of the Borough Council to continue to honour that trust in practical terms.

We will carry the honour of our past with us to the fulfilment of a glorious future for the twin Valleys of Rhondda.

Hwy Clod Na Golud.

## MARDY - LAST PIT IN THE RHONDDA

The name of the Colliery is a corruption of the original "Maer-dy". The first syllable is the Celtic term for a Tribal Chieftain, and the second syllable means house.

The Mardy Pits were sunk at points about 1,000 ft. above sea-level at the far end of the Rhondda Fach. Mardy Colliery was developed by the enterprise of Mordecai Jones, a native of Brecon, he was chairman of Brecon Gas Works, High Sheriff for the County in 1876, Deputy Lord-Lieutenant, and a Justice for the Peace.

In partnership with another man, Wheatly Cobb, the hazardous task of sinking the shafts was started in 1875 and the first seam, the Abergorki, was struck in December 1876, the first consignment being shipped from Cardiff in April 1877. The shafts continued to the deeper seams which were developed in 1878, output rapidly increased, until by 1884 annual production stood at 160,000 tons of high quality steam coal.

On December 23rd 1885, an explosion occurred, underground, where two hundred men were entombed and eighty one lost their lives, a catastrophe which took a terrible toll on the community.

Meanwhile in 1879 the lease of the colliery was obtained by the Lockett - Merthyr Company who continued operations until after the 1926 lock-out. Subsequently the colliery re-opened under the Welsh Associated Collieries in 1932, and by Powell-Duffryn in 1935 until further closure in 1940.

In line with the general history of the coalfield the pits were the main source of employment, indeed, villages like Maerdy were single industry communities and only came into being because of the sinking of the pits.

The inter-war years were times of great industrial unrest, and social distress culminating in the 1926 lock-out, where the people of Maerdy stood out as a beacon of community spirit, political awareness and solidarity. It was during these turbulent times that Maerdy was nicknamed "Little Moscow".

In 1947 the Labour Government Nationalised the Coal Industry, a year later they approved plans for a major project for the work of the coal reserves at the Northern end of the Cwmdare and Rhondda Fach valleys. The

objective, to construct a completely modern colliery using the existing shafts of Mardy 3 & 4 and Bwllfa No. 1 shaft.

It was estimated that there were 115 million tons of workable coal in the twelve different seams available to the project, containing some of the best quality dry-steam coals in South Wales. The total expenditure of £6.6 million providing in excess of one hundred years of life.

The project was planned to provide employment for labour which was employed in the collieries of these two valleys which were deemed as nearly exhausted. When work commenced the contours of the old surface features were bulldozed out of existence, in its place a completely modern complex was constructed. Underground was also on modern trends, the continental method of horizon mining was adopted. The Bwllfa No. 1 shaft (upcast) was connected to the Mardy 3 & 4 shafts by tunnels on the first and second horizons. Three main Horizons served the colliery at depths

Yellow Horizon - 242 yards

Red Horizon - 325 yards

Blue Horizon - 408 yards

These horizons had access to 80 million tons of workable coal in the longer term, a fourth horizon could be driven and so, in 1958 all necessary work completed, Mardy was ready to fulfil the dreams of its creators.

Sadly, on December 21st 1990 the dream ended prematurely.

**Eric Price, Secretary  
Mardy Lodge N.U.M.**

I FEEL IT A DEEP HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE, AS CHAIRMAN OF MARDY LODGE, TO BE PART OF THIS FINAL ACCOUNT OF THE END OF AN ERA IN COALMINING IN THE RHONDDA VALLEY.

IT WAS CERTAIN THAT FROM THE TIME THAT THE FIRST COLLIERY WAS SUNK IN THE SOUTH WALES VALLEYS, MANY YEARS AGO, THAT EVENTUALLY THERE WOULD BE A TIME WHEN THE LAST ONE WOULD FINALLY CLOSE AND THAT IS HOW THE WORKFORCE OF MARDY COLLIERY WILL FACE ITS CLOSURE ON DECEMBER 21st 1990, WHEN THEY LEAVE THE COLLIERY FOR THE LAST TIME, NEVER TO RETURN AGAIN. THAT DAY WILL END THE ERA OF RHONDDA COALMINING.

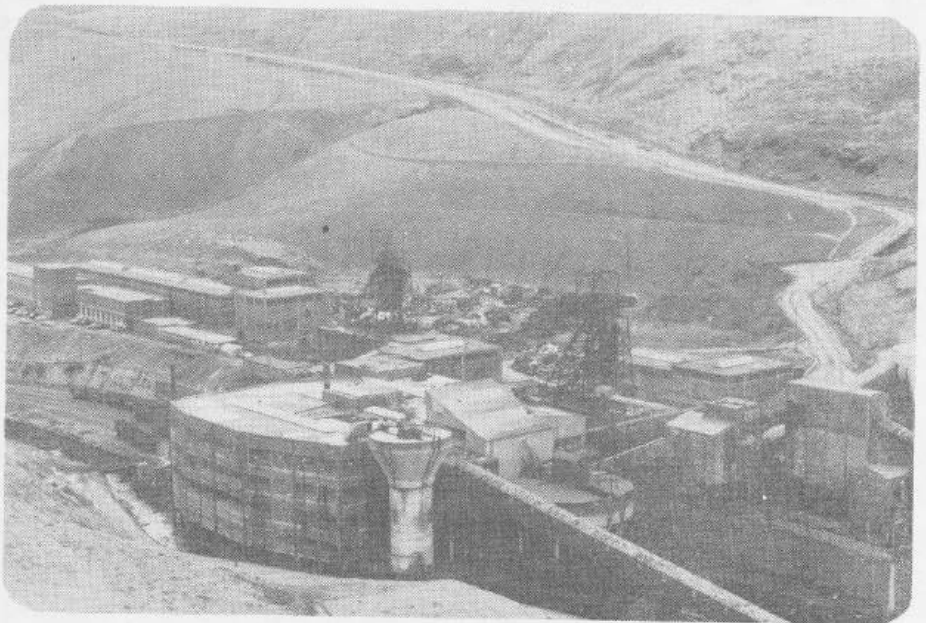
THE HISTORY OF THE MINERS' FEDERATION AND THE PRESENT NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkERS HAS BEEN RECORDED IN MANY BOOKS COVERING ALL THE PAST EVENTS OF OUR UNION AND IT IS NOT MY INTENTION TO REFER TO ALL OF THEM OR TO DWELL UPON THEM, BUT FOR THE MEN IN THE MINING INDUSTRY, AND FOR THE SOUTH WALES NUM, THE PAST 5 YEARS HAVE BEEN THE MOST TRAUMATIC AND CATASTROPHIC FOR THE UNION, AND FOR OUR INDUSTRY. WE HAVE WORKED AND OPERATED UNDER THE MOST DIFFICULT CONDITIONS AND WITHIN A POLITICAL CLIMATE WHICH BRITISH COAL HAS USED IN ITS HOSTILITY TOWARDS THE MINERS AND OUR UNION, BUT THE AREA LEADERSHIP AND THE LODGE LEADERS CAN HOLD THEIR HEADS HIGH, IN HAVING ALWAYS DEFENDED OUR BASIC RIGHTS AS TRADE UNIONISTS.

THE VICTORIOUS STRIKES OF 1972 AND 1974 SEEM SO VERY LONG AGO NOW, BUT DESPITE THOSE VICTORIES OUR MEMBERS RETURNED TO WORK AFTER THOSE STRIKES, WITH A MAGNANIMOUS APPROACH TOWARD THE INDUSTRY AND TO THE NCB, AND RETURNED TO DILIGENT WORKING IMMEDIATELY.

THE END OF THE 1984/85 STRIKE, HOWEVER, WAS A VERY DIFFERENT SITUATION. WE SUFFERED A BITTER DEFEAT BY A TORY GOVERNMENT—SUPPORTED COAL BOARD, AND ON RETURNING TO WORK WE SUFFERED A VENGEFUL AND VICIOUS ATTITUDE FROM THE NCB, WHO IMMEDIATELY BEGAN TO SLAUGHTER PIT AFTER PIT, WITH MINERS NOT KNOWING WHICH PIT WOULD BE

CLOSED NEXT.

ALTHOUGH THE MEN IN MARDY FELT THE SAME INSECURITY, AS THAT FELT BY ALL OTHER MINERS IN THE COUNTRY, WE CONTINUED TO FIGHT OFF AN ATTEMPT TO CLOSE THE MINE IN 1985 AND DEMONSTRATED, BY OUR SUCCESS, IN THOSE FOLLOWING YEARS, THE MADNESS OF BRITISH COAL AND THIS TORY GOVERNMENT OF CLOSING COLLIERIES ON A SHORT TERM POLICY, WHICH IN THE LONGER TERM, COULD BE SUCCESSFUL, EMPLOYING MANY PEOPLE AND MAKING A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY, RATHER THAN THROWING YOUNG MEN ONTO THE DOLE QUEUE WHICH IS THE CASE IN SO MANY OF OUR MINING VALLEYS.



THE MEN IN MARDY WITH THEIR COURAGE AND DETERMINATION HAVE BEEN PROUD MEMBERS OF THE MINERS' UNION AND ARE FAMED NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY, IT IS TRUE TO SAY, BY THEIR POLITICAL AWARENESS, THEIR UNITY AND SOLIDARITY IN ALL INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN THE MINING INDUSTRY OVER THE YEARS. THE MARDY LODGE AND ITS MEN WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED BY TRADE UNIONISTS, YOUNG AND OLD. AS MEN WHO HAVE STOOD BY ITS UNION AND ITS CAUSE IN A MINING VALLEY THAT IS KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE WORLD - THE RHONDDA.

MIKE RICHARDS  
Chairman Mardy Lodge NUM.

# *In Loving Memory* of the 3527 MINERS Who lost their lives in COLLIERY DISASTERS

**IN WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE DURING THE LAST 95 YEARS.**

		Killed			Killed
1837	May 10, Plas-yr-Argoed, Mold	21	1878	September 1, Abercarn	62
1837	June 17, Blaina, Mon.	21	1878	September 11, Abercarn	268
1844	January 1, Dinas	12	1879	January 13, Dinas	3
1845	August 2, Cwmbach	28	1879	Sept. 22, Waunllwyd, Ebbw Vale	84
1846	January 14, Risca	35	1880	July 15, Risca	119
1848	June 21, Victoria, Mon.	11	1880	December 10, Naval Steam Colliery	96
1849	August 11, Llety Shenkin, Aberdare	52	1882	January 15, Risca	4
1850	December 14, New Duffryn Colliery	13	1882	February 11, Coedcae	6
1852	May 10, Duffryn	34	1883	February 1, Coedcae	6
1853	March 12, Risca Vale	50	1883	August 21, Gelli	4
1856	July 13, Cymmer	114	1884	January 16, Cwmavon	10
1858	October 13, Duffryn	20	1884	January 28, Penygraig	11
1859	April 5, Neath Chain Colliery	26	1884	Nov. 8, Pochin Colliery, Tredegar	14
1860	December 1, Risca	146	1885	Naval Colliery	14
1862	February 19, Gethin, Merthyr	47	1885	December 24, Maerdy	81
1863	October 17, Margam	39	1887	February 18, Ynyshir	37
1863	December 24, Maesteg	14	1888	May 14, Aber, Tynnewydd	5
1865	June 16, Tredegar	2	1890	January 20, Glyn Pit, Pontypool	5
1865	December 20, Upper Gethin	30	1890	February 6, Llanerch	176
1867	November 8, Ferndale	178	1890	March 8, Morfa	87
1869	May 23, Llanerch	7	1892	August 12, Great Western Colliery	58
1869	June 10, Ferndale	60	1892	August 26, Park Slip	110
1870	July 23, Llansamlet	19	1894	June 25, Cilfynydd	276
1871	February 24, Pentre	38	1896	January 28, Tylorstown	57
1871	October 4, Gelli Pit, Aberdare	4	1899	August 18, Llest Colliery, Garw	19
1872	January 10, Oakwood, Llynvi Valley	11	1901	May 24, Seghenydd	82
1872	March 2, Victoria	19	1901	September 10, Llanbradach	12
1872	March 8, Wernfach	18	1905	March 10, Clydach Vale	31
1874	April 5, Abertillery	6	1905	July 5, Wattstown	119
1874	July 24, Charles Pit, Llansamlet	19	1913	October 13, Senghenydd	436
1875	December 4, New Tredegar	22	1923	April 26, Trimsaran	9
1875	December 5, Llan Pit, Pentyrch	12	1927	March 1, Cwm, Ebbw Vale	52
1876	December 13, Abertillery	20	1929	July 10, Blaenavon	8
1877	March 8, Worcester Pit, Swansea	18	1932	January 25, Llwynypia	11

*A sudden change; at God's command they fell;  
They had no chance to bid their friends farewell;  
Swift came the blast, without a warning given,  
And bid them haste to meet their God in Heaven.*

## AN APPRECIATION OF THE MINER

There are various occupations in this world of din and strife,  
And the struggles, they are many, to meet the needs of life.  
We move along like busy bees in this big industrial hive,  
And it sometimes seems miraculous how all of us seem to thrive.  
But of all the many callings, there is one of which all can say,  
That their lives are held in jeopardy all through the dreary day.  
Deprived of natural air and robbed of all its light,  
They earn their daily bread in a place as black as night;  
Down in the bowels of the earth, away from all sunshine,  
For mothers, wives and children, they toil down in the mine.  
Without the aid of these splendid men, our key industries would die,  
Our engines, and our navies too, though with oil they've had a try;  
The happy homes of England would lack the joy and mirth  
If the much talked of miner did not keep a cheerful hearth.  
His sacrifices are many, and oft-times we are told  
That beneath the grime of coal-dust beats many a heart of gold.  
Now and again we are reminded, and then the nation stirs  
To read of brave, heroic deeds when a mine explosion occurs:  
How men will volunteer, with lives almost in their hand,  
To save their fellow-comrades they will form a little band;  
They descend the mine with the courage that shall forever last,  
Although, perhaps an hour before, 'twas the scene of a terrible blast.  
In the recent mine explosion that just took place in Wales,  
We have been given proof of their bravery in tales  
Of how many risked their lives, if possible, to save  
Their pals, comrades, yes, brothers, too, from such an awful grave.  
We have listened, to, with sympathy of children who are left  
Fatherless, and who perhaps in future of pleasures will be bereft,  
Of mothers, wives, and sweethearts, who sadly will recall  
That the mine to them will forever be a funeral pall.  
So when you hear, as you will do, of the miner being a cad,  
Think that amongst the miners, there are some not really bad.  
And when seated by your fireside, and you see the coal's red glare,  
Just give a thought to the miner and for him say a prayer.

**Written and Composed  
by F. E. Popham**

## Poems from the Children at Maerdy Junior School

At 7 o'clock the hooter blows,  
And down the pit the miners go.  
In darkness there they cut the coal,  
They know its better than the dole.

The work is dusty noisy and wet,  
But the work is done without a fret,  
Their comradeship is second to none,  
Through all the grime they still have fun.

The colliery ghosts are starting to moan,  
They really don't want to be left alone,  
Some of the miners were really quite scared,  
When ghosts were spotted and voices heard.

So Mardy pit is due to closure,  
Sad day for the people of Rhondda,  
Three hundred men looking for jobs  
Where will it end I wonder.

Christopher Williams  
10 yrs. 4 mths..

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Mardy pit's been here so long  
Since eighteen seventy five  
I'll bet that all the miners  
Are glad to be alive.

Mardy pit is now to close  
It's time has come to pass  
The miners rest their weary bones  
They'll see the sun at last.

No more fathers, no more sons  
To descend in the dark  
Time to watch their grandchildren  
Playing in the park.

No more coal, no more toil  
No more blood and sweat  
The last pit in the Rhondda  
Will shut with all the rest.

Paul Clement  
10 yrs. 10 mths

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The last pit in the Rhondda has been put to rest,  
The miners that worked there strove to do their best,  
In years to come they can look back with pride,  
How they fought to keep it open, side by side.  
Now they can look forward to a different way of life,  
Far removed from coal dust, and all the sweat and strife.

Emma Warton

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Mardy pit is closing down  
We're going to say "Goodbye"  
They now have no more use for it,  
So they're leaving it to die.  
Last pit in the Rhondda -that is,  
That's one of its claims to fame.  
But when they take the mine shaft down  
Maerdy will never be quite the same.

Ceri S. Jones  
10yrs 5 mths

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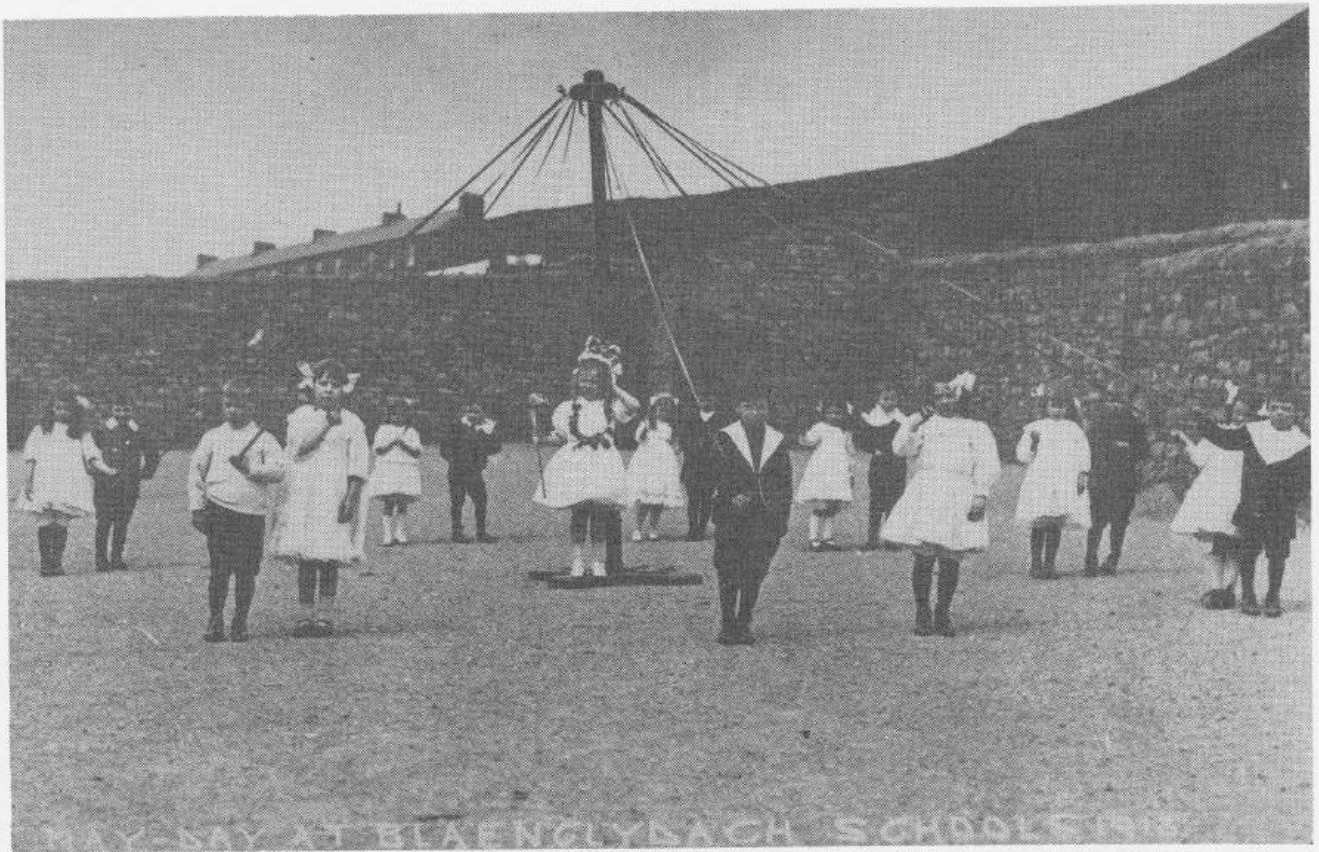
Mardy pit is closing down.  
A gloomy day it will be.  
All around the people frown,  
There's no more in this Valley.

Twenty first of December is the time.  
The day that history's made.  
The day that we will lose our mine,  
But Maerdy'll make the grade.

Loy Lee

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December twenty first the end of an era  
 For men and boys who went with no fear,  
 Digging for coal through night and through day,  
 Never to see the sun's shining ray.

Returning along the homeward bound track  
 With black aching arms and an aching back  
 They step into the cage to rise above  
 To breath the fresh air that all miners love.

Just because they no longer want Mardy coal  
 All of our miners must sign on the dole  
 This is the last of the pits in the Rhondda  
 Can our community last out much longer.

Yes it can and I'm sure it will  
 Our village will survive until  
 More work comes for men to do  
 Don't worry men you'll see it through.

Julian Pike  
 10yrs 6 mths

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The last pit in the Rhondda to close,  
 Just unlucky miners, I suppose.  
 There'll be no more black coal,  
 Only more men on the dole.

The strike hit hard, the mine stood still  
 In our village on the hill.  
 Spirits fell as the months went by  
 But the Maerdy spirit will never die.

Mardy pit will close for good  
 Just as Thatcher said it would.  
 Coal dust will settle all around  
 Like in the chest, while underground.

The lifts will soon be at a halt.  
 This is not the miners fault.  
 Machinery stops, the valley's dead  
 And that is all that can be said.

Carla Hughes  
 10yrs 10mths

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## RHONDDA AFTER COAL

Rhondda without Coal. Laurel without Hardy. Switzerland without Watches. Burton without Taylor. Rhondda without Mines. Wales without Rain. Laughter without Tears. Morecombe without Wise. Rhondda without Miners. Gorbachev without Russia. Fish without Chips. Kinnock without Glenys. Rhondda after Coal.

Rhondda without Mardy Colliery : at the very end of 1990 after a full century and a half of coal getting in the Rhondda the unimaginable has happened. Unimaginable, that is, to anyone who has been part of that history in which the mining of coal saw the making of communities. Rhondda's existence as any kind of packed human settlement has been dependent, in good times and bad, from the first scratchings at Dinas to the deep sinkings at Treorchy, on Coal. The nature of the Valleys' culture took its clue from that male dominated, heavy industry. There were the swelling, dress-shirted male choirs and the phenomenon of the 'Rhondda Forward' to stiffen the Edwardian Welsh XV's; deacons in Chapel, drinkers in Pubs, hunger marchers en route. It was a public world of men counterpointed by the domestic and family lives of women whose influence was never power and whose identity was often left as subterranean as the daily work of their male companions. In all of this there was compromise and struggle within the framework of Rhondda lives as well as against the common enemies of exploitation, poverty and death. Above all, and it is a fact not a cliché, there was, from generation to generation, a sense of shared discovery in the possibilities of communal life and neighbourly behaviour. Rhondda's solidarity of the spirit was based on the rock of comradeship.

No one who was present in 1985 when Mardy miners marched back to the pit head on a cold, blustery morning at the end of their epic strike will ever forget their brave defiance or the heart-rendering playing of the band. It was the last act of a long drama and those men and their

equally brave families, in their stunningly resolute togetherness for twelve bitter months, did credit not only to themselves but to the whole of Rhondda's people, those alive and those long dead - The ghosts of 1898 and of 1910, of 1926 and of 1935, of 1947 and 1972, seemed to swirl around that small band as it played at the funeral of all of us who have, one way or another, been marked and shaped by that coalfield culture of South Wales in which Rhondda was paramount for a hundred years.

The images linger yet. In Maerdy Hall, that brooding mausoleum of hopes deferred, Noah Albett is being appointed checkweigher in 1910 and talks of workers' control; in 1919 his protege, the brilliant 25 year old Arthur Horner succeeds Albett and, on his release from



prison for conscientious objection, vows to fight the Class War instead. The shelves groan with books purchased and the building echoed with debate and anger and laughter. In the 1930s when the Company closes the pit the unemployed Horner is told that it is he, and his kind, who have caused grass to grow on its surface. When he returns to mark a new era for the resurgent pit's history in the 1940s it is as General Secretary of the N.U.M., and the industry is already nationalised. Little Moscow bears its name as a badge of pride. For the Rhondda, as a whole, the post-war period promised an utter rejection of the protracted agonies of inter war unemployment and population decline. Hopes

are raised, and in many ways triumphantly met. But Rhondda's condition remained the condition of coal. The struggle takes on new shapes in the 1960s and rapid closure of pits defers fresh hopes. Through the conflicts that then unfold Rhondda miners will be to the fore. As the N.U.M. in South Wales today surveys the wreckage and speaks, yet again, with courage and honour, and with the voice of reason in the accents of Rhondda's Arthur Cook, Arthur Horner and Will Paynter, the President and the General Secretary, Des Dufield and George Rees, are Rhondda men. In 1990 they are at the helm of the Union that Rhondda's M.P. William Abraham, once led as its first President in 1898.



Pit hooters will never again disturb Rhondda days like the mournful digital watches of slumbering giants. No one, one day soon, will be able to recall the sound of hob nailed boots clattering by the hundred in the early morning or sniff the dark, sour smell of pit clothes or feel the grit of small coal soaked from bodies by sudsy tin baths of twice used water. Of course there is, too, the thankfulness that here, at least, no more will be killed or impaired underground to add to the horrifying total Rhondda has amassed. Nor will Rhondda' women see the finish of their history as handmaidens to King Coal as anything other than a cause to rejoice. Even so, this final leave-taking which the closure of Mardy Colliery represents cannot but touch us with overwhelming regret. A whole way of life that gave fame and meaning to the name of Rhondda now disappears from sight and from touch forever.

All of which makes it vital that we treat this aftermath of the funeral of 1985 as a wake. It must be a sorrowful occasion but it should also be a celebration of our history, our significance and of Rhondda's future. The legacy of our forebears should not be swilled away with sentimental tears, it should be inherited with gratitude. You only have

to look down on Maerdy, from high above the colliery clutched at the valley's blank end, to see its bunched terraces, closed together in a fist of self-knowledge, radiating local pride. No one pretends it will be easy to

maintain, in Maerdy or the Rhondda or anywhere in the Valleys, but whoever said it was ever easy ? These people, in this beautiful landscape of hillside and plateaux given human shape by an irreplaceable valleyscape of terraces and darting roads, will not readily lose their togetherness by letting go from their special places. Sooner than you think others will come in to join them, recognising what this city of the spirit, in its unique setting, can alive offer. The future of the Rhondda then, after coal, will still depend on the physical traces of that saga and on the memory of it that History, in all its guises, from books to films to heritage centres, must articulate to give value to the story of Rhondda's people.

Rhondda after Coal: Rhondda with People. Rhondda without Coal : Rhondda with Purpose. Rhondda in the 1990s: Rhondda into the 21st Century.

Dai Smith.

## **A MINER'S DREAM - Maureen Jackson**

For many years in Wattstown  
Lived Will Evans and his dream  
To one day win the pools  
And breathe fresh air

So every week like clockwork  
His coupon he sent in  
It could mean a life extension  
For a miner something rare

This man was born a comic  
of his talent there's no doubt  
When acting in the local play he shone  
He could make you laugh  
And make you cry "A natural" they said  
With his name on the bill  
All seats were gone

But through his life his dream remained  
And Saturday each week  
When the results were broadcast  
Not a soul would dare to speak  
Three minutes silence were observed  
By all who were around  
But never did his dream come true  
Eight draws he never found

But wealth did come a trifle late  
Three years to be exact  
For Will had died of coal dust  
A carefully proven fact  
The cheque was compensation  
Sent to his devoted wife  
The one thing that is cheap today  
The price for a mans life

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## **DOLE DAY AGAIN - John Morgan 1974**

My pit closed down a year ago -  
The Gelli Number Two.  
I'm forty five, tho' I don't look so,  
And I want some work to do.

But it's dole day again, it's starting to rain,  
Another morning signing on for me.  
It's dole day again, it's starting to rain,  
Can't get a job, they say I'm too old you see.

I'm fed up sticking round the 'ouse,  
Tho' the missus doesn't care.  
I'm in the corner like a mouse,  
At four blank walls I stare.

I'm fit as any man could be -  
Well for the age I am;  
That, all them up the dole agree,  
But they don't give a damn.

I agree the young should get the first  
Refusal, but it's hard.  
I always seem to get the worst  
Of the deal - the losing card.

The Tories if they could I'm sure,  
Would create more unemployed;  
For they can't know what men endure -  
When jobless feel destroyed.

Some dignity is all I ask -  
A job that I could do;  
Any kind of menial task -  
I know I could get through.

But it's dole day again, it's starting to rain,  
Another morning signing on for me.  
It's dole day again, it's starting to rain,  
Can't get a job, they say I'm too old you see.

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## **MADE IN WALES - John Watkins**

The shop counter was alive  
With memories of those  
Who had died.

To holiday makers buying presents,  
The black figures were shelf ornaments  
Real coal - Made in Wales.

Daffodils and dragons, male voice choirs and songs  
This isn't just my heritage, its where my heart belongs  
The Rhondda Valley is my home and wherever I may  
wander, be it far or be it near  
It doesn't really matter because my roots are here.

I remember days gone by when miners were the pinnacle  
Of what this Valley stood for, their lives a minor miracle  
Each day they all descended into dark, deep, dirty mines  
To hew the coal and fill the drams and send them down the lines  
The conditions and the dangers must have been horrendous  
But equally I have to say their courage was tremendous.

The wives they also suffered, the worry and despair  
Never knowing if their loved ones would return home to that chair  
The one that sat beside the hearth, especially for dad  
There's many a chair stayed empty, it was so terribly sad,  
More heartbreak often came to pass when a mother lost her lad.

On Sundays it was Chapel, be the weather foul or fair  
To offer up our thanks to God, with a silent prayer  
We'd listen to the sermon, then sing our favourite hymns  
And humbly ask the Lord above to forgive us all our sins.

The times they are a changing in this valley I adore  
They've closed the pits, transformed the tips and more  
Monuments are being placed in prominent positions  
Bastions proclaiming the virtues of the minions.

If our generation holds within our hearts and minds  
The courage, strength and fortitude our fathers left behind  
Our heritage will always be well renowned world wide  
Of a valley where its people will always walk with pride.

Sheila Hollins

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**Maerdy - The Last Pit in the Rhondda - Jennifer Edwards**

There's a sadness in my soul  
300 men now on the dole  
Rhondda's factories now make no sound  
For Rhondda's factories are underground

Gone - the last pit in the Rhondda - Mardy  
Gone are the miners, gone our history  
Little Moscow's not the same  
Robbed of her wealth but not her fame.

No longer will I ever meet that black face on the street  
In the village of fire and coal gone is the mine but not the soul.

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## MARDY PIT - Pat Sheppard

The last pit in the Rhondda is closing. This is a very emotive issue for the ordinary Rhondda person in the street and of course a great problem for the Welsh Office, and many Government departments.

Writing as an outsider who is privileged to live in the Rhondda, I am delighted to see the end of the mining era. Every path, every mountain and every rock in this place runs red with the blood of young men who died before their time because of exploitation by the Mine Owners. Coal was King and Money was God. The slaves were sent down the pit to serve their God and their King.

“This travesty of justice must never be allowed to happen again,” so let us keep our Rhondda Heritage Park, erect a statue, unveil a roll of Honour in memory of those who died serving God and Mammon. Let us then transfer it to history, where it belongs, and let us have the Valleys green again.

If I could wave a magic wand, then the sons would pay for the sins of the fathers, but I doubt that England will ever pay the full price for the destruction of life and countryside. Let us therefore settle for the largest crumbs we can get, and turn the Valley into a fitting memorial to its brave, loyal and exploited ancestors.

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### Maerdy Pit - 30th June 1986. - Moira Hodgkinson

The last truck of coal has been taken out of the Mardy pit in the Rhondda. No rejoicing, brass band, no gold cups or silver salvers. The heart of the valley kept Britain warm, powered steam engines and great ships. Only scars and untidy mounds of rubble are left. The huge wheel is still. It will never turn to take men and boys to darkness and danger. We could never afford to pay the true worth of hours spent getting the ‘black diamond’ out of the earth. Each shift worked by the miners, could have been their last hours alive, Killing dust, coldness, damp or really wet conditions were a daily experience, while lurking in the shadows was Methane, ready to snatch life away. Their homes and loved ones a few miles away sometimes above their heads or even in the next valley. Lives depended on the

safety officers and your ‘butty’ working beside you. Some pits used ponies for hauling coal trucks along the mine workings. They were treated well by the miners and their handlers. Dinners shared and apples for special treats. Mice were also fed by accident or design, especially if the food box wasn’t properly closed. As the last shift came up, I am sure there were a few tears shed. A way of life is gone and nothing to replace it. The older men can plan a life of tomorrow, and tomorrow. For the young and middle aged a despair blacker than any lump of ‘best Welsh’ coal. God bless them all. We must not forget the boys and men who died underground. Lives lost for greed or gain, by the owners in some cases. Remembered always by their families and friends.

Let not the nation forget them.

**MAERDY (1840-1990)**  
by **HAWYS JAMES**

Thickly wooded, lush green pastures,  
Fishes filling pond and stream,  
Birds of every size and colour,  
Place of beauty, artist's dream,  
Squirrels travelling down the Valley,  
Leaping on from tree to tree,  
River Rhondda Fach like crystal,  
That's how Maerdy used to be.

Eighteen seventy five - a coal mine  
Sunk by Jones and Wheatley Cobb,  
Hooter's wail and black faced miners  
- Shoni, Ianto, Dai and Bob;  
Immigration into Maerdy,  
Families swarmed and settled there,  
Row on row of hillside houses,  
Slag heaps, coal tips everywhere .

Eighteen seventy five - explosion !  
Eighty one poor souls were killed,  
On Christmas Eve this tragic happening,  
Families with grief were filled,  
Strikes by miners came years later,  
When they struggled for their rights,  
Rioting in Tonypany,  
Soldiers, marches, clashes, fights .

No work then, no money either,  
Children standing each with bowl  
By soup kitchens, thin and hungry,  
Fathers couldn't claim the dole.  
Jazz bands formed in Maerdy village,  
Choirs' voices filled the air,  
Chapels full, gymanfa ganu,  
Neighbours all prepared to share.

Tram cars, tin baths, silicosis,  
Trips to Barry and Porthcawl,  
Greyhounds, pigeon-cotes and 'Bracchis',  
Dramas in the Workmen's Hall;  
World War 2 with raids and gas masks,  
Evacuees, the siren's whine,  
Mardy Pit was then re-opened  
After the War in '49.

Mardy Colliery and Bwlfa  
Linked by tunnel to Cwmdare,  
Pit-head baths for modern miners  
But were wages really fair?  
Strikes throughout the country followed  
- Seventy two and seventy four,  
"No pit closures", said the miners,  
"And our wages should be more ! " .

But the Strike to be remembered  
In the Rhondda and the land  
Came in nineteen eighty four  
When miners made a fearless stand.  
'Solidarity' their motto,  
Firm they stood in their campaign  
Backed by wives and friends and families,  
Never did their spirits wane.

Mardy's pit life, it has ended,  
Of Rhondda's mines it was the last  
And the Big Wheel now is silent  
But memories live of Rhondda's past,  
And the spirit of the Valley  
That upheld her through dark days  
Will bring strength and hope and courage  
- A pride that nothing can erase.

DEDICATED TO  
MR & MRS JONATHAN THOMAS, BRAZIL, INDIANA, AMERICA.  
IN MEMORY OF MY DEAR BROTHER GWILYM THOMAS,  
LATE OF YNYSYBWL, GLAM.

# NEARER MY GOD, TO THEE

(YN NES, FY NUW, I TI.)

☼ SACRED SONG ☼

FOR SOPRANO OR TENOR

ENGLISH WORDS BY MRS. S. F. ADAMS

WELSH TRANSLATION BY REV. J. EVANS, MAERDY.

Music by

## TOM THOMAS, MAERDY

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## REFLECTIONS - L. A. Roberts

My earliest memories are of the warmth and security which surrounded me as a result of being born into one of Rhondda's typical extended families. Like many, many others I had three sets of parents, my own mother and father and both sets of their parents. Life was far from easy, money was always in short supply but love was never rationed.

My sisters and I shared our time between our three homes, staying with our grandparents was an adventure. We never got bored, houses full of strange Bric-a-Brac and old fashioned things.

A house lit only by gas mantles, and candle to light our way to a brass bed with feather mattress, a stone hot water bottle and a very ancient, temperamental wireless, with my grandfather, an avid Archers and News listener, semi-permanently 'attached' to it.

Both my Grandfathers worked in the pits and in different ways their time spent under ground dramatically affected their health and their lives.

Dadda Glanville and his brother took on the responsibility of supporting their family when their father was tragically killed 3 minutes after reporting for work at the "Scotch" Colliery. No warning had been posted to keep the men away from an area where a shot-firer was at work and unknowingly my great grandfather walked into the danger area and was killed instantly by the "shot". Dadda and his brother, both still boys immediately started work, at the same pit where their father had died, so needlessly. My grandfather worked at the pit until the General Strike of 1926, after which he was unable to get work of any kind, remaining unemployed for 12 years. He died, at the age of 60 years, and like so many of his peers he never knew the tranquillity of retirement.

Dad Brace started work in the Colliery at the age of 11 years. He was so eager to make his much needed contribution to the upkeep of his family that he used the Birth Certificate of his dead brother to secure work at the pit. Years later, Dad moved to Nebo Level where he and his workmates spent most of their time crawling on their bellies, hewing out the coal. In 1939, at the age of 51 years, a roof fall at Nebo broke Dad's back and he spent the next 2 years encased in plaster from his neck to his legs and was never expected to walk again. After 40 years in the collieries, with his back broken and the prospect of being crippled for life, his benevolent employers allowed him one month of concessionary coal and a letter confirming that from then on he was graciously allowed to pick coal from the Colliery waste tips, without fear of being prosecuted. His great strength of character and determination helped my grandfather to defy the diagnosis and eventually he did walk again. He was never fit enough to return to the pit but found work on the building of the Jersey Marine bridge. Dad died in 1960 at the age of 72 and I honestly believe it was his defiant spirit and his great love of his family that kept him alive that long.

I've always hated the Coal board because its a thief. It has always stolen the lifeblood of our families. It exploited in Rhondda a vehicle which brought the Valley World renown but it was always Rhondda's families and communities who paid far too dearly for that fame.

People who think they know everything, but really know nothing, can say no one was forced down the mines. They have no understanding of the lack of practical alternatives and even less of the tremendous pride, dignity and determination of Rhondda men and boys to provide for their beloved families.

The Coal Board stole my Grandfathers from our family whilst I was still very young, but it can never steal my memories of them, though there should have been many more. Giants of men they both were, but gentle as lambs. Their faces indelibly marked with the character that grew from struggle, pain, tragedy and hardship. Their breathing a series of hard, audible gasps and panting, from lungs that had too often sucked in the deadly DUST.

My strongest memories, however, are of their great love for their family and their humour. A twinkle in their eyes that proved beyond doubt that their souls were far beyond reach of the greedy, selfish grasp of the "Coal Owners".

My grandmothers, too, share this precious place in my heart and memory. With their beloved husbands they lived for their family. Both lived with the fear of their men working in the dark, damp and dangerous world underground. Both watched the years, and eventually each single day, sap the life out of their men, ultimately they were both left alone to grieve the loss their final parting caused.

Like all miners' wives they continued to support the family, taking on the roles of both mother and father, grandmother and grandfather and it was many years before I really appreciated how devastated they had been, how their hearts had literally been broken. Though they had a loving family all around them, neither could ever escape the deep pain of separation that both kept, very privately, in their hearts, until the day they were re-united.

My own teenage son never had the great privilege of knowing my Grandparents, as I did, sadly they had all died before he was born.

But the circle continues, my own wonderful parents now fulfil this role, being a second set of parents to my son, my nieces and nephews. My own mother and father bring this unique bond of love to my generation and the next, and I know my Grandparents are proud of them, as I am.

My memories, I know, are similar to those of many of my generation in Rhondda.

We are the lucky ones who benefited from the love and strength of families who shielded us from the hardship and tragedy that was an inevitable foundation to life in Rhondda and other mining communities.

My emotions on 21 December, 1990, when Mardy, the last pit in Rhondda, finally closes, will be very mixed. I will not grieve for the physical end of an industry which brought hardship and tragedy to our people, but my heart will ache because future generations will not know the character of miners and their families within our community.

I sincerely hope that the commitment given by mining families and communities to Rhondda, over the past 150 years will continue, there is no reason why it shouldn't . . . . .

For, it was never the actual coal, nor the dramatic pit-head gear that earned Rhondda its' place in World history . . . .

It was always the PEOPLE.

This has been a tribute to some of them.

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### NEWS AT TEN - John Watkins

It was announced today  
That another colliery is to close in South  
Wales  
With the loss of 750 jobs.

A British Coal spokesman said that  
The pit had proved to be uneconomical.

750 miners were unavailable for comment.

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## **FATAL FIGHT IN WALES**

### **A Collier Lad dies after a Thirty Rounds Battle.**

One of those petty fights between collier boys, which are of such frequent occurrence in South Wales, came to a sad and fatal termination on Sunday week, near Ferndale, Rhondda Vach Valley. Two lads, named John Thomas and Ed A. Collette, aged respectively nineteen and eighteen, agreed to settle a small dispute by fighting with naked fists on the mountain for £1 a side. Shortly after five o'clock in the morning the two combatants with their respective supporters went to the spot agreed upon and seconds having been chosen

the men set to work in a determined manner. The fighting was heavy on both sides, and during the first eight or ten rounds the lads were equally game and able to stand plenty of punishment. From then to the fifteenth round Collette forced the work and had a slight advantage, but the pace was too much, and Thomas, who had evidently been keeping in reserve, then got to work in an effectual manner. At the twenty third round Collette was virtually beaten, but with indomitable and irrepressible determination, he persisted in going on with the fight. It was all over "bar" the shouting, but the youngster refused emphatically to give way. Thomas, his opponent, was unable to knock him out and even he desired to finish the fight, but Collette declined. Remonstrance being useless, they continued to slog away, and soon after the thirtieth round was commenced Thomas put in some swingers, and his opponent became too weak to retaliate, the end came. The party broke up immediately, but owing to the exhausted state which Collette was in, a few of his admirers carried him to a neighbouring house, where the poor fellow expired about seven o'clock, no medical aid having been procured. Later in the day Thomas was arrested, together with David Jones, W. Watkins, D. Parcel, W.J. Ware, and John Davies, all from Maerdy, together with W. Matthews and B. Llewellyn of Ferndale. On Tuesday an inquest was held and a verdict of manslaughter was returned, and the following day Thomas was committed for trial.

Extract from

The National Police Gazette, London

Dated May 26, 1897.

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#### **PIT FACE - John Watkins**

Below,  
A hard black face  
Veteran of life and death  
Seduces the innocent.

Above,  
In the bath house,  
A harder face tries  
To wash away the guilt.

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## Background to the Visit

**"Miners are the same the world over."**

Jim Bennett, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,  
16 May 1979

It was in the spirit both of education and of internationalism that the seven-man delegation from South Wales set out in May 1979 to visit the Appalachian (Eastern) coalfields of the U.S.A.: to observe, to learn and to exchange experiences with American miners about working and social conditions, current problems and our hopes for the future. It was particularly appropriate that we should have been in the U.S.A. when the "energy crisis" was coming to a head and very soon after the Harrisburg nuclear accident in Pennsylvania.

There is no doubt that the differences between the coalfields are enormous; so much so that they dominate this report. Private ownership of the coal industry and all energy resources; no closed shop and the consequent weakness in some areas of the United Mineworkers' of America (U.M.W.A.); the lack of a Welfare State or a "social wage", and the existence of women miners; these were undoubtedly the four most obvious differences but there were many others (including above all coalgetting and safety), all of which are detailed in this report. We were also forcibly struck by two all-pervading impressions: the American miners were living and struggling through a period which our parents and grandparents had already experienced but also we were seeing the all too obvious effects of the "energy crisis" and an economic slump which would ultimately affect our own coalfields.

Official links between the South Wales miners and the U.S. miners, perhaps surprisingly, have never been strong. This visit was a small attempt to rectify this. Surprising in the sense that the most famous of all American miners' leaders, John L. Lewis, was of Welsh stock and that so many South Wales miners and their families, as we were to frequently find, had been amongst the earliest pioneers in many of the U.S. coalfields.

Informal links have, however, been developing between the Appalachian and South Wales coalfields since 1974-75, when members of the staff at the Highlander Research and Educational Center in Tennessee were based at the South Wales Miners' Library of University College Swansea. They made a series of video-tapes on Welsh mining communities which were used at Highlander with discussion groups and for educational programmes in the Appalachian coalfields. Highlander arranged a visit for a group of miners from West Virginia to South Wales in 1976. Among the South Wales miners' lodges prominently involved in these links were Brynlliw, near Swansea and Mardy in the Rhondda. It was for this reason, that three from each lodge were invited by the Highlander Center to visit the American coalfields in 1979. Dr. Hywel Francis of the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at the University College Swansea and the tutor/librarian of the South Wales Miners' Library was asked to act as co-ordinator of the delegation. The Department has, since 1974 organised the educational scheme of the South Wales Area of the National Union of Mineworkers and centred this work at the

Miners' Library. This visit was consequently seen as a logical development of the Department's work in that it organises similar educational visits to other countries.

### Aims of the Delegation

The principal purpose of the visit was to acquaint six young, rank and file South Wales miners with the social and economic conditions in the Appalachian coalfields (including Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky and Virginia). It was also our intention that we should build educational links between the two rather similar regions for the benefit of miners and educationalists in South Wales and . Lectures, meetings, seminars and workshops were organised during the visit to provide the opportunity for miners (from both countries) to discuss, compare and contrast their problems and the ways in which their respective countries have met the questions of safety, production, training, dust control, health-care, education, housing, the environment and community development. Such gatherings afforded, in addition, an opportunity to discuss the differences and similarities between the histories of the two regions. It was also our intention to try to evaluate, albeit in a very tentative and superficial way, American society beyond the coalfields.

### Extract from

### SOUTH WALES MINERS IN AMERICA 1979

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## HIRAETH - Les Harries

"Hiraeth" is a special word  
Translation is denied  
So many deep emotions  
To this word can be applied

It's a longing for our mountains  
And a thousand crystal streams  
The valleys and the meadows  
That are always in our dreams

We miss the Hymns and Arias  
The balm for every grief  
The songs of celebrations  
That strengthen our belief

It's a yearning for our homeland  
With a love that never fails  
And it's only known to Welsh folk  
For it was made in Wales

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## CHILDHOOD REFLECTIONS

When I lived in the Rhondda  
Young, though I may have been  
I learned how hard a miners lot  
From suffering I had seen

My grandfather when laid to rest  
I saw on his white face  
The all too common "Blue" pit marks  
Time never can erase

The bonds throughout the years grew strong  
The suffering shared by all  
To hear the colliery hooter  
"Oh God, there's been a fall"

But Wales, the place we still call home  
Where men still sign the dole  
And huge depressing slag heaps stand  
Like monuments to coal,  
Will never change while pits remain.  
And though it is unjust  
Men still go down the earths dark depths  
And end their days with dust

Maureen Jackson

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## STREETS OF THE RHONDDA

As I walked out in the streets of the Rhondda,  
As I walked out in the Rhondda one day,  
I spied an old miner sat down on his doorstep,  
Sat down on his doorstep his face drawn and grey.

'I see by your blue scarred hands that you are a  
miner'.  
These words he did say as I slowly walked by.  
'Come sit down beside me and hear my sad story,  
Got dust in my lungs and I know I must die'.

'Was once down the pits, boy, I used to go digging;  
Dew ! Once down the pits I went digging for coal;  
But now I am useless with an 'undred per cent dust;  
My life's toil for black gold has taken its toll'.

O, bury beside me my mandrill and shovel,  
My boots on my feet and my lamp by my side;  
On top of my coffin put a flagon of bitter  
So the miners might drink as I take my last ride'.

O, sound the 'arp slowly, and let me hear - lowly,  
Treorchy Male Voice sing Myfanwy once more;  
Then play the Dead March as they carry my coffin,  
As to my last rest in the graveyard I'm bore'.

As I walked out in the streets of the Rhondda,  
As I walked out in the Rhondda one day,  
I spied an old miner sat down on his doorstep,  
Sat down on his doorstep - now he's cold in the clay.

John Morgan 1974

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GREAT GRANDFATHER - (His last words)  
John Watkins

I cannot write any more,  
The day is closing  
And my life seems  
Too far gone

I will say "Goodbye"  
And leave you  
A lifetime of words,

I hope you find out  
What I wanted to say.

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**Monday, December 3rd, 1954, 5.30 am.**

You could set your clock to the echoes of his hob nailed boots, as he strode through Stanleytown towards the pit head. He felt good. His 50th birthday and number nine pit lay ahead of him.

After a smoke, he caught the first bond down. It was always the same, a routine that never changed. But today, something different was to happen.

A long walk lay ahead, his lamp fluttering about the sides of the arched dusty passageway, that lead to the training face, there he would sit, with the axe from the toolbar, he would smooth away with stone in hand, things had to be done correctly, a sharp axe a sharp mind, would see him safely through the shift.

At the entrance of the coal face, that now teamed with his work mates, and young men, all eager to get the coal cleared, that would end the shift's hard toil. They met and chatted freely.

He enjoyed the comradeship, the feeling of friendship, that he found, deep in the bowels of the earth.

Stay back! Shouted Stan, his arm across his chest, barring his way into the three foot high coal face stopping him. Yet allowing others to enter, to crawl through the small coal, left by the coal cutting machine. Cut by the shift before.

He was confused for a while, but before any questions could be asked, his way was clear. Stan, had moved to the side, with a grin on his face, beckoned him on, into the coal face, it was in darkness, strange he thought? As he crawled on hands and knees pushing his shovel forward, with the rest of his tools.

He knew others had gone on before him, but, he could not see on ahead, with his cap lamp cast down to the dusty floor. He crawled on.

It must have become bright as day for the first few seconds, lights shone from everywhere. The clatter, was frightening, metal upon metal, shovel on axes, beating to the sound of singing. All around him, he could hear.

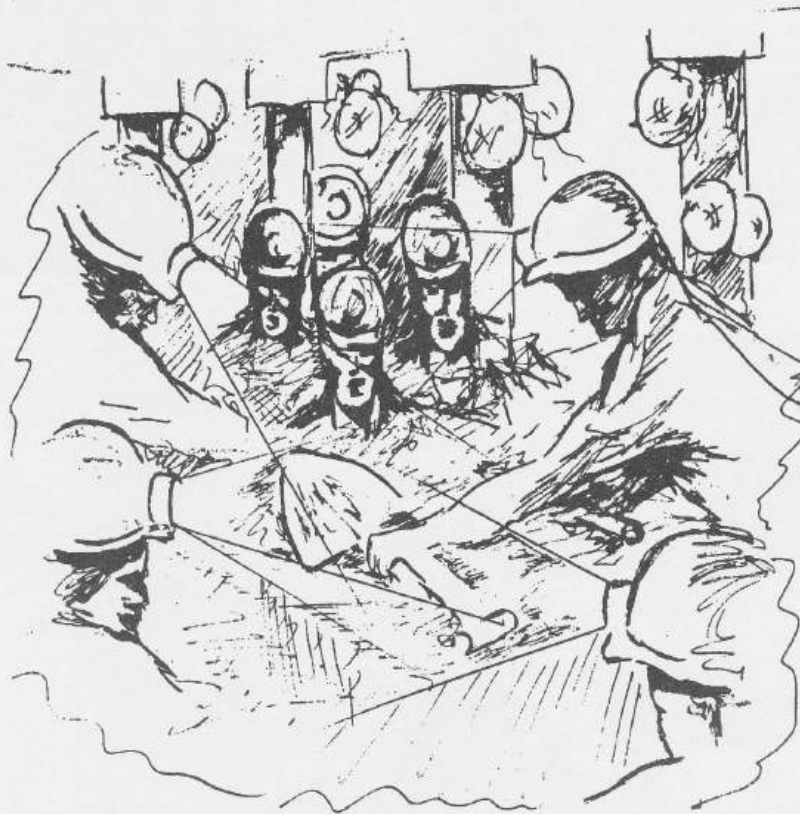
“Happy birthday dear Boogy, Happy birthday to you.”

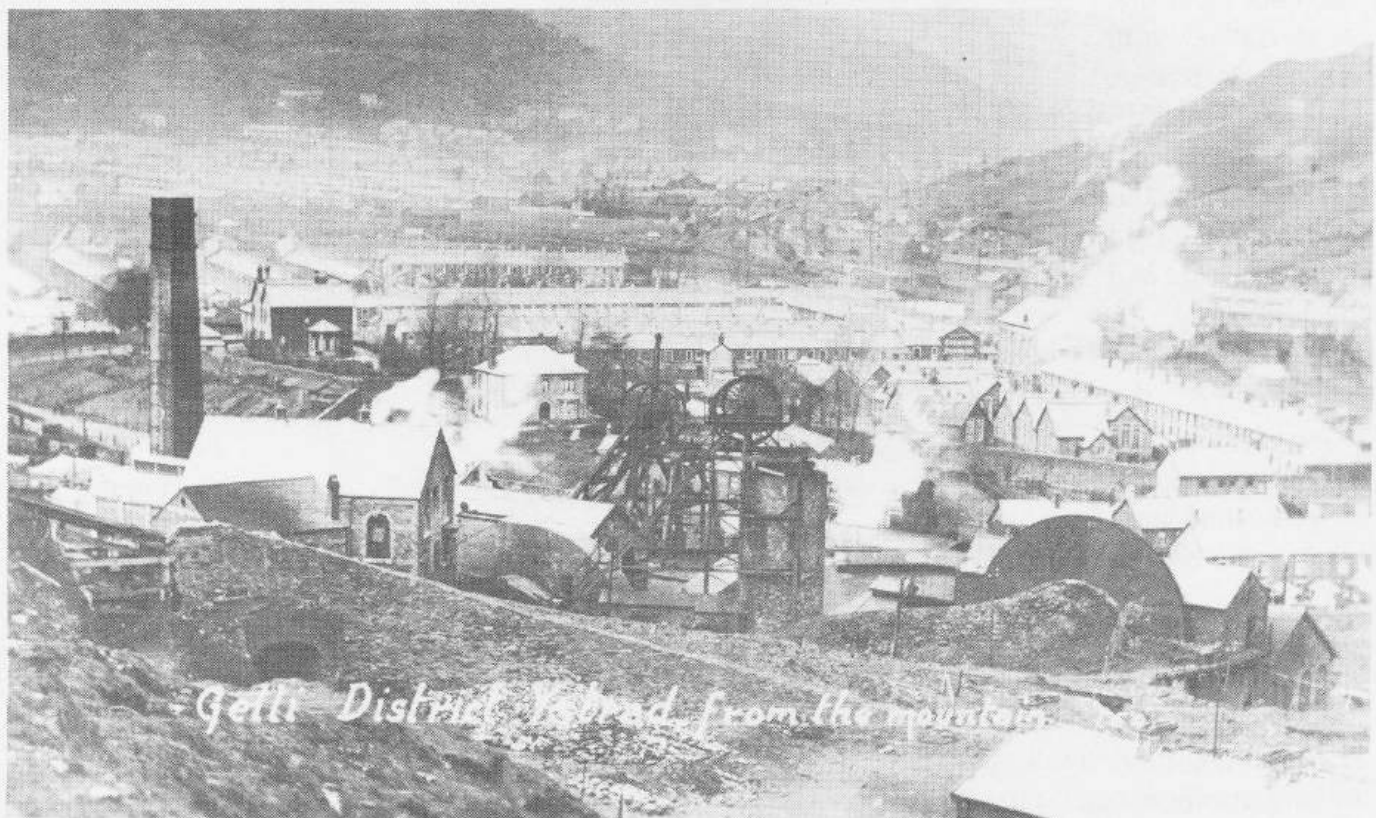
He looked up, all around, hanging from the wooden posts and roof supports, were balloons of every

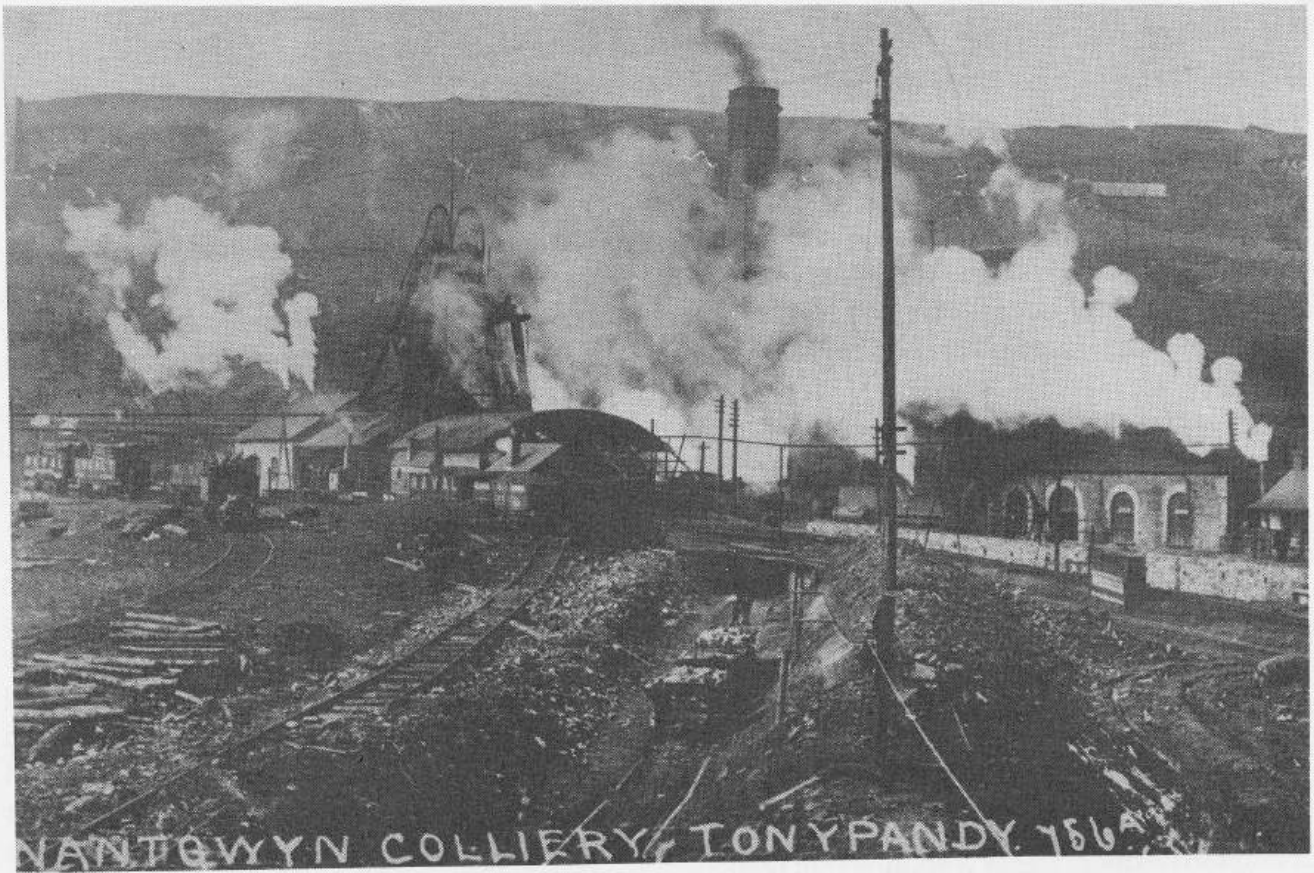
colour, and the glint of white teeth, coming from the smiles of his friends, singing in Rhondda harmony. This birthday he would remember for the rest of his life.

**“HE FELT GOOD”**

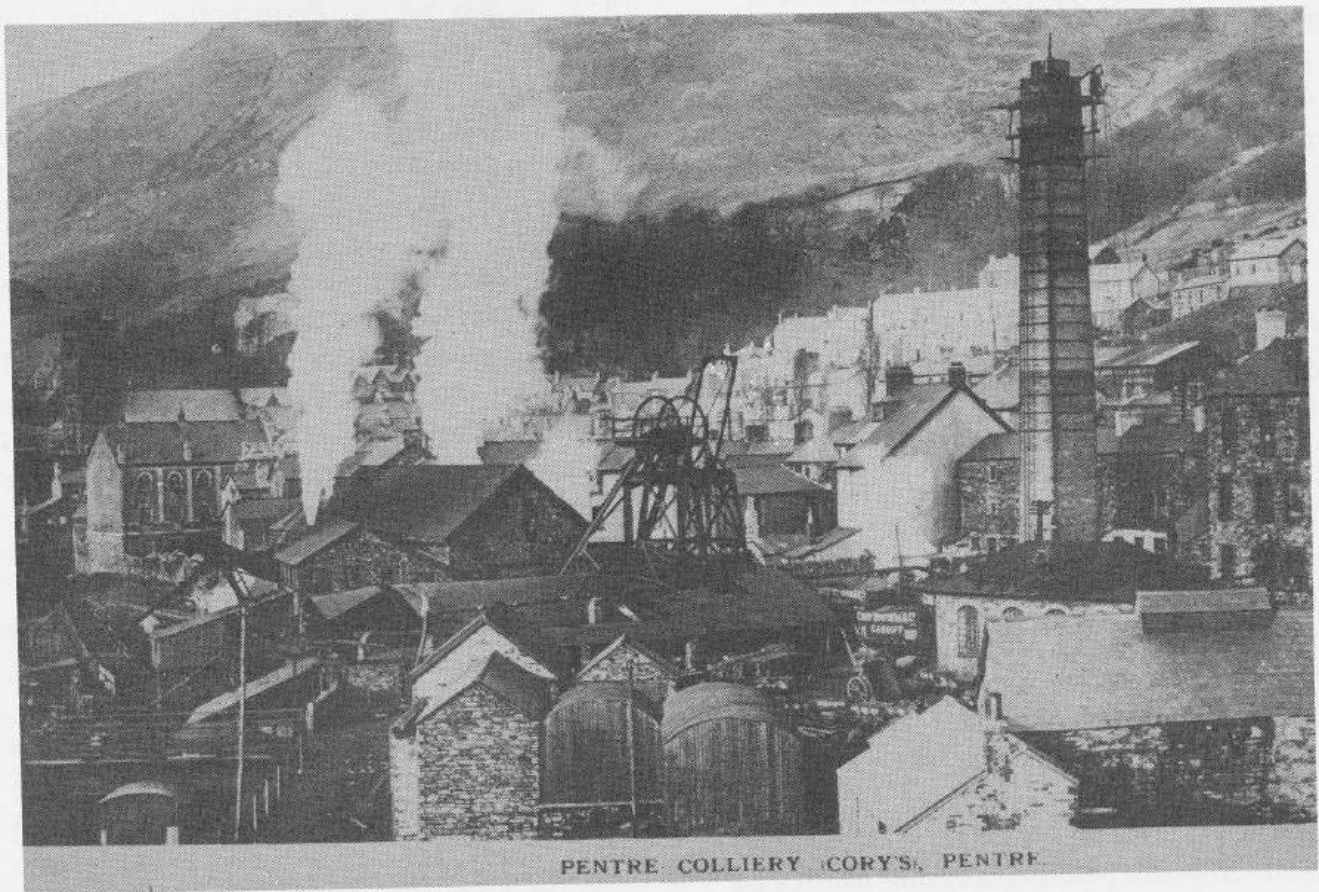
**Arthur Brown**







NANTGWYN COLLIERY, TONY PANDY. 1964



PENTRE COLLIERY CORYS, PENTRE.

## MARDY THE INHERITANCE

Why is it that Mardy is known the world over as the most consistently socialist, progressive - indeed, dare we say it - even revolutionary - pit and community in the British coalfields?

There are many reasons but perhaps we can sum it up in this way. The men and women who came to work in the Mardy pits and made the community of Mardy in the early years of this century were not "raving Bolsheviks" - at least not all of them. But there was a high proportion of people who recognised the importance of marrying political education with industrial struggle to improve the lot of not just miners and their families but everyone in society. In that critical fusion there emerged generations of leaders - some world famous like Arthur Horner, others like Charlie "Coch" Jones known only locally, who saw the need to discuss, analyse, debate and write about their day to day problems and then agitate and link them to wider struggles.

One such man was Noah Ablett, the Mardy checkweigher, one of the great intellectuals of the European Labour Movement, author of *Easy Outlines of Economics* and co-author of *The Miners' Next Step*, a pamphlet by Rhondda miners which saw the importance of industrial democracy.

One of Ablett's "pupils" was another great thinker, the Communist Arthur Horner who, although born in Merthyr, will always be associated with Mardy. It was during his short period in Mardy, from 1919 to 1933, that he earned the reputation of "the dictator of Little Moscow", a term of abuse perpetrated by the coalowners' mouthpiece, the *Western Mail*, which was banned from the community during the 1926 General Strike. Allegedly because of this reputation, the local pits were closed and were not reopened until after Nationalisation. The Mardy lodge thought otherwise: it was inadequate safety precautions and capitalism not communism which shut the pits.

Universally recognised as the architect of the National Union of Mineworkers in 1945, and as the British miners' most important and successful leader this century - by far - Horner always acknowledged his roots in Mardy. And Mardy miners have always been quick to acknowledge their debt to him, like future leaders of the South Wales miners, Emlyn Williams and Haydn Matthews.

Whether it was in the pit and lodge, or in the Mardy Hall, or in Rhondda politics (as against bailiffs, on

Hunger Marches or in Parliamentary elections), he always acknowledged his debt to the people of Mardy. What made him such a different leader was that he was "just an ordinary bloke" - a typical "male chauvinist miner" as his daughter described him in later years. He enjoyed his pint. He tried hard but he was a hopeless billiards player, as anyone in Mardy Hall in those days would testify. When arrested on his return from Russia in the early 1930s he was held at Porth police station. His young friend and successor as British miners' leader, Will Paynter, recalled that his requested reading material was cowboy comics. But he also read widely the great political and social thinkers of the time.

Mardy's concerns in the 1920s and 1930s in the "Horner years" and ever since were not just the pit. They were universal: they showed solidarity to all peoples in struggle, and this was not just "sloganising" solidarity. Such a stand is to be found in Frank Owen who was killed in action in the Battle of Brunete fighting fascism in Spain, as a member of the International Brigades.

It should not be forgotten that the writer Lewis Jones gave the title of "Cwmardy" to his first novel for good and obvious reasons. The epic personal, family, community and class struggles told in those pages had for the most part, actually happened in Mardy. I vividly recall the experience of going around Mardy, Blaenllechau and Ferndale with Annie Powell in 1964 and 1966: even then, three

decades on from the depression years, the respect shown to "Mrs. Powell" who best symbolised the fighting spirit in our more modern times, was an echo of that past. It was also an acknowledgement of the courage and sacrifice of the women - mothers, sisters, daughters - who had for so long held together families and communities. And a more public acknowledgement of that fact came when they organised themselves in 1984-85 under the banner of the Mardy Women Against Pit Closures.

It is therefore not the industrial power alone, but its combinations with progressive ideas which has made Mardy so important in our history. What other trade union branch had its circulars placed before a Cabinet committee in 1926, or any other time? That is Mardy's inheritance to us: the highlighting of the power of ideas to achieve a change towards a better world.

HYWEL FRANCIS

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# YNISHIR

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## THE RHONDDA'S NEW FACE - Fiona Koncsol

How long will it take for the legend of the Rhondda Mining Industry, to be forgotten. The years of children being subjected to crawling through tunnels like rats to dig out coal, that the rich could sit in front of.

The last pit is closing and now in it's place is the Lewis Merthyr colliery, which they have turned into a palace. Nobody will ever know what the real coal face was like unless they remember. The Lewis Merthyr has sparkling clean winders, drums in mint condition. Years ago everything would have been dirty, rusty, inefficient and damp. Miners would stand in puddles of water day after day.

My uncle worked in Mardy Pit and would either come home exhausted, or come home with broken bones.

My grandmother never knew if she was saying goodbye to my grandfather for the last time every time he went to work. They went down but God only knew if they would be brought back up.

My grandfather died prematurely, because of the dust from the pit and the conditions, which resulted in me never knowing my grandfather existed. The pit killed him and he had nothing to show he ever lived. He finished work at 49 and died at 59.

His only medicine was 50 red hot needles in his legs and wax treatment which was useless. For ten years he struggled up and down hills, until he could walk no more.

## DISASTER AT NUMBER 6 - John Morgan

Dawn breaks slowly o'er the green hills of the sleepy valley town;  
To another day shift goes old Daniel Jones.  
It's a cold and bleak October day of another week of work -  
As he walks along to Number 6 he curses it and moans.

He arrives there just before 6 a.m. . . . then into the cage he walks  
Along with the other miners of the shift.  
The gate is closed behind them and the carriage it descends -  
Into the hellish blackness drops the lift.

The clock by Martha Jones' bed reads eight fifteen a.m.  
She's wakened by a knock on her front door  
There are voices loud and shrill outside of crying and distress;  
As she rises there's a 'rat, tat, tat' once more.

She answers to a startling sight, for hunched outside her door  
Three anxious women neighbours sobbed and sniffed.  
'Disaster!' Wept old Mrs. Pugh, 'disaster at The Pit!  
Is your 'usband just like ours on the shift?'

'Yes, O Yes,' cried Martha Jones, 'What happened, are they safe?'  
All three howled back: 'Explosion down below!'  
'Gas I think' said Annie Hughes - 'The flames all lit the sky'  
Shot up the shaft just like a firework show.

With no more ado they hurried off, all four to number 6;  
Great crowds were there of tearful wives and men.  
All feeling for the lives of their husbands and their sons -  
In their thoughts the disaster there in 1910.

With baited breath the families watch as the cables heave and pull  
The cage towards the surface - up it crept  
With anguish in their hearts and minds they tremble at the sight -  
As the carriage gate swings open out they stepped:

On the stretchers bore the bodies of the dying and the dead. -  
With wounded who could walk; a bloody mix.  
A cry of pain swept through the thong as they realised the scope  
Of the tragedy afflicting number 6.

The rescue teams throughout that day at fever pitch they worked -  
Retrieving broken bodies - young and old.  
Poor Martha Jones she waited, but by Nine that night she knew:  
Her husband, they from death could not withhold.

The miners who survived that blast were the lucky and the few:  
Two hundred bravely perished - to a man.  
On that chill October morning the true price of coal was shown;  
And was paid in full by Martha Jones' Dan.

## GWRAIG Y GLOWR (The Miner's Wife)

Y tan yn oeri'n araf  
A'r lluniau wedi ffoi,  
Y fodrwy wedi llacio  
A'r bys yn dal i'w throï.

Y llestri ar fwrdd y gegin  
A'r slipars dan y stol,  
Yn disgwyl trigain mlynedd  
I ddod trwy'r drws yn ol.

In fire's dying embers  
No pictures now remain,  
The ring is slack on the finger,  
It turns again and again.

Dishes are set on the table,  
Slippers 'neath the stool on the floor  
Awaiting sixty years to return  
And walk right in through the door

Written by Glyn James  
Translation by Hawys James

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## LAMP Y GLOWR (The Miner's Lamp)

Cawsant ef, a'i lamp a'r fandrel  
A heb arno farc na chlwy',  
Draw yn nos y talcen eithaf  
Lle na chanai' deryn mwy.

Yn nhywyllwch yr unigedd  
Y mae lamp nas gwelwn ni,  
O dan liain yr anwylo  
Mae'n 'Aladdin' iddi hi.

He was found with lamp and mandrel  
And without a wound or mark  
In the blackness of the coalface  
- No bird sang there in the dark

In his wife's world - dark and lonely  
There's a lamp we cannot see,  
Magic 'neath her soft caresses  
- Aladdin's lamp of memory.

Written by Glyn James  
Translation by Hawys James

**Protest Against  
Accelerated Pit Closures**

**Cambrian Workmen Are  
In Action !**

**We Are On Strike**

The latest closures which includes pits with ample reserves of coal are situated in areas threatened with heavy unemployment; Duffryn Rhondda in Maesteg, Glenrhondda and Cambrian in the Rhondda Area, they follow quickly after Park and Dare, and Albion as recent as Friday last.

This is not only a Cambrian issue

**This is your fight also  
are you with us ?**

Every Lodge—Every Miner—into Action. We can only get what we are prepared to fight for

**LET CLOSURES BE PHASED  
and alternative employment provided**

As a Lodge we ask for your support.

For Cambrian Lodge,  
J. V. DAVIES, Chairman.  
GARFIELD ROGERS, Secretary.

Evans & Short Ltd., Printers, Tonypandy

**THE LAMPROOM - Dai Thomas (ex Miner)**

At the end of the valley over rugged tracks  
Through dark shadows out of the gloom  
Stands a bleak building called a Lamproom  
With dust grimed windows which hide nature's sun  
The inside sparkles 'till day is done  
Lamps on shelves like birds watching prey  
Being prepared for a working day  
Their lights glitter like glistening snow  
Neatly arranged all in a row  
In a caged corner are lamps made of brass  
For protection to miners from deadly gas  
Along the corridors footsteps sound  
As they enter the Lamproom  
To go underground  
To pause for a period  
In this galaxy of light  
Each one takes his secondary sight  
To show him the way  
Through a darkened gloom  
In this place  
Called a Lamproom

**The Rhedynog Glee Party  
Ferndale, South Wales**

**THE MINERS' SONG  
Tune : Men of Harlech -  
Verses by Francis Brown**

Ye are friends who stand around us,  
Full of music you have found us,  
Yet the chains of care have bound us -  
Help us in our need !  
Miners' wives at home are weeping,  
Hunger near and nearer creeping,  
Death around the corner peeping,  
'Tis for them we plead !

Chorus -

You can help the children,  
Womenkind and children,  
You can give that they may live,  
Women who are fearing for their children !  
Kindly hearts are always willing,  
Empty platters now need filling;  
If you ever spared a shilling,  
Do it, do it now.

Famine's flag is grimly flying,  
Tiny tots for milk are crying,  
They from want may soon be dying -  
Hear their bitter cry !  
Some of them are weak and ailing,  
Now their daily food is failing,  
Can't you hear them softly wailing ?  
Will you let them die ?

Chorus -

"No !" you proudly thunder;  
Break their bonds asunder,  
To starve our kin would be a sin,  
Never while we live shall they go under !  
Now the fact are we revealing -  
All the time we hold the feeling,  
Not in vain are we appealing !  
Thank you, one and all !

No work for the miners, they will be no more,  
In the pit they fought so hard for in nineteen eighty four,  
What will the men of Rhondda do, now their pit has  
ended,  
They'll breath fresh air and see the sun as surely God  
intended.

Now the grass can grow again where Mardy pit once  
stood,  
The blackened hills and darkened land will now disap-  
pear for good,  
No more breathing coal dust, no more toil and sweat,  
But the miners happiness will depend on the type of jobs  
they'll get.

On Friday the twenty first that sad day in December,  
The people of Maerdy, all of them, will think and they'll  
remember,  
The good times, and the bad times, the comradeship  
and trust,  
Of the proud and happy miners who worked to earn their  
crust.

Grant Smith 10yrs 7mths

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Mardy Colliery was very grand,  
It's fame was known throughout the land,  
It's coal was passed along the line  
The pit's been there a long, long time.

Mardy miners dug for coal  
Now they'll all be on the dole.  
So many mines have closed with time  
And Mardy pit is next in line.

Rhondda's known for coal and song,  
But closure day will not be long.  
Mardy coal will be no more  
What's left for us? Where do we go?

But don't you worry, we'll survive  
We have our health - we are alive !  
We'll make this valley proud and true  
'Cause we're Maerdy people through and  
through.

John Carey 10yrs 6mths

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I'll march down and stand proud  
But yet, I will feel hurt,  
The years that have gone by  
Gave both a laugh, a sigh  
Even maybe a cry.  
The last shift is finally over,  
Is that something to be enjoyed  
Now a chapter closes for the old  
The young, who knows.  
Be happy, the memories remain  
A new era begins

Martyn Williams 10yrs 6mths

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The last pit in the Valley closes  
With memories of days gone by,  
Days when dads and granddads  
Went down the mine to try  
To earn a living cutting coal  
They worked down there from dawn till dusk  
In a deep dark dangerous hole.  
In dirty grime and swirling dust

One day the people of the Valley  
will simply stand and stare  
And they will tell their grandchildren  
that Mardy Pit stood there.

David Simmons  
10yrs 10mths

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Miners work all day,  
Some for very little pay.  
So it gives me quite a pain  
To think they'll never work again.

Underground they will not go  
'Cause Mardy Pit will be no more.  
But what a great pit you have been,  
The greatest one the world has see.

Hannah Howells  
11yrs 2mths

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Many many years ago  
Among our hills so green  
Our forefathers dug deep round holes  
To reach the vast coal seams.

Every day the men would ride  
Into the black of night,  
And dig beneath the earth so deep,  
With lamps their only light.

When work was done they'd rise again,  
Those men, both young and old,  
Their hands were soiled, were cut and blistered  
From digging that black gold.

For many years this carried on,  
But now the end's in sight,  
To work no more for that black gold  
In the darkness, day or night.

The day'll be sad, because we all know  
And won't forget this time  
When we say goodbye to Rhondda's  
Last and only working mine.

Melanie Evans  
11yrs

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At the top of the valley stands the old pit sheaves.  
Today their silence is deafening compared to those  
many years of whining and groaning.  
No more do you hear the singing of miners on their  
way to work  
Instead you hear the coughing and the wheezing of  
those same hard working men and children.  
No longer can you see the drams rising from the  
darkness.  
No more of the deafening hooters at the end of every  
shift.  
No more noise.  
No more life.  
No more Pit.

Kelly Richardson  
10yrs 3mths

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The day we must remember  
Is the twenty first day of December  
That's the day our pit will end  
No more coal for miners to send.

The men that worked in Mardy Pit  
Had to be big and strong and fit  
But their lamps will shine no more  
The time has come for the men to go.

When the land is green and flat  
Miners will remember that  
Their pit once stood there tall and proud  
But to mine coal now is not allowed.

Kelly White

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For many years in olden days  
Work was rare indeed  
Rhondda men had little choice  
They had their families to feed.

So men went down the coalmine  
They worked hard and long to survive  
For very little money  
To keep them all alive.

The work was dangerous and hard  
The coal was hewn by hand  
Their job was most important  
Their coal warmed all the land.

Years went by and many died  
In that hole underground  
The mothers and the children cried  
When they heard the sirens sound.

One by one the pits have closed  
Ours is next to go that way  
It's the ending of an era  
A sad and sorry day.

Jonathan Podmore  
10yrs 7mths

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# THE MINER'S TALE

Taken from the Album "Which Side Are You On?"  
Produced to raise funds in support of Striking Miners

Oh, it's in our troubled coalfields, I'm so sorry for to say  
That hardship and privation is increasing every day  
The striker and his family they suffer some things there  
And for the cause of this coal strike I lay at Thatcher's lair  
To break the Miners' Union was a plan they did contrive  
And with McGregor's Plan for Coal, a plan to privatise  
The miners' fight, a fight for jobs, that be his Union's role  
And every job's important with four million on the dole  
The closing down of Cortonwood the Coal Board could not wait  
Their answer to the Union was 'we don't negotiate'  
The Coal Board and the Government were working hand in hand  
And the onslaught on the miners was both savage and well planned  
They planned to rob the striker, rob his family as well  
And with their laws through Parliament that's when the hardship fell  
I've said it once, I'll say it twice and I'll say it oft times more  
I lay the blame for this coal strike at Maggie Thatcher's lair  
They shout about the violence, violence on the picket lines  
They shout about the pickets and they shout about the crime  
But in all the violence in their wars it's never once been seen  
The Picket fighting for his life on a life support machine  
Censorship and propaganda is the game that they play well  
We seldom hear the striker's tale, he has a tale to tell  
We've seen the guardians of the peace wear riot gear and all  
But we don't see them with batons beating miners to the wall  
They will show the blackleg's bruises, they will show the policeman's moans  
But when they show the picket he is always hurling stones  
We never see the fractured skulls received by mining men  
And I ask how many strikers died? I'm sure that few folk ken  
Oh, I wish this strike be over and I wish the striker well  
I wish to see the striker's tale, he has a tale to tell,  
I've said it once, I've said it twice and I'll say it oft times more  
I lay the blame for this coal strike at Maggie Thatcher's lair

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## Privilege

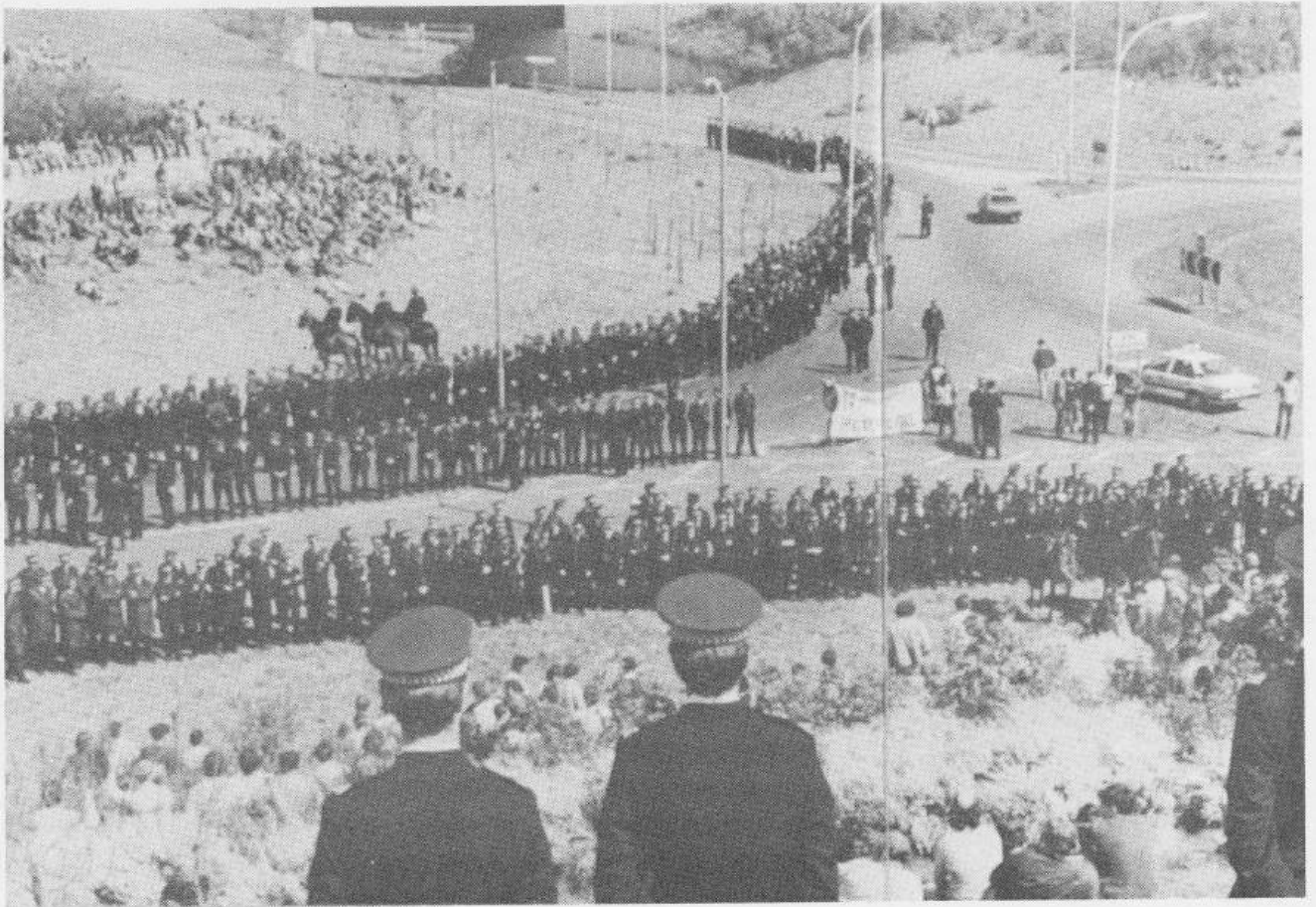
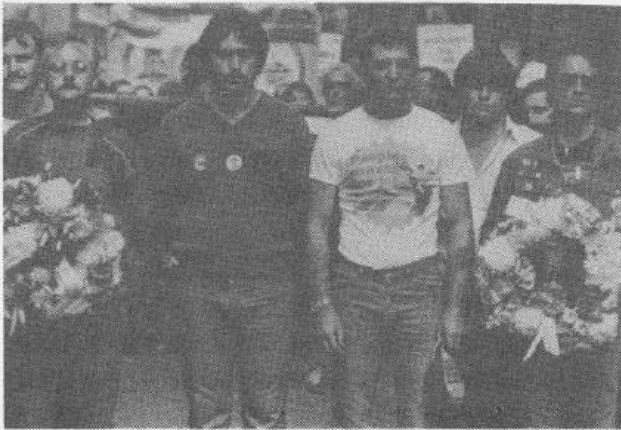
Honour to you, -  
Men of Maerdy.  
Honour to you,  
N.U.M.

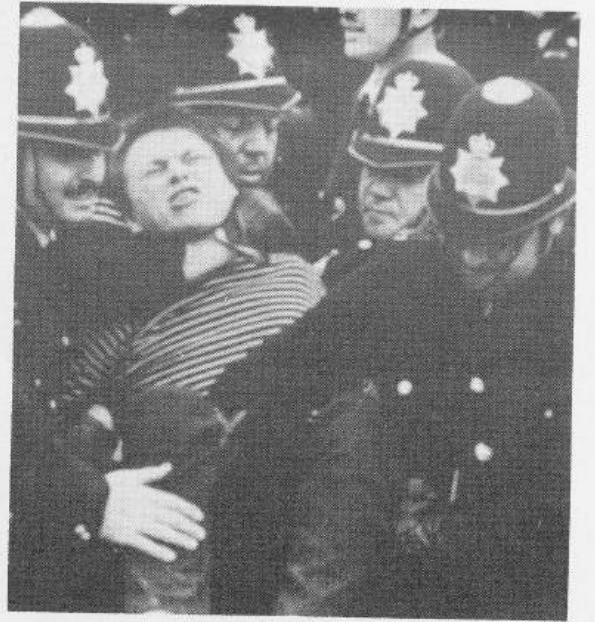
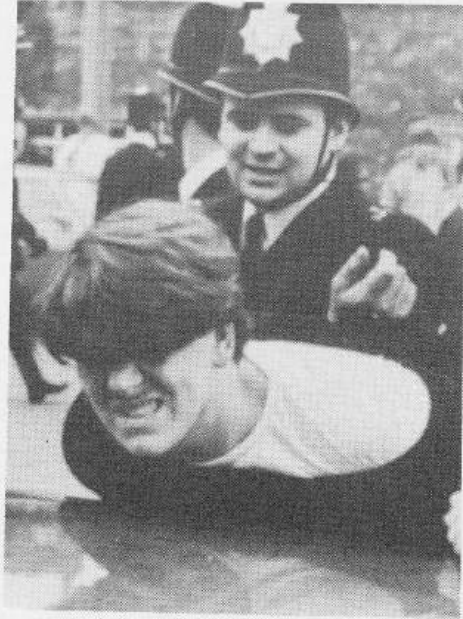
Lodge and member,  
Man and Boy.  
Fight, you say,-  
the closures.

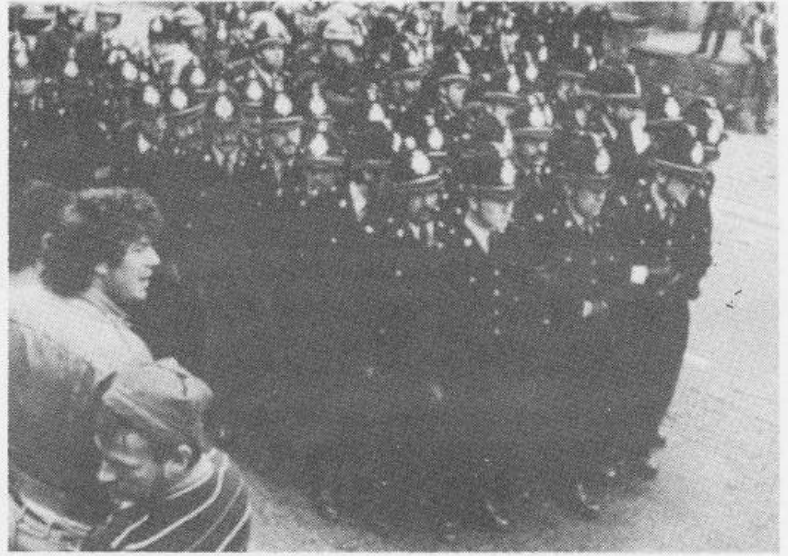
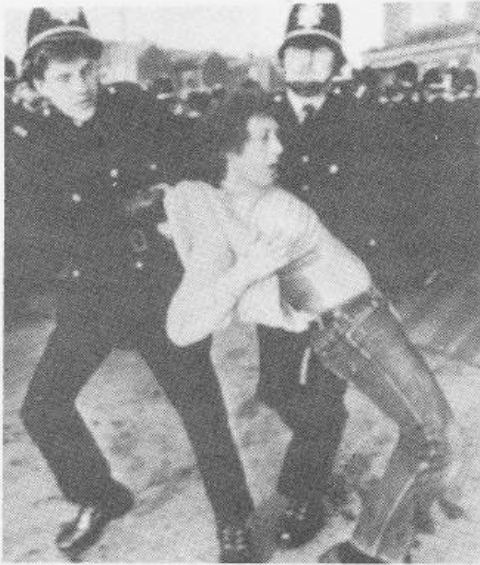
Fight, you say,  
for Mardy Pit.  
Not give in,  
but fight.

Honour to you,  
Men of Maerdy.  
Privilege to know you,-  
Thank you.

Brenda Edwards.  
October 6th 1985.







## COAL NOT DOLE

It stands so proud, the wheels so still,  
A ghostlike figure on the hill.  
It seems so strange, there is no sound  
Now there are no men underground.  
What will become of this pit yard?  
Where men once trampled, faces hard,  
So tired and weary their shift done  
Never having seen the sun.  
Will it become a sacred ground?  
Foreign tourists gazing round  
Asking if men once worked here  
Way beneath this pit head gear.  
Empty trucks once filled with coal  
Lined up like men on the dole,  
Will they 'ere be used again  
Or left for scrap just like the men.  
There'll always be a happy hour  
For those with money, jobs and power  
They'll never realise the hurt  
They've caused to men they treat like dirt.  
What will become of this pit yard  
Where men once trampled, faces hard  
So tired and weary their shift done  
Never having seen the sun.  
There'll always be a happy hour  
For those with money, jobs and power  
They'll never realise the hurt  
They've caused to men they treat like dirt.

## 1867 - THE EARLY YEARS.

### LIST OF COLLIERIES.

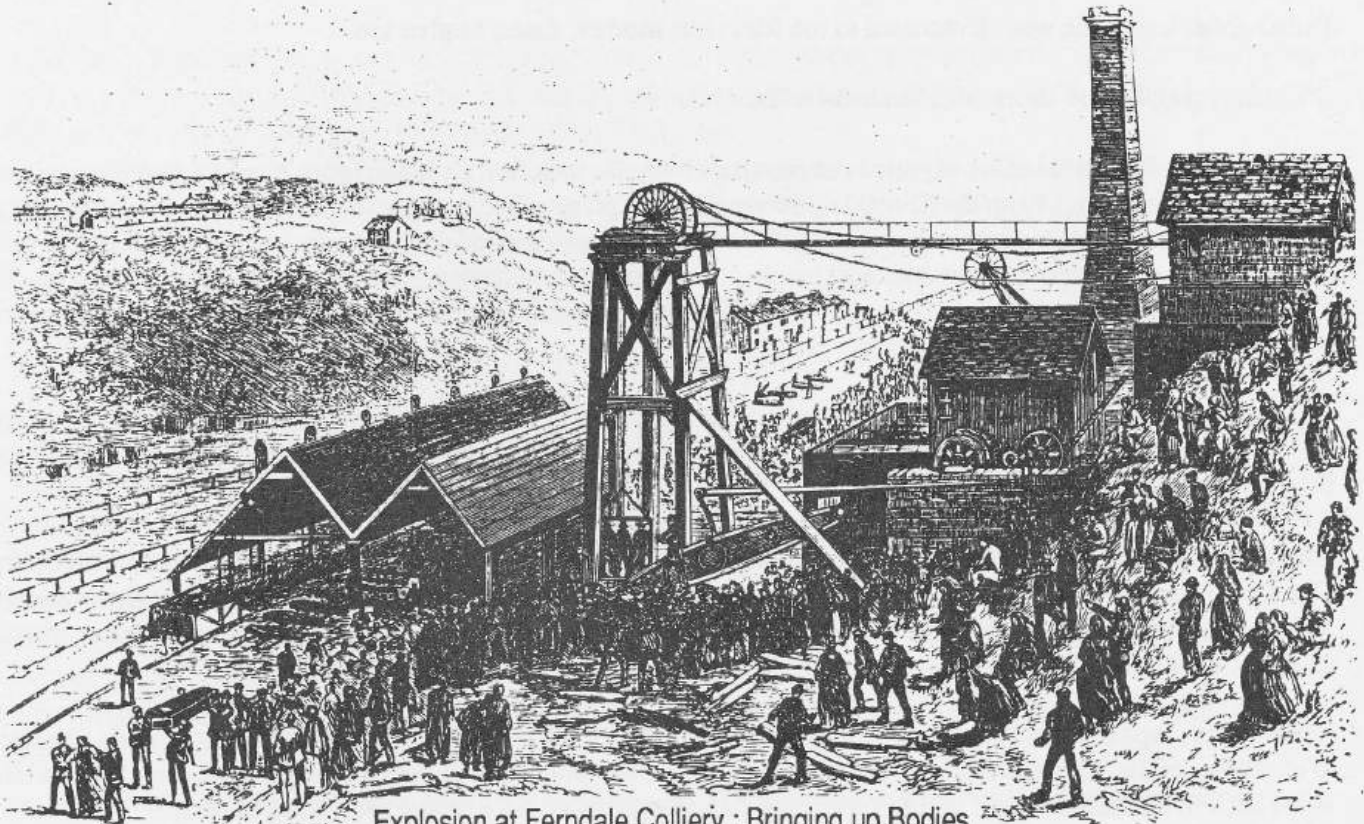
<b>Colliery</b>	<b>Owners</b>	<b>Manager</b>
Aber-Rhondda	Aber-rhondda Coal Company	Isaac Davies
Tynewydd	Troedyrhiw Coal Company	J. J. Thomas
Tylors	Tylor & Company	D. Mathews
Ynyshir Steam	J. Thomas	E. Jones
Ynyshir No. 2	Thomas Jones	J. Jones
Jones' Navigation	Thomas Jones	T. Jones
Mardy	Lockett's Merthyr Steam Coal Co.	J. Salathiel
Ferndale No. 2	D. Davies & Sons	W. Thomas
Ferndale No. 4	D. Davies & Sons	W. Rosser
Ferndale No. 1	D. Davies & Sons	J. Meredith

#### SOME FATAL ACCIDENTS IN THAT YEAR

May 30th	Ferndale, doorboy aged 13 years, fell before trams.
June 25th	Ynyshir, collier aged 25 years, fall of roof.
July 1st	Ferndale No.4., haulier aged 18 years, shaft accident.
July 6th	Ferndale No. 4., collier aged 24 years, fall of roof
July 18th	Ferndale No. 1., collier aged 25 years, fall of roof.
July 31st	Jones' Navigation, aged 27 years, fall of roof.

#### SOME MAJOR COLLIERY EXPLOSIONS IN THE RHONDDA FACH VALLEY

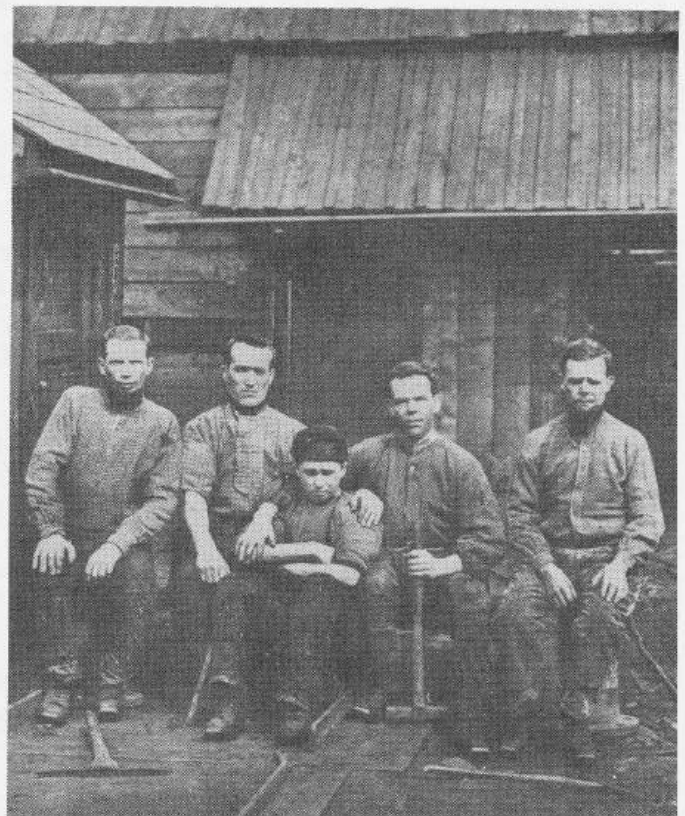
1867	178 killed at Ferndale
1869	60 killed at Ferndale
1885	81 killed at Mardy Nos. 1&2
1887	39 killed at National Colliery
1896	57 killed at Tylorstown
1905	2 killed at Tylorstown
1905	119 killed at National Colliery



Explosion at Ferndale Colliery : Bringing up Bodies

**Extract taken from  
"Disaster at Tynewydd"  
An account of a  
Rhondda  
Mine Disaster  
in 1877  
by Ken Llewellyn.**

The flooding of Tynewydd, in terms of loss of life and suffering was a minor affair. Only 14 people involved, five dead and nine saved, but the courage and resource of the rescuers, the suspense, and the means used in the rescue struck a spark in the imagination of thousands of people.



The Tynewydd Disaster - 11 April 1877  
Rescued Colliers - Left to Right  
David Jenkins - George Jenkins - Moses Powell - John Thomas.  
The young boy is David Hughes

"Hwyl". We cannot export it but we are willing to share it.

Father gone, lost to the war . Evacuated to the Rhondda, mother, sister, brother too.

The valley people took us in, with kindness in their hearts .

A short stocky Rhondda collier captured our mother's love. He took us in, a home for three of us, and then children of his own, to live and play on the Rhondda's sunny side, in a place called Stanleytown. Thoughts of my young days, now long forgotten. But my memories still ring clear of those happy carnival days, also my last days of school, to leave only to follow my adopted father and elder brother to the only decent paying job available in these hard times . The 'PITS' of the Rhondda Valley . On completing my training, now side by side with dad, working with pride on a district called the "yellow" in Tylorstown number nine .

Alas this pride did not last, something in me pulled and tugged my heart, the longing to get away from this view I now had of the Rhondda . Seeing through different eyes, the blackness, the unclean greys - the polluted mountainsides . Slag heaps tipped without thought or care.

I remember also, the times I would run home, across bridges, dram roads, and down streets. The hill at the end of Bottom Street was "steep" but never slowed me in my quest to get home to our back kitchen, to wallow in the clean water, hot in the old tin bath . I had to be there in front of my dad and my brother, before they could splatter the water with the coal dust blown from their noses.

It was always tops first, assisting each other, back cleaning in turn, then casting off our stiff sweaty stand up trousers to the corner of the fireplace. (Mother would prepare food) our bottom halves we would then complete. Many a blow at the back of the head I would get, as I foolishly dusted my dinner plate before food was put on it.

It was on my second attempt, that I joined the R.A.F. to see how the other half of the world lived. Some of the time I spent in England . Two years or more abroad, Singapore and other places of tropical wonder . Places that dreams are made of . I came across all sorts of races, creed and clan . All odd in stature.

One who was big in stature, was that of a North Wales man, a typical "scrum half" (huge). He tackled me, and took me to task, because I would not turn and answer when called upon, by the name of "Taff" .

Nearing the end of my service career, I found I was more of a "Taff" than I realised . I had a lot of Rhondda in me . The green, green, grass of home (although greyish) was calling me back.

I returned once more, seeing the Rhondda from the heart, seeing, feeling, a sense of belonging.

The Rhondda has now accepted me. She who pushed me out, welcomed me back. Go she said. Find out what is out there in that world outside, and when you are ready, return to my bosom and be part of me. Be prepared to mix with it's people, return their friendship, enjoy their singing, and the "Hwyl".

If only we could export this part of the Rhondda, but alas we cannot. "Hwyl" is in the hills, mountains, streets, rivers, below ground in the old workings of bygone mines, it is in the people old and new.

Somehow it is being passed on by these people and preserved to be passed on again. My proof of this is still around. He is 86 years old now but still talks about the comradeship of his 40 years underground working, given a chance he would go back tomorrow.

My story of my Rhondda, I dedicate to him.

To William Llewellyn (Boogy) Morgan.  
From Your son Arthur.

## THE TASTY BOOTS - Donald Roberts

Like his seven brothers, my father began work at the local colliery when he was fourteen years old. At the age of twenty one he left his Stanleytown home to join the Army, and soon found himself on the way to India's North West Frontier.

It was 1941 before the South Wales Borderers were despatched to North Africa, just in time for the fall of Tobruk, where my father was taken prisoner by the Italians. The conditions at the Italian Prisoner of War Camp were very poor, with hunger and disease rife. In his letters home he often told his elder brother Tom, who worked throughout the war at the National Colliery Wattstown, of the situation.

Although not well off themselves, the family got together a parcel, containing a pair of boots, and through the Red Cross, sent it to Italy.

On receipt of the parcel my father immediately exchanged the boots for food with one of the prison guards. In his next letter home, he thanked Tom for the boots, "They were delicious," he said. Tom reading the letter exploded in fury and ran to the nearest Bracchis where he grabbed the proprietor by the throat and shouted, "You are over here getting . . . . . rich while my poor brother is over there, having to eat his . . . . . boots."

During the years after the war, my father and his brother often talked and laughed about the boots, especially over a few pints.

My father spent most of the rest of his life working in the National Colliery and never lost his sense of humour.

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### My Valley

I have a dream, of hills broken up by different shades of green and gold and farms nestled in their hollows. Of sheep wandering down to the valley floor to drink from the cool clear river. Cottages scattered here and there with smoke rising from the chimneys, the only sign of human habitation. This vision of mine was once somewhere close to reality but can never be so again.

The landowners of the past found a commodity, quite literally, under their feet. Coal was to be found in abundance and for them it was black gold. For the poor and the desperate who flocked to the valleys in search of work, it was often the black death.

From fresh and fragrant peacefulness came clogging dust and dark despair. Men digging their way through the black gold, hundreds of feet below ground, with only a Davey lamp to guide them through the darkness and maybe a canary for company to let them know the air was safe to breathe.

For the wives who waited at home there was always the uncertainty and dread. Would they still be wives at the end of the shift or would they be widows? In the face of such adversity one wonders where their courage came from.

Once again a change has come to my valley. Mardy pit has closed, it was the last pit in the Rhondda. Maybe we can once more look forward to breathing good clean air but never again will we find the peace and tranquillity that once was to be found here.

Sheila

## JOHN DAVIES, DISTRICT SECRETARY 1919-1937

The year after John Davies was born in 1882 his father, like so many others of that period, responded to the "coal-rush" which was changing the rural Rhondda into a vast network of communities feeding labour into the coal mines that were mushrooming into the upper reaches of the Valleys. His father left his father-in-law's home at Llangeitho, Cardiganshire, to start work at Mardy Colliery in 1883 and the family moved to Ferndale, Rhondda. Tragically, a few days before Christmas 1885, an explosion at the Mardy Colliery claimed 81 victims including John Davies' father. In February 1886 his mother with her two young sons returned sadly to Llangeitho. After attending the British School at the village until he was thirteen years old he started work as an apprentice to a draper back at Porth in the Rhondda. After only two years his health broke and he returned home suffering a chest complaint that was to plague him several times during his life. After a few months he was able to return to his apprenticeship at Porth. During the following year the miners came out on strike for six months giving him a close view of the deprivation and sorrow suffered by families during these industrial battles that scarred the mining communities.

Finishing his apprenticeship he found a position first at Barry and then at James Howells of Cardiff. From there he moved to a post with Lewis Lewis at Swansea and then Ben Evans, Swansea. Joining the Union (Shop Assistants, Warehousemen, and Clerks Union) he soon represented members at their Annual Conference at Manchester in 1903 and then at Glasgow. Suffering a further spell of chest trouble he eventually returned to work at Hampstead, London in a shop and whilst there came under the influence of the Religious Revival of 1904-1905, but 1906 saw him back home once again with his chest complaint. His work, from his recovery until 1914, was in the Swansea Valley. Rejected for military service he went to Salisbury Plain as a Hut Leader with the Y.M.C.A. until 1917.

He returned to South Wales as an Organiser with the Agricultural Labourers Union of Cardiganshire, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire feeling much stronger after enjoying the outside life. In December 1919 he was appointed Secretary of the South Wales District of the Workers' Educational Association. He

also became Joint Secretary with the Registrar of the University College of South Wales, Cardiff in 1920. For eighteen years he served the District until his death on December 5th, 1937, aged 55. In the words of Thomas Jones, C.H., John Davies would never have passed the test of any Chartered Institute. "He played the game, but broke all the rules." But the Movement prospered under his genial dictatorship. There were few Branches in the District, but friends of the W.E.A. were many throughout South Wales in Trade Unions and in the University Colleges. He was always known as John Davies, W.E.A. which was cherished as much as any degree and Professors and Chancellors rubbed shoulders with this evangelic Welsh peasant and sat on his executive committee and nodded their heads obediently at his request for support.

His wife, Ruby Davies, contested the Wells Division in 1929 on behalf of the Labour movement, a year after meeting John and coming to know him well. They had eight years of happy marriage working together. Ruby always felt that if she had succeeded in entering Parliament it would have been a lesser role in life than the one she shared with her husband in serving the W.E.A. Movement in South Wales.

The last words he spoke at a public gathering, at a conference on Social Service and Unemployed Clubs, on October 12th 1937, were: "Education is not enough for the calls of our day and generation, or indeed for the calls of any day and generation. We need active contact with the spiritual forces in the Universe. This alone will give us the faith that life - come what may - is really worth while, and it is this faith that will enable us to dedicate ourselves to the service of our fellows and to the service of the community in which we live. We all of us need that spiritual sustenance that will re-invigorate us and help us to face and breast all our economic and ethical difficulties."

He died at his home at Maes-yr-Haf, Rhiwbina, Cardiff and was buried at Llangeitho on December 8th, 1937, after a lifetime of strenuous service for the less fortunate of his fellow men and women in Wales, mourned by the great in Welsh society, and by the working men and women of whom he was a prime example of dedication and idealism.

# THE COLLIERY WORKERS' MAGAZINE.

Vol 1 No. 10 October 1923.

## Baths at the Pithead

BY EDGAR L. CHAPPELL. Secretary Welsh Housing and Development Association.

The case for the provision of bathing facilities at Collieries has been so widely expressed in South Wales during the past 10 years that it is not necessary to set forth the various arguments, at great length, in the present article. It will be sufficient to state that Pithead Baths are needed for the following chief reasons:—

1. The present system of home bathing involves the introduction of industrial dirt into the homes of miners and this leads to uncleanliness, insanitation and general discomfort.

2. The preparation of baths and cleaning up and clothes-drying operations entail an enormous amount of labour on the part of the women folk, which would be avoided if the miners returned from work clean.

3. The custom of bathing in common living-rooms is highly undesirable. Probably less than 1 per cent of

miners' dwellings in the South Wales Coalfield have separate bathrooms, and many of the dwellings are so overcrowded that privacy for bathing operations is, in many cases, impracticable.

4. The appearance of miners in public places with blackened faces and in working garb tends to degrade the miners as a class in the eyes of the non-mining population.

Numerous other reasons could be given why the present arrangements should be abandoned, and readers who desire to pursue the subject further should read, "Pithead and Factory Baths," written by Mr. J. A. Lovat-Fraser and myself, in which the subject is discussed in close detail. . . . .

. . . . . the key note of the Pithead Bath movement is that Industrial Dirt should be left at the Colliery.



Georgina Miles, Maerdy

## THE JAZZ BAND

We've all got a book of time, that we keep in our mind  
So let us turn the pages back, and see what we can find.  
Come with me for a little while, come and take a look  
I can show you lots of things, that I keep in my book.  
Here is one about the war, of that we must forget,  
So let us turn another page, we'll find some-thing better yet.  
Here is one 1926, let's see what that is like,  
I wonder if you remember that, it is the Miners Strike.  
Here's Blaenllechau without the bridge, here's friends I used to know,  
There's some standing in little groups, by a corner in Long Row.  
That's a picture I can't forget, the strike had just begun,  
The tricks that some get up to, just for a little fun.  
Listen to "Will John Reuben" as some-one cracks a joke  
And poor old Dai pulling out a fag, ready to share a smoke.  
All these men were ready, to pull their belts in tight  
And the women too, God-bless them, joined in this bitter fight.  
Here's old Alf Harrison coming, let's hear what he's got to say  
He's telling Morgan Davies, there's no settlement on the way.  
Everyone is in their shirt-sleeves, the weather is boiling hot,  
The gardens have all been planted, some-thing for the pot.  
Hark ! at those chaps laughing, let's hear what's being planned  
Jack Lewis and Will Thomas, wants to form a band.  
Let's dress up in some old clothes, and march up through the street,  
The banner boys brought out drums, and a bath for Will to beat.  
Even Bob Price heard the role call, dressed in a sailor's suit,  
Listen to old Gurnos playing a ditty on his flute.  
Every-body in Long Row, was standing at the door,  
Although we made an infernal noise, they clapped and called encore.  
Every-one was laughing, at our Comic turn,  
Sam Mason as a nigger, around his waist he tied some fern.  
The children must have wondered, where were these people from  
Tom Thomas with his sisters dress on; 'that was madam Pom Pom.  
'Let us form a Jazz Band,' let's show what we can do  
We'll even make some jazz suits, and have a committee too.  
And scrap all this nonsense, and have Bazooks without delay,  
And let us ask Joe Prothro, if he'll teach us how to play.  
Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. Chamberlain, were busy day and night,  
Making hats, suits and ruffles, they worked to get things right.  
Joe brought out his tuning fork, we practised hard and long,  
Poor "Ukelele Lady", we blew of her sarong.  
Syd Fletcher taught us how to march, and hold our chins up high,  
Come on boys, Unk Burgoyne said, you can do it if you try.  
Shoni Felin Fole was coaxing, show you are no duds,  
Because some-one had suggested, we'll be called the "Long Row Spuds".

Ted Ritchins too was helping, so was old Sam Clare,  
 Ianto, Twm and Shoni, were eager to do their share.  
 Rees Reuben was the leader, he was also very strict,  
 But who were we to grumble, he was the man we picked.  
 This big drum isn't much good, that's what Will Griffiths said,  
 Shoni and Ted went to Newport, for a better one instead.  
 This Jazz-band craze was spreading, we marched over hills and dales,  
 "Ukelele Lady" must have thought, that she was born in Wales.  
 When we went to competitions, we played and marched so proud,  
 Jack Mason with supporters, clapping very loud.  
 We won a lot of Prizes, of course, we lost some too,  
 The poor old judges had the fault, we cursed the B . . . . blue.  
 Then the argument started, let's give the lady a rest,  
 Let us learn the Maerdy March, and then hope for the best.  
 Will Matthews was in favour, just like he told Jim Gadd,  
 She'll either end up on the town, or I'll go raving mad.  
 We also played Moon-light and Roses, and Sally's come back as well,  
 Joe even taught us a medley, while the "Lady" was taking a spell.  
 Now the soup kitchens have been opened, we were sure of one good meal,  
 We made little collections, putting our shoulders to the wheel.  
 Some men opened levels, to supply the kitchens with coal,  
 We were happy with empty pockets, nothing, not even dole.  
 Though the days turned into weeks, and the weeks turned into months,  
 The Coal-Owners lashed the whip, we never squealed, not once.  
 Then the miners were all forced back, we even lost the day,  
 To work the same old hours, and for even smaller pay.  
 So I'll close my book very softly, though its pages shall never grow old,  
 It's printed in my memory, in letters of purest gold.

I hope you enjoyed my story, of things that are long past,  
 But the Jazz-bands won't be forgotten as long as my book will last.  
 There's names that I have mentioned, who have gone to a better land,  
 And names who shall be mentioned, when there's talk of the "Long Row Band".

**T. Lewis**

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### **THE PIT PONY - Cheryl Hier**

The big wheel's stopped,  
 The pits have closed,  
 And now my work is done,  
 Retired they say to well earned rest,  
 My last days in the sun.

They've given me a pleasant field,  
 At foot of forestry,  
 With rolling hills and drifting clouds,  
 Alas my eyes can't see.

I'm well looked after,  
 I'm well fed,  
 My freedom is a treat,  
 I hear the insects buzzing round,  
 Smell clover 'neath my feet.

And yet I'm plagued with discontent,  
 I'm bored as bored can be,  
 For paradise cannot replace,  
 The miners company.

## IN MEMORIAM - DISASTER AT CAMBRIAN COLLIERY, MAY 1965

I remember that May day quite clearly. It started as a perfectly ordinary Monday. Washing had been hung out to dry in the back gardens of most of the terraced houses that straddled the valley. It fluttered and swung in the breeze of the early afternoon. It was one of those typical May days - Spring not quite over and Summer not quite begun. Preparations had been started behind the net curtained windows for the meal to be eaten when the men returned from work. Today being Monday the usual fare in most of the households was the remains of yesterday's Sunday joint with the re-hashed cold potatoes and vegetables which were also left overs - popularly termed 'fry up'. In the early afternoon stillness a barely perceptible tremor was felt by the women at work in their kitchens. A few went to their front doors and looking each way up and down the street and seeing nothing untoward, shrugged their shoulders and returned to their tasks. It was the beginning of the end for some. Gradually, then swiftly like a gust of cold wind rising up, the news spread through the small community. Explosion! There had been an explosion at the Cambrian Colliery. Out of the small houses they came, young women clutching children by the hand, older women, lines of fear etched on their faces, young men, old men, as one they headed forward in one direction - up the long steep valley road, which led to the pit head. In the huddle of the mountains which stood at the top of the hill the pit wheel stood silhouetted in the fading afternoon sunshine. There was no outward indication of the holocaust below. It was only the crowd of hushed people assembled there, silent to the last one, to indicate the enormity of what was

happening below where they stood. They stood as one, shivering from the chill of the fading day and the icy touch of fear which had fallen among them. Murmurings and whisperings began to ripple



through the silent watching crowd as the wheel at the pithead revolved slowly. From the depths of

that devilish hole stepped the first rescue workers - eyes downcast, heads shaken in futility. Tears streaked grotesquely in white rivers down the black sweat stained faces. There followed throughout the rest of that day the terrible ritual of the stretcher bearers. Their tragic burdens obscured by dark blankets. As another blanket descended, that of the early summer night, the crowd slowly began to disperse. Sobbing softly for the most part but some with terrible cries of anguish as they returned to their now lonely homes. One newly widowed woman left the scene, tears not shed but her face ravaged with grief. As she moved slowly back down the hillside supported by her relatives, a small child followed closely behind wailing noisily, but for once in his young life, ignored by his mother. Behind, in the valley of the shadow, the pit wheel stood silhouetted, its shape resembling a giant question mark. The little houses closed their doors and settled in to prepare to mourn their dead. The sun shone again the days those miners went below ground for the final time. As one, the mining community assembled to escort their comrades and workmates on their final journeys. Throughout the winding narrow street, the roadside was lined with silent respectful mourners. They stretched from the makeshift mortuary at the Assembly Hall, near the pithead, down the long steep hill and continued, following the course of the black river, which had seen this all before. It stretched for miles to the hillside cemetery at Trealaw, where awaited resting places for most of the thirty one dead. The first of the hearses came slowly down the hill, then the second and a third. One by one they came, a long black procession. Black as that terrible day. Behind that terrible succession of hearses, the footsteps sounded. Tramp, tramp, tramp they came, that silent body of mourners. Eyes were fixed forward as they followed their brother miners on their last journey. As one person they moved. Who knows what went through each man's mind as they walked behind those coffins to the cemetery. 'There, but for the grace of God, go I'. Yes, I remember that time well. I was one of those who stood in that silent crowd, head bowed in respect as each bier passed. I remember it today as I stand at the same spot where I observed those pathetic remains of humanity being brought above to a daylight extinguished

from their eyes forever. If by some chance they could come and stand here today they would not recognize the scene. The verdant green mountain slopes down now into a green valley. Black has disappeared. Nature's blanket has covered the scars inflicted by the coal barons. No ugly pit wheel now, no shiny black heaps of coal. Now in their place is a beautiful lake. A small bridge straddles the water and a solitary old miner enjoys the quiet of a May afternoon. The scene is one of peace and tranquillity. Who would question that anything of a distressful nature happened here. The pithead is forgotten. A small bench stands by the lake-side. One can sit and enjoy the beauty and peace of the mountains. But listen closely. Perhaps we can imagine we hear the rattle of the trams as they climb the mountainside of the Cwm to deposit their waste at the summit. Perhaps we can hear the bantering shouts of camaraderie from comrades working beneath the sound of the revolving pit wheel. Yes of course we can remember and imagine those forgotten sounds. But now here today, the only sound disturbing the May day is the gentle lap of the water, the soft winds whispering in the grass and gentle birdsong. But in the wind, and the mountains and our hearts the echo will ever be there.

'WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER.'



PAT JONES. MAY 1990

# THE DISASTER AT CAMBRIAN COLLIERY

by D. FRANCIS, General Secretary.

Taken from the Magazine "The Miner", Vol. 13, No. 3

I HAD thought that colliery explosions were a thing of the past—that we had left them behind after the grim warning we had following the explosion at Tower colliery on April 12, 1962, just over three years ago.

But the dark clouds of tragedy and disaster have again descended on the most famous of our valleys - the Rhondda- which has given so much in the last 100 years in toil, tears and sweat, contributed much to the wealth of our country, and received so little in return.

Thirty-one miners have given their greatest possession - their lives - to provide the nation with fuel and power.

All that afternoon and evening, crowds of people were around the pithead, often in driving rain, watching and waiting for news from down below. Will we, who were at Cambrian colliery on Monday, May 17, 1965, ever forget the pain and anguish on the faces of relatives, friends and neighbours of our comrades who lost their lives in the blast that rushed from the P26 powerloading face sometime around mid-day.

Travelling up the valley that afternoon, many thoughts went through my mind. I had many pleasant memories of meetings with Cambrian lodge committee. It was at Cambrian that the scenes were shot for our Gala film. It was at Clydach Vale that the late Jack Jones— gallant and courageous comrade of the working class movement— had lived all his life.

## GRIEF AND SORROW

But all this disappeared when I saw the grief and sorrow of the people surrounding the pithead baths and canteen. The Cambrian has again given us a grim reminder of the narrow margins that exist between incident and disaster. We watched those heroes of mining disasters, the rescue workers — coming and going from the shaft until the last of the

NAME	ADDRESS	AGE
A. Colcombe	87 Morion St. Clydach V.	44
D. Evans	4, Bryntawel. Blinclydach	28
W.L. Thomas	13, Francis St. Clydach Vale	33
L. May	347, Brithwenydd Trealaw	46
A. Newman	3, Bryn Terr. Blaenclydach	45
I. Jacobs	83, Ynyscynon Rd. Trealaw	46
J. Channing	31, Brook St. Williamstown	48
E.L. Rees	57, Edmandstow Rd. Penrhwyfer	51
V. Nicholas	53, Moaddock St. Blinclydach	34
R. Daniels	108, Park St. Clydach Vale	28
G. Thomas	31, Jones St. Blaenclydach	32
I. Morgan	Flat 2, New Century Rd. Trealaw	42
D. Price	4 Llwynypia Rd. Tonypanyd	27
T. Williams	78 High St. Clydach Vale	55
R.J. Roberts	25 Court St. Tonypanyd	55
S. Williams	74 Ely St	
K. Davies	8 Railway Terr. Blaenclydach	26
E. Williams	17, Rowling St. Williamstown	51
E.W. Burnett	30 Caeglass Penrhwyfer	46
T.J. Harris	4 Sunny Bank Blaenclydach	
R. Hucker	103 Park St. Clydach Vale	
R. Flower	83 Marian St	45
D. Culvert	96 Charles St. Tonypanyd	40
D. Griffith	"	43
R. Gregson	154 Dunraven St. Treherbert	21
H. Lee	70 High St. Clydach Vale	56
R. Arnold	26 Pontypridd Rd. Porth	48
H. Pope	106 Wern St. Clydach Vale	50
G. Davies	170 Court St. Tonypanyd	24
E. Breeze	[Manager]	
L. Williams	[Undermanager]	

31 dead were brought from the pit.

I commented to a man standing near me, 'I never

thought that in 1965 we should be faced with a tragedy such as this!"

To the lodge officials and committee men of Cambrian and neighbouring lodges fell the difficult task of visiting the homes of the bereaved, up and down the valley. Would those who criticise the miners and complain about their concessionary coal accept such an onerous and unhappy responsibility?

It required strong men with tender hearts - the miners-to undertake this task.

### **BRAVE FAMILIES**

By now, night was falling and the distant pits were shrouded in mist. Sorrow and pain had come into the homes of so many of the Rhondda Valley's brave families. Wounds had been inflicted in their hearts which will never be healed; gaps on their hearths which will never be filled.

Sympathy for them transcends all boundaries. Newspapers carried headlines of the catastrophe and messages of condolence were beginning to come in from all over the world—one of the first from the Australian miners' union.

Our last tribute was paid to our dead comrades at the funerals on Friday, Saturday and Monday, May 21st, 22nd and 24th, when, it seemed the entire population of the Rhondda turned out with dignity to pay their last respects.

The week-end was dull and rainy and was in keeping with the occasion.

It is incumbent upon the Executive Council, in paying their last tribute to our comrades, to translate our sympathy into action and to do everything within our power to see that these terrible happenings in our collieries are a thing of the past. In this way we believe that we shall best remember them and the things they lived for and cherished so dearly.

### **THE FINAL ANSWER TO HATRED**

TWO months ago the shock of the pit disaster at Tonypany, in which 31 miners lost their lives, stunned the whole country.

The response to the disaster fund was immediate, and in those first letters came one from a noble woman.

It was from a mother in Germany sending £4 - 10s. and promising further donations every month for the sorrowing wives and their families.

A touching gesture, but from all the women in the world you would have thought it the least likely to have come from Mrs. Martha Holle.

For all her three young children were killed during the war by the R.A.F., when they bombed her home in Dusseldorf.

### **The gift**

Indeed, her sufferings at that time were appalling yet one precious memory of those years remained and brought forgiveness.

When she and her family were almost starving after the war, a food parcel arrived from England. It was sent to Mrs. Holle's brother who was a victim of the Gestapo.

"From then on I had no bitterness," she says. "I was stunned that an English family could send food to us at such a time."

And a few days ago Mrs. Holle arrived alone in the Rhondda Valley for a holiday. My picture shows her looking down on the Cambrian pit, the scene of the disaster.

That one click of a camera's shutter has captured all that need be said to answer those who still bear hatred against their enemies of 20 years ago.

Extract from People, July 18th 1965.

## TRIBUTE TO HEROES OF THE MINES

Extract from the Observer/Leader, Friday, May 10th, 1985.

WHILE Britain commemorates the victory in Europe 40 years ago and pays tribute to the country's war heroes, many Rhondda families are remembering how some of their loved ones lost their lives to the insidious enemy of the miner—dust.

During the war years, thousands of able bodied young valleys men were not able to fight for their country. They were needed at home, in the collieries to mine the coal so desperately needed to fuel Britain's warships.

But remaining at home if you were a miner did not guarantee your safety: For over the war years, as in other years, the miners, particularly those in South Wales, were battling against coal dust; the cause of pneumoconiosis which has killed so many men.

Of 140 men who were working in the Yard seam number four pit at Cambrian colliery during 1933 - 41, only five are now alive. The others have died mostly lingering and suffering deaths from the dust disease or other chest related illnesses. One of them was Dick Carpenter of Howard Street, Clydach Vale, who was just 25 years old.

One of the remaining five men is Arthur Belmont of Morton Terrace, Clydach Vale. He is, at 73 years old, certified as being 100 per cent affected by dust, but counts himself one of the lucky ones.

"That seam used to be called the White man's grave," he said. "We used to have to dry cut the coal and the dust was so tremendous that you couldn't see a hand in front of you. In the end they had to close the seam, long before they closed the colliery in 1966, because of the dust problem."

Sadly the story of the Yard Seam Number four pit is one which repeats itself throughout the valley. Dust disease has claimed thousands of victims, but there are no memorials to testify to the bravery of these men.



## AN APPEAL FOR THE MINER

Ye men of the City—Ye men of the Town,  
Ye men of the Country of wealth and renown  
Just pause for a moment, just list to a tale  
If you've any manhood, t'will make your cheek pale.

It's of the old miner, whose lot is so poor,  
There's none of you knows what he has to endure  
The world with oppression is full to the brim,  
The Miner well knows it, yet tries to be trim.

He's risking his life in the depths of the earth,  
Far, far from the sound of all joy and all mirth;  
You look from your Mansions upon him with scorn,  
And thinking the miner beneath you was born.

He works for such wages as you would refuse,  
Yet you always treat him with scorn and abuse;  
Come home with the Miner, to see his poor cot,  
And say would you gladly exchange with his lot.

Ah, friend, would you know it, there's many a cot,  
That's fuller of love than your Mansions of rot,  
There's many a heart that is true to the core  
If life's things are scanty, there's Love, more and more.

When on a day's outing, he's known by a look,  
And held in derision by scribes of the book;  
Deformed in his body, disfigured his face,  
Beneath all these coal marks, lurks many a grace.

You city-bred squire in faultless attire,  
Don't deride the miner who squirms in the mire;  
For you he does suffer, his comforts are few,  
He's always in danger for the likes of you.

He's bold and he's daring, courageous and true  
Think Friend, if these qualities are found in you;  
Acquainted with sorrow, oppression and strife,  
There 's nothing but sacrifice all through his life.

Don't judge him too harshly, his life is so sad,  
If you had his burdens, it would make you mad,  
Just have some compassion, p'raps, he 's not all white,  
But when comes the judgement, he'll stand in the light.

Tom Thomas, Maerdy

## BLACKEST DAY

by M. E. Dudson

Traditions of a valley die  
Eaten bit by bit  
When news is reached of closure  
That of Mardy Pit

From the valley floors there sprang  
More than fifty mines  
With them came a workforce  
Needed for those times

Longing for work brought the men  
They came from far and wide  
Waiting for their shifts to start  
Standing side by side

Leaving terraced houses  
Fathers with their sons  
Cutting at the blackness  
For coals that came in tons

In a herd they shuffle  
Waiting for the cage  
It takes them down to darkness  
Clanking with a rage

Tommy Box and Davey Lamp  
The uniform of miners  
Supplying coals to steam run trains  
And ocean going liners

Grime and sweat, the dreaded dust  
A price that miners pay  
Small rewards for working blind  
Not knowing night from day

With the pit go forlorn men  
Resigned to what must be  
Their heads are bowed, a silent throng  
Through watered eyes they see

The future's bleak, the pit must go  
The last remaining one  
And with it goes a culture  
That is surely second to none.

## A VIEW OF THE RHONDDA

John Morgan 1985

The Rhondda not so long ago  
Was a boomtown for coal;  
It's now an industrial wasteland -  
Scarred, stripped of soul.

Yes the Rhondda was world renowned  
For the coal from her mines;  
But has it been worth it all ?  
I ponder sometimes.

I'll tell you a little story of  
This Valley of mine.  
Come listen and hear me now,  
I'm sure you have time.

Until the nineteenth century  
It was still purely green;  
The river was clear then -  
A bright, silver stream.

With the first seam of coal they found  
At Dinas, things changed;  
And the face of the Rhondda  
Soon became re-arranged.

Now the river ran deathly dark -  
Polluted by silt;  
So flowed a reminder of  
The coal owner's guilt.

The hills huddled round this town,  
Once as green as could be,  
Had now black tips of colliery waste  
Serve as stark company.

The grimness was manifest -  
You'd view everywhere;  
But the owners, they saw  
Their stocks and their shares.

From Cwmparc to Tylorstown,  
Blaenrhondda to Porth,  
If you'd asked to see beauty,  
Greed and profit stepped forth.

Oh Rhondda I cried for you  
In your hour of need;  
And prayed I might be the one  
To plant the first seed.

And tho' the days when tips are grassed  
At last have arrived,  
No landscaping can replace  
What nature contrived.

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## THE END OF AN ERA (The Condemned)

Like all things that history tells  
There are holes deeper than wells  
Where hard sturdy men venture to go  
Crawling and grovelling on the floor  
To dig a substance we call coal  
Is no mean feat for those who go  
With knees red raw and aching backs  
They stumble across the winding tracks  
Into the unknown of a darkened hell  
Only these people can really tell  
Coal, Coal is that awesome cry  
With tears of anguish that never lie

They fight and strive to reach a goal  
Of that priceless thing we call coal  
With brains, brawn and human strength  
The bodies of these miners are physically spent  
From dawn to dusk they labour in vain  
Knowing they'll be back again  
Their money is sparse as the wintered grass  
But they still fight on  
From the days of the bitter past  
For the new generation  
They hope some day  
Will earn for British Miners  
A decent pay

Dai Thomas (Ex Miner)

## Walking Home

Giants of men they were,  
From days when I was young.  
To see them walk the valley streets  
When their shifts were done.  
Strange black faces, whites of eyes,  
Clunk of steel capped boots on pavement,  
Metal helmet with tommy box to match,  
Bundles of stick under one arm,  
Talking and laughing whilst making their way  
Home from the shift at the end of their day.

An awesome sight they surely were, but,  
For Rhondda's children they held no fear,  
We lived with them, loved them, held them dear,  
For they were our fathers, grandads, brothers,  
We knew their worth, if did no others.

It's many years since these sights we saw,  
The pit head baths have, long since, daily  
Washed away the skins' covering of black coal dust.

The tragedy is that no amount of pure, clean water  
Could cleanse the lungs of these gentle giants.

L. A. Roberts



Wife to husband home from work late, "Where have you been?"  
Husband to wife, "Walking Home!"

## "MY DAD THE MINER"

In Wattstown many years ago  
My dad once dug for coal  
For twelve long years  
Of sweat and tears  
He laboured down a hole

We take so much for granted  
Who work above the ground  
We see the sun, the birds and trees  
There's beauty all around

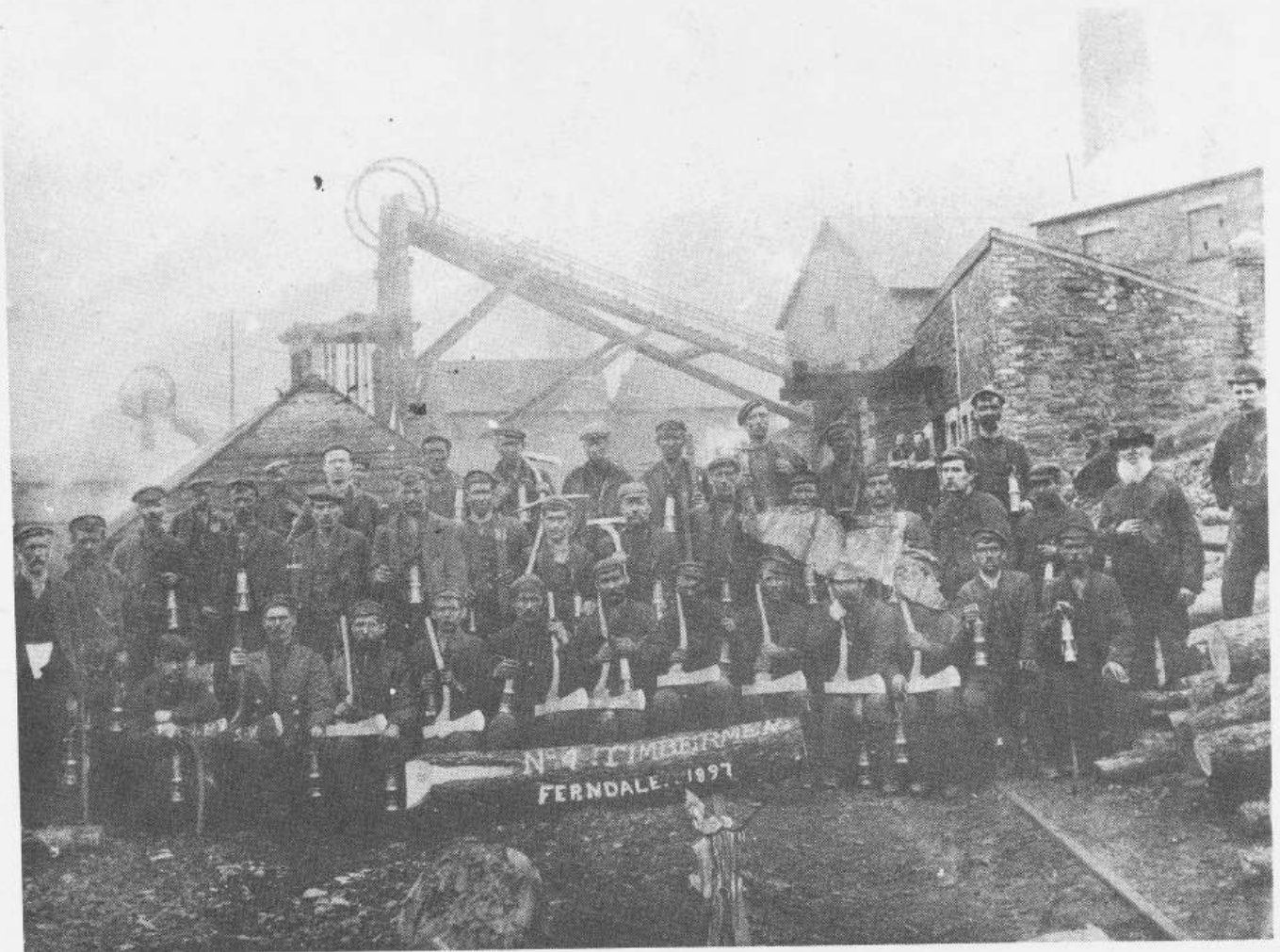
But where a miner toils all day  
Is dark and damp and cold  
No central heating, canteen breaks  
You'll find down in that hole

No clean and flushing toilets  
Nowhere to have a wash  
A toilet and a wash-basin  
My word that would be posh

A miner is a rugged man  
With hands and back so strong  
His loyalty to kin and friends  
Will last a lifetime long

Beneath a tough exterior  
Beats a heart that's made of gold  
For every miner come what may  
Is from a special mould

Maureen Jackson



## The Coal Owners' Ten Commandments to the Miners.

I. *Thou shalt have no other Master but me.*

II. *Thou shalt not make for thyself any comforts, nor the likeness of anything - to thine own interest, neither on the earth, nor above, or in the mine.*

III. *Thou shalt bow down to me, and worship me, for I am thy Master, and a Jealous Master; and I will show you no mercy, but endeavour to make you keep my Commandments.*

IV. *Thou shalt not take the name of thy Master in vain, lest I sack thee at a minute's notice.*

V. *Honour thy Master, and his Stewards, and his Deputies, that thy days may be short, and few, for I shall not want thee when thou gettest old and not able to work; thou wilt have to end thy days in the poor-house.*

VI. *Remember that thou work six days with all thy might and with all thy strength, and do all I want thee, but the seventh day thou stop at home and do no manner of work, but thou shalt do all thou canst to recruit thine exhausted strength for my service on Monday morning.*

VII. *Thou shalt have no other Union, as it is against my will.*

VIII. *Thou shalt always speak well of me, though I oppress thee; thou shalt be content if I find thee work and pay thee what I think well; thou shalt starve thyself and thy children if it is anything to my interest; thou must only think of me, not thyself.*

IX. *Thou shalt have no meetings to consider thine own interest, as I want thee to keep in ignorance and poverty all the days of thy life.*

X. *Thou shalt not covet thy Master's money, nor his comfort, nor his business, nor anything that is his; thou shalt not grumble at anything, as I want to reign over thee, tyrannise thee, and keep thee in bondage all the days of thy life.*

**Skewen Miner !**

**Taken from The Colliery Workers' Magazine**

**Vol 1 No. 10**

**Dated October 1923.**

I started mining at Aberaman Training Centre four weeks before my fifteenth birthday. All mining trainees had to spend thirteen weeks there before attending their respective pits.

Thirteen weeks of Coal News films, playing football and visiting local pits, everyone said the same thing, they would complete the thirteen weeks then take a job somewhere else, very few did.

My first shift at Mardy Colliery was on December 23rd 1963, that day is etched in my mind forever. I boarded the 6-05a.m. Double Decker Bus with my two older brothers, when it reached Ferndale Clinic there was standing room only. I was greeted at the pit by Eddie Smith and Boxer Williams, and descended number 4 shaft in the last bond at five minutes to seven, I heard the hooter go as we were being dropped.

Eddie and Boxer assured me that they would not allow the overman J. R. Jones to allot me to a miserable collier, they were as good as their word, and I followed my "butty" Billy England to the training face adhering to the strict pattern of walking two paces behind.

On reaching the face, whilst taking the tools off the bar, the main topics of conversation were Richard Burton's romance with Liz Taylor and the Hypnotist pushing twelve inch needles through his forearm the night before at Tylorstown Workmens Club.

Ronnie Bartlett enquired whether I had best butter in my box and remarked that it would probably change to Echo Marge by Thursday.

The first shock came upon entering the coal face, I had to crawl up even though the seam was over six foot high, throwing my shovel and mandrill a yard at a time in front, the face was infused and fired and I could't understand why there was no walking track, the reason being, when we visited faces from the Training Centre, by the time we arrived at mid-day most of the coal track had been cleared ready for turning.

My "butty" Billy soon got down to the bottom, and when he went in a yard, placed me, shovel in hand, under a front liner wooden post, with the instructions, always fill your shovel and watch the top slips of coal.

When our stint of one and a half pans was cleared, we knocked out our temporary posts, and stood posts with flats, which were duly inspected by the Deputy, Essex Mardon.

By now my every muscle was aching but I was elated by the fact we had cleared, whilst looking up and down the track, cap lamps were still throwing beams of light to and fro signalling that they were still chucking on.

I was continually aware that my sense of smell had increased ten fold owing to the forced ventilation, and the early aroma of Persil from washed clothes, had been replaced by the smell of timber and last night's beer.

At one thirty p.m. we put the tools back on the bar, I put on my coat and scarf and started the weary walk back to pit bottom. By two twenty five p.m. I was under the shower thankful for the end of the first shift, happily anticipating three days off for Christmas.

When the bus reached Queens Square in Tylorstown at three p.m. my two brothers had jumped off the bus before it had stopped and ran into our house laughing. I soon discovered why, when I realised that my mother's chip saucepan was only big enough for two lots, so I was the last to be fed.

**Eric Price**

IANTO AND THE DRAGON by HAWYS JAMES

Right up in the Rhondda Valley, in Maerdy to be precise,  
There lives a retired miner and his name is Ianto Price,  
He's fond of his allotment, his pint and cigarette  
And in his pigeon-cote he keeps a very unusual pet  
Named Merlin, scaly dragon, quite friendly and bright red,  
Whose favourite meal is cawl and cockles, leeks and laver bread,  
For afters, he likes Welsh cakes, he's choosy with his food,  
Washed down with Rhondda's best pale ale - Ianto's own home brewed.

He takes his scaly dragon to National rugby games  
And if the Welsh are losing he breathes out tongues of flames  
To spur them on to victory, that winning try to score  
Then Merlin joins in with the crowd and gives a mighty roar;  
But if our team is winning he flaps his tail and wings  
While Ianto shouts and cheers and claps and with the crowd he sings  
"Cwm Rhondda", "Hymns and Arias", "Hen Wlad fy Nhadau" too,  
Astride his shoulders Merlin stands as if stuck on with glue.

In National Eisteddfodau he climbs up the big marquee  
And stands so proudly on the top for everyone to see,  
He's in the Royal Welsh Show with Ianto at his side,  
He even helps the Tourist Board and acts as tourist guide,  
But on St. David's Day, right around our land he goes  
Attending parties, drinking toasts, he positively glows.  
If you've not noticed Merlin then you must use your eyes,  
He's seen on shirts and flags and mugs, jumpers, scarves and ties.

PENHYDD

*HEN afon yr Iorddonen!  
Rhaid imi groesi hon;  
Wrth feddwl am ei dyfnder,  
Mae arswyd dan fy mron;  
Ond im' gael nabod Iesu,  
A'm carodd cyn fy mod,  
Af trwyddi'n digon tawel,  
A'r gwaelod dan fy nhroed.*

*Paham yr ofna' i'r afon  
Wrth weled grym y dwr?  
Mae'r gwaelod wedi ei g'ledu,  
A'r Iesu'n bennaf Gwr!  
Yr afon goch lifeiriol  
A darddodd dan ei fron,  
Mae miloedd yn mynd adref  
Yng ngrym yr afon hon.*

**D. Gwilym Thomas, Maerdy.**

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Still a Palace of Treasure - Maerdy, August 1984  
(month six of the Miners' Strike)

There is still a Place of Treasure  
in the valleys of the Celt.  
In the ravaged face of Rhondda Fach  
lies Maerdy, of black wealth, that  
at one time fed all the world  
with fiery nourishment.  
And, though those days have passed away,  
yet still the Treasure shines, for now  
it is not coal that gleams with light,  
but human spirit fine.

They tried to tread the spirit down with words,  
and blows and arrogance, but,  
we replied with tight-closed ranks  
that could not be defiled.  
These men and women and village-folk  
will cling forever true,  
and cannot be defeated by moneys' beckoning  
hue.

Brenda Edwards.

## **ROLL ON THE DAY**

**(Words and Music by Allan Taylor)**

**As the dawn come creeping  
Roll on the day  
Another night not sleeping  
Roll on the day.**

### **Chorus**

**Roll on the morning, roll on the day  
I hear the old man softly praying  
Roll on the day.**

**Praying for another day  
Roll on the day  
When it comes it wastes away  
Roll on the day.**

**Every night you fight for breath  
Roll on the day  
Hurts so bad you wish for death  
Roll on the day.**

**Repeat verse one.**



## Of Men And Coal.

Hubert Thomas

ex Deep 7 District. Cambrian Colliery. (No4 Pit)

The coal has been cut, the cutter moved away  
Just as quite a normal routine of every day.  
As the coal is infused water soon gushes out,  
It's up over my boots; somebody will soon shout.  
We tolerate the water for that indeed we must  
To minimise the risk of lungs filled with dust.  
Deep down in the earth midst rocks and clay  
Men's thoughts turn to home and kiddies at play.  
At every shift's end it is quite a treat  
To stand and inhale the fresh air so sweet.  
'Neath the warm sunshine life does seem so grand,  
Just one day's visit underground and you might understand.  
Evening comes and you are at home once more  
Relaxing with them that you really love and adore.  
Feeling quite satisfied within, for your day's work done,  
With the family its now time for some fun,  
Or; maybe taking the Mrs out for a walk  
Contentedly holding her hand, not attempting to talk.  
Ignoring the shaft as you both go strolling around  
You pause and listen to nature's own sweet sound.  
The thrilling sound of a bird in the tree  
Expanding his chest as he sings out with glee.  
He incites us all to be happy each day  
And helpful to others we meet along the way.  
Calling at the fish shop as we're homeward bound  
As we often feel quite peckish whilst strolling around.  
On arriving home, the first job must always be  
Switching on the kettle for a pot of tea.  
Quite soon the young ones are off to bed  
But, not until their prayers are quite nicely said,  
With a special prayer for a girl called Kay  
Whose daddy, did not come home the other day.  
In life and limb cost of coal is high  
Yet men will dig for it until, they die.

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### Birth by John Watkins

The first morning of spring  
Peeps through the coal dust  
And soaks up the rising sun.

A mother kisses the head  
Of her new born.

Father picks a red rose  
And plants another seed  
In the valley

## THE RHONDDA

The dust and grime, the rivers of pollution  
The hills the streets, hugged into the mountains  
The tears the joy of people who worked here  
They are my memories of the Rhondda  
Mam cleaning the house or feeding the kids  
Dad out with the cart gathering food for the pigs  
The streets as they rang with laughter and shouts  
The pit wheels are turning bringing the coal out.

The mountains, the trees and bushes wind blown  
The bogs and the streams and paths overgrown  
We'd climb to the top to take in the air  
And fill up our lungs with air that was pure  
Home we would run down the old mountain tracks  
Into the house and into the bath  
Washing and scrubbing and cleaning our teeth  
Then into the kitchen and ready for tea.

Now with the changes the valleys are silent  
The new generation are under the skin  
They work and rebuild just as their kin  
The rivers are cleaner the coals gone away  
The fish in the water the children at play  
There is only memories where once there were pits  
So let us go forward and show we can fit.

Jeffrey B. Price

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**Time hides the path  
that your weary footsteps made.  
Your sun has gone down  
slowly . . . very slowly  
your shadows will fade.  
No mortal foot shall ever tread  
upon the path you trod  
no other mortal shall taste the  
bread  
that you received from God.**

T. Lewis

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## "FOR VALOUR"- Underneath

The courteous invitation tendered by the Mardy Colliery Lodge, (N.U.M.) and the Rhondda Borough Council to Rhondda people to "Reflect In Their Own Words" their heart felt feelings applicable to 'Rhondda's Mining History'. And to express how they feel about the disappearance of an Industry which brought dignity, fame, comradeship and character to our beloved Valley. I welcome this opportunity to do so, not only as the father of two serving miners, and someone who has spent a lifetime in the coal-industry, but also as a living representative of my late Father, Grandfathers and Great-Grandfathers who were all Rhondda Miners. Men who spent long years as subjects of King Coal, the Black Emperor of The Steam Age, and toiled for pittances in his Kingdom Of Darkness.

When the sculptor will cut the years 1875 - 1990 into the tombstone of MARDY, thus will end an ERA - momentous in the annals of 'Coal Mining Industry', an ERA which Historians of the future will categorise as UNIQUE and UN-REPEATABLE.

It is very true that the par-excellent characteristics of dignity, fame, comradeship and character far exceeded the mammoth tonnages of coal that was produced in the past one and an half centuries of Rhondda Mining and if I may be permitted to add one more VERY SPECIAL CHARACTERISTIC, namely 'VALOUR'.

In the same Victorian Age that brought to birth so many pits in-so-much that the greedy Coal Owners gripped with greed and avarice, threw overboard (Industrial Birth Control) in their 'Rape Of The Fair Country', Queen Victoria instituted a Decoration for "SPECIAL ACTS OF BRAVERY" namely the 'VICTORIA CROSS' - in the year 1856.

The same year the Dunraven, Tyntyla and Bodringall Levels in Ystrad were opened, and the Gelligalled Colliery.

This, the highest of decorations, is described as follows, 'A BRONZE CROSS WITH THE ROYAL CROWN IN THE CENTRE, SURMOUNTED BY THE LION, AND THE INSCRIPTION "FOR VALOUR" UNDERNEATH. This came about as a result of the gallant CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH in the battle of Balaclava on 25th, October, 1854 in the

Crimea War.

The same year 'Ynysfeio Colliery' Treherbert was opened.

As a fitting tribute to those Gallant Miners Of Rhondda who exercised the same brand and quality of VALOUR in their "CHARGE INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH" and galvanised the GREAT IN GREAT BRITAIN- also qualify for the highest award - and certainly -  
"FOR VALOUR" - UNDERNEATH THE GROUND.

The PEACE of our Valley prior to the coming of King Coal was coined by the late- Doctor E.D.Lewis, the author of "THE RHONDDA VALLEYS" as "UNDISTURBED ETERNAL SOLITUDE" very similar to the "POPPY FIELDS OF FLANDERS" prior to 1914 and the Great War. If MALTA, is known the world over as the "GEORGE CROSS ISLAND"— even so the "RHONDDA VALLEY" Underground - should equally be known as "THE COAL CROSS VALLEY".

So Very Proud To Be A Rhondda Boyo,

Yours Respectfully, Tom R. Jenkins

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W. H. Edwards J.P., who is the Secretary of the Rhondda Civic Society writes:

Dear Friend of Rhondda,

I write in the belief that, like others, you have an affection for Rhondda, created perhaps by some inexplicable and compelling yearning, or hiraeth, to trace the source of your early beginnings; possibly in quest of an identity! For are we not all sprung from the same stock, partakers of the same nature and sharers in the same hope?

It has been said that 'The Past is Everywhere' but for some like myself I cannot resist making known that one of my starting points is here at Maerdy, Rhondda.

Maerdy is a typical mining village situated at the north end of the Rhondda Fach where on the afternoon of Wednesday 23rd December 1885 a terrible explosion occurred at the local pit killing 81 men and boys. My grandfather, Edward Edwards, who is also the grandfather to Mrs. Morwen (Price) Williams,

of 53 Oxford St., Maerdy, was one of the victims, as was his son, Edward, aged 17 years. another son was born posthumously in February 1886 and was christened EDWARD POSTHUMOUS EDWARDS, and it is he who is my father.

As the youngest child of a large family, Posthumous Edwards was much loved but has now long since joined both his parents to become part of Rhondda's soil at Maerdy before moving on to Heaven and Eternity!

I have written this brief piece of personal history as a form of introduction which may strike a responsive echo, perhaps to remind you, of a similar incident in your family long ago.

Either way, please read on.

The Borough of Rhondda extends across 37 square miles of the two valleys known as the Rhondda Fawr and Rhondda Fach with the mountain ridge between them and mountains on both sides.

The Borough's population of about 80,000 is centred on the four towns of Porth, Tonypany, Treorchy and Ferndale, and in the villages between and around them. This sets the Rhondda scene as it is today.

But first let me take you back almost two hundred years—back to the earlier part of the 19th century when Rhondda was almost unknown to the rest of the country. The whole area was sparsely populated and forestry and the rearing of sheep and cattle were the principal occupations; although corn and other cereals were grown in areas where the former forest had been cleared.

However, all that changed with the successful sinking of the first small mine shaft at Dinas in 1809 which heralded the start of commercial mining—and inevitable changes were on the way.

The subsequent feverish development and expansion of this new found wealth altered Rhondda's face almost overnight with the valley disfigured by ugly and savage scars—and the very name Rhondda becoming synonymous with industrialism. This, of course, was only the beginning for in the course of a single century Rhondda became the most intensively mined area in Britain, probably the epicentre of coal production in the world!

By 1921 there were over 160,000 living in Rhondda; most lured by the prospects of earning a living in one of the 66 collieries. And of this vast population some 41,000 men and boys were employed in the pits and producing a yearly output of nearly 10 million tons of coal.

Of the great mining achievements of those times little remains, but the often terrible pit disasters will always remain etched in the valley's history. As will the premature bereavements, the sacrifices, sufferings and hardships encountered by our forbears.

However, soon after the mid 1920's collieries began to close. A process which at first began slowly but accelerated in the 50's and 60's and which was finally completed in the '70's and '80's.

The last Rhondda colliery—that at Maerdy— closed in July, 1986, but the seams of coal, as long as they hold out, are still being worked but the coal produced is now sent underground to surface in the next valley—the Cynon Valley. However British Coal has now decreed that all coal producing work will cease and the mine will completely close on the 21st December 1990.

So in Rhondda, neither coal nor coal miners dominate the scene and a way of life has passed for ever. It marks the end of an epoch, for Rhondda, without coal, is like the sea without fish, the sky without birds—it is a contradiction of natural terms. Gone too is the huge population for there are fewer than half the 160,000 people now living in Rhondda.

Now hopefully against this brief introductory and historical background you will be better able to appreciate when it is explained quite simply, but nonetheless with some sense of history, that the tradition of Rhondda, with its one-time total involvement of all families in a common work which united and fused them in a close community spirit, is deeply embedded in coal mining. An industry which in the past has been associated with dirt, difficulty and danger.

It naturally followed therefore that in the confines—in the somewhat claustrophobic confines—of deep and dark underground holes the emphasis was always on fellowship. Fellowship which was born of necessity, to combat an unstable and insecure changing universe wherein injury and death were constant companions to all who toiled and slaved in the bowels of the earth.

Fellowship has therefore been of the essence and whilst it would be foolish to pretend that Fellowship was sanctified by the old mining fraternity of Rhondda, it would be more than fair to say that it was nourished by them, and is now endemic to the Rhondda Valley.

**Above extract is taken from the Rhondda Civic Society's publicity brochure.**

## **THIS WOMAN RISES**

This woman slumbers,  
soft green down feathers across plump dim-  
pled limbs.

A yawn,  
A stretch,  
she stirs -  
shifting slightly,  
the mystic landscape of her shape  
awaking passion in fire hungry suitor.

This woman wakens,  
spread eagled legs mottled with the pox  
marks of man's  
crazy lust.

A sigh,  
A moan,  
she dreams -  
crying softly,  
the pathetic heartbreak of a lover  
on finding herself soiled.

This woman labours  
heart pumping blood through the arteries of a  
hundred terraced streets.

A gasp,  
A twitch,  
she yields -  
groaning quietly,  
the synthetic fabric of her cape  
glints dully, the colour of pewter.

This woman rises,  
soul soaring high above the carcass of life.

A breath,  
A hum,  
chanting lowly -  
the prophetic keening of a mother  
lamenting those for whom she toiled.

**Dei Trainer**

## **Turn Around**

Turn around, my Jesse, look about the vale.  
See the mighty engines toiling through the  
glades.

They have come with workers,  
foreigners they are, to sink deep shafts, cut  
down the trees and spread the hard, black  
scar.

Turn around, my Jesse, how quick the streets  
have grown!  
The miners bring in their families, to help them  
underground,  
so small the boys, like scurrying ants  
into the bowels they toil.  
And none gainsays their suffering -  
the profits much too royal.

Turn around, my Jesse. Three hundred souls  
or more,  
are buried alive 'neath the daylight,  
of this valley floor.  
No rescue, no release for them, -  
they'll stay there for evermore.

Turn around, my Jesse. Now quiet is creeping  
back.  
Other countries tunnels are deemed more  
profit to pay.  
And who cares for those out of work? Those  
sons of those who cracked  
the first wealth from South Walian mines.  
It isn't wanted now. It does not suit the Grand  
Design.  
No matter that whole villages will die,  
that families split and spread apart.  
Those who have never lost, will not lose now,  
while those who have always cried will still cry.

**Brenda Edwards.**

## Casual Reflections.

The valley has been stripped of it's main asset  
With fine men, being deprived of a worthwhile goal.  
Now they strive to do what they consider best  
Whilst never forgetting the price some paid for coal.  
Pits are long closed and the scene is changed,  
Machinery gone, concrete having given way to grass.  
Most working mens' lives have been well re-arranged  
People had said that it would come to pass.  
Groups of men stand talking outside the Pandy Inn  
Of fixed holidays out abroad without a single care,  
Of races at Ascot and which horse would win  
And quite often wishing that they could be there.  
Out of Social Security offices a young man came  
Meeting his family, they all then boarded a bus.  
As his daily routine has always remained the same  
They are off to Tesco's without too much fuss.  
A hearse passes and each man doffs his hat,  
Gestures of sorrow, even from strangers are not denied.  
One man said; I would never ride in that,  
His butty said; You wouldn't know, if you died.  
Up to the Rhigos and some well flattened ground  
Dai Faggots from Pentre coaxed an over loaded bus.  
For a picnic where nought but peace would abound  
And kiddies run and play without any real fuss.  
Jones Kippers wife Bessy to bingo made her way  
Patting her bag for luck, we wished her well.  
To call a full-house would make her day  
And, it could happen for all we could tell.  
Croaky Lewis the top tenor went on shuffling by  
With the Morning Star paper tucked under his arm.  
When he sung he'd bring tears to your eye,  
An old softy but he wished no one harm.  
Laundry woman Pigs Wilson rode past on her bike  
Ringing her bell like fury, all of the time.  
Her old man would still prefer to hitch-hike  
Than reminisce, on past life which had been sublime.  
In politics the valley will see some new change  
But, never far from it will I ever roam.  
Its true, loyalty our allegiance can never re-arrange  
If you are Rhondda born the valley, is home.

Written by Hubert Thomas. This amended copy dated. 29/10/90.

## BALLAD OF THE RHONDDA by Hawys James

In the Rhondda Valley long, long ago,  
A sprightly little squirrel just like the wind would go  
From tree to tree, so fast and free,  
Right down from Maerdy to Pontypridd.  
But row on row the streets now go,  
Along the valley they stretch endlessly  
And from roof top to roof top a cat can bound  
And travel down the valley and never touch the ground.

### Chorus

O listen well. My tale I'll tell  
About the Rhondda Valley and it's history.

In the Rhondda, colliers went down the mine,  
In cap and muffler clad they heard the hooter whine,  
With faces black they dug for coal  
And filled the drams down that deep, dark hole.  
But strikes soon came and who could blame  
The miners as they fought for their rights.  
Soldiers marched up and down Tonypany Square  
And all the miners wanted were wages that were fair.  
In the Rhondda Jazz bands came everywhere,  
Treorchy and Pendyrus voices filled the air,  
No work, no work for boys or men  
And thousands left old Cwm Rhondda then.  
But there was warmth on every hearth  
And friendly neighbours filled every street  
The soup kitchens were full and the chapels too  
And miners squatted idly, they had no work to do.

In the Rhondda now the big wheel is still  
And clean are streams and rivers and green is every hill,  
Here tourists flock from many a land,  
They say, "The Rhondda is really grand."  
And they all find that hearts are kind  
And friendly neighbours fill every street;  
Still with Sioni and Dai there will always be  
A friendly little chat and a pleasant cup of tea.

O come with me. O come with me.  
We'll go from Bwlch y Clawdd and onward to Treorchy,  
Through Pentre on to Gelli, Llwynypia, Tonypany  
And over Brithweunydd on to Porth and Dinas,  
Then we'll go right up to Maerdy  
And pass through Ynyshir and old Ferndale.

## David the miner who retired at 80

As miners press for a reduction in their retirement age to 60 it is sobering to consider the life of David Davies.  
For 73 years he worked underground and in doing so earned himself a place in the Guinness Book of Records, which he is unlikely ever to lose. And after all that service his only pension was free coal for the rest of his life.  
Born in 1842 in Pontrhydyfen in the Afan Valley, he started work at one of the 4 Lockets pits then open in Maerdy in 1849. His retirement in 1922 was widely reported in the local press.



### Portrait

The most lasting impression he left of himself remains in, of all places, the U.S.S.R. In the 1920's, when Maerdy was known as "Little Moscow", two soviet artists asked if they could paint his portrait. Persuaded by local communist Arthur Horner, Davies agreed and his portrait still hangs in an art gallery in Moscow.

David Davies taught himself to read and write in both English and Welsh. He often went to the aid of his fellow miners, treating them for eye inflammations caused by pit dust, with a herbal mixture he made himself.

He lived for many years in North Tce., Maerdy, and died there in 1928 at the age of 86. A few years before he died he and his wife celebrated their Diamond Wedding anniversary, making them the longest married couple in the town - another record for David Davies.

**The Shawl -  
Maerdy, Tuesday, 5th March, 1985.**

They came to stare and click their cameras,  
freezing in time, what  
they termed 'defeat'.  
With lights brighter than diamonds,  
with rudeness and cynicism  
the media thought their package 'complete'.  
But, they never thought of, or guessed  
at the feelings, or the pride  
or the love, that would rise with that dawn,  
and when we all marched in the glow of that  
morning,  
even they had to admit  
that a Greatness was born.  
A Greatness that was sown in the  
hearts of many peoples,  
in Oxford, in the Midlands  
and even London Town.  
A Greatness that had travelled to Italy and Russia,  
to America and Germany, with acclaim and re-  
nown.

A Tuesday, in Maerdy - a brass band at Dawn,  
the raising of silk banners against  
sky forlorn, and then  
the sky turning, from blue/black to  
orange show,  
the All Saints bells singing -  
the pride starting to glow.  
The village of Maerdy followed  
their men, their miners  
back to the pit.  
And, no-one complained of the frost, or the cold  
because no-one even noticed it.  
The band played the marchers  
on their Victory route,  
and we all began to sing,  
and then,  
the Greatness was around us  
like a shawl,  
cuddling all of us in.  
It was a shawl made of dignity  
and pride, and it shone  
with the lustre of community joy,  
love and affection were the fringes upon it -  
and none of it could cloy.

And now, when those who were not there, laugh  
or show their contempt,  
I realise I pity them in their ignorance.  
For I have been witness  
to a great moment in time,

when the spirit of the peoples  
rose above that of the swine.

**Brenda Edwards.**

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**Advancement**

Barbara was brave - and brilliant,  
Glynis could speak like a song.

Mary, Maudie and Joan, and all the rest  
helped their men along.  
Along the route they believed right,  
the route, that they believed true -  
that is, for the choice to work in their pit,  
and live as they wanted to do.

They could foresee a time close ahead,  
when their village might well disappear,  
no jobs of any sort, for any of their young -  
if Mardy would close - as they feared.

So, in March '84, they took off their aprons  
and put on the raiment of WAR -  
and bobbies and media,  
and Thatcher and cronies got more  
than they bargained for.

It could not have been easy to travel long hours,  
to speak to support groups and yet,  
still to manage on 'Strike Pay' (that is a good one' !!!) -  
to feed all their families - pets.  
But, never a break did they make away,  
nor an inch did they move from their mens cause - apart  
from behind to besides them, that is,  
or even in front - now and then.

Now, the Strike may be over,  
- the closures are coming, but one thing  
is certainly so, that the women will no more allow men to  
lead them  
they now know where they want to go.

**Brenda Edwards. April 15th, 1985.**

# Maerdy

## The 1984-85 Miners' Strike

### THE RETURN TO WORK

It was about 4-30a.m. on a cold winters morning. I wasn't exactly sure where we were going, except that it was to support the miners, who had been hurt, mentally and physically.

When we arrived in Maerdy there were hundreds of people in small groups, talking to each other. The church bells chimed repeatedly, as though mourning a great loss. Everybody then lined up behind the band and the miners returning to work. As we walked through the town people were on their doorsteps in their nightclothes, some handed the miners red roses, while others just clapped. Lots of people were crying as they clapped or marched. We soon left the town and marched along the long road which led straight to the mine. There were television cameras and reporters with us all

the way. One lady reporter, from the Rhondda Leader, asked me some questions about how I felt supporting the miners.

When we arrived at the mine, the miners all stood on both sides of the end of the pit road and clapped, cheered and thanked us all for our support. Some miners then got up on the roof of the Colliery building to talk to us and say how pleased they were that we were there with them. They then gave one final goodbye and thank you wave and went inside the pit.

We then walked back down the icy pit road to the car, we went home feeling sad, but proud.

I am glad I was there.

**Ben Roberts (then aged 10)**



The miners from Maerdy came to my house for a week in March '84 and stayed for nearly a year. All of us involved in the Oxford Miners' Support Group are proud of our involvement with the Mardy N.U.M. lodge during the period of the Great Miners' Strike. With their lodge's long tradition of class struggle the Maerdy community inspired us, showing us that the strike was justified and important and that victory was not only crucial for them to stop pit closures but for the rest of the working class not only in this country but as a symbol throughout the world.

In Oxford this inspiration resulted in the development of a Miners' Support Group and Oxford Womens' Miners Support Group which together raised £111,000 in cash and food for the miners; had a weekly attendance at it's peak of well over a 100; had groups throughout the county and in the Oxford colleges; collected food for the miners; was receiving donations from 92 Trade Union organisations, 45 Labour Party branches, 29 colleges and 9 International groups; had an active Oxford Miners' Support Group in Bonn in the then West Germany which is twinned with Oxford, and in Rapperswil in Switzerland. It organised 6 mass pickets of the nearby Didcot power station, three major rallies, a march linking the issues of pit closures and nuclear weapons and organised Xmas parties for 1,400 miners' children and published the book "The Miners' Strike in Oxford".

This support for the miners did not finish with the ending of the strike as Oxford Trades Council continued to play an active part in the essential national campaign 'Justice for Mineworkers' on behalf of those miners sacked and in many cases imprisoned for standing up for basic rights.

Like everyone else in the Oxford Miners' Support Group I have many very moving memories of the year and of the warm and brave people in this South Wales mining community. I don't think I have ever laughed in a year so much, so many jokes, so many stories late at night after a meeting, sitting around the kitchen table over a bag of chips and a mug of tea. I remember Eric Kilgoyne quietly observing one day that it was the first time in his life he had hairs on his knees - he had gone into the pit as a young lad and had worked on his knees ever since, except for this strike.

You had to joke and laugh to keep your spirit's up, endlessly shaking tins out in the cold in the shopping centres, anywhere where there was a crowd like St Gile's Fair. You also needed a sense of humour to deal with some of the bigoted

and hostile comments you received against the strike. I saw many a red face as a result of the sharp wit of people like Mike Richards, Glynnis Evans, Nippy Parcel, Megan and Glan Webster. Other people had other ways of winning people around, impressing them with the dignity and justice of the cause, people like Barbara Williams. I was privileged to have so many wonderful men and women from Maerdy stay at my house during that incredible struggle that made everyone find something important in themselves to contribute. It felt like one big extended family and like all families we had our share of rows, usually over attitudes to women.

On the Thursday before the end of the strike Mike Richards came in with Nippy and in his arms he had bundles of notebooks, diaries and papers from the strike. He gave me his battered map of Oxfordshire that he had used throughout the year as he travelled the length and breadth of the county speaking at meetings. "Here take this" he said "We won't be needing it" and he started tearing up the notebooks. I tried to stop him saying "Mike, keep them, they're part of history." He replied bitterly "Yes, that's all we are now - a part of history." Realising this really was the end of the strike I went out to the kitchen beginning to cry, Nippy was there and said "C'mon now gran, don't or you'll start me off too." There were tears in his eyes.

In the morning, before I went off to work, I said goodbye to Mike and Nippy, I couldn't believe they wouldn't be back on Monday with their suitcases and their shout "Hello, let's put the kettle on, how's things?"

One battle was over with the strike ending and another one is to end with the closure of the colliery. In Oxford too, we have a serious fight on to prevent the closure of the Cowley Car Plants and the decimation that will cause in this area. But even if battles are lost, the important thing is to ask ourselves if we fought to the full and to know we won't give in to defeat and give up the war against all those who exploit and oppress us, or who try to lead us to defeat. All of us experienced so much during the strike, we need to use what we learn from all our history as a class and use it to build for the future. That fighting spirit seen in history of the women and men of Maerdy and the Rhondda must live on to inspire us all.

Anne-Marie Sweeny  
Oxford Womens' Support Group

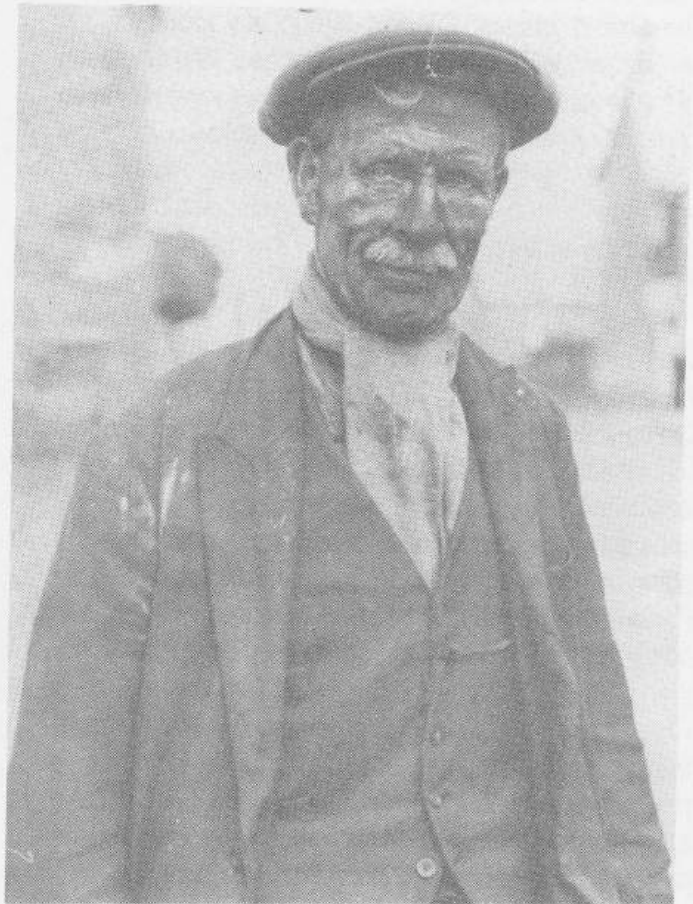
## My Rhondda.

My Rhondda, My Rhondda, My Rhondda,  
In 1985 the men all marched to work,  
After a long, hard twelve months strike  
That did not really work,  
The Coal Board did just what they liked,  
They closed the collieries down,  
And now in the Rhondda Valley  
There is just one mine to be found.  
Mardy, Mardy, Mardy Colliery,  
The Last pit in the Rhondda to close down.

When I was just a little boy,  
So many pits around,  
You could find work easily  
Way down underground,  
But now I'm getting older  
My hair is turning grey,  
They offer me a transfer  
To a pit so far away,  
I think they said Bettws or maybe Penallta,  
But what's the point of going there,  
They may close twelve months after.  
Mardy, Mardy, Mardy Colliery,  
The Last pit in the Rhondda to close down.

It's a cold December morning,  
The last shift is down the mine,  
The men have tried so very hard  
To keep this pit alive,  
But owing to Geology,  
This pit has got to close,  
I think the men at Mardy  
Deserve a big applause.  
Mardy, Mardy, Mardy Colliery  
The Last pit in the Rhondda HAS closed  
down.

Beverley Collins



Mr. O. J. Buckley, a Welsh miner, who has the distinction of being Chairman of the largest Urban Authority in England and Wales - the Rhondda Urban District Council.

Here he is seen arriving home from a day's work, having completed half-a-century in the mines.

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The Rhondda Borough Council and  
the Mardy Lodge of the N.U.M.  
would like to thank all those people  
who have contributed to the  
compilation of this  
Commemorative Book,  
marking the end of an era of  
coalmining in Rhondda.

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**Photographs of Mardy Pit before Nationalisation.**



**This photograph shows the working conditions at Mardy Colliery, under Private Ownership, immediately prior to Nationalisation.**

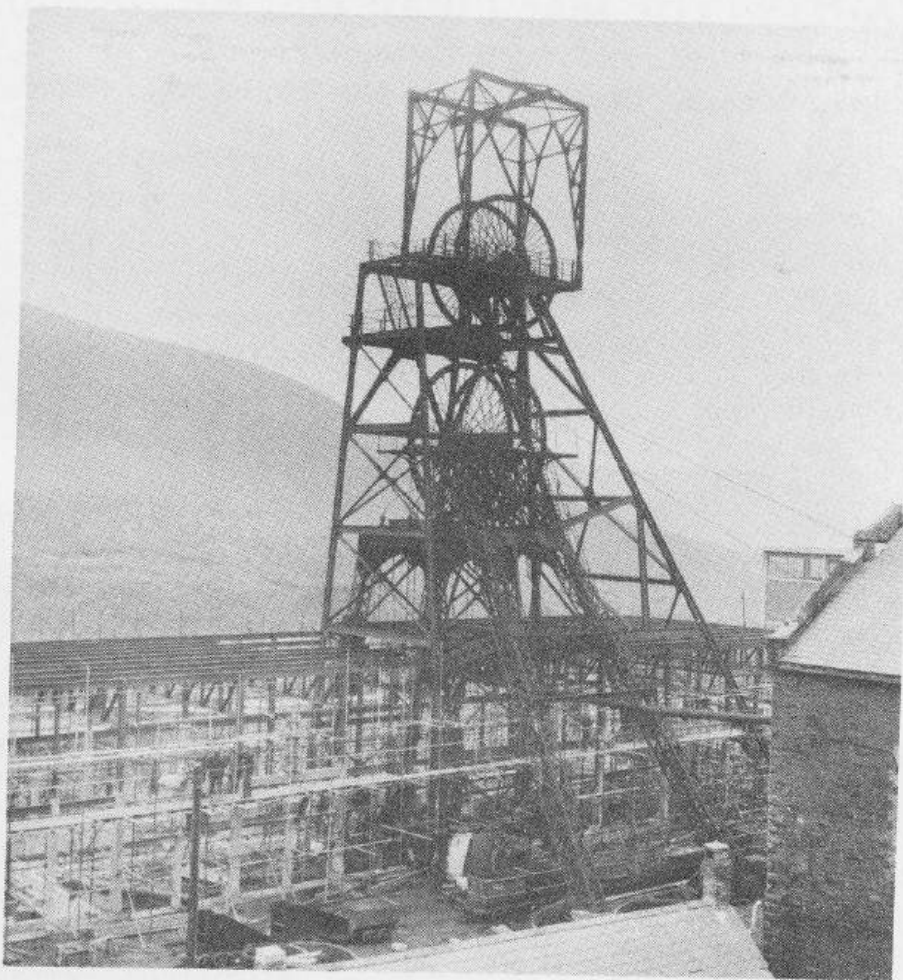


From the collection of the late Mr. Maurice Williams, who was for many years Manager of Mardy Colliery

The official opening of the Pithead Baths in 1955.

The Ceremony was performed by Arthur Horner, General Secretary of the N.U.M. and a former checkweigher at Mardy Colliery.

To his right is Mr. Charlie 'Coch' Jones,  
Mardy Miners' leader for many years.



From the collection of the late Mr. Maurice Williams, who was for many years Manager of Mardy Colliery

### Number 3 Shaft at Mardy Colliery in 1951.

The photograph shows the turning of winding direction, this work had to be carried out without stopping the pit from working.

A tremendous feat of engineering, for this day and age, let alone for 1951.

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The Mardy Lodge of the N.U.M. would like to officially record  
their thanks to the Rhondda Borough Council  
for their assistance in the commemoration of the closure of  
**Mardy Colliery, the Last Pit in the Rhondda.**

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# MARDY (The last pit in the Rhondda)

(Words and Music by Dave Rogers)

Taken from the Album, "The Last Pit in the Rhondda", by Dave Burns.

There's a mist down in the valley  
And the snow lies on the hill  
No men walk through the empty streets  
The pit lies quiet and still  
There's a keen wind down the valley road  
That bites into your skin  
But the people of the Rhondda  
Will keep fighting till they win.

When I was small I used to sit  
Down by the fireside  
To hear the tales of struggle  
That would fill my heart with pride  
I heard of the evictions  
Back in 1932  
When the people of the Rhondda  
Wouldn't let the bailiffs through.

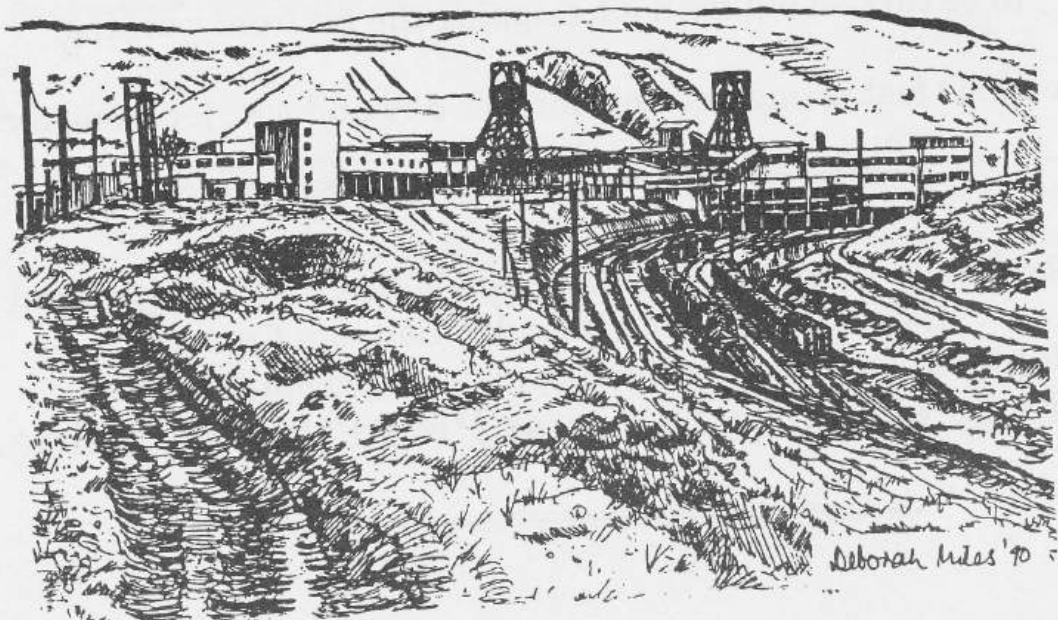
They told me of a valley  
That we'll never see again  
When the coal mines found employment  
For forty thousand men  
The anthracite was plentiful  
Down in the Rhondda seam  
But the owners wanted closures  
And economising schemes.

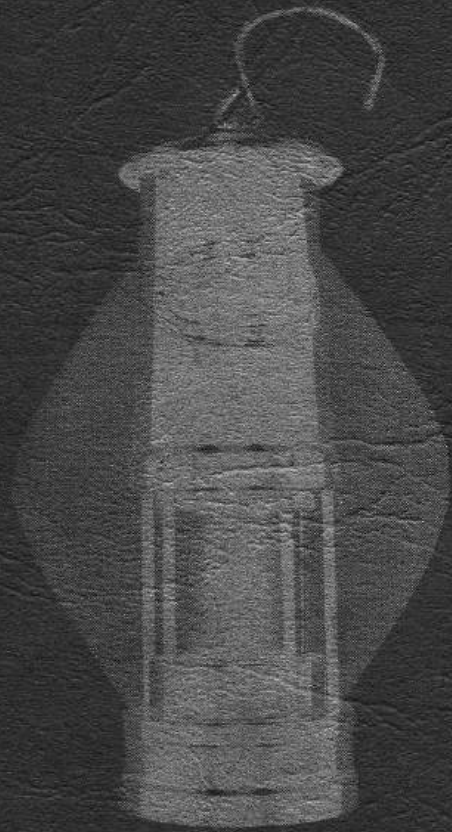
My father had to fight  
To earn a living from the mine  
If he was here today  
He'd join the picket line  
His lungs were full of Mardy dust  
That's the price of coal  
The dust it took his body  
But the Union gained his soul.

The women of the Rhondda  
Are out on the picket line  
To stop the Coal Board's closure plan  
And save the Mardy mine  
Fighting for our children  
And the town where we belong  
You'll hear their voices singing  
"We are women, we are strong."

I've marched with men from Cortonwood  
And with the Keresely wives  
I've joined the Durham miners  
Like us, fighting for our lives  
I've stood with lads from Nottingham  
Down on that Orgreave field  
And faced the dogs and truncheons  
And the bloody riot-shields.

Repeat Verse One.





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