

# A RELUCTANT BEVIN BOY !

## A LASTING IMPRESSION

The dawn was breaking when I heard a distant bell ring three times, and then in reply three louder rings, a metallic noise, a slight jerk upwards and then like a stone going down a well I found myself plunging down the dark shaft, faster and faster. A terrific cold wind began to become a gale as the floor of the cage had more holes than floor! I began to think is this the end ? Then suddenly I felt if I was going up again but it was just a illusion, as the brake was applied to the cage in the Engine house on the surface.

## CALL UP.

When I was called up for the armed services I had a medical like all the others, if I remember rightly, if your registry number ended with a five you were drafted into the mines so that out of every ten, one was sent into the mining industry, which then was short of labour.

Wrongly ,the skilled miners had been called up for the services when the war started, eventually there was over of over 40,000 miners shortfall .

This scheme was bought in my the then Minster of Labour, Mr Ernest Bevin, hence the name -Bevin Boys !

## TRAINING

I was lucky that I lived in the coal mining district of Stoke-on-Trent , so my first day of the four weeks training was at the local library in Station Road, Tunstall.

One of the instructors was called Mr Halfpenny I thought at the time that it was an amusing name, but he proved to be a very interesting man who described to us how coal was mined and also we had drummed into us the dangers of the mines. Several hours were taken up with Physical Education.

There were over fifty of us in his class from all over the country, all with peculiar accents of course, we had a Taffy among who was quite humorous, another a pacifist architect, we were quite a mixed bag.

After the first two weeks we were told to go to the local training pit called Kembell six miles away, the other side of the City, at 7-30 am

On arrival we were kitted out with steel capped boots, boiler overalls, and a miners helmet which was black and around the rim was painted a white band, so that we were branded beginners in the mines !

Kembell Pit was only a small disused mine, it had been altered for a training centre for this area, it was to give us some insight into the mining industry, so that we would get used to the environment

In the early days we were issued with a huge cast aluminium battery light which was switched on by rotating the base, it looked like a miniature lighthouse and it felt like one when you hung it on your belt, believe me! Your legs were black and blue with this dangling on your belt as you walked, you needed your hands for the job in hand!

We were taught how to couple the tubs up while on the move. If you were not quick enough you would likely get a smashed hand; when two tubs come together with over 15 cwt in each nothing like your hand can stop them!

These Couplers were a short chain with two large hooks to engage with the drawbar hole on each tub.

Gravitation was dependant on in certain areas, and you had to control the speed of the tubs with wooden scotches to act as brakes, also metal rods with handles called Lockers were inserted in the spokes of the wheels to lock them. This was quite an art as the small wheels sometimes rotate at some speed and you could not see where the holes were in the wheels. It was just a matter of jabbering at the wheels in hope, the faster the tubs went, more was the demand to slow them up to prevent a derailment. Again when the locker went in you had to judge how far you inserted in the wheel if you pushed it too far your fingers would be crushed between the body of the tub and the locker handle!

Some of us dared one another how fast you could locker a empty tub, we pushed the tub as fast as we could and some idiot would attempt to stop the empty tub at speed. This came to an end when one tub was propelled so fast that on inserting the locker in the front wheels the entire tub did a somersault and crashed upside down... we were severely ticked off for this episode.

We were also given some instruction in the old way of undercutting the coal seam. It was quite something to see an actually seam of coal in situ, we took turns lying on our back wielding a pick into the coal, the principle was to remove the bottom six inches of the seam as far back as you could drive your pick. You also had to drive wooden wedges and posts to support the overhanging coal seam. This system was outdated as they later used a huge electric powered coal cutter with revolving steel blades on a jib which undercut the coal seam by over six foot more than a miner could do with an pickaxe!

While training a point was raised by an ardent future politician in our ranks, that we were entitled to have leave like the armed forces. We even went to the local public telephone box in the Market Place Tunstall and rang 10 Downing Street!

Of course, nothing came of it, they knew we would be dispersed after our four weeks training. so any demands were soon forgotten.

## **ON THE SURFACE OF CHATTERLEY WHITFIELD COLLIERY**

We were then allocated to the local Collieries in the area, again I was lucky to find I was to work at Chatterley Whitfield, a large Colliery which was only three miles away from home.

I was to report on the Day Shift ready for work at 6-00 am!

So my alarm was set for 4-30 am after two rounds of burnt toast [No Electric automatic toaster then, only a gas grill ! ] and a mug of cocoa. off I went to a nearby Bus Stop, where several more miners had collected,

The local bus companies ran a shuttle service from all over the area to the colliery. On entering the Art-Deco modern Baths[ built 1938] you could, if you wish, go through a door on the right into a large tiled canteen, there was dozens of table with all sorts of Miners seated around discussing who and what was to be done from the miners from the previous shift and how many pints they had consumed and which public house they went to the previous night!

A large counter extended on one wall where you could get a cup of tea. If you were lucky you may be able to buy cigarettes, or a twist of Tobacco, most miners chewed this revolting stuff to offset the thirst during the shift ,especially if you worked in a dusty part of the mine. if you looked closely on the canteen tiled floor occasionally you would see huge cockroaches -they loved the moist warm atmosphere within the Baths! The heat was needed to dry the clothes in the lockers, and to keep us warm because you were stripped off most of the time while you were in the baths.

My locker was upstairs, it was no 2773 among the rows and rows of metal locker's stacked on one another. this is where you stored your clothes. You then went through the shower section of the baths to what was called the dirty end just wearing a towel ,to another set of duplicate lockers where you kept your working clothes, the boiler overalls were soon discarded, they were not suitable. Some days you were stripped to the waist, mostly you wore old trousers and shirt, these were rarely washed some had ripped trousers repaired with shot wire. Socks were unbelievable, if large holes appeared you drew the holey part down and sewed up the end and cut the worn end off!

In the locker beside your clothes; your Safety helmet complete with white band, one pair of trousers, a jacket to wear till you got to your place of work, your water bottle for your water to drink during the shift. Also you carried your snapping tin which held your sandwiches. Your Boots eventually went hard due to the heat in the lockers ,they were uncomfortable till they had got supple with the heat from your feet. However on leaving the baths, there was a small room where you could coat you boots with thick grease to help to preserve them for a bit longer,that is, if you had the time, which was rare!

On exit from the baths there were two men with large metal cases which came from the caterers Swinnertons of Shelton. They contained sandwiches, they provided us with two rounds each for our snapping ---[that is a meal break half way through the shift]. If I remember on Monday it was one of Beef and the other Jam, on Tuesday it was Ham and Cheese [the best of the week !] Wednesday it could be two Beef sandwiches. I forget what we had the rest of the week, you fitted them in your snapping tin what was attached to your belt. You then filled your water container up. The first days you drank enormous amounts of water, at one time I had a large tin banjo holding over seven pints. Eventually I got used to only consuming two pints. It was a regular thing for your colleagues to ask for a mouthful when they had run out themselves, believe me it tasted like Champagne sometimes!

The first few weeks were spent on the surface, near the pit head, scotching loads and sorting out coal tubs and dirt tubs {waste rock} These latter were directed towards the huge waste tip where they were emptied into three huge hoppers on wheels. When these were full they were hauled up to the top by a huge haulage engine, where a trip was engaged and the hopper tipped over to empty its contents to the tip, I think it was over 400 feet high at this time. I ought to remember as I had to once climb up to the top with a jack once when the hopper had come off the track!

## FIRST DAYS UNDERGROUND

On this memorable day you went across the yard to the Lamp House and queued up at small windows where you presented your Lamp Check, mine was No 2773. In return you received your recharged hand lamp from the Lamp house attendant. This was to check who was in the mine and where you were in case of an accident in the mine.

On the way to the pithead called Hesketh you would see groups of miners collected into groups near the Fan House or the engine sheds or by the huge compressor air containers by the Power House or below the Winding House. Some have brought a last fag and a match to have a smoke before entering the mine where smoking was strictly forbidden. It was a criminal offence to take any combustible material down the pit, due to danger of explosive gases .

At the pithead you would approach your Roadman, to see what job and what district you were allocated for that shift. In fact before you went down a fireman may make a spot search check, he also inspected your lamp to see it was in full working order, then into the cage to begin your shift.

On arrival at the pit bottom at a depth of 1902 feet [or 560 metres] I found it was huge with an arched roof like a church. It even had a lower basement to accommodate the lower deck of the cage. The cage was a Double Decker holding three tubs in each deck.

The pit bottom was floodlit with large lamps in their explosion proof cast iron fitting. The walls were bricked and whitewashed, and this was this my first job underground as I had been told I was to whitewash! I found the job I was detailed to do near the pit bottom amongst the numerous rail tracks, but it was not the job what I thought it was! My work on this first day was very menial, the large metal wagons called tubs went slowly past me, from the inner workings of the mine. I was given a piece of unravelled rope and a small paint tin of water mixed with some stone dust. I was told most forcefully that the job was important as the pay of the colliers depended on how I did my job. This was to find on each load of coal a large piece of coal and paint a white triangle on it. Several pieces in each tub had to be marked so the surface workers would know which district the coal had come from. In this case it was called Brights, the name given to that seam of coal.

It was not that exhausting, but found later this was a beginners job, so that others around me could keep an eye on me, and how I coped with my first days underground.

During the day shift I had marked over three hundred and fifty tubs.

## THE MAZE OF THE WORKINGS

You walk along the Main Cruts [Tunnels ] most of these were constructed by metal arches called rings, these were steel girders bent in an arch shape in two halves joined at the top by huge fishplates to form a semi circle. These were spaced about four feet apart at the base, they stood on rough wooden chocks. The spaces in between the arches were filled in sparsely with green timber planks jammed in where spaces were convenient.

Near the pit bottom there is a great amount of wind due to the ventilation of the mine, this reduced as you walked towards your working district. This could be above two and half miles away, before you could start work, the districts were called by the names of

the inclined coal seams such as Cocks Head, Bullhurst, Hard Mine, Old Whitfield, Holly Lane, Brights were among some of them. Lights were only provided at the main junction, at other times you were in the pitch dark but for your own lamp. There was no transport to the coal seams, the only transport was on the inclines off the main crut .

These were called Dips as these were steep you had to struggle down amongst the hidden sleepers. The dust was generally was over boot depth and the dust rose in clouds as the ventilation moved down the roadways towards the coal faces to be returned to the surface up the up cast shaft which was part of the Bambury Mine complex.

But when the shift was completed, men trolleys were sent down the dips. They stopped at different levels to pick up the tired miners, some of these dips had the roof rings so distorted that there was only three feet clearance between the rails and the roof ,so when you were on the moving trolley you had to keep your head down, and crouch as low as you can ,there was no stop button on the trolleys !

In fact if any coal was above the top of the tub it had to be broken up otherwise the tubs could be derailed! If they hit the contorted rings, the weight of the roof above eventually bent them from 8ft to only 3ft , in fact you could see the girders polished by the top edge of the tubs as they passed the rings.

The only difference between you and a tub of coal is that greater care is taken when men are in transport. For coal the bell signal to the Engineman was one ring for Stop and two to Go. With men it was four rings pause and then one ring, and four rings and pause then two. Consider the danger of having your head knocked off! I had not heard of any accident, the deterrent was so great!

As you descended the dip, on either side were the levels going direct to the coal faces. These could be over half a mile as the coalface advanced everyday six feet away from the main dip .

One of the first districts I worked was near the Pit Bottom, well over half a mile in. After leaving the pit bottom you left the lights behind. The only fixed lights were at important junctions such as top of the Dips. After some yards you came to the main dip. At the top was a huge electric winding engine, whose single steel cable snaked down into the dark dusty abyss of the Dip following the single track downwards. This was a small working seam area, this working was opened in the 1914 war, closed after and re-opened in the 1940,s . The reason was the coal was poor quality and the seam was only 3 ft thick and it could be even be less, so this seam was opened due to the necessary demand at this time .

You carried your lamp forward to see the way down, I can't remember what distance we walked down to the landing we were operating from, but it was a long way! Especially when you had to stoop where the roof had come down under pressure from above.

On the way down you came across landings, the levels running at right angles to the dip, it was at the end of these levels, that the actual coal face existed, these ran parallel to the main dip.

The coal face advanced daily. After what was called the main drawing shift, called the day shift ,the following shift [2-00 pm to 10-00 pm was called the noon shift] they packed the open void behind the face with timber blocks and waste rock (this was called dirt by the miners), this was called packing, to control the roof subsiding too quickly into the empty void. This was an area known to produce dangerous gases, so the Davy lamps were used to keep an eye on these explosive gases. On the Noon shift, the borer and his mate came in carrying the huge air drill and several boring bits to drill numerous five foot deep holes in the exposed face ready for the night shift, who would blow the

freshly exposed coal face down with explosives for the following day. Besides this the ponds had to be thrown forward. These are huge metal conveyors which shook the coal down to the loader at the end of the level. They also advanced by the same distance each working day, it was generally in this area most of the haulage hands did work, Yes, that is what we were called amongst other things !

As we walked along the Level some stayed at the dip landing, to operate the points at the landing and to transfer the attached Dip haulage rope from the empty tubs to the full ones these went up the dip in group of threes. Then the engineman who drove the level haulage rope went into his alcove where the compressed air operated engine was fitted, In fact I was eventually promoted to this responsible position in later days.

This engine was coupled to an endless rope which extended from the dip to near the working face. The rope went around huge cast iron grooved pulleys at either end of the level, attached the rope was a length of chain with a hook to attach to the tubs, either full or empty. By the way, if you saw a tub marked with chalk with **M.T.** -- it meant **Empty**

Then we had the Road runner [No, not the TV cartoon character!] He took the empty tubs along the level to the loading end, then he brought the full tubs along to the dip ready to be hauled up, this system was called Main and Tail. Attached to this rope was a chain and large hook to attach to the tubs he wanted to move. A great deal of bell signals were needed, not only stop and go, but forward and reverse, and go slow signals. No room for errors here, lives could depend on it. Majority of us went to the Loader end, two of us had to twist the empty tubs on a steel plate to go behind a tub which was being filled off the Loader belt, two other haulage hands controlled the filling tub. When filled you yelled to the one behind who would push the empty tub with an extended leg, while the two at the front heaved out the one under the loader. All this time the belt was unloading the coal it needed someone to shovel all the excess overflow into the empty tub, you were black with dust after the first ones, Only 350 tubs to be loaded to go !

Then we had to push the full tubs out toward where the haulage rope started, and coupled them together with a coupler, the distance extended every day by six feet. Sometimes two of us would have to push them over 100 yards, then return with empty tubs left near the haulage rope. We were therefore called Wagoners, a sort of promotion!

The haulage rope would not be extended till it was absolutely necessary. After all labour was cheaper than the price of splicing extra rope and moving the return wheel nearer to the loader end by the Mechanics, who were in short supply. So each day was a longer push, some tubs were difficult and we sometimes dug our heels in to push them over some sections of the track.

We also had to empty tubs of incoming material such as timber, rings, ramming [a form of wet clay, this was used to ram home the charge of the blasting powder] .

The miners were a breed that no longer exists sadly, the comradeship that existed was great. If you were in a problem your colleagues soon rallied round, because if you held up the production above five minutes all hell was let loose, everything came to a standstill. First the foreman in charge of the haulage called a Roadman, was generally on hand to see what the trouble was, next it would be the fireman, then if over twenty minutes you would see two yellow strong spotlights coming along the level. You were really in trouble if the incident was your fault, the figures would be a cursing underground Haulage Manager, who was an awesome man named Danny Holdcroft who could control your destiny in the mine. If you displeased him, you were really in the

S\*\*\* ! Probably sent to work on the coal face !

One thing has come to mind that the older miners had mostly old testament biblical names; some I remember are Amos Clews, Sampson Bowyer, Daniel, and of course Joseph.

At no time did you have to delay the coal loading, if the loader was turned off, the ponds had to stop, and then you had the abuse of twenty colliers loading at the face coming to a stand still. All hell was let loose if this happened, all this was reflected in the colliers' pay,

Sometimes we had derailment of the tubs. It would take several of us heaving at the offending derailed tub. It was more difficult if it contained dirt as this was twice as heavy as coal. All this, and having a lighthouse lamp dangling between your legs ! We used blocks of wood and bars to lever the tubs back on the rails.

In some larger districts where more coal was produced this method of haulage was insufficient. These levels had a continuous rope running between two sets of rails. On this if you required to move tubs, full or otherwise, you hooked a device called a Smallman Clip on the drawbar at the front of the tubs. It consisted of two cast steel plates fixed together by a centre loose adjustment screw. and a foot long handle which had on its base a snail shaped cam. At the lower part of the plates there was a half shaped round groove on each cheek, as you forced the handle down the two semi circles moved together thereby gripping the moving haulage rope. I have seen more than twenty tubs being moved at one go , but you had to stand on the moving clip and batter the handle down with your boot, standing on the clip, to enable it grip the moving rope, then you had a job of releasing the handle at the desired point! Some of us had a short length of steel pipe [Illegal !] to give more leverage to get them off, otherwise the moving tubs would go under the stationary tubs, causing a major derailment!

Sometimes, there was a delay...was it a problem at the face ? If you did not receive the full tubs at the dip end, you then went into the level to investigate, there was no road runner with this system. Clips of loads of about five tubs were sent unattended, empty and full tubs alike. You may have found one clip had come off the rope and the other tubs kept coming, you sometimes came upon several tubs derailed, even some upside down, their contents emptied everywhere. You immediately rang the engineman to stop the rope to prevent further groups of tubs joining the melee. Of course this meant the nearby haulage hands had to get the mess sorted out, under the instruction of the Roadman... that was if he was about. Here again everyone gave themselves to get everything in working order as soon as possible.

This is where the use of the Walter was occasionally used. This device was a length of steel bar and on one edge was machined a rack of large teeth and at one end of the rack a heavy chain was attached. A cast steel box slid on this rack. On top of the box was a catch that released a steel sprung peg that engaged into the rack at the desired point. On the box was hinged a large lever which on the end had a peg to engage the rack, a metal chain was fixed on the box. By pushing the lever forward the steel pin engaged into the rack, as you pulled the lever upwards the box slid backward about an inch. It worked on the principle of levers, the ratio was such you could exert a force of over one ton, so if anything that was fast this device was very useful, it was also used to remove wooden props on the coal face.

You may wonder how this device got its name, a small local engineer firm based in Tunstall realised that we needed a portable high power jacking system. in the mines. The owner of this firm designed this tool and started to produce it. His name was Walter Sylvester, hence the name "go and fetch ,the Walter! ".

As the coal production was too great to use a single track dip haulage system a similar system was used in the double track in the main dip as the levels. The tubs on both rails were attached to the moving rope, the only difference was the use of Dip clips instead of Smallman clips. The weight of the load exerted the gripping power on the rope. The dip clip was an open sided cast steel box which was placed on the rope. You then pulled the handle back and a rotating cam engaged on the rope, the weight of the tubs put more pressure on the upwards moving clip, something had to go as on the top of the dip was an enormous 150 H.p. electric haulage engine driving the endless loop of the steel rope carrying dozens of tubs down and up!

At the top of the dip there was a reverse incline on the right side to enable you to unclip the full tubs. You just moved the handle forward and sideward to remove the clips. as the tubs ran down the incline.

From here they were sent into the main Crut where other loads from other seams were being sent to the Pit Bottom over two miles away. Of course all having the emblems stating which seam that each load had come from!

I remember the first day at the loader end, hot and dirty after awhile I asked what time was was it nearly our snapping break, I had consumed most of my water, The roadman opened a brass case within was an old wind up watch, he told me it was only 7-30 am two more hours before we had our short break, twenty minutes if you were lucky! I was soon reduced to begging water off other workers, after this I bought a large round tin container in the shape of a Banjo ,this held over seven pints, negative point was that it weighed a ton when it was filled and the string round your neck cut in with the weight. Even this amount was not enough if you were behind the loader end where you received all the coal dust from the coal face, when the shift was finished you were covered head to toe, it took more than one bath to remove it.

Towards the end of the shift the flow of coal slowed down. You had to wait till the colliers came off the face, and then it was called Loose it !!

We all raced towards the main dip to queue up, if you were lucky you were on the first run of the trolleys. After arriving at the top of the dip, you raced to the pit bottom to queue up again at either the top deck or the lower deck [the cage was double Decker] We all jammed into the cage, I think each cage held a maximum of twelve. Officially! On reaching the surface you raced to the lamp house to hand in your lamp, and receive your brass lamp check, then to the dirty end of the baths. You stripped off, and if you had made it quick you did not have to queue up again to wait for a shower cubicle. Sometimes you thought you were lucky that you had found a vacant cubicle, you turned on the hot tap and waited... alas, no hot water. No wonder the cubicle was vacant.

We were instructed what a Jim Crow was, also a Walter, what Smallman clips were, Dip clips, Main and Tail haulage and dip system, the importance of correct signalling on the haulage system, this could be life or death in some situations.

I will explain what these unusual devices were, without them our coal mines would be obsolete. Well they did become obsolete, but through that the mines, were no longer wanted to produce coal, it was found cheaper to import coal from abroad.

After a few years, I got it to a fine art; knocked off work at 1-30 pm, through the system to get to the first out going bus out of the yard at 2-05 pm !! {quick wash !!} I think it was about twelve months when some building alterations were carried out at the Lamp house, two large double doors were fitted, the windows blocked up , Hooray!--inside there was rows of racks on which the new fangled cap lamps were being charged. It was a pleasure that you had no longer had a lumbering large hand lamp



[about 15 x 5 inches weighing approx 8 lb's ]made of cast aluminium. When you come off your shift, you clipped your cap lamp on the stand where two contacts then charged your battery. A meter indicated that your battery was being charged for your next shift. The rechargeable battery was worn on a wire clip that you had wore on your belt, your check was on a hook under the light. Mind you, you had to take your cap off if you wished to do a visual signal down the level. Oh, yes this to was illegal, but if the bell wiring signalling had gone haywire there was no other option !!

All the signals from each Roadway went to the haulage engine drivers, the electric supply for the signals was derived from wet Lechenle cells wired in series to give a low safe voltage,

Along each Roadway the signal wires were bare thick iron wire fixed on insulators on wooden battens lashed to the side of support rings, so where ever you were in the roadway you could give signals by pressing the two wire together giving the appropriate signal to the engine driver.

Some days when you arrived at your place of work, it looked if it had snowed. What happened was the night shift had come along and thrown liberally large amounts of white stone dust every where, this was to prevent any coal dust explosions taking place. This was a real pain as you walked about you stirred the stone dust up, it was like working a in a fog. It was worst as you ran to the pit bottom after the shift, you ran not only to get up, but to keep out of dust stirred up by the numerous feet from those in front of you.

### THE COLLIERS.

These men were the real workforce who actually were the coal face workers. They worked under a contractor, who aim was to produce the maximum amount because the tonnage produced was reflected in their wages they got at the end of the week. This was why so much pressure was on us to move the coal up the pit, and not to delay the movement of the coal tubs.

They were physical strong men, usually stripped to the waist, they came along the levels, searching to find their personal tools, shovels and picks, where they had hidden them buried beside the roadway the day before, woe betide if they were missing !!

They use to boast how much beer they had shifted the night before, most chewing twist tobacco, spitting out the brown spittle. They did not care where they spat, worse still when they broke wind, sometimes deliberately, because you could not get out of the foul stench!

They would stoop, and go under the loader end to get on to the coal face. The seam here was only three feet thick. They scrawled up the steep incline on their leather knee pads, over the freshly blown coal one side, sometimes climbing up the coal conveyer called the ponds [large metals U shape]. This could be a distance of over hundred yards to get to the portion of the face he was allocated to, This is called his Stint, it his job to move his section of coal on the Ponds, during the shift, with his fellow colliers either side of him doing the same. The roof is supported by a few steel posts. As the coal was moved they would fix more posts with a wooden blocks jammed on the top, to replace the void where the coal had been.

One of the worse jobs was not exhausting but--you could been given the job of the Pond driver, You scrawled up the face to the huge compressed driven engine which operated the ponds, you squeezed into a small place beside this huge iron engine your head

crouched down -- only two foot six space here, the roof groans continually, moving downwards, your job was to drive this monster, which was secured by wood posts which use to shake on each movement of the ponds. It was deafening the noise. The only communication was by waving of a cap lamp to start and stop. The shift seem eternally long. You never volunteered for this job !

### ON THE ROADWAYS

It became evident that the locals miners did not trust us to do some jobs alone, the matter came worst when some could not be depended on to report regularly for work. They came the next day and said they were BUZZED, that meant overslept ! Luckily, as I lived locally and I had the dialect of the area, I was accepted, but if you showed you were keen and prompt, you could be given at less dusty job. You moved eventually from the loader end to being a road runner, or a clipper on further down the roadway towards the Main dip.

The main dip was a place where you had to have eyes around, because sometimes there occurred what is called a runner, that is a tub or tubs, or worse still full tubs that have broken loose. They would tear down the dip till they jumped the rails and embedded themselves into the roadside, that is why you had to have manholes in the side so you could take refuge. [QUICK!]

I have seen runaway tubs stacked up on each other, some times injuries took place. I found that the boots supplied lasted about twelve months, they went like hard cardboard and split due to the heat in the bath lockers. The majority of the miners wore clogs, so I thought I would have a pair. The cost from the stores was about six shillings, they were made at Broads in the Market Square Tunstall, While not flexible like boots, they were more comfortable and not so sweaty. They were noisy as they had metal steel tips on the bottom, but they were ideal for banging Smallman clips on, more firm than a curled up leather boot.

When my safety hat got crushed, I purchased another one from the stores minus the white band, now I was a local miner !

Sometimes, we were asked if we could do a Double shift, that is sixteen hours, you had to ration your food and drink.! These shifts were for major roadworks, such as extending the haulage system as the coal advanced, also fitting replacement rails, this was were a device called a Jim Crow came into use.

Imagine a large cast steel letter C, the ends of the C turned over to form a lip, in the centre of the C was a screwed boss, which had a large U Shaped anvil. The device was placed on the rail which you wanted to bend to a radius, you engaged the lips on the sides of the rail, then screwed the anvil to tightened on the rail. You then engaged a large lever in the screw and gradually bent the rail to the shape you required.

You also helped the Mechanics to splice the haulage ropes, sometimes you were involved in getting a new level ready further down the main dip where level steel plates would be inserted to enable the tubs to be directed from the dip by slipping the dip clips off, then pushed round to the levels to be sent in to the coal face via the level haulage rope system.

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I will explain what these unusual devices were, without them our coal mines would be obsolete. Well they did become obsolete, but through that the mines, were no longer wanted to produce coal, it was found cheaper to import coal from abroad.

### LATER DAYS

After a few years, I was asked if I would mind working all noon's, that is 2-0 pm to 10 pm, this was called the old man shift because the only time off was a few hours in the morning, but you had to keep an eye on the clock, you could easily get Buzzed ! [Miss the Shift !] The upturn was we were working only on a small district, so not many miners were required. It was like a small family, you felt you let them down if you missed a shift. We knew what was required and we all pulled together. Towards the end of the shift the amount of coal fell off considerably, sometimes we waited for the trolley to come down for us because we had completed our Stint!

Many tales were told, we had many a laugh. I remember one Man called Freddie Gratton who we aimed to get him to laugh, because he got a laugh like a donkey, much to our amusement.

One story was about an eccentric surface worker, he use to walk miles over the moors to work . He wore a piece of sacking when it was raining [this was called Brandishing] He cleverly had two pockets sewed inside this rough garment. He use to pinch two house bricks from work on each shift. When this came obvious, he was then called Bricks Brown... he was only building a privy at the bottom of his isolated cottage !

Another occasion was when we rang the level engine driver to stop the rope, no answer. We went quickly to the engine house to stop the engine, we found the Engine driver fast asleep, this is one of the miners commandments not to do. I got his water bottle and tricked the contents down his shirt! He woke up and threatened to spoil me in a broad Biddulph Moor accent [This meant he was going to punch me, but he soon realised he was in the wrong]

Later on, I become an engine driver, Eddie the roadrunner and I had second sense, because I was driving the twin cylinder air main and tail engine, I could sense exactly where the chain and hook was on the level.

One illegal thing we did was to put the hook on the rear tub , the roadrunner hanging on the tub, we could by this means push the tubs nearer the ends of the road way, this was a lot quicker, and saved a lot of effort of pushing the tubs manually.

Once the roadman left the hook on the side of some stationary tubs, unfortunately the Underground manager came around, he said " No one was going off that shift till who did this illegal act owned up!" We had a council of war, the Roadman said he would be demoted if he owned up, I said I would be the fall guy, otherwise all the workers waiting to go off the shift would go no where ! I got around it by saying as I was the engine driver, I had placed the hook there to show exactly where the hook was for the next shift, and to prevent the tubs rolling towards the dip. After a great lecture from the big boss, we were allowed to go up the dip, to go home !

I used to stop the rope without signals, paused for a few seconds, to enabled transfer of hook from the empty tubs to the full ones, then reversed the engine so the rope brought full tubs, towards the dip-- all without signals.

Of course, over the time I was involved, I had several near misses, quite a few were injured, some accidents could not be helped. Once the worker called the Hooker letting

the empty tubs out of the cage at the Pit Bottom was one such accident. Above the exit of the pit bottom gates were huge railway sleepers, mounted at an angle so that anything dropping down the mine shaft would be deflected away from the sides of the shaft, a thousand to one chance was when a rogue fishplate [a steel bar with four holes to bolt the rails together ] came hurtling down the shaft, bounced off the guard timbers and hit the Hooker on the head, his helmet saved him from certain death. Unfortunately it pierced his helmet and entered his skull and damaged his brain. He ended his days in the pit on light duties , after months of convalescence. This is what happened to anyone who was injured and survived. He had huge dent in his head.

Most miners especially the face workers had small injuries . You could always tell what they did for a living because the coal dust would enter any open wound, giving them a tell tale black scar for life. We all suffered black eyes due to the coal dust, it took ages for your eyes to become clean. Mind you this was a blessing in disguise, we were never approached and asked why we were not in the armed services.

Once we had an E shift, that is, we were sent home, because the huge winding engine had a fault. A steam cock had failed on one of the huge cylinders, due to the winder who had accidentally thrown the engine in reverse while winding at full speed.

### PAY DAY

This was on Friday, if I remember correctly it was between 11-00 am to 3-00 pm. Below the Lamp House was a long low wooden building with several shuttered windows where you queued up to receive a wage packet from the clerk inside. You showed your lamp check for identification.

The pay was about £3 -10s-[ £3-50p ]I know if I worked on the Saturday day shift I only got about two shillings- {10p} the rest went to the income tax authorities!

The contractors received the pay on what the Colliers had produced in the previous week, so they gathered around in secret little groups sharing their earnings out among their team. There was deducted payments for the personal tools they had on tick from the stores [picks shovels ,etc]

It was known ,that some of the workers went to the local pubs, after the day shift and had a few pints before going home with their wages. Some unfortunately gambled some of their wages away. It was known that some wives came up to the colliery on pay day to get their share before it was lost in the pubs !

Occasionally I would meet the Welsh Bevin boy [sorry cannot recall his name,--[may be correct if I say Jones or Williams !],one day shortly after the war he informed me that he had the date of his release from the mining industry, he told me to apply at the head office, who would eventually inform me of my release.

In a way it was a sad occasion to leave the dedicated miners who had worked all their life in the mines, whose comradeship was forged through their hard work and depending on one another, always ready for a joke, I have never come across this environment again.