

Language variety and communicative style as local and subcultural identity
in a South Yorkshire coalmining community

Andrew Cave, BA Hons.

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Dedicated to my parents Arthur and Jenny, who have lived
through historic times and managed to retain pride and humour
in the face of great adversity

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Abstract

The study has two broad objectives. The first is to describe the regional and socio-occupational language varieties and communicative styles used locally through the collection of empirical data. The second is to explore the extent to which the various components of such language function as markers of social identity for certain individuals. It is an ethnographic, synchronic study looking at the complex link between language and identity, and is cross-disciplinary, drawing on the knowledge already generated via research in sociolinguistics, anthropology and folklore. It is argued that such an eclectic approach will provide profitable insights and reveal new possibilities, both in the description of regional and occupational language varieties and in their role of local identity construction.

The concept of someone having a particular social identity or 'self' in this study refers not only to geographical, territorially-based group affiliations, but to locally-based, social categories. The study group comprised men and women from the village of Royston and neighbouring communities in South Yorkshire, who have, until recently, relied on coalmining as a way of life and as their major source of income. Undoubtedly, as with all people, each individual is affiliated to different, overlapping and sometimes conflicting social groups, which they can enter and leave easily.

Subjective feelings of identification to a geographical region or a social group are not necessarily expressed via language behaviour. This study however, argues that, among many people still living in communities such as Royston, Grimethorpe and Darfield in South Yorkshire, the coalmining industry has been a significant factor in their lives, and continues to be an important retrospective resource, which in certain contexts, can be manipulated symbolically for the display of a distinctive local social identity. The study emphasises that language is not simply an emblem of membership to a pre-existing group, but rather these affiliations and boundaries are constituted, maintained and negotiated through the process of interaction.

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Transcription conventions

The data presented in this study is of two kinds, audio tape-recorded speech collected via semi-structured interviews and speech noted during participant observation fieldwork, which is then recorded in the fieldwork diary. The following conventions of transcription have been followed when representing the speech:

1. All forenames and surnames have been replaced with pseudonyms in order to protect the identities of the speakers.
2. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has been used to represent transcribed speech in the detailed description and analysis of the regional speech variety in chapter three. Items contained within obliques are phonemic transcriptions, e.g. /i:/, phonetic transcriptions are placed within square brackets, e.g. [ɔ:m].
3. A semi-phonetic transcription system has also been used for longer extracts in an attempt to present a selection of the salient phonetic features of the local vernacular spoken whilst trying to retain the texts' referential meaning.¹ Such representations of the local vernacular have a long tradition in dialect prose and poetry produced locally and have been adopted by previous scholars.² However, there is no particular standard transcription convention agreed upon and therefore to avoid confusion the prominent features referred to in the extracts transcribed in this study are noted below:

¹ Many important local dialect features are not presented in these extracts. For example 'h' dropping is a common occurrence yet words are presented here as retaining the 'h', similarly the personal pronoun 'I' is almost exclusively pronounced as 'a'. For a full description of these and other features of the regional speech used the reader is advised to consult Chapter Three.

² Shorrocks, Graham, "The Social and Economic Background to the Narrative of Verbal Conflict", *Lore and Language*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1991), 67-76.

abaht/baht - about	i'n't – is not
ah - yes	mi - my
ahr - our	mooer - more
aht - out	nah - now
al'a's - always	neet - night
an' - and	nowt - nothing
anymooer - anymore	oil – hole
coit - coat	rahn - round
cos - because	reight - right
cou'n't- could not	tek – take
dahn - down	thi- thy
dint – did not	uns - ones
dunt – does not	us sens - ourselves
gen - given	wanna – want to
gerrin – getting or get ingerrup – get up	wheer -where
goin'/goin' - going	wi' – with
gu - go	

Brackets are also used in the semi-phonetic transcriptions for two types of information.

Their use is intended to enhance the readability of the transcripts. Italicized text within brackets refers to the tone and mood of the preceding utterance, eg (*angry tone*).

Unitalized text placed within brackets refers to missing lexical items and intends to clarify an otherwise potentially vague utterance.



DANGEROUS
BUILDINGS
DO NOT ENTER
NO LIABILITY
ACCEPTED

HIGH CAMP
SUCK
GARY
1987

1

Introduction to the study

“ ‘There will always be a picture of the ground underneath,’ he explained. ‘The pit is gone. The heap might go soon, and there’d be no remnant, but I would know it by underground still, and know that there is a belt of coal. The old miners tell us, so we remember where the coalfields were. They were down *here*, they were *there*, they were over *there*. We know the whole region, not simply the surface buildings, not simply the people who live there, but also what it’s like underneath. We know it and that can’t be destroyed.’ ”¹

¹ Douglass, Dave and Krieger, Joel, *A Miner's Life*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 14.

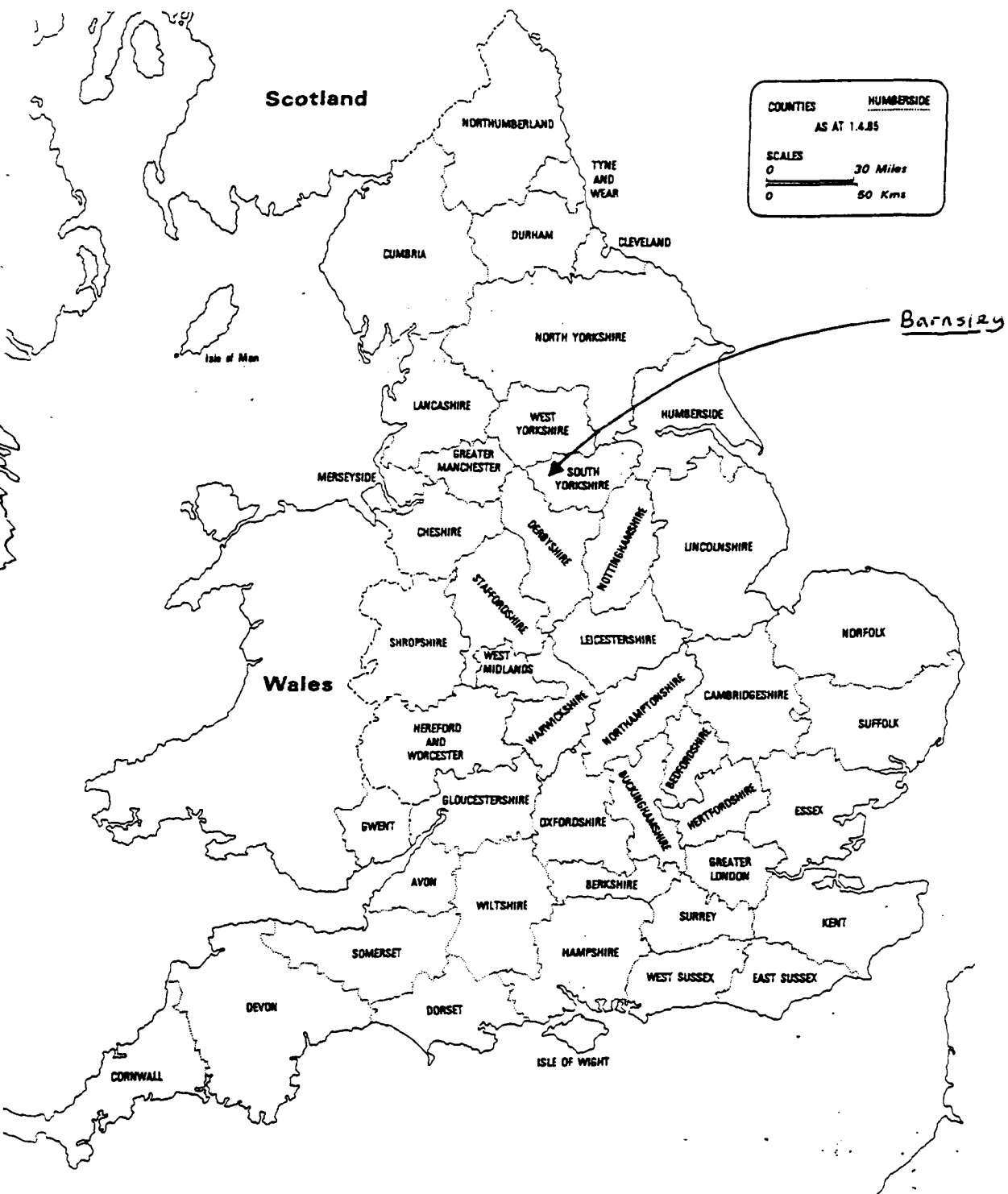


Figure 1.1 Map showing the counties of England and the town of Barnsley in South Yorkshire.

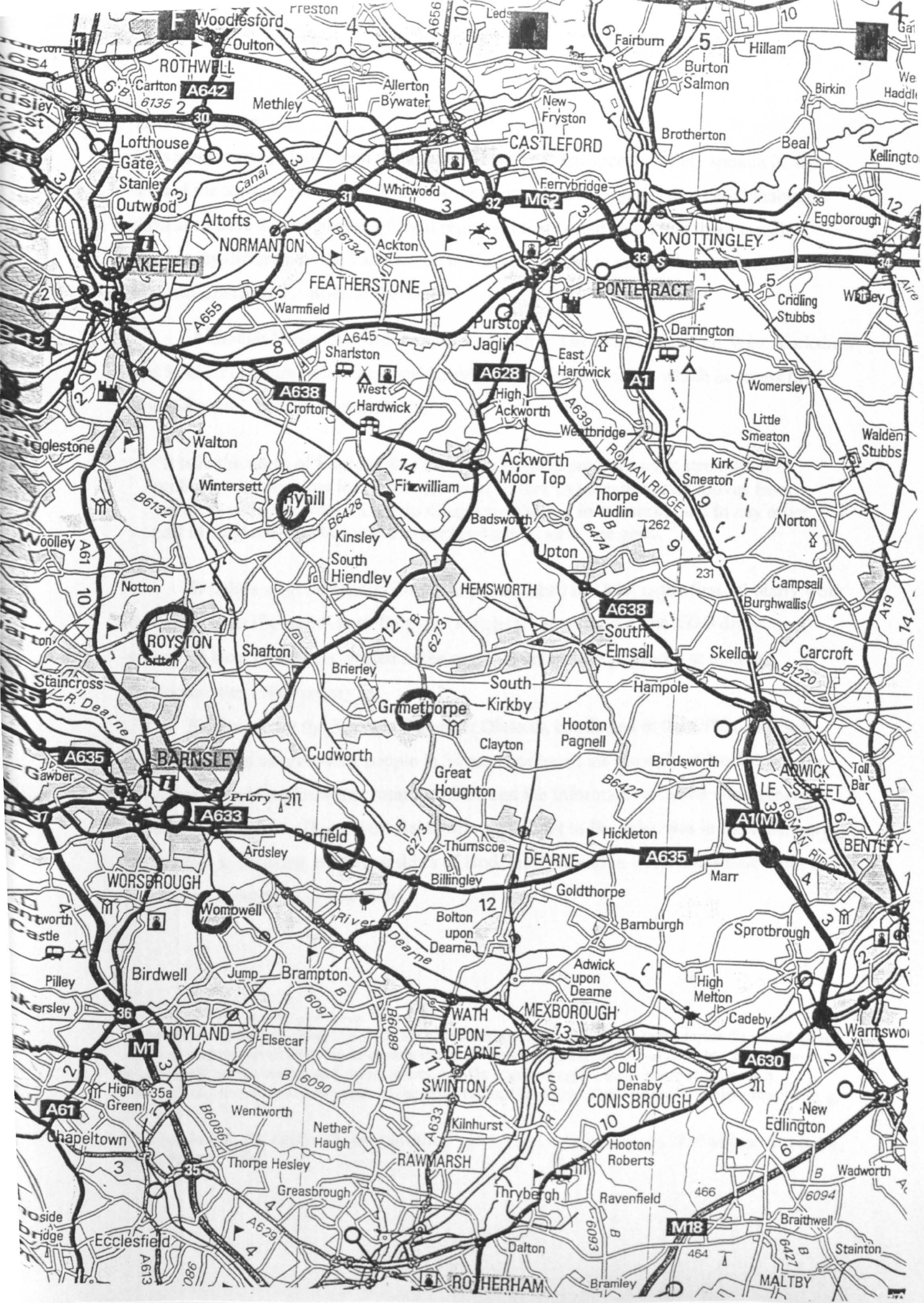


Figure 1:2 Map of the Barnsley area with circles denoting localities investigated.

Introduction

No serious surveys have been undertaken of the regional speech variety spoken in and around the town of Barnsley.² This is somewhat surprising in an area where inhabitants profess to have a strong sense of local regional identity and claim that their speech is profoundly different to the varieties of Wakefield 8 miles to the north, Doncaster 14 to the east and Sheffield 12 miles to the south.

Although Wells classifies an industrial belt in Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire as having considerably similar local accents, which he terms the 'middle north', he also comments that:

"It is in the north of England that traditional-dialect survives most strongly. It is probably also true that local differences in dialect and accent as one moves from valley to valley or from village to village are sharper in the north than in any other part of England, and become sharper the further north one goes."³

Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary*, published in 1898, is the first scholarly work that draws specific attention to Barnsley's dialect.⁴ In particular, the *EDD* draws on a variety of local pamphlets written in the regional vernacular produced at intervals throughout the 19th Century.

Fieldwork for the Survey of English Dialects, conducted in the 1950s and early 1960s, involved interviewing people in 34 separate locations throughout Yorkshire. The localities were biased towards rural locations and the informants selected were generally older, male speakers. The nearest fieldwork carried out to Barnsley was in Skelmanthorpe, eight miles to the west, on the outskirts of Huddersfield, and in Ecclesfield nine miles to the south, on the outskirts of Sheffield.

² Works referred to throughout this study are acknowledged where they relate to the topics discussed. Here, only a precise examination of literature concerning the regional speech variety of Barnsley, local socio-occupational speech variety and communicative styles is given to place them in a specific context.

³ Wells, J.C., *Accents of English, vol. 2: The British Isles*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 351-352.

⁴ Wright, Joseph, *The English Dialect Dictionary, vol. 1.*, London, Henry Frowde, 1898, and *vol. II.*, London, Henry Frowde, 1900.

However, compared to Sheffield to the south and Huddersfield to the west, very little serious dialect research has been undertaken in Barnsley.⁵ Although this study is not a full scale investigation into the regional speech of Royston and other villages in the Barnsley area, it aimed to collect and record on tape a number of men and women of different ages, talking principally about mining related issues. This data can be analysed to describe the local regional speech at the familiar levels of phonology, lexis and grammar.

In 1989, Willy Elmer underlined how “in contrast to the terminology of farming and fishing, the occupational dialect of coalmining is still waiting to be unearthed.”⁶ Peter Wright also attempted to capture the living heritage of the coalmining dialect. As early as 1972, he pointed to the urgency of collecting primary data, warning of the possible disappearance of coalmining jargon due to the decline of the coal industry. The research of both Wright and Elmer focuses on the occupational jargon of coalminers, and aims to compare data between different coalmining regions of Britain by using extensive lexical questionnaires. In contrast, Ceri George’s study, *Community and Coal*,⁷ is a more in-depth investigation that describes the phonological, grammatical and lexical aspects of the English spoken in the Rhondda Valleys in South Wales. Unlike Wright’s and Elmer’s work, George’s study does not aim to be comparative. George also relies less on the traditional dialect questionnaire than her predecessors for the collection of data, choosing to use it alongside tape-recorded ‘naturally occurring’ free speech.

Other research has used old written reports and underground plans to unearth coal-mining jargon used in the past.⁸ While not being as comprehensive or as analytical as the more serious dialect studies, such work highlights the importance of written material as a data source to reinforce or contextualise data collected orally. Questions remain, however, regarding the use of occupational jargon in the wider community. To what extent have

⁵ For a review of dialect study in the Sheffield area see: Widdowson, J.D.A., “From Hunter to Newspeak: Dialect study of Sheffield 1829-1984”, *Lore and Language*, vol. 11 (1992-1993), 199-221. For a more recent dialect study in West Yorkshire refer to: Petyt, K.M., *Dialect and Accent in Industrial West Yorkshire*, Amsterdam, Benjamin, 1985.

⁶ Elmer, Willy, “A Questionnaire for the Terminology of Coalmining”, in Fischer, Andreas, *The History and Dialects of English: Festschrift for Eduard Kolb*, Heidelberg, C. Winter, 1989, pp. 245-253.

⁷ George, Ceri, “Community and Coal: An investigation of the English-language dialect of the Rhondda valleys”, mid Glamorgan, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cardiff, University of Wales, 1990.

⁸ Prince, ‘Coal-mining Names in the North East of England’, *A Journal of Name Studies Relating to Britain and Ireland*, vol. 7 (1983), 97-101; and Sellars, Cedric, “Barnsley Dialect in Evidence”, in Kellet, Arnold, and Dewhurst, Ian, *A Century of Yorkshire Dialect*, Otley, Smith Settle, 1997, pp. 178-185.

words from the mine entered areas of social life, such as the home or the social club? How has the occupational jargon evolved from generation to generation: which words have remained relatively unchanged and which have changed over time? Such questions would require observing language associated with the workplace in shifting contexts, viewing it as situated discourse. This could be achieved by using ideas from interactional linguistics and, in particular, the ethnography of speaking.

Some of the most extensive and valuable studies of the expressive verbal behaviour of coalminers and other industrial social sub-groups have been undertaken by American folklorists. Korson's impressive collection of industrial protest songs *Coal Dust on the Fiddle*, was published in 1943, at a time when the world of the coalminer was not considered a worthy line of enquiry by most practising scholars.⁹ In the 1970s, industrial folklore had become a respectable pursuit among some American scholars, which led to the arrival of more inclusive studies of miner's lore and language, notably Archie Green's *Only a Miner*.¹⁰ Meanwhile, as Fish notes in 1975, other than Lloyd's collection of mining folksong *Come all Ye Bold Miners*, the folklore of coalminers, and industrial folklore generally, in England had remained almost completely unrecorded.¹¹ It took the foresight of Fish, herself an American folklorist, to recognise the potential of language and belief among the mining fraternity of England. Her book, *The Folklore of the Coal Miners of the Northeast of England*, is still the most scholarly study on the subject to date, and contains a superbly detailed literature review which pulls together a wide range of scattered 19th and 20th Century references. It remains a useful starting point for any scholars researching expressive behaviour in British coalmining communities.

The use of nicknames among miners has been frequently noted by researchers as an important part of their subcultural identity. Lynn Davies found that nicknames and humorous stories about the origins of nicknames were common among coalminers in South

⁹ Korson, George, *Coal Dust on the Fiddle: Songs and stories of the bituminous industry*, 2nd edn., Hatboro, Pennsylvania, Folklore Associates, 1965. Also for an early article dealing with narrative and belief of American Silver miners see: Hand, Wayland, D., "Folklore From Utah's Silver Mining Camps", *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 54 (1941), 132-161.

¹⁰ Green, Archie, *Only a miner*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1972

¹¹ Fish, Lydia, M., *The Folklore of the Coal Miners of the Northeast of England*, Norwood, Norwood Editions, 1975.

Lloyd, A.L., *Come All Ye Bold Miners - Ballads and songs of the coalfield*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2nd edn., 1978.

Wales, whilst Laidlaw found the same among miners in North Wales.¹² Skipper argues that nicknames among male and female miners in Pennsylvania function to promote in-group solidarity.¹³ In Utah's former silver mining camps, Ryden found that often people only knew a miner by his nickname, having no idea about his real name.¹⁴ However, no serious studies among English coalminers has been undertaken to date.

In the Yorkshire coalfield, joking relationships and verbal duelling, in particular, have been shown to be a vital part of miners' expressive verbal culture, firstly by Douglass, himself an underground miner in Doncaster, and then by Green.¹⁵ Green's article, "Only Kidding: Joking among coal-miners", is a first-rate scholarly examination of the function of humour both in the specific local context of mining and in a much more general sense. However, more primary data needs to be collected so that a more accurate picture of the context and function of joking relationships can be gained. Meanwhile folklorist Georgina Boyes collected and described a number of strike songs sung by pickets during the 1984-1985 coalminers' dispute, highlighting how new language forms arise as a form of protest when the group is threatened.¹⁶

The justification for this study in part lies in the necessity of collecting and describing historically important linguistic data from speakers who are affiliated to this socio-occupational group whilst we may still do so. This is especially the case considering the speed at which the whole of the local mining industry was closed during the 1980s and early 1990s. However, this study goes beyond the description of local language use (what?) to view it in its social context (where and when?) and to ask what it means to the speakers themselves (why?). The 'why' question, neglected by correlational sociolinguistic studies,

¹² Davies, Lynn, "Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales", *Journal for the Society of Folklore Studies*, vol. 9 (1971), 79-107. Laidlaw, Roger, "Community, Work and Religion: Mentalities of the North Wales Coalfield, 1930- 1960", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 1995.

¹³ Skipper, James, "Nicknames, Coal Miners and Group Solidarity", *Journal of the American Name Society*, vol. 34, no.2 (June, 1986), 134-145.

¹⁴ Ryden, Kent, C., *Mapping The Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1993.

¹⁵ Douglass, Dave, *Pit Talk in County Durham: A Glossary of Miner's talk together with Memories of Wardley Colliery. Pit Songs and Piliking*, Oxford, History Workshop Pamphlets, No. 10, 1973. Green, A.E., "Only Kidding: Joking among coal-miners", in Green, A.E., and Widdowson, J.D.A., eds., *Language, Culture and Tradition*, Leeds/ Sheffield, Institute Of Dialect and Folklore Studies, University of Leeds, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, 1981, pp. 47-76.

¹⁶ Boyes, Georgina, "The Creation of Vernacular Songs in Contemporary Urban Culture: A classification of songs associated with the National Union of Miners Strike 1984-5", in Shields, Hugh, ed, *Ballad Research:*

is central to this ethnographic linguistic study which attempts to contribute to the challenge of widening sociolinguistics to explain the function of language use.¹⁷

The stranger in ballad research and other topics, Dublin, Folk Society of Ireland/Cumann Cheol Tire Eireann, 1986, pp. 273-284.

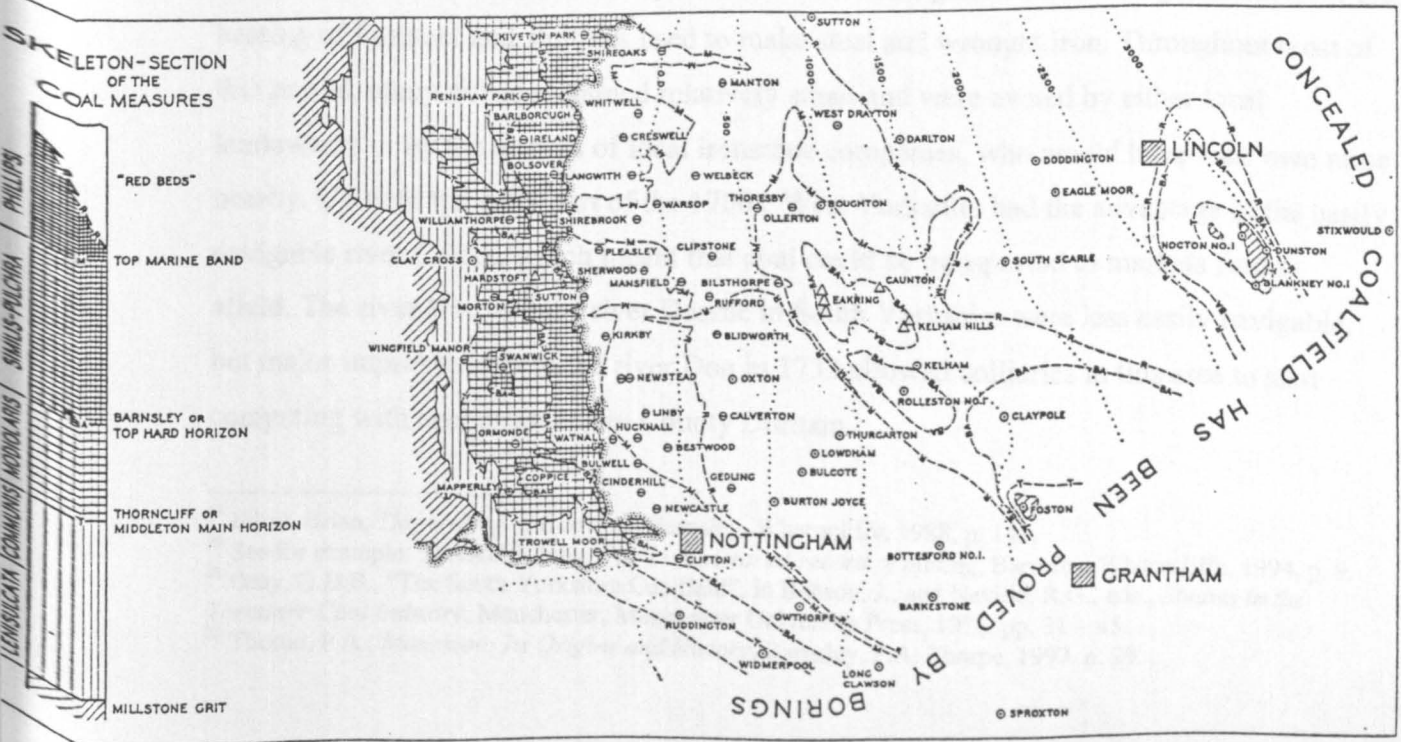
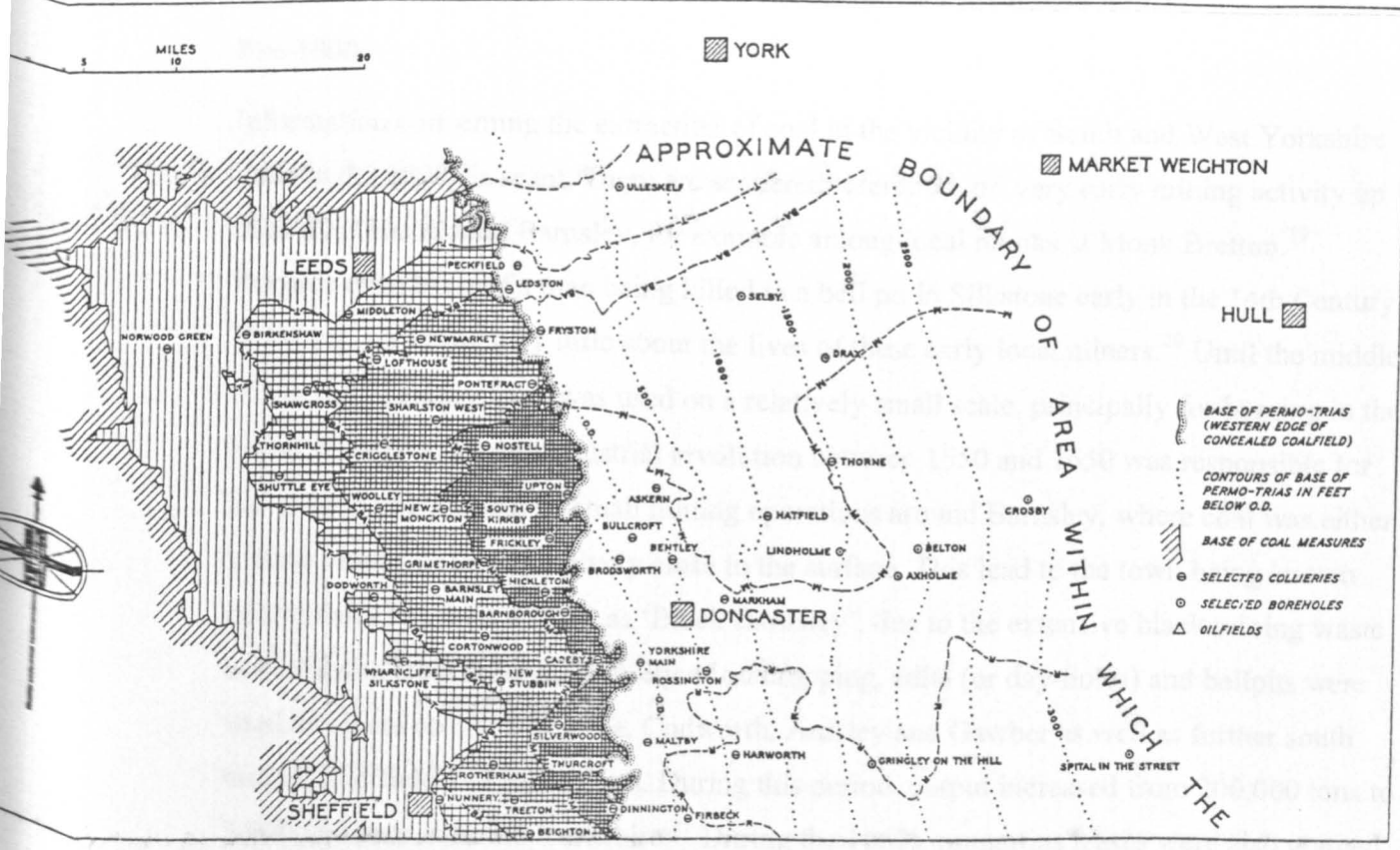
¹⁷ For a discussion of the importance of this task refer to: Coupland, Nikolas, *Dialect In Use: Sociolinguistic variation in Cardiff English*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1988, p. 14 – 16.

Social and economic historical overview of coalmining in Royston and neighbouring villages of Barnsley

*“Very few teachers of English literary history besmirch the romantic picture of Shakespeare’s London by telling us there was coal dust on the fiddles in the Globe theatre and often the spectators could not see the actors for the acrid smoke drifting down from the eternal clouds of smog drifting over its open roof. But it was this filthy substance, disgusting to foreign visitors, that immediately raised England to its pride of place – not the defeat of the Armada or Elizabeth’s cunning political machinations or even the English sea power – and it was coal that directly or indirectly made the great technological advances of the next three centuries that in turn caused the Industrial Revolution and today underlies the hope for our escape to cleaner, saner, and less despoiled planets”.*¹⁸

It was felt necessary to describe some of the key processes that have helped shape the socio-occupational group or subculture under study. A critical factor influencing the development and decline of mines and colliery villages in the regions of South and West Yorkshire is the dip of the coal bearing strata to the east. This means, for example, that around the Barnsley area, the earliest mines were situated to the west of the town where the coal seams were exposed or close to the surface. As a general rule, as demand increased concomitant technological advances in mining allowed thicker and more deeply situated seams to be accessed to the east of the town (refer to geological map on page 11, from: Edwards, W., and Trotter, F.M., *British Regional Geology: The Pennines and Adjacent Areas*, London, Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954, pp. 48 – 49).

¹⁸ Greenway, John, in the foreword to Korson, George, *Coal Dust on the Fiddle: Songs and stories of the bituminous industry*, 2nd edn., Hatboro, Pennsylvania, Folklore Associates, 1965, p. v.



Map of the Yorkshire and East Midlands Coalfield

Outcrops' against the base of the Permo-Trias in the Concealed Coalfield are calculated

Reproduced by kind permission of The British Geological Survey.

Pre-1800

Information concerning the extraction of coal in the vicinity of South and West Yorkshire prior to the 1800s is scant. There are scattered references of very early mining activity up until this time around Barnsley, for example among local monks at Monk Bretton.¹⁹ Records even exist of a man being killed in a bell pit in Silkstone early in the 14th Century. However, we know very little about the lives of these early local miners.²⁰ Until the middle of the 16th Century, coal was used on a relatively small scale, principally for burning in the home. However, a mini-industrial revolution between 1550 and 1650 was responsible for the growth of a number of small mining operations around Barnsley, where coal was either visible or known to be relatively close to the surface. This led to the town being known colloquially by some visitors as ‘Black Barnsley’, due to the extensive black mining waste covering the local moors. A variety of outcropping, adits (or day-holes) and bellpits were used to access coal at Silkstone, Cudworth, Ardsley and Gawber as well as further south around Sheffield and Rotherham. During this period, output increased from 200,000 tons to 3,000,000 tons in South Yorkshire.²¹ During the 1660s, numerous leases were also granted to mine coal in the Felkirk parish, the parish neighbouring Royston to the east, by local landowners, the Moncktons of Holroyd and Savile of Brierley.²²

During the 18th century, the local demand for coal grew, especially in the Sheffield area, due to its requirement in the production of bricks, glass and, most significantly, for the heating of furnaces and smithies used to make steel and wrought iron. Throughout most of this period, many mines remained relatively small and were owned by either local landowners or by the owners of local ironstone companies, who would have their own mine nearby. Up until the early part of the 1700s, West Yorkshire had the advantage of the easily navigable river Calder, which meant that coal could be transported to markets further afield. The river Don and the river Dearne in South Yorkshire were less easily navigable, but major improvements to the river Don in 1733 allowed collieries in this area to start competing with coal produced in County Durham.

¹⁹ Elliot, Brian, *The Making of Barnsley*, Barnsley, Wharncliffe, 1988, p. 141.

²⁰ See for example: Threlkeld, John, *Pits 1: A pictorial record of mining*, Barnsley, Wharncliffe, 1994, p. 9.

²¹ Gray, G.D.B., “The South Yorkshire Coalfield”, in Benson, J., and Neville, R.G., eds., *Studies in the Yorkshire Coal Industry*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1976, pp. 31 – 45.

²² Thorpe, P.A., *Monckton: Its Origins and History*, Barnsley, P.A. Thorpe, 1997, p. 29.

Towards the end of the 1700s, demand for coal started to increase significantly, and technological advances were allowing more ambitious mining operations to be undertaken. In 1760, for example, South Yorkshire had one of only three Newcomen engines, which powered the 'gin' that raised the coal, in the country. Hopkinson notes that during this period of development 'narrow work', with 'short faces', 'benks', 'endings' and 'gobs' as well as 'pillar and stall' methods of mining coal were both common in the South Yorkshire area.²³ Hopkinson also records some of the very earliest customs and traditions known to exist among Barnsley coalminers, including shaft sinkers being given 'sod ale' when a new shaft was sunk and 'pricking ale' when coal was first reached. Ale was also given when a 'gin' was moved. At Elsecar colliery, the miners had an annual feast event, and at some local pits during Christmas time, owners gave their miners flannel, out of which to make pit clothes, as well as free or cheap coal.

1800 – 1920

During the first half of the 19th Century, West Yorkshire saw an expansion of the coal industry in response to the increasing use of coal to generate steam power in the textile mills that were densely situated in the Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield and Dewsbury areas. These mines were generally small and privately owned. During the second half of this century, however, a number of factors combined which led to an increasing number of much larger and company-owned collieries throughout South Yorkshire.

The demand for coal during the mid-19th Century was greater than ever before due to industrialisation and, in particular, to the expansion of the steel industry and the widening use of steam power. The coal lying beneath the Barnsley area, in the Silkstone seam, and especially in the thick Barnsley Bed seam, was of a superb quality and contained very little dirt. Technological advances (due in part to the availability of steel and the use of steam power) included improved underground ventilation systems and water drainage systems, advances in both shaft sinking and the introduction of more sophisticated cages to travel up and down the shaft. This meant that these eastern lying, deeper and hotter seams could be exploited. The expansion of the railway infrastructure throughout the region was

²³ Hopkinson, G.G., "The Development of the South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire Coalfield, 1500-1775", in Benson, J., and Neville, R.G., eds., *Studies in the Yorkshire Coal industry*, Manchester, Manchester

also in part intended to meet the need to transport coal longer distances, thereby allowing these mines to compete with markets around Britain and abroad. The North Midland Railway, which linked Derby and Leeds and passed through Royston, was opened in 1840. The bigger mining operations in the future would be located close to this line.

Two other essential components required for these ambitious mining operations were outside capital and a vast workforce. These two factors in particular were to have an enormous impact on the development of the South Yorkshire coalfield, leading to both a massive influx of workers and to the start of a pattern of ownership and industrial relations between workers and mine owners that would last into the early part of the 20th Century.²⁴ The issues of migration and industrial relations during this period were vital ingredients in shaping of the socio-occupational communities in villages such as Royston and Grimethorpe.

During the 19th Century, the population of Royston rose from 360 in 1801 to just 676 by 1871. Until this time Royston and neighbouring Woolley were predominantly farming villages.²⁵ In 1871 the traveller and author W.S. Banks wrote of the surrounding countryside:

“The district is purely agricultural and away almost from the sight of a town, and in spring when the trees and plants are in flower, the air is full of perfume and the aspect of the land is very beautiful”.²⁶

However, by 1901 Royston’s population had risen dramatically to 4,397. Undoubtedly, the main reason for the massive increase was the expansion of coalmining in the area. See figure 1:1.

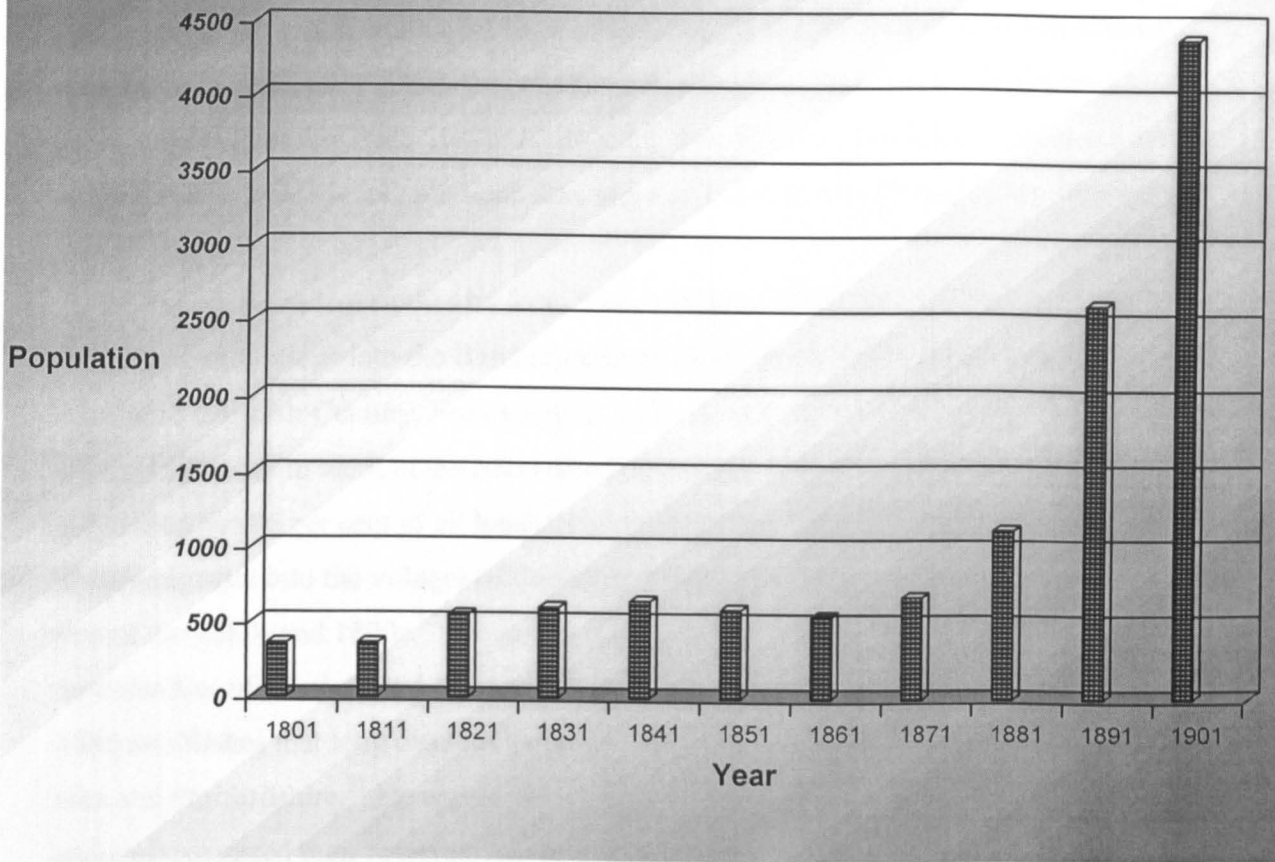
University Press, 1976, pp. 1-31.

²⁴ Baylies notes that during mid-1874 reportedly 100 collieries were being sunk in the Yorkshire area and that in 1880 two thirds of all collieries in the area were owned by companies: Baylies, Carolyn, *The History of the Yorkshire Miners, 1881-1918*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 6-12.

²⁵ Taylor, Harold, “Nails, Mules, Music and Miners: Village Life in Mapplewell and Staincross Through the Nineteenth Century”, in Elliot, Brian, ed. *Aspects of Barnsley 2*, Barnsley, Wharnccliffe, 1994.

²⁶ Banks, William, S., *Walks about Wakefield: Illustrated with contemporary photographs*, Wakefield, Wakefield Historical, 1983, - (A fascimile of *Walks in Yorkshire, Wakefield and its Neighbourhood*, London, Longman, 1871); quoted in Thorpe, P.A., *Monckton: Its Origins and History*, Barnsley, 1997, p. 9.

Figure 1:1 Bar chart showing the population of Royston from 1801 to 1901 as recorded in the census returns.



During the 19th Century, the population of England and Wales increased from nine million to 32 million. As Jones notes, by 1851 only 40 per cent of people over the age of 20 had been born in the town or city of their residence.²⁷ Jones also states that, until the mid-1880s, most immigrants travelled an average of just 22 miles from their former place of residence. Many people interviewed for this study referred to Royston as 'Little Staffs', due to the alleged influx of Staffordshire migrants that came to work at the local collieries. A quarter of those interviewed from Royston claimed Staffordshire or Black Country ancestry, and informants interviewed from neighbouring localities, such as Darfield, Havercroft and Central Barnsley, confirmed that they believed Royston was full of 'Staffordshire folk' with a distinctive regional speech pattern. Although no studies have been undertaken to quantify the migration from the Midlands to Royston, or indeed the

impact of the alleged influx on the local community, it is acknowledged by authoritative sources, such as Baylies' *History of the Yorkshire Miners*.²⁸ Scattered references to local coalminers originating from Staffordshire exist, and they are identified as being distinctive either through their speech, physical size, sense of humour or their nickname, for example 'Staffy Harry'.

Insightful recent studies by local historians have highlighted that such longer distance in-migrations into the Barnsley area of South Yorkshire were not unusual during the mid to late 19th Century. For example, Jones shows that Staffordshire ironworkers who moved to Elsecar to work in the ironworks there comprised only eight per cent of the local population but 86 per cent of all long distance migrants.²⁹ He also charts the large influx of Welsh migrants into the villages of Carlton and Smithies, close to Royston, during the latter part of the 1880s and 1890s.³⁰ Walker's research into migration into the mining communities of Darfield and Wombwell, to the south east of Barnsley, between 1860 and 1880 establishes that long distance migrants came predominantly from the Black Country area and Staffordshire.³¹ He argues that coalmines in the Black Country were mainly small, and had exhausted their reserves, had drainage problems, and a growing number of contractual disagreements between the men and the mine owners.

Movement generally into the South Yorkshire coalfield, at this time, was made easier through the much improved transport networks of road and rail, but more importantly the prospect was attractive because of the financial security and in some cases housing provided by many of the developing, large and more permanent collieries, such as Monckton, Woolley, Wharncliffe Woodmoor, Houghton, Wombwell and Grimethorpe.

By 1900, 40 per cent of pits employing more than 100 people were located in South Yorkshire, along with 71 per cent of collieries employing 1,000 people or more.³² It is

²⁷ Melvyn, Jones, "A Sponsored Migration from Staffordshire to Hoyland in the Mid-Nineteenth Century", in Elliot, Brian, ed. *Aspects of Barnsley 5*, Barnsley, Wharncliffe, 1998, p. 119-136.

²⁸ Baylies, Carolyn, *The History of the Yorkshire Miners, 1881-1918*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 18.

²⁹ Jones, Melvyn, "A Sponsored Migration from Staffordshire to Hoyland in the Mid-Nineteenth Century", in Elliot, Brian, ed. *Aspects of Barnsley 5*, Barnsley, Wharncliffe, 1998, p. 129.

³⁰ Jones, Melvyn, "A Welsh Diaspora And A Yorkshire Colony: The Establishment and Development of a Welsh Community in Carlton and Smithies", in Elliot, Brian, ed. *Aspects of Barnsley 2*, Barnsley, Wharncliffe, 1994, pp. 49-71.

³¹ Walker, Andrew, G., "Migration Into A South Yorkshire Colliery District, 1861-81", *Northern History*, vol. 29 (1993), 172-3.

³² Baylies, *ibid*, p. 11.

difficult to quantify in any precise terms what impact such an influx of people had on a village like Royston. However, judging by their prominence in the local folk history, it is reasonable to assume that Staffordshire migrants maintained a distinctive identity that helped to shape the social and cultural milieu of the village during a crucial period of population expansion. Kinship and friendship networks among the men and women formed in the previous locality and place of work will have continued to bind people into social aggregates, at least for the first generation. Informants have noted that miners with Staffordshire accents were still in evidence in Royston during the 1950s. However, with in-migrants from Derbyshire, Lancashire and Wales as well as Staffordshire recorded in the census returns, we can only assume that these different regional speech varieties and pit jargons must have been assimilated into the local system over time. Pressure to conform to a local standard speech variety was exerted in part by local dialect literature, such as the *Barnsley Foak's Annual* that stereotyped and celebrated the salient features of the local speech variety and also the local working-class customs and traditions.³³ The role of dialect literature in south Yorkshire during this period and throughout the 20th Century awaits thorough investigation.³⁴

Although by the 1860s a number of sizeable coalmines had been established on the outskirts of Royston (e.g. Lodge's pit), the cutting of the first sod of Monckton Main Colliery in May 1877 was the herald of a new era, which would require massive pools of labour. By 1903, Monckton employed 1,721 men, and during the next quarter of a century was to sink four other shafts at neighbouring South Hiendley and Notton. Royston, like Grimethorpe and Woolley, quickly developed into a village comprised of a male workforce employed predominantly in coalmining. Such localities differed markedly from places like Sheffield, which had a much greater occupational diversity. A variety of factors combined to create a sense of group belonging in localities, such as Royston, where individuals' shared fate and experiences were inextricably linked with coalmining.

³³ Joyce, Patrick, "The People's English: Language and Class in England c.1840-1920", in Burke, Peter and Porter, Roy, eds., *Language, Self, and Society: A Social History of Language*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991, p. 175

³⁴ The link between dialect literature and regional speech in other parts of England has been investigated, see for example: Beal, Joan, C., "From Geordie Ridley to Viz: popular literature in Tyneside English", in *Language and Literature*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2000), 343 – 359. Also see: Shorrocks, Graham, "Non-standard dialect literature and popular culture", in Klemola, J., Kytö, M., Rissanen, M., eds., *Speech Past and Present*

Although coal reserves were extensive and Royston, by now, had a substantial mining workforce, fluctuations in market demand for coal combined with disagreements over 'price lists', working terms and conditions led to a ceaseless tide of unofficial disputes, periods of short-time working, longer strikes and lock-outs during the first part of the 20th Century. Some of the major disputes affecting men at Monckton include: in February 1914, a general strike throughout the Yorkshire coalfield; in 1919, a bitter dispute at Monckton because surface workers had no break for 'snap' and were paid by the day whereas underground miners were paid by the ton of coal produced and also worked shorter hours; in 1921 a national coal strike that lasted 13 weeks; in 1926 the infamous general strike, which only ended with coalminers returning to work after seven months, being on the point of starvation. Miners in South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire have a long history of union activity, and had well established organisations by the late 1860s. Miners in South Yorkshire were also responsible for establishing one of the early permanent miners' relief funds.³⁵

The dangerous working environment of coalminers combined with periods of short-time working and strikes meant that mining families led a fragile existence remaining constantly vulnerable to economic destitution. In 1866, the Oaks Colliery disaster at Ardsley, Barnsley, where two underground explosions killed a total of 361 men and boys, is one of the worst accidents ever recorded in British coalmining history. Although towards the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, improvements in ventilating coalmines reduced the number of underground explosions, they continued to plague local communities for some time. For example the explosion at Wharnccliffe Woodmoor pit at Carlton in 1938 killed 57 men. Irrespective of underground explosions, coal mines remained undisputedly dangerous places to earn a living. Until the second half of the 20th Century, the roof of a coalmine was supported predominantly by timber and men being trapped or killed by roof falls was a common occurrence, known colloquially as 'being buried'. A glimpse of a list of fatalities at the notoriously dangerous Lodge's pit on the outskirts of Royston is enough to convince: 1878, D. Nilstrip killed by fall of roof; 1881

: *Studies in English dialectology in memory of Ossi Ihalainen*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1996, pp. 385 – 411.

³⁵ Rymer, Edward, A., "The martyrdom of the mine", *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 1 (1976), 220-244, and vol. 2 (1976), 149-170.

two fatalities, details unknown; 1884 S. Brear, killed by fall of roof; 1884 T. Loyd, killed by fall of roof; 1885, A. Hiscock, fell down shaft; 1890, J. Davies, killed by fall of roof; etc.³⁶

During times of distress, such as strikes or fatal accidents, communal expressions of socio-occupational identity were commonplace. Following particularly big incidents, such as the Oaks disaster, broadsheets of a ballad written to commemorate the victims were printed and sold, and the proceeds distributed among the stricken families.³⁷ Following the death of a miner at Monckton pit, it was customary that all men on all shifts would not work that day as a mark of respect for the man and his surviving family, a custom adopted by miners in many parts of Britain. This tradition was known to be abhorred by Monckton's company director, Ellison, as it affected production. In later years the tradition diminished and instead the men worked but donated that day's wage to the bereaved family.

During strikes, miners, their wives and children would spend their time picketing, coal pickin', eating in the local soup kitchens and collecting donations in nearby districts with more diverse occupational structures. The oldest miner interviewed in this study remembered staying with relatives in West Yorkshire as a small boy during the 1926 strike. His two enduring memories were of walking around working men's clubs there holding a large plate collecting money for people back in Royston, and once back in Royston, he remembered the network of soup kitchens at the Salvation Army and the Miners' Institute on Midland Road. He recalled the Monckton miner Georgie Griffiths' song outside the miner's institute, which encouraged local school children to take advantage of the food on offer:

“Free breakfast in Royston and nothing to pay.
Stand by the wayside and have a good day.
Free breakfast in Royston and nothing to pay.”

The point is that, although it is difficult to argue that communities such as Royston were homogenous, due to the different regional backgrounds of the occupants and the

³⁶ Thorpe, P.A., p. 113.

³⁷ Fish, Lydia, M., *The Folklore of the Coal Miners of the Northeast of England*, Norwood, Norwood Editions, 1975, p. 44.

expected status distinctions and conflicts, inherent in any working-class community there were shared experiences and hardships that helped create a sense of group belonging for many, particularly at times of distress. Baylies takes a similar stance on the nature of Yorkshire coalmining communities at the turn of the century:

“Communities (*in Yorkshire*) were frequently tight, supportive. The family could be a source of enormous strength. Yet at the same time communities were often heterogeneous, their residents drawn from both far afield and from within the country, and internally compartmentalised. And the family could be a prison of patriarchal privilege and individual loneliness could fester as easily within it as elsewhere. While a ‘tradition’ defining the typical colliery community and the typical colliery family arose over time, it could never describe the experiences of all miners. But the extent to which family and community were drawn into mining, contributing to its fortunes and suffering from its unpredictability, sometimes with collective grief, served to distinguish it from other industries. If such an experience was not exclusive to mining, it was at the same time true that the industry characteristically spawned certain community characteristics. The community was tied up with the pit in a close and symbiotic manner.”³⁸

Personal testimonies of individual miners during the 19th and early 20th Centuries are scarce. The few historical accounts of mining in the Barnsley area deal predominantly with the lives of union leaders and mine owners. Details of women’s lives in coalmining communities generally during this period are even more scarce and, as Angela John has pointed out, to a great extent their history still remains to be written.³⁹ Some details of women working underground in the Barnsley area are recorded in the reports compiled by the investigators for the Children’s Employment Commission of 1842. This report commenced as an issue dealing with child labour in the mines but ended up having the dual foci of preventing children and women working underground in coalmines. However, although The Act of 1843 prohibited women from being employed underground, some women continued to work on the surface of the pit, in Whitehaven for example, women worked on ‘the screens’ up until the 1970s.⁴⁰ Only one woman in Royston, a Mrs. Porteos, was identified as having worked on the surface at Monckton pit, but we can assume that other women had worked there.

³⁸ Baylies, *ibid.*, p. 3. Note: my italics.

³⁹ John, Angela, V., “Scratching The Surface: Women, work and coalmining history in England and Wales”, *Oral History Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Autumn, 1982), 13-26.

Women's sense of belonging to a distinctive community was displayed frequently during times of disputes. Recent historical reassessments of the Yorkshire coalfield have pointed out that 'rough musicking' was particularly common in Wombwell, and Hemsworth.⁴¹ This involved large numbers of women jeering at strikebreakers during strikes and lock-outs, and served to intimidate these workers, acting as a form of informal social control.

However, women's hardship was often endured individually. Prior to canteens and pithead baths, women's days were taken up by a constant cycle of chores in the home - cooking meals, preparing 'snap', washing pit clothes and heating water for baths. Often there would be three or more males in a house sometimes working different shifts, which meant that the chores lasted literally all day. Retired Royston miner Harry remembers his mother's workload during the 1930s, when he, his four brothers and his father were all working at the pit and living in the same house. He reflected: "There's many a time nah I think I dunt now how she got through it...when you think abaht it she wa' a slave, she wa."⁴² Women's work in the home in mining communities has remained invisible in many accounts of coalmining communities, but, is beginning to be acknowledged by academics and through the emergence of autobiographical accounts by the women themselves.⁴³ Close social and kinship ties among women existed, too, as a response to lack of outside help, creating a sense of mutual aid, for example in times of birth and death, where specific local women would be known for their amateur skills. With so many domestic chores, employment opportunities outside of the home for women married to miners were rare. Employment opportunities for young unmarried women in the Barnsley area during the first part of the 20th Century were also relatively limited. Thus, whilst in Dewsbury in West Yorkshire, 88 per cent of all women aged 19 were employed, in Barnsley the figure stood at only 65 per cent.⁴⁴ This was due to a relative lack of occupational diversity in Barnsley, and

⁴⁰ Ibid, 14.

⁴¹ Walker, Andrew, G., "Social and Cultural Constructions of Communities in South Yorkshire Colliery Settlements: The mining households of the Darfield and Wombwell district, c. 1851-1900", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 1994, p. 529. See also: Baylies, *ibid*, p. 112 -125.

⁴² Interview with Harry W., 5/11/98, t 1, s 1, 23.4

⁴³ For example see: White, Carol and Williams, R., *Struggle or Starve: Women's lives in the South Wales valleys between the two World Wars*, Heol y Cawl, Dinas Powys, Honno, 1998.

⁴⁴ Baylies, *ibid*, p. 24.

more factory work in West Yorkshire. Many young single women in South Yorkshire worked as domestic servants during this period.

Post-1926

The following section of the historical overview draws on oral testimony recorded from local men and women of Royston, Grimethorpe, Darfield and Oakwell, as part of the data collection process. A number of themes continually emerged throughout the different interviews, and these are considered significant aspects of locally lived experience.

All the older men commented on the fact that they started working at the pit because, at that time (1930s and 1940s), alternative local employment was severely limited. One informant living in Wombwell commented how, during the mid-1930s, aged fifteen, he had been encouraged by his father to look for a job outside mining. The 1920s and 1930s had been a tumultuous time for the local mining industry with a catalogue of notorious underground catastrophes, bitter disputes and short-time working, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that some men dissuaded their children from following them underground. However, as Bill explained, after spending a day asking for work at local garages, butchers and woodworkers, he was left with no alternative but the pit. When he told his father that he had failed to find a job, he offered to take him up to the pit and introduce him to the pit manager. Wombwell Main was known as a family pit, and like many local pits, nepotism was the norm; Bill had a brother and a father with good reputations already working there, so he started work immediately. As Harry, a former Monckton miner, explained with resignation “It was a known tradition round here, you was a pitman and that was it.” However, just because a village had a large proportion of its workforce employed in mining it did not automatically mean that everybody worked at the local colliery. In fact a number of men moved from pit to pit, seeking better conditions and better terms of pay. Harry W. of Royston, for example, who started work underground in 1932 at the age of 14 years, had worked at seven different pits by the time he was 20 years old, sometimes commuting to Nottinghamshire daily by motorcycle.⁴⁵ Moving from pit to pit meant that Harry worked in a lot of different coal seams, some that were semi-mechanised with coal cutting machines and some that were pre-mechanised, known locally as ‘machine-got coal’ and ‘hand-got

⁴⁵ Interview with Harry W., 5/11/98, tape 1, side 1, 8.5

coal' respectively. Sometimes, at a pit, each seam could be different in terms of the machinery techniques used, and often individual coal faces within the same seam differed markedly in terms of the conditions encountered and the amount of investment the owners had decided to make.⁴⁶

The coal industry was nationalised in 1947 under the Atlee government, and this led to the introduction of a five day week, increases in wages and improved safety in the workplace. It also led to improvements in the welfare of coalminers, including the introduction of pit-head baths and canteens. Increasing demand for coal during the post-war era led the government to try and expand the workforce and to improve their morale after a long period of uncertainty, disputes and a war. National stocks reached an all time low during 1947 which prompted Atlee and Shinwell, the Minister for Fuel and Energy, to attend the various miners' galas around the country. Ten thousand men, women and children attended the traditional gala day march, under their respective union branch banners, from central Barnsley to Locke park. There, they heard Atlee and Shinwell plead with the men for increased output, telling them how vital they were to the future of Britain.⁴⁷

However, during the 1950s and 1960s, the arrival of cheap oil from the Middle East, combined with coal reserves becoming exhausted at many South Yorkshire collieries, led to the first extensive colliery closure programme by the National Coal Board. Monckton Colliery was closed in 1966 after almost 90 years of coalmining. Many Royston miners transferred to nearby pits, but a significant number went into other industries, in particular the various factories now established around Barnsley that produced either glass, rubber or paper.

This shrinking of the coal industry led to a rise in union militancy in the Yorkshire coalfield, which culminated in the two bitter strikes of 1972 and 1974. Conversely, the dramatic rise in oil prices during the mid 1970s led to a greater reliance on coal and attempts by the government to reinvest in the industry and to lure workers by improving pay and conditions. A significant number of men interviewed for this study entered the profession during the mid 1970s, either for the first time or after a spell in other industries.

⁴⁶ At Monckton Main Colliery electric and steam powered coal cutting machinery was trialled on some of the more straight coal faces during the early part of the 20 th century, Thorpe, *ibid*, p. 46.

⁴⁷ *Barnsley Chronicle*, Saturday June 28th 1947, p. 1.

In 1976, Royston drift mine opened opposite the former Monckton number one and two sites. By then 21,000 men in the Barnsley borough were employed in mining, and in Royston 58 per cent of males were miners.⁴⁸ The decision to enter the industry for all these men rested on the economic reality that they could earn considerably more at the pit than they could with other local employers.⁴⁹ Most of the miners' wives interviewed, who had raised their children during the 1970s and 1980s, said that they appreciated the economic security and economic benefits such as free coal, despite the dirty and dangerous nature of the job and the unsociable shift. As Barbara of Royston explained: "I said I'd never marry a miner, but it wa' the money."⁵⁰

One of the most prevalent themes emerging throughout the interviews with local men and women in this study was the dialectic of hating the exploitative, dangerous and dirty nature of pit work, whilst simultaneously taking great pride in performing such a job and being part of a collective, unionised workforce, which offered financial security. Oral historian Storm-Clark identified the same conflict of themes in his research among coalminers in the 1970s.⁵¹ Pride arises principally from the knowledge that the miner is responsible for extracting coal, a commodity necessary to the general public. Pride also emanates from the physically demanding, isolated and dangerous work that mining entails, as well as the relative autonomy enjoyed by workers and the security provided by the union.

The nature of the job corresponds to, and helps to reinforce, locally valued, narrow definitions of masculinity. It is a pride also expressed by the miners' wives. Individual and collective pride is manifested through structured forms of joint activity, such as union membership, as well as things like the pit brass band, first aid teams and rescue teams, all of which are all taken very seriously by the participants who enter the regional and national competitions, and which function as sources of local prestige for non-participating local residents. Participation in more informal leisure pursuits, such as fishing, keeping pigeons, or football and cricket teams, until recently continued to be organized through the Miners' Institute or working men's club in villages such as Grimethorpe and Royston. Women's

⁴⁸ Threlkeld, John, *Pits 2: A pictorial record of mining*, Barnsley, Wharnccliffe, 1989, p. 207.

⁴⁹ Interview with Sam E., 24/9/98 and also interview with Paul M., 27/1/99.

⁵⁰ Interview with Anne W. et al., 8/3/99, t 1, s 1, 46.

⁵¹ Storm-Clark, Christopher, "The Miners, the Relevance of Oral History", *Oral History*, vol. 4 (1972), 72-92.

communal sense of pride is traditionally manifested most clearly during times of industrial dispute, as was the case with the women interviewed in Royston who were instrumental in establishing soup kitchens and fundraising events in the 1972 strike and the 1984-1985 strike.

However, despite this economic security and pride in being associated with coalmining, there is also disdain towards the occupation from both the men and women interviewed in this study, and a real hope that their children would not enter the trade. Sandra explained that, to be a miner's wife, for her is special, and that this arises in from the unique working environment that her husband experienced daily - the total darkness, the danger, the trust among the men. When her two sons went to work underground in the 1980s she was 'devastated and heartbroken', and these feelings were difficult to reconcile with the fact that she had been a key member in the local community during the 1980s and 1990s campaigning against pit closures. Sandra's close friend, Joy commented that "it's only when your bairns gu dahn pit" that you think of the danger.⁵²

Paul said that he and his young friends who decided to go to the pit in order to earn more money had underestimated the underground environment and were shocked by it. He and his friends had said: "We're goin' to pit for some reight money, we talked us sens into it, we talked us sens into hell."⁵³ Another Royston miner commented "I dunt know anybody that liked it, but you had the camaraderie."⁵⁴

The single most defining event in the lives of the informants interviewed in this study, almost without exception, was the year-long strike between March 1984 and March 1985. Even today, local people talk about events as happening either before or after 'the strike'. In 1960, 40,000 jobs were provided in mining in the Barnsley coalfield. By 1974, this had been reduced to 20,000. During the early 1980s, the Barnsley coalfield received an injection of £400 million of investment and remained the largest local employer, having 14 pits open in 1983 and employing 14,000 local men.

The event that triggered the strike was the announcement by the National Coal Board that it intended to close 20 pits nationally, including Cortonwood in the Dearne Valley to the south of Barnsley. Although there was overwhelming support for strike action

⁵² Interview with Sandra M., Barry M., and Joy M., 9/3/99, t 1, s 1, 9.17-25.5

⁵³ Interview with Paul M., 27/1/99, t 1, s 1, 12.2

⁵⁴ Interview with Sandra M., Barry M., and Joy M., 9/3/99, t 2, s 1, 20

among south Yorkshire members of the NUM, Nottinghamshire miners refused to join the call for action, and called for a national ballot. Arthur Scargill's decision not to hold a national ballot would become a major issue in the less militant mining areas of Britain, and many miners from Nottinghamshire and some from Derbyshire returned to work and subsequently formed a breakaway union, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers. Although Scargill's militant approach to industrial action had little sympathy outside of the militant coalfields, his predictions that the Conservative government intended to destroy the British coalmining industry were ultimately realised in the early 1990s, by which time the majority of coalmines in the country had been closed, including every mine in the Barnsley area. To many people, both within and outside coalmining communities, the strike symbolised a bitter political wrangle between Thatcher's right-wing Tory party and left-wing trade unionism, epitomised by Scargill and the NUM.⁵⁵ Thatcher employed an American businessman, Ian McGregor, a.k.a. 'The Butcher', to deal with the unions and to implement the pit closure programme. The year-long strike became a political battleground whereby the tabloid media, in particular, portrayed the men and women of the mining communities as 'public enemy number one', whose use of pickets had to be contained at all costs by an unprecedented number of police and changes to the laws governing the act of picketing.⁵⁶ However, the individuals interviewed here emphasised that, in actual fact, the protest was a means of securing both existing local jobs and future job opportunities for their children in an area that had very little other industry. In areas such as Barnsley, the majority of miners and miners' families were committed to strike action. However, in other coalfields such as Derbyshire, where support for the strike was divided, experiences were very different.⁵⁷

Men and women interviewed in Royston commented that they believed the strike had drawn people together by establishing close social networks that provided mutual aid. Joint engagement in setting up soup kitchens, going coal pickin' and picketing the local pits meant that the villages and the surrounding landscape was reminiscent of a much earlier

⁵⁵ To view two diametrically opposed views of motives for and events during the strike see: Thatcher, Margaret, *The Downing Street Years*, London, Harper Collins, 1993, and also Benn, Tony, *The end of an era - Diaries 1980-1990*, Ruth Winstone, ed., London, Arrow Books, 1994.

⁵⁶ For an excellent discussion of the role of the media during the strike see: Wade, E., "The Miners and the Media: themes of newspaper reporting", *Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 12, no.3 (Winter, 1985), 273-284.

⁵⁷ For an excellent sociological critique of the different after effects of the strike in the Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire coalfields see: Waddington, D., Wykes, M., and Critcher, C., *Split at the Seams?*

earlier age. The feelings of ‘togetherness’ that the strike engendered are still lamented by many who perceive a decline in community spirit. After the strike, relationships between men and the management at South Yorkshire collieries were reported as being particularly strained, with many miners being sacked because of offences committed during the strike.

Between 1985 and 1993, a rapid pit closure programme was introduced by the government and all 14 pits in the Barnsley area were closed, including Royston Drift, Grimethorpe, Houghton Main and Barrow. Many older, retired miners blamed Scargill for being too extreme in his approach to managing union policy during the strike. At least two men interviewed believed that the younger miners, by supporting Scargill, had collaborated in throwing away all the hardwork undertaken by previous generations of local miners. Strategic union involvement stretched back into the previous century.

Tactically, the strike came at a time when UK coal stocks were high. The winter of 1984-1985 was also a relatively mild one. Many power stations, too, had been fitted with facilities that ensured they could also be fuelled by oil. Morale among the police was also high due to recent pay increases.

Seen in a wider context still, the miners and their families were victims of dramatic shifts in the global economy, which resulted in major shifts at the local level, and a restructuring of employment relations, including the increasing intolerance of the trade union movement and the working-class consciousness inherent within these structures.⁵⁸

The 1990s and beyond

“Over long-forgot machinery
The deadly nightshades grow
And the silence screams
Like the tortured souls
Of the men who worked below

And I’ve heard it said
There are still alive
In this God-forsaken hole
Those who knew this place
When it was a mine

Community, Continuity and Change after the 1984-5 Coal Dispute, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1991.

⁵⁸ Cumbers, Andrew, “Continuity or Change in Employment Relations? Evidence from the UK’s Old Industrial Regions”, *Capital and Class*, no.58 (Spring, 1996), 33-57.

Where their fathers dug for coal

Where the men of this community
All wore with well-earned pride
Tribal scars of coal dust blue
Before tradition died

But the men who toiled for wages
in the bowels of the earth
Were robbed of their inheritance
Were cheated of their worth

And the fireplace is empty now
And the hearth stones all are cold
And men who knew what working was
Are dead or very old"⁵⁹

Material symbols of identity

During the 1990s, many buildings that had stood as reminders of Royston's inextricable link with coalmining for so long began to disappear. The Miners' Institute, which had been a youth club during the 1970s and 1980s, along with the Miners' Welfare, or 'the Gym', which had been a social centre for Monckton colliery and then latterly a night club, were demolished. In 2000, the Monckton working men's club was closed and boarded up. Of more importance locally, however, was the blowing up of Monckton's number six winding tower. Perhaps, more than any other building, this grey-white, concrete monolith was an important reminder of the underground world that, for over a hundred years, had shaped the lives of so many local people. As with the removal of other 'headgear' in neighbouring villages, this day marked a significant event for locals. The 'sodcutting days' in the previous century had marked a new era of economic prosperity in the region and led to the rapid expansion of the surrounding village populations. In a symbolic sense, the razing of the number six winding tower signalled the end of this era and contributed to a growing feeling of uncertainty among locals about Royston's sense of identity.

Such an event is, of course spectacular in itself, and many people made the journey up Monckton Hill, or pit hill, to witness the event. Terry attempted to capture it on video, but unfortunately he ran out of film just before it was dynamited. Nevertheless, he boasted

about how he had got ‘a reight view’ of the event. One evening, in the tap room of the Red Rum pub in Grimethorpe, a video of Grimethorpe pit’s various winding headgear being demolished was shown on big screen. It sparked off numerous conversations as people wanted to point out where they had been when the event took place. Up on the allotments had been a good view, apparently, although everyone had got covered in dust. Joe had gone to his son’s house and filmed it out of a velux window in the attic.⁶⁰ Interestingly, during roughly the same period that these buildings were being demolished, the headgear that had been a motif on the pages of the local news section of the town’s weekly newspaper, *the Barnsley Chronicle*, also disappeared. One sensed a change of identity being orchestrated in the whole area, an attempt to help the people move on.

However, local sentiment and nostalgia for the former coal industry remains strong. Although ordinary in appearance, these continuing signs are invested with a real emotional attachment. Photographs and paintings of different colliery headgear, along with scenes from the 1984-5 strike and books about mining history can be found on a number of stalls on Barnsley market. Another shop in the Alhambra shopping centre sells miners’ brass oil lamps along with ornaments made from coal, many of which are figures of miners, underground tubs and, once again, the colliery headgear. These things, these representations, are not bought by tourists or visitors to the area, but by local residents, and are used to decorate the hall or the front room at home.

The voluntary group Royston Women Against Pit Closures, which was formed in 1984 still meets every fortnight in a local pub. The group has its own miner’s lamp which members look after in turn, each one keeping it for a few months before passing it on. Many miners interviewed during the fieldwork for this study remembered their underground check numbers. One ex-colliery manager who was interviewed, in his current non-mining office in Newcastle, had a large photo of one of his favourite coalfaces above his desk, and throughout the two-hour interview he held a small brass check tightly in his hand which bore the inscription ‘M 1’ (*manager*). An ex-surface worker that I met during participant observation had a brass check attached to his keyring which read ‘Grimethorpe Colliery, 1980, the first million tonnes’ (see photograph on p. 31).

⁵⁹ From “Back in the Future” in Gittins, Jean, A., in *Coal, Culture and Community: Proceedings of a conference at Sheffield Hallam University*, Sheffield, Pavic Publications, 1994, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Fwd, 14/3/97, Grimethorpe.

In a different way, Sandra B. commented on the influence of the pit on her husband's behaviour in the house during the years he had been working underground at Royston Drift mine: the way he had looked in the cupboard moving his head up and down as if he was still wearing a caplamp attached to his helmet; the way he sometimes left the corners of the sandwiches he had been holding uneaten, a common habit among men underground who didn't want to eat the bit covered with black coaldust; the way he and his mates sat in a chair, something she said allowed her to spot an underground worker, although she found the pose difficult to describe.



The effect of pit closures on social-networks and the production of narrative

This whole study is centrally concerned with local language behaviour and how language can provide a link to people's sense of belonging to a region and to a socio-occupational group.

Prior to the presentation and analysis of narrative data collected, it will be beneficial to assess how the recent closure of local coalmines has affected local social networks and the context for the production of mining-related language forms. During the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked how they believed local social structures and practices had been affected. Their perceptions of the main effects of pit closures on the local community can be categorized into three separate but related strands: the social degeneration of the community; the disappearance of mining as an emotional loss; a breakdown of social networks among former miners, along with the disappearance of the pit as a major topic of conversation.

The social degeneration of the community

Participants from Royston and neighbouring communities commented that they believed the closure of the pits was responsible for a range of social problems relating to younger people. Obviously, a heavy reliance on the mines as a local monopoly employer meant that when mines closed there were few alternative opportunities for school leavers. This perception is reflected by Harry, a retired, 80-year-old, Monckton miner:

AC: Do you think it's a bit sad that there's no pits?

Harry W: What wi all pits finishing?

AC: Yeah.

HW: Well a mean to say there's no jobs for these young uns or nowt nah is there. I can sit here on a neet an' you can see lads walk up and dahn this – rahn this avenue, ah big strong young lads baht fotteen, fifteen, sixteen year owd an' they've no jobs o' nowt...

...its summat different altogether for me, an' ehr when you think abaht it, same as me, when I wa' fifteen year owd I wa' coilin' and trammin' and there's some o' these nah they're (*laughs*), the've finished school an' that an' there's nowt for 'em wi' pits being shut an' that."⁶¹

⁶¹ Interview with Harry W., 5/11/98, t 1, s 2, 35.0

This perceived lack of opportunity is also blamed for the low self-esteem among young local people and as contributing to the growth of the region's drug culture. One local councillor told me that Grimethorpe is known as 'the heroin capital of South Yorkshire'. Whereas there was traditionally virtually no drug use in the villages of South and West Yorkshire, like Royston and Grimethorpe, now the streets are flooded with it, with a dealer operating on virtually every one of the large housing estates. Numerous fatal heroin overdoses in Royston during the fieldwork phase of this particular study are a testament to the problem. Locally it is viewed as an epidemic. Undoubtedly, the problem reflects the growth in the nation's drug culture in general, but it intensifies exponentially when combined with economic insecurity and lack of self-esteem due to unemployment. Royce Turner makes the point that the 'secret society' or sub-culture of local coalminers, with their 'snuff' and chewing 'bacca', has been replaced with a different kind of subculture based around drugs.⁶² In Royston, participants interviewed in this study also spoke about a lack of respect for the police due their behaviour witnessed during events in the 1984-85 strike. Many people perceive that pit closures have led to the inevitable disappearance of local informal social controls, or 'earhole clipping'. As Ian from Grimethorpe explained:

*"Ian T: ...When there wa' a pit if (I) dove through someone's hedges, yeah privet, when me dad got in t' pit baths
'Tha can sort that lad o' thine aht. His not diving through my privet.'
'Aye a'reight I'll sort it aht'.
So when a got home from school me dad wa' in –
'Tha' been through so an' so - I'm not having people pulling me in t' pit baths abaht you'.
So that wa' it like big bollocking. Nah you dunt get that anymooer cos people dunt work together."*⁶³

Increases in crime figures for former mining villages in South Yorkshire following the pit closures are startling, but they are surely not only due to a lack of 'earhole clipping'. In Grimethorpe, for example, in just two years between 1992 and 1994, burglary increased by over 300 percent compared with a 22 per cent increase in South Yorkshire. Similar figures exist for car thefts .

⁶² Turner, Royce, *Coal Was Our Life*, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2000, p. 202.

⁶³ Interview with Ian T., 18/1/99, t 2, s 1, 9.24

The disappearance of mining as an emotional loss

The closure of the region's coalmines is felt by many local people as a very real personal and emotional loss. Two Royston surface workers commented that it was one of the sorriest days of their lives to see the pit closed and to see all the machinery being dismantled and turned to scrap.⁶⁴ Another miner, Neil, a 40-year-old former underground fitter at Barrow colliery, explained the emotional impact following the last shift worked:

Neil S:...I can show mi emotions I'm not bothered, but you know pit lads, 'ah come on' kicked helmet up in air and throw boots through you know into skip, 'sod it we've done' ehrrm but...

AC: The 'not ones for showing their emotions are the'?

NS: ...but most of 'em one to one have said they felt a real, real pang of emotion, you know some o' 'em cried, some of went home and cried ah, it just shows you know, its a big, big part of your life that's gone."⁶⁵

The acceleration of pit closures in the Barnsley area in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and presumably in other areas of Britain, had a seismic psychological effect on the men and women of these communities. This is evident in so much of the data collected during fieldwork. Many Royston miners interviewed claimed, often unprompted, that they felt the closure of all the local coal mines as being 'a way of life gone', something that has 'died', or 'the end of an era'. As Anthony Cohen points out perceptively:

"...one often finds in such communities the prospect of change being regarded ominously, as if change inevitably means loss. A frequent and glib description of what is feared may be lost is 'way of life'; part of what is meant is the sense of self."⁶⁶

Although this may be true in communities such as Royston and Grimethorpe, the perceived symbolic loss is combined with a genuine impact on local patterns of behaviour, including the breakdown of certain social networks and the disappearance of the 'pit' as a major topic of conversation.

⁶⁴ Interview with Dave A. and John C., 10/12/96, t1, s 2, 9.0

⁶⁵ Interview with Neil S., 10/12/96, t 1, s 1, 15.0

⁶⁶ Cohen, A.P., *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, London, Routledge, 1985, p. 109.

Breakdown of social networks along with the disappearance of the pit as a major topic of conversation

Half of the 20 men interviewed during this study had been made redundant from mining during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In Royston, the lack of money was seen as the primary reason why so many local pubs and clubs had been forced to close. People simply cannot afford to socialise as much as they had done when earning a regular wage. Many of the pubs and clubs that have remained open have restricted their hours in an attempt to cut overheads. As Clarry, a redundant Royston deputy, explained:

“Clarry W: ...So I could tek you to every place in Royston and there’d be hardly anybody. They’re closing Cross they’re boardin’ it up this Friday, that’s another one that’s hit the wall, and this is simply because there’s no, no industry left and you know...”

AC: It’s sad really.

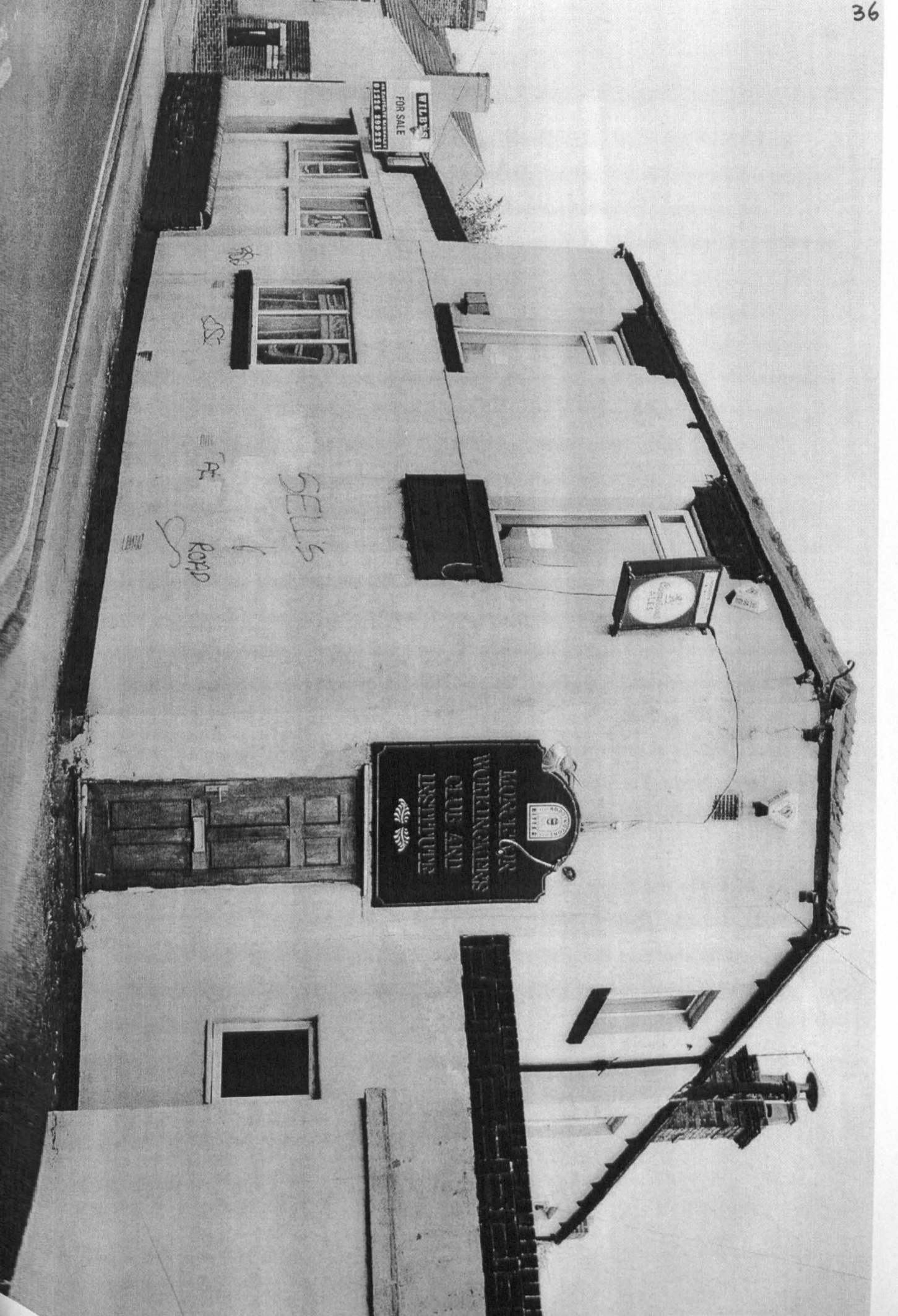
CW: It’s very sad, very sad. And I have – not very often a gu aht boozin’ at dinner time - but I have a friend Barry and we have a ride and ehr, we’ll gu to Grimethorpe and Hemsworth an’ it’s just same, they’re just same as us, places you gu in are empty.”⁶⁷

Of course, not everybody likes to socialise in pubs and clubs, and so for these people, without the workplace, it is unlikely that they’ll continue to have much regular contact with former colleagues. Some men might also choose to socialise in different venues to the ones frequented by their former work colleagues. Ian used the example of his father who operated a double disc shearer cutting machine with a man named Ray on a coalface at Grimethorpe pit:

“Mi dad’s mate Ray who he worked with for years and years and years, nah Ray on’y lives up Red City an’ mi dad lives up White City, but Ray dunt booze in same pub as mi dad and mi dad dunt booze in same pub as Ray, so whilst they were best o’ mates at work they hardly see each other, a mean they’ve probably seen each other twice since pit closed (five years ago).”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Interview with Clarry and Mary W., 22/10/98, t 1, s 1, 37.0, ‘The Cross’ was a well known pub in Royston.

⁶⁸ Interview with Ian T., 18/1/99, t 2, s 1, 8.3



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CLUB AND
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Whilst some former friendship links are retained, many argue that the pit is no longer a regular topic of conversation. People commented that it is still a raw topic because of the way local people feel they have been treated by the authorities. One woman summarised the episodes of the year-long strike followed by the closure of the local mines as having “knocked shit aht o’ everybody”.⁶⁹

The greatest sense of loss commented upon by the men, and to a lesser extent the women, interviewed in this study concerns what they term ‘camaraderie’. When pushed to describe exactly what they meant by this they frequently referred to ‘banter’ - ‘Tha couldn’t fault pit for banter’, ‘I’ve never worked anywhere as good for the crack’ - and miners having ‘an amazing sense of humour’. Only one man interviewed in this study still remained in the coalmining industry, travelling from Royston to Selby and back, each day. However, he believes it is a very different atmosphere at the pit in Selby, commenting that many of the employees are not from mining backgrounds and are therefore unaware of the ‘pit language’. He explained how these people would not understand terms such as ‘pit bank’ or ‘pit hill’. He also missed the older miners in the ‘new industry’ who, normally, would have been contributing to this sense of camaraderie. In particular he lamented the lack of these older miners passing on tales in the pit head baths.⁷⁰ To an extent, he sees the eradication of a world he once knew and was part of in terms of language loss. In Cohen’s terms it is a loss of ‘sense of self’ that he is experiencing, and which is, in turn, a response to changes locally in social network patterns. He is still involved in coalmining, but laments the loss of the local affiliations such as family and club social groups of which mining formerly overlapped.

While there is a general nostalgia for the coalmining days, many admit that the pit closing has meant new doors of opportunity opening. However, even those men who have managed to find new jobs or have returned to further and higher education commented upon the change in the communicative styles of interaction encountered in their various new environments.

⁶⁹ Interview with Clarry and Mary W., t 1, s 1, 32.2

⁷⁰ Interview with Dave A., and John C., 10/12/96, t 1, s 1, 23.0

Neil S: Mi brother, he worked in a pit from leaving school, he's forty now, an' he knew no other life and he loved it, he revelled in it, you know just typical pit man, he loved everything that went on, went aht wi his mates you know weekends and played darts whatever, and when the pit closed he came to Barnsley Main, when Dodworth closed, and when Barnsley Main closed, for whatever reason, I dunt know ahr he did it, but he got this really spot on job in Sheffield in a printing firm. He wore a tie, they were gunna send him to college, he had a smock, clean, and he couldn't believe it how he got this job. A mean he's a good communicator, but he'd never done anything other than pit and he got this job in this printing firm in Sheffield, he couldn't believe it and within say six months he couldn't hack it. He loved the job, but there were no mates, there were no, what he termed as pillocking, you'll have heard that you know...

AC: Oh aye.

NS: He says it wa' just totally alien to him, he wa' goin' to work and everybody 'Morning' you know, he wanted some crack some interaction like, an' he weren't gettin' any, an' ehr he's in a foundry nah...

AC: Really?

NS: Yeah , yeah he had to leave, he sez 'a can't wear it'. He wa' really upset when he wa' talkin' to me abaht it, he sez 'I've got the best job I've ever had', he sez 'I just can't stand it...' there were nothing in common with him and so he finished up at a foundry wi' a lot other pit lads and he's back into old camaraderie."⁷¹

Numerous other informants contrasted their new jobs with coal mining. Those who returned to further or higher education found that the communicative style they had used at the pit was wholly inappropriate, and they lamented the lack of humour or 'banter'.

Summary

The majority of people interviewed in this study believe that local pit closures have contributed to the lack of social cohesion in Royston and Grimethorpe. This is characterised principally by lack of job opportunities for school leavers; lack of informal social controls, previously held in place by the social networks at the pit; and a rising problem with drug use. The social changes created by local pit closures are interpreted by people as an emotional loss, often as the end of 'a way of life', which had previously provided job security, money with which to enjoy socialising outside of the home, a social network based around work, and, importantly, a socially-accepted position linked to self esteem and pride because of the job performed. Undoubtedly, many of the points concerning loss voiced by the informants in this particular study are common to joblessness more

generally,⁷² and , although certain social problems, such as rising drug use and associated crime, must be linked in part to the pit closures, they are also part of more widespread trends in Britain during the 1990s.

Nevertheless, one distinctive feature repeatedly cited as having deteriorated due to the pit closures was a feeling of camaraderie. In a separate study looking at the psychological effects of redundancy and worklessness among coalminers in Markham in Derbyshire, Victoria Vass concludes that:

“Mining generates close social ties both within and outside the colliery, however, these quickly disintegrated after the closure. The comradeship among miners was greatly missed by the redundants and there is some evidence that, as a result of absence of this social contact which provided an important opportunity to discuss common problems, stress within the family increased.”⁷³

Importantly, data collected for this study shows that people who had found alternative employment or returned to education, as well as the redundant, unemployed and retired, commented that they too missed the comradeship and social ties they had experienced in mining. Crucially then, although lack of money was cited as a major effect of local pit closures, just as important is the decline of social life. The two are interrelated, of course, lack of money being a deterrent to going out socialising and sustaining friendships. Investigating social changes in Yorkshire mining communities, Warwick et al. commented that these localities are:

“social entities unlike urban neighbourhoods which form the majority of community spaces in the contemporary world. Further they are caught up in processes which, despite protest and resistance, are modifying them inexorably.”⁷⁴

Similarities between the findings from this particular study and with other studies discussed above strengthen the idea that there are genuine common problems and consequences of pit closures. Particularly in Royston, Grimethorpe and Darfield the social

⁷¹ Interview with Neil S., 10/12/96, t 1, s 1, 8.0

⁷² For a pioneering case study on the economic and social effects of joblessness see Jahoda, M., Larzarsfeld, P. and Zeisl, H., *Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community*, London, Tavistock, 1972.

⁷³ Vass, Victoria, “The Psychological Effects of Redundancy and Worklessness - a case study from the coalfields”, in *Coal, Culture and Community: Proceedings of a Conference at Sheffield Hallam University*, Sheffield, Pavic Publications, 1994, p. 191.

and economic change can be seen as creating an ‘identity crisis’ among the people affiliated to these socio-occupational groups.

⁷⁴ Warwick, Dennis, and Littlejohn, G., “The Cultural capital of Coal Mining Communities”, in *Coal, Culture and Community: Proceedings of a Conference at Sheffield Hallam University*, Sheffield, Pavic Publications, 1994, p. 61.

2

Methodology

“You can become a tramp simply by putting on the right clothes and going to the nearest casual ward, but you can’t become a navvy or a coal-miner. You couldn’t get a job as a navvy or a coal-miner even if you were equal to the work....For some months I lived entirely in coal-miners’ houses. I ate my meals with the family, I washed at the kitchen sink, I shared bedrooms with miners, drank beer with them, played darts with them, talked to them by the hour together. But though I was among them, and I hope and trust they did not find me a nuisance, I was not one of them, and they knew it even better than I did. However much you like them, however interesting you find their conversation, there is always that accursed itch of class-difference, like the pea under the princess’s mattress.”

George Orwell, 1937¹

¹ Orwell, George, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, London, Penguin, 1989, p. 144 - 145. (First edition: London, Victor Gollanz, 1937).

Introduction

In order to collect data on the behavior of the worker in the home, the worker must be employed. This is the only way to get the worker in the home, and the worker must be with it for some time. The worker must be in the home for some time in order to get the worker's job and to get the worker's job done. The worker must be in the home for some time in order to get the worker's job done. The worker must be in the home for some time in order to get the worker's job done.



For example, Wilson, Paul, *Industrial Psychology*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1940, p. 140.
Dunlap, H., and T. J. G. Jones, *Industrial Psychology*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1940, p. 147.
Van Dine, 1914, in *Handbook of Psychology*, Charles C. Sage Publications, 1914.
The experimental observation of individual differences in quality of work, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1915, 1, 1-10.
"The human element," *The Psychologist*, vol. 22, no. 4 (April 1915), 154-155.

Introduction

In order to collect the necessary data for the study a variety of research methods were employed. This included the researcher conducting 20 semi-structured, informal interviews with 30 men and women; becoming a participant observer in the social settings of the community's pubs and clubs; and collecting unpublished writing and other mining related materials to form an archive. Having three different types of data enhances the trustworthiness, or internal validity, of the overall material, and allows triangulation of the prominent structures and themes across different verbal genres. The aim of this chapter is to describe how the data for the study was collected. This is achieved by discussing in some detail the 'ideal' methodological approach striven for, followed by a description of the 'actual' fieldwork experience of data collection.

The gap between the object of study and its representation in ethnographic and case study research has been the focus of much attention in recent writing.² This study acknowledges that the researcher, to some degree, shapes the data being collected, and this reflexivity will be explained in two principal ways: firstly, the personal background of the researcher will be revealed; and then, in subsequent parts of this chapter, the recorded experiences of the researcher during the fieldwork phase will be drawn upon. The revelation of these two influences will enhance the 'trustworthiness' of the study.³ The discussion of these experiences, combined with comparing findings in this study to findings in previous relevant studies, orientates the research and strives to lessen the gap between the object of the study and its representation.

Background of the researcher

Undoubtedly the motivation for examining the regional and socio-occupational language varieties and communicative styles of this former coalmining area sprang from the

² See for example, Atkinson, Paul, *Understanding Ethnographic Texts*, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 1992.

Agar, M., *The Professional Stranger*, New York, Academic Press, 1980.

Denzin, N., and Y. Lincoln, "Introduction", in Denzin, N., and Lincoln, Y., *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 1-17.

Van Maanen, John, ed., *Representation in Ethnography*, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 1995.

³ For an excellent discussion of 'trustworthiness' in qualitative studies see Johnson, Sally, "The horrors of scientific research", *The Psychologist*, vol. 12, no. 4 (April, 1999), 186-189.

researcher's own background. I lived in the region until the age of twenty and, perhaps more importantly, come from a family of coalminers. I also worked as a coalminer between the ages of 16 and 20. In particular, my background influenced my access to members of the mining community in a number of ways. Although I had not lived in the area for over ten years, since 1986, I could still speak the local dialect. I could also tell people of my family history when asked frequently for example who my parents and grandparents were, which pit they had worked at, and which part of the village we lived in. They also wanted to know where I had worked and what job I had performed underground. This revealed that I was familiar to some degree with the world of coalmining, its peculiar lexicon and customs, and the underground landscapes. One advantage was that during some of the longer personal experience narratives the participants did not have to interrupt the flow of a 'tale' or narrative with constant explanations. Sometimes, however, I would request an explanation if I thought it would benefit the research by providing a context with which to better understand a joke or a coalmining term.

The researcher's background also influenced the focus of study in the preliminary stages, especially with regard to the choice of topics, namely the speech genres and themes perceived to be part of the miners' sociolinguistic repertoire that were introduced during the semi-structured interviews. Instead of starting from a blank slate, it was already known, for example, that nicknames and storytelling were important parts of the local coalminers' language. That some of these elements were confirmed during the course of reviewing the relevant literature and later during preliminary fieldwork was reassuring. Serious academic studies into the speech behaviour of working-class socio-occupational subcultures by an inside researcher are particularly rare. Pilcher's anthropological research among the Portland Longshoremen in the early 1970s is an exception, however although language is considered it is not a central concern.⁴

Choice of locality

There are several reasons why a mining community near Barnsley was chosen as the focus for this study. From a purely practical point of view, Barnsley is relatively accessible, being only one hour away from my home by public transport or car. More importantly, however,

is the fact that Barnsley's whole identity has been inextricably linked with coal, historically, emotionally and economically. Also the regional dialect spoken in and around the town differs markedly from standard English and from other regional varieties of language used in surrounding areas. This fact, combined with the presence of the rich occupational lore of the coalminers, presents an irresistible challenge to the researcher of regional and socio-occupational language. Surprisingly, compared with coalmining communities in areas such as South Wales and the North-East of England, there has been little serious research undertaken into either the regional or the mining language. Why this is so is not clear. On an amateur level, there have been virtually no specific recordings made of local speech or oral histories of local mining life.

The initial inquiry for this study involved preliminary fieldwork that aimed to get a firmer grasp on how to best collect the required data and to establish a network of contacts in the field. The four principal areas on which the initial enquiry focused comprised Darfield, Oakwell, Grimethorpe and Royston, - separate but neighbouring districts of the town (see map on p. 4.). The first three were explored fully prior to looking for contacts in Royston, the community I am most familiar with. As well as meeting ex-miners and their families, this led to valuable meetings with a variety of people involved or connected with the mining community, including outreach community workers concerned with regeneration, those involved in further education, and the all-party lobbying group the Coalfield Communities Campaign. Ongoing visits to mining exhibitions, mining museums and local libraries as well as correspondence with researchers who had undertaken fieldwork in or near the area, in disciplines such as education, industrial relations and local history, meant that the early stages of the study remained informed by a wider outlook. Figure 2:10 (p. 81) summarises this fieldwork.

Whilst visiting various communities during the early stages of the fieldwork provided a valuable overview of the region, ultimately the research required a tighter geographical boundary. If the study area became too large, it could have failed to provide the in-depth contextual detail necessary to place the narratives and other genres of the oral tradition in a more meaningful frame. A larger area would have allowed the drawing of comparisons, but limitation of time and money prevented such an approach without the loss

⁴ Pilcher, William, *The Portland Longshoreman*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972.

of depth. Ultimately, it was decided to confine the research to Royston, although neighbouring areas were not totally excluded. More contacts existed here and the chance of success in reaching the target list of sample informants was greater. To different degrees, I came to informants as a 'local', passed from one person to another with a recommendation and with an understanding of the industry. In fact this position is similar to the one described by Milroy in her Belfast study, as a 'friend of a friend'.⁵ Being from the community made access to the social clubs and pubs easier, entrance to the social world of the coalminer having been deemed problematic by previous linguistic researchers.⁶ For some members of the community these venues have always served as centres for verbal communication and, in the absence of the coalmine, will provide the study with some of the necessary contextual detail. I could make use of accommodation offered by friends and family in Royston. This made longer ethnographic type fieldwork an attainable reality, given the limited funding and timescale of the project.

⁵ Milroy, Lesley, *Language and Social Networks*, 2nd ed., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987, pp. 178 – 179.

⁶ Elmer, Willy, "A Questionnaire for the Terminology of Coalmining", in Fischer, Andreas, *The History and Dialects of English, Festschrift for Eduard Kolb*, Heidelberg, C. Winter, 1989.

Choice of Sample

The following discussion of the study's chosen 'ideal sample' and the 'actual sample', bearing in mind issues of access, aims to establish the level of reliability of the study's data. It is not claimed here that this particular study is replicable. However, a degree of dependability is achieved by being open about the research processes and the decisions taken during the fieldwork. For this study, a 'social network approach' was used to locate the informants, and this worked well. The main pitfall with such an approach is the danger of being passed around a small sub-group who share similar beliefs. This point was illustrated during the initial fieldwork phase. In Grimethorpe an outreach community worker acted as a key contact, or 'gateway', and this led to several contacts being made. However, many of the miners met were in some way connected with the local community centre, or the local council, or were ex-union officials. Acting as the spokespeople of the community they were sent as representatives to talk to any visiting outsiders, for example journalists or academics.⁷ Being passed around one small group of informants or meeting only 'official spokespeople' raises the questions of whose voice is it that we receive and what happens to those on the margins of community life?

Invariably such spokespeople are underground workers and, as was discovered whilst reviewing the literature, studies of mining communities have tended to focus on the lives of underground workers rather than those of the lower-profile surface workers. Many miners' biographies, too, are written by underground face-workers.⁸ Such studies are dominated by singular voices and make it imperative that we view their validity on that basis. What also became apparent during the early part of the fieldwork was that, during the normal working life of a miner, many different jobs might have been undertaken, with time being spent working both above and below ground, which further complicates the labels 'surface' or 'underground' worker. To maintain as wide a perspective as possible it was believed that the ideal sample would encompass informants who have worked on the coalface as well as those who have worked elsewhere in the industry. It was learnt that

⁷ In Grimethorpe I was introduced to an ex-NUM representative to whom the community workers referred as 'the most interviewed man in Grimethorpe'.

⁸ John, Angela, V., "Scratching the Surface. Women, work and the coalmining history in England and Wales", *Oral History Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Autumn, 1982), 13.

essentially, to be effective, the ‘social network approach’ needs to be combined with a target list. A target list ensures that the data collected can be analysed more rigorously, in this case with relation to age and specific occupation. Such data could be used to confirm or refute specific claims made in other studies. The target list shown in Figure 2:1 below represents the ‘ideal’ spread of participants. It is based on the hierarchical structures in the workplace and in the wider community as suggested by the literature reviewed and the preliminary fieldwork.⁹

Figure 2:1 The ‘ideal’ sample list of participants for the semi-structured interviews

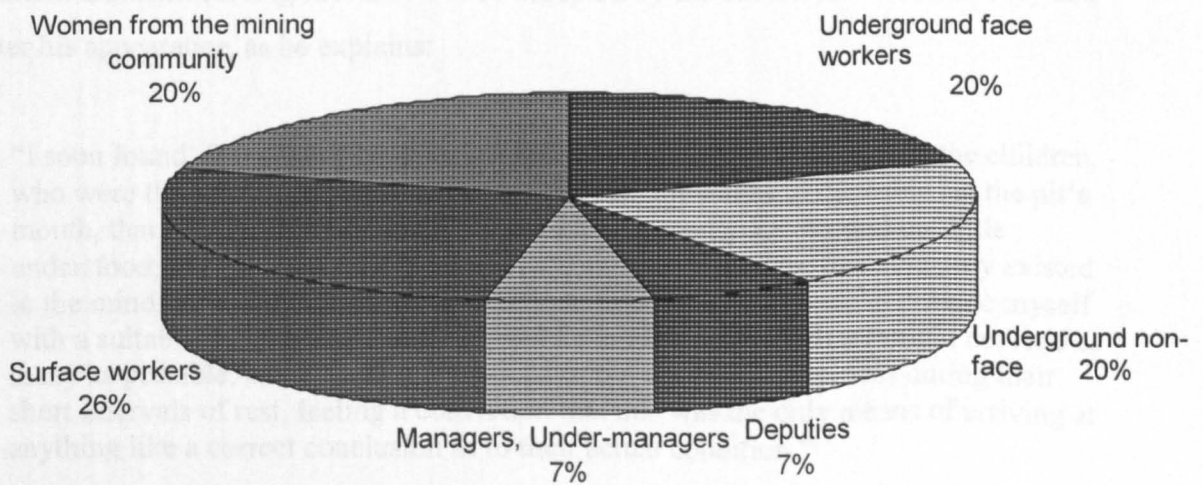
Description of participants	
Underground face workers	6
Underground non-face	6
Deputies	2
Managers, Under-managers	2
Surface workers	8
Women from the mining community	6
Total participants	30

To a large extent the status distinctions that the sample tried to represent exist in a real sense through union segregation and the incentive bonus scheme. Workers in the local mining industry were normally members of one of four unions, the NUM, (National Union of Mineworkers), COSA, (Colliery Officials and Staffs Area), NACODS, (National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers), or BACM, (British Association of Colliery Managers). The NUM was the largest union but between the men there were

⁹ Some of the limitations and pitfalls of sampling methods in the social network approach are examined, as well as many useful forward references, in: Wasserman, Stanley, and Faust, Katherine, *Social network Analysis: methods and applications*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 33 – 34.

further distinctions more accurately reflected in the Production Bonus Scheme.¹⁰ The 'bonus', as it is referred to, could make up a significant part of a worker's wages and was awarded according to the job performed at the pit. A man working on the coalface would be given 100 percent of the bonus whereas a surface worker would only receive 50 percent. However, differences between workers existed outside of the institutionalised frameworks of unions and bonus scheme. Boundaries of status are maintained through aspects of socio-occupational and regional language collected and examined in this study. Women's involvement and relationship to the occupational and regional lore is also examined by allowing them to represent 20% of the total sample of participant interviewees.

Fig.3 The participants to be interviewed presented as percentages of the total 'ideal' sample.



¹⁰ The production bonus scheme was introduced in May 1978, and was directly related to the amount of coal produced per man hour at each colliery. For an excellent discussion on how it came into practice see: Ashworth, William, *The History of the British Coal Industry, vol. 5, 1946 – 1982, The Nationalized Industry*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, P. 373.

The initial fieldwork highlighted the importance of remaining open to as many potential networks as possible when collecting the remaining data. The main reason for this is that to attain a wide sample the researcher must endeavour to find a number of key people, or ‘gateways’, who will ideally provide access to different networks within the same community. The village of Royston offered the best possibility of attaining this sample.

Accessing the sample

Attitude to outsiders

One of the earliest records of an outsider entering into the mining communities of West Yorkshire is the report by commissioner S.S. Scriven during his research for the 1842 Mines Report for the Children’s Employment Commission. He endeavoured to undertake ethnographic fieldwork in order to substantiate his report. However, this task was not without incident. Having first failed to be accepted by the colliers, he decided to try and alter his appearance, as he explains:

“I soon found, from the difficulties I repeatedly experienced in bringing the children, who were the especial objects of my search, from the mines to the cabins at the pit’s mouth, that my arrival in the district was pretty generally known and but little understood; and all my endeavours to overcome the prejudices that evidently existed in the minds of the colliers proving fruitless, I determined at once to provide myself with a suitable dress of flannel, clogs, and knee-caps, in order that I might descend as many as possible, and take the depositions of the children themselves during their short intervals of rest, feeling a conviction that this was the only means of arriving at anything like a correct conclusion as to their actual condition.”¹¹

Scriven obviously felt that changing his dress and descending the shaft to the site of the workplace would help him capture a more accurate ethnographic record. In his words:

¹¹ Scriven, Samuel. S., “Yorkshire Coalfield, West Riding Report”, in *Children’s Employment Commission, Mines, 1842, Appendix, Part 2*, p. 58.

“I have reason to congratulate myself upon my resolve, because I feel I have become more familiarised with their habits, practices, wants, and sufferings...”¹²

Scriven’s experience illustrates very clearly the idea that members of the mining community are wary of outsiders, an idea that has continued to be noted by investigators throughout the twentieth century. Dialectologist Willy Elmer hints at this when he talks of the problems he had accessing not only the underground working environment of the coalminer but ‘the social life of miners’ too.¹³ The isolation and cultural marginalisation of coalmining communities is discussed by Storm-Clark, Benney, and more recently Critcher et al.¹⁴ Hudson used his family connections to make an entry into the world of Horden, a mining community in County Durham.¹⁵ While it is true that I had connections in the mining community on which this study focuses, I never felt a complete insider. A more accurate description would be to say that, during each fieldwork encounter, my status was continually renegotiated, rendering the labels of insider or outsider inadequate. The following section describes the problems and successes, or the reality, of finding the ideal group of participants for the semi-structured interviews.

Place and occupation

The Acorn community centre in Grimethorpe looks oddly out of place and allegedly many locals have not welcomed it, sitting as it does on the site of the former colliery, which was closed in 1994 shortly before its centenary. I had been invited to the centre to meet outreach community worker at the centre, Dave Hunter, a former coalface ‘ripper’ in the Parkgate seam at ‘Grimey’, as it is known locally.¹⁶ When asked if the pit was still an important part of people’s lives he replied, “The pit is everywhere, it’s in the shops, it’s in the streets, it’s

¹² Scriven, *ibid.*, 1842, p. 58.

¹³ Elmer, p. 245.

¹⁴ Storm-Clark, Christopher, “The Miners: The Relevance of Oral History”, *Oral History*, no. 4 (March, 1972), 72-92.

Benney, Mark, *Charity Main: A Coalfield Chronicle*, 2nd edn., Wakefield, EP Publishing, 1978.

Waddington, David; Wykes, Maggie, and Critcher, Chas, *Split At The Seams? Community, Continuity and Change After the 1984-5 Coal Dispute*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1991.

¹⁵ Hudson, Mark, *Coming Back Brockens: A Year in a Mining Village*, London, Vintage, 1995.

in the people.”¹⁷ This pervasive element of the pit in people’s lives, despite the fact that all the pits had now been closed, was found in all the locations. However, most pit villages did not correspond with the neatly described models of mining communities referred to by early sociologists, where the local workforce all worked at the village pit.

Many miners and their families interviewed in Royston, for example, had lived in the village for over three generations, yet they had worked at a variety of pits, some of which were quite a few miles away. This is partly due to the fact that during the closure programme that began in the 1960s, more and more local family pits had been closed and people had to move to a neighbouring pit or to look for alternative employment. This gradually led to today’s situation where the handful of remaining miners living in Royston travel either to Selby or Pontefract where the closest existing mines remain. However, even during the 1930s and 1940s, availability of work, more favourable working conditions, or better pay had meant that some miners had chosen to travel reasonable distances outside the district to work at other pits.¹⁸ Once one member of a family had established himself at a pit this made it easier for siblings to follow. Even in the 1980s, during the last intake of miners into the industry, nepotism was the norm. For example, the only reason I was given an interview for work at Grimethorpe colliery in 1982 was because my father worked there. Although Royston Drift Mine was much closer to where I lived, I had no relatives working there and so I was discouraged from even trying to get a job at that pit.

It is important to recognise however, that although men may have worked outside the village in which they lived, many of these communities still continue to think of themselves as mining villages. Royston’s pit, Monckton Main Colliery, was closed in 1965 and the Drift Mine had a short life between 1976 and 1989. However, many inhabitants perceive it as a mining village, as a bounded entity with a discrete identity. In Grimethorpe, where the pit closed more recently, such feelings are even more acute. Regional and socio-occupational identities of people and perceptions of the villages themselves are less than clearcut, and often intermeshed and overlapping. For example, other evidence collected during interviews suggests that Royston’s identity is also tied to the railway industry, many

¹⁶ Grimethorpe is referred to as ‘Grimey’ by the people of Grimethorpe as well as those living in nearby villages such as Royston, Cudworth and Darfield.

¹⁷ Fieldwork diary, 30/10/96 (herewith Fwd).

¹⁸ Interview with Harry W, 5/11/98.

people having worked on the local railway, until the closure of the station and then the goods yard in the 1960s, and subsequently in the coalmining industry.¹⁹ This makes it difficult to generalise about the locality's identity being linked solely with coalmining.

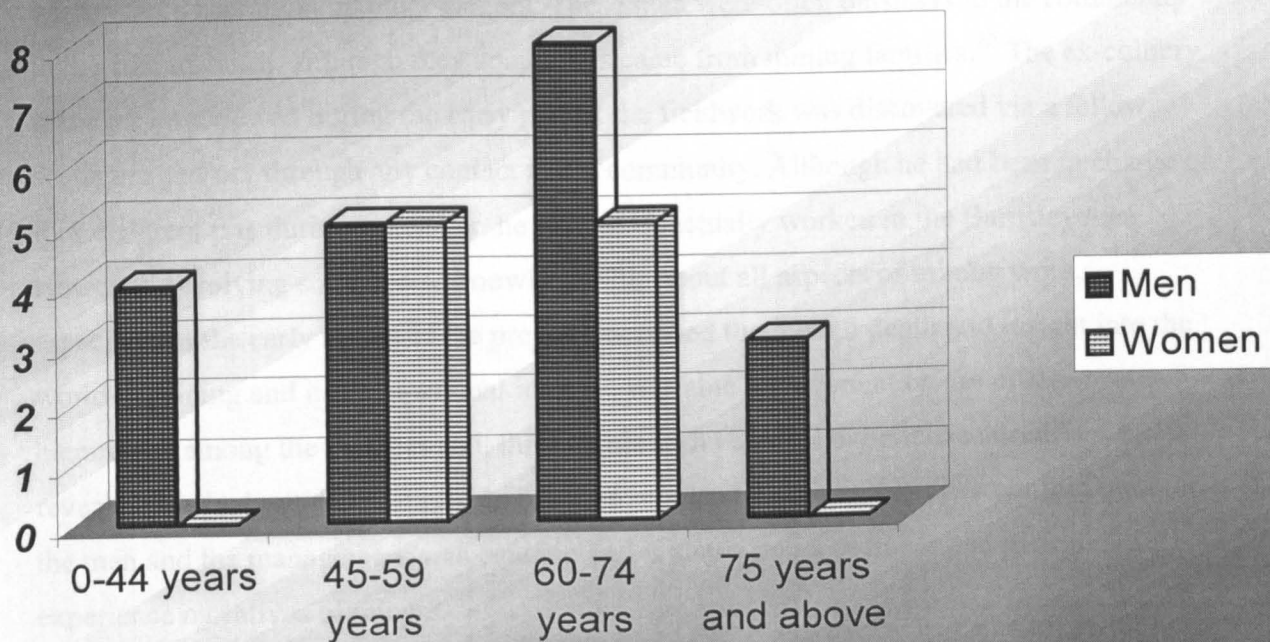
With regard to occupation in mining, the target list of participants includes groups of men who had worked underground and those who had worked on the surface. As many men had worked both underground and on the surface it was decided to categorize them in relation to where they had worked the longest or by how they perceived themselves at the time of interviewing.

Age range of sample

The ideal sample aimed to have a wide range of ages represented. If achieved, this might show up differences in language use on a micro level as well as potentially producing a wider range of occupational lore. However, in practice, a number of factors influenced the range of ages available. Firstly, there was a lower limit to the age of people involved in the mining industry as the last serious intake of recruits was in 1983. This meant that the youngest miner available in 1996 would be twenty nine years old. Secondly, miners in the age category seventy and above were difficult to find. Harry W claimed that only one of his former work colleagues was still alive in the village today. He recited a long list of his friends who had died recently. Thirdly, the key informants or 'gateways' were often between forty and sixty, and this led to more interviews with participants in this age range. The women who were part of the Royston Women Against Pit Closure Group were almost exclusively from this age group as well. Despite the dominance of this age group, the sample finally collected has a wide age range, as will be seen in figure 4.

¹⁹ Interview with Anne and Terry W, 8/3/99.

Fig. 4 The age distribution within the 'actual' sample of 20 men and 10 women interviewed.



Roydon Drill Mine actually still lived in the village of Roydon. There were probably good reasons why I had not been told of his whereabouts. There were obviously sensitive relations between the men and their families and the manager in view of all the labour disputes. Inevitably, the only person to reveal where the colliery manager lived was himself. I was very aware that by visiting the manager I was potentially jeopardising the trust and friendship that had been built up during the fieldwork to the community and which had led to such good support in the interviews. The fieldwork diary records my concern that some people would be irritated if I included the voice of a manager in the study. However, ultimately I had to take the risk and speak to the manager and his wife if I wanted to achieve the projected ideal sample.

This dilemma of trying to be loyal to the community as a whole while at the same time exposing between different factions is a potential hazard when undertaking ethnographic interviewing and participant observation data collection. Jay McLeod writes clearly about

¹⁷ For more on this see the manager, M. J. and interviewee, the K. and interviewee, M. J.

Colliery Managers and Deputies

During the preliminary stages of the study, it proved difficult to determine the whereabouts of colliery managers and under managers. Allegedly, some had moved away from the area, while others had taken up other careers. These men were often outsiders to the community in the first instance, although they sometimes came from mining families.²⁰ The ex-colliery manager interviewed during the early part of the fieldwork was discovered via a fellow academic and not through any contact in the community. Although he had been in charge of four different pits during his career, he had never actually worked in the Barnsley area. However, involving someone so knowledgeable about all aspects of mining work, especially in the early stages of the project, increased the overall depth and insight into the world of mining and its occupational lore. He was able to comment on the different hierarchies among the workers and, through his own personal experience narratives, he revealed much about the relationship between men and management. The conflict between the men and the management was evident, and is also a major theme in the personal experience narratives of miners.

Surprisingly late in the research, it was discovered that the former manager of Royston Drift Mine actually still lived in the village of Royston. There were probably good reasons why I had not been told of his whereabouts. Things were obviously sensitive between the men and their families and the manager in view of all the colliery closures. Interestingly, the only person to reveal where the colliery manager lived was himself a deputy. I was very aware that by visiting the manager I was potentially jeopardising the trust and friendship that had built up during the fieldwork in the community and which had led to such good rapport in the interviews. The fieldwork diary records my concern that some people would be insulted if I included the voice of a manager in the study. However, ultimately I had to take the risk and speak to the manager and his wife if I wanted to achieve the projected ideal sample.

This dilemma of trying to be loyal to the community as a whole where animosity exists between different factions is a potential hazard when undertaking ethnographic interviewing and participant observation data collection. Jay McLeod writes clearly about

²⁰ Interview with Steve C, ex-colliery manager, 7/12/96, and interview with Ray K., ex-colliery manager, 24/10/98.

this subject in his description of his own fieldwork for his book 'Ain't no makin' it.'²¹ He becomes associated with two opposed gangs of young males in the USA, information about both of which he wishes to include in his thesis. He reveals the difficulty in satisfying both camps and describes how he narrowly misses being an outcast when both the teams play a basketball game and he has to decide which team to play with. In moments like these my outsider status as an academic was clearly dominating and motivating my action. In contrast to managers and under-managers, deputies are relatively easy to locate. More often than not they started out as miners and were then promoted. Usually, deputies still live in, and are very much part of, the community.

Women from the mining community

During the very early stages of the fieldwork, it became apparent that being a man would make the task of reaching female informants difficult in these communities.²² During preliminary fieldwork for the study, a community development officer arranged a meeting between myself, John, a former electrician at a colliery in North Derbyshire, and Pam, an ex-miner's wife. Although not in the Barnsley area, this was a good opportunity to make contact with members of the mining community. John arrived and explained that Pam could not come. Later that evening, once rapport had been built, he explained that one of the problems for females in this community is the negative attitude of their partners towards education. There was also the problem of them coming to meet an unknown male alone. Their partners would be jealous, John said, and would probably want to be here too. On a different occasion in Grimethorpe an event had been organized by the local community centre to try to bring the local community together to share their memories of mining life. The response was impressive with almost a hundred people attending. The men outnumbered the women present by eight to one. At the end of the evening, the community worker who had helped set up the evening explained to everyone present how he hoped that the people of the village would want to record their experiences orally on tape and then, later, perhaps in the form of a book. In the middle of this a woman shouted "What abaht

²¹ McLeod, Jay, "On the making of Ain't no makin' it", in Lareau, Anette, and Shultz, Jeffrey, *Journeys through Ethnography: Realistic Accounts of Fieldwork*, Boulder, Westview, 1996.

²² Fwd, 18/10/96.

me, I could tell you some tales. I had to clean aht all those dirty offices.”²³ People in the room laughed at this remark, but clearly here was someone trying to get a stake in a history that would otherwise be dominated by the voice of men.

Although some women took part in the interviews during this research, alongside the men, it was often only at a marginal level, and a greater effort would have to be made to reach them. Their marginal role can be partly explained by the researcher’s agenda, which mainly aimed to capture the sociolinguistic repertoires of the miners themselves. Another factor was that it was assumed by many of the families that the pit was the man’s world and that this is what I wanted to hear about. Often during interviews the women would appear only to bring tea and then quietly disappear to another part of the house, although occasionally women became more involved, contributing lengthy narratives. Even where women take a marginal role in the interviews their contribution underlined the importance of their perspective. For example, Maureen from Darfield provided pertinent comments on the oral traditions of narrative jokes, ‘pillocking’ and nicknaming, all of central importance to the local coalminers. She later revealed that she had written poems about mining, one of which had been published locally. In a separate interview, Mary occasionally interrupted her husband, and with a counter narrative provided a different version of events. For example she shed much light on the stigma sometimes attached to being a deputy, especially during times of conflict, something her husband never mentioned. Such fieldwork experience made it imperative to include the voice of women in the study.

Women’s interaction needed to be observed and recorded directly, and this required a radically different approach. Rather than interviewing women via their partners, they must be interviewed on their own terms and not with an agenda preoccupied with male issues. It was believed that one way to achieve this without incurring the denied access experienced earlier in the research was to contact a women’s organisation. Fortunately, in Royston, a group calling themselves the Royston Women Against Pit Closures (RWAPC) movement still meets regularly and, after some enquiries, agreed to meet me.

The first visit to the RWAPC Group was a totally new experience. Here I met a large group of women, all of them deeply involved in the mining community. It seemed wholly inappropriate to try to record their meetings, and instead I chose simply to attend the

²³ Fwd, 14/3/97

meetings and observe. I spoke mainly when asked to explain what I intended to achieve in the study. Three out of four of their meetings were attended between November 1998 and March 1999. Only then did it feel appropriate to suggest recording some semi-structured interviews. This period, between November and March 1998, was invaluable as it allowed the development of the topics to be focussed on in the interviews which aimed to deal specifically with issues pertinent to the women. These central themes and issues arose in the discussions with the women and also in the autobiographical writing and poetry that was read.

During this part of the research the difficulty of defining my own status with any exactitude became apparent. Concepts of 'insider' and 'outsider' seemed inadequate as they failed to reflect the uncertain and dynamic feelings that were experienced during the fieldwork. This conflict was borne out in one particular instance recorded in the fieldwork diary. First of all there was my own selfconsciousness that I was entering a social situation that was all female, crossing a boundary that normally men did not cross. By the end of my first visit I felt reasonably relaxed and stayed on to chat with a small number who regrouped around a table. I joined them in a round of bingo, and they continued to talk about mining life. Towards the end of this evening, I felt that perhaps I had overstayed my welcome and that I had failed to recognise that this was a separate part of the evening where this small group liked to have some time to themselves. Conflicting with these feelings of being an intruder, however, were moments when I felt incredibly welcome. "It's been really nice to reminisce tonight," one woman said.²⁴

Initially it seemed more appropriate to meet the women in the formal context of their group. It took many weeks before I felt comfortable about suggesting that they participate in some semi-structured interviews. This would involve going directly to their houses, which might be a problem. Some of the women openly admitted that their partners did not like them coming to the fortnightly RWAPC, even though they had been coming now for nearly fifteen years.

Being on the periphery of these fortnightly meetings provided an extremely privileged view of the female perspective. The women's own narratives were vital too, giving an insight into how mining life has affected their lives. Also, because of their

²⁴ Fwd, 15/11/98

relative distance from the male communicative world of mining lore, women were able to reflect on male verbal behaviour in ways which the men were often unable to do. Both these factors strengthened my resolve to try to capture some of their contributions on tape. Eventually I conducted two interviews, the first with four women and the second with two. During these interviews I was also given some of their own writing, both autobiographical and fiction as well as poetry. This material formed part of an archive and is used alongside the oral data in the final analysis.²⁵ In particular such literature is useful in triangulating some of the key themes that are central to many of the personal experience narratives collected on tape. Wayne Gavrie points out that there is an oral tradition in mining communities that centres around pit life, but that it is a tradition that “remembers the deeds of men but not those of women.”²⁶ By including women in the study it is possible to gain a greater appreciation of the community talk complex.

Figure 2:4 Table showing ‘ideal’ and ‘actual’ sample of people interviewed

Description of participants	Ideal sample	Actual sample
Underground face workers	6	4
Underground non-face	6	8
Deputies	2	2
Managers, Under-managers	2	2
Surface workers	8	4
Women from the mining community	6	10
Total Participants	30	30

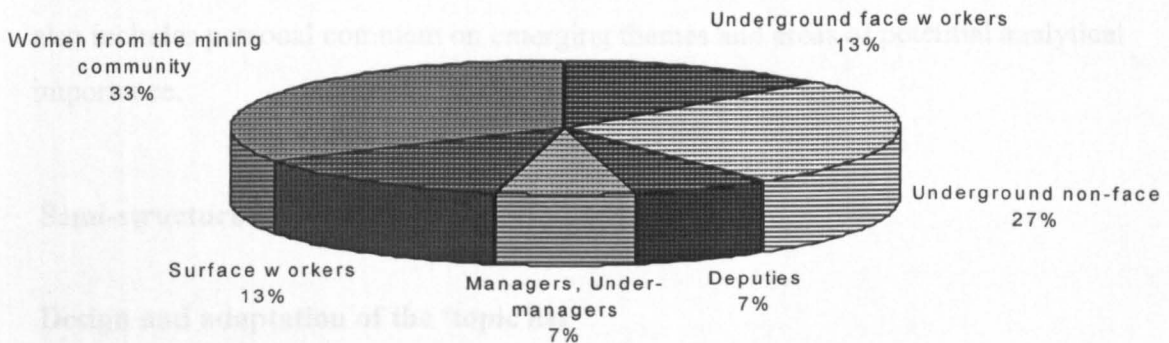
Despite the problems encountered in accessing the sample participants the ideal and the actual are not too dissimilar, as seen in figure 2:4 above. One of the greatest shifts was in

²⁵ The archive is named *The Andrew Cave Royston coalmining lore and language collection*, referred to hereafter as *ACRCC*.

²⁶ Garvie, Wayne, “Mill Hill: The making of a mining community”, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 1988, summary.

the number of women eventually interviewed, which increased from 20% to 33% of the total sample. See figure 2:5 below.

Fig. 2:5 Actual sample of participants interviewed presented as percentages of the total sample



As this section has exemplified accessing the 'ideal' sample was not wholly achievable in light of the constraints experienced in the field. However, the constraints due to issues of age, gender and hierarchy have not rendered the 'actual' sample worthless. It is worth pointing out that in truth an 'ideal' sample is literally an ideal and that an actual sample, as presented here, that almost reaches this target in light of the fieldwork reality is a worthy, very viable and representative sample. Undoubtedly, my status as someone having worked underground and being a former resident of the community provided privileged access to the men and women of the community. This certainly contributed to the success of achieving a wide and representative sample.

Collecting the data

The following section aims to show how the different data sources were collected via semi-structured interviews, participant observation and an archive. Also discussed here is how the main themes of the research developed, influenced by the researcher's own background, the literature reviewed, and the reflexive nature of ongoing fieldwork. Discussing these issues will help to demonstrate the reliability and dependability of the data. Throughout the following discussion the research diary will be drawn upon to provide a record of the successes and problems encountered during the data collection process. The research diary also includes personal comment on emerging themes and areas of potential analytical importance.

Semi-structured interviews

Design and adaptation of the 'topic list'

Although data from participant observation in the field is crucial, without doubt most of the data for this study was collected via tape-recorded, semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews, although informal in nature, were always orientated around the 'topic list'. This topic list was a flexible research tool which was adapted at various stages of the data collection process. The interviews also included a section designed to elicit biographical data. The information sought included age, the pit worked at, and the job performed at the pit, as well as details of relatives' involvement in the coalmining industry. The interviews were recorded on tape, in total amounting to 33 hours of material. However, varying amounts of interaction occurred immediately prior to, and after, the actual recording of the interviews. This material is valuable as it provides clues to the explanation of the main interview data. Details of this interaction, which was not tape-recorded, are found in section 'b' of the fieldwork diary. The initial agenda, or 'topic list', for the semi-structured interviews was influenced by three factors. First, my own experiences as a coalminer and my recollection of some of the prominent features of the linguistic behaviour undoubtedly shaped the initial enquiry. I knew that humour, the process of nicknaming and certain taboo words had all been strong elements of local mining lore during my four years

as a coalminer. Some of the literature read in preparation for the study confirmed many of these memories, and alerted me to other elements of miners' expressive behaviour. For example Tony Green's groundbreaking article on 'Kidding'²⁷ maps out customary joking relationships of coalminers, as does a large section of Douglass and Krieger's book, *A Miner's Life*.²⁸ Jim Bullock's *Bower's Row*²⁹ talks of nicknames, and Mark Hudson's *Coming Back Brockens* underlines the importance of anecdotes and stories which are told with the force of an argument in the former mining communities of County Durham.³⁰ Whilst writing over one hundred years ago about mining life in northern France, Emile Zola, in his book *Germinal*, makes reference to superstitions among coalminers.³¹ Thirdly, preliminary meetings with people in the mining community affected the focus of the topic list. Figure 7 below charts the production and adaptation of the topic list used in the semi-structured interviews.

It was difficult to know at what stage of the research to enter the field to begin the interviews proper. Should participant ethnographic observation precede the semi-structured interviews or vice versa? Whilst such questions were valid, at the same time there was a sense that the very data that needed to be collected, the socio-occupational language variety of coalminers, was disappearing. Every week it was discovered through the local newspaper's obituary columns that older members of the mining community were dying. This quandary on how much time to prepare before entering the field was recorded in the fieldwork diary. "A sense of urgency is in the air as people die and I am spending too much time developing a method".³² After almost two months I felt confident enough to undertake the first fieldwork interview. I was greeted by my first interviewee, Alan, with the words:

"Na then cock, what's tha want to know?"

²⁷ Green, A.E., "Only Kidding: Joking among coal-miners", in Green, A.E., and Widdowson, J.D.A., eds., *Language, Culture and Tradition*, Leeds/ Sheffield, Institute Of Dialect and Folklife Studies, University of Leeds, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, 1981, pp. 47-76.

²⁸ Douglass, David and Krieger, Joe, *A Miner's Life*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983,

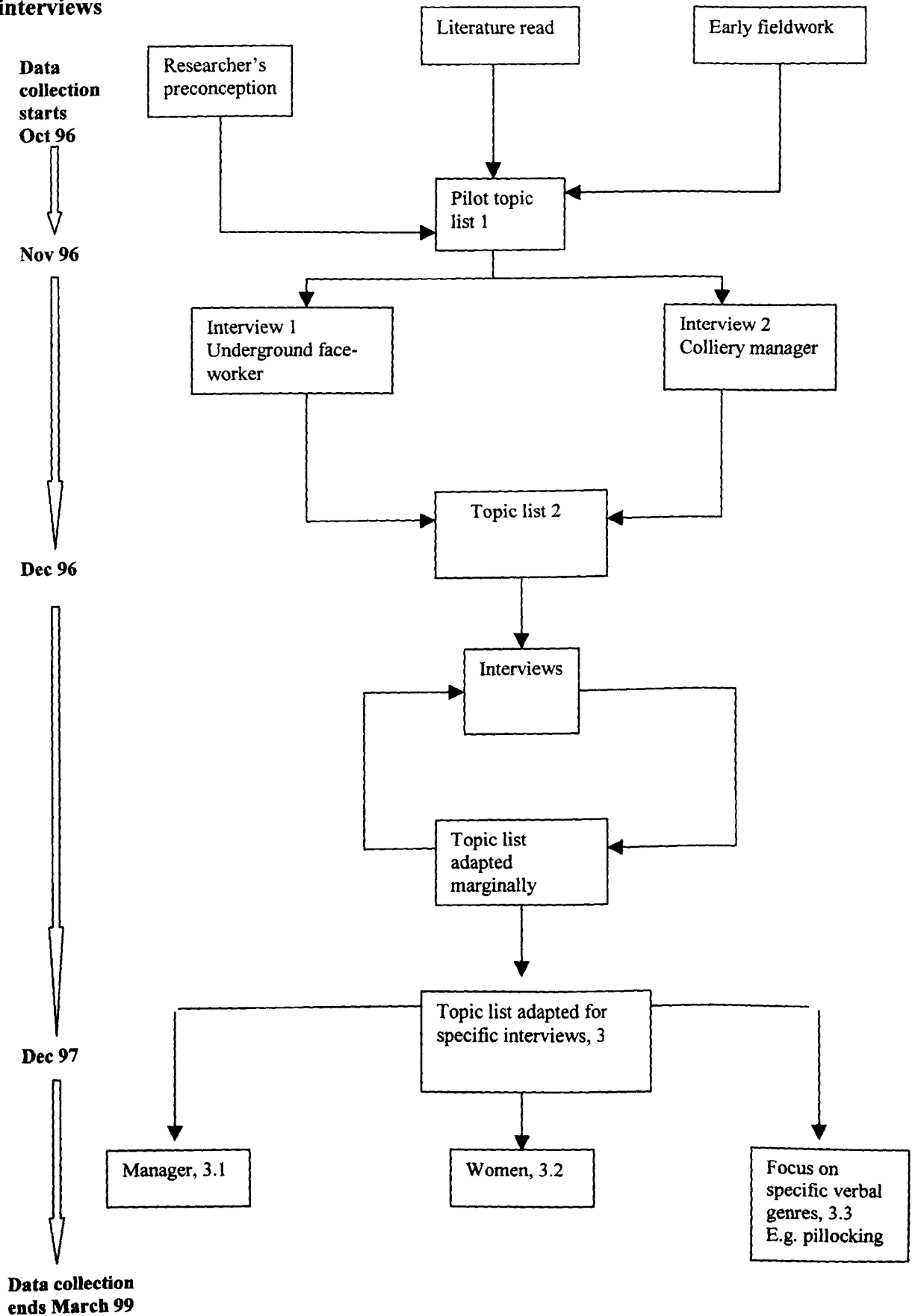
²⁹ Bullock, Jim, *Bower's Row: Recollections of a mining village*, Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1976.

³⁰ Hudson, 1995.

³¹ Zola, Emile, *Germinal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954.

³² Fwd, 25/11/96.

Figure 2:6 The production and adaptation of the topic list used in the semi-structured interviews



Alan was a thickset man with large tattooed forearms, an earring and a shaven head. His directness was not meant to be unnerving, but might have been interpreted that way had I not been familiar at least to some degree with local ways of speaking. What did I do now, tell him about my whole project or just commence asking questions? The university library seemed a long way away. Unzipping the small rucksack I found the piece of paper which contained a number of keywords as prompts. After just ten minutes of sitting there, it became apparent that, with this man, there was no ice to break or, if there was it was very thin; he simply loved telling tales, and had the skill to do so.

The major themes of ‘humour’, ‘conflict’ and ‘method of working’ were all there in this very first interview, although at the time I could not appreciate that they would be significant in every interview undertaken. The rich regional and occupational lexis, the nicknames and the superstitions were also there and those things had been asked for specifically. Although the list was not elaborate, the prompts and questions were obviously influenced by my own experiences as a miner, and by the literature that had been read in the preceding few months. This particular interview was vital in shaping the early draft of the topic list. As well as confirming the sheer wealth, importance and uniqueness of the occupational narratives and lexis that I had been aware of to some degree from my own knowledge of mining communities and the literature recently read, there was a whole new language complex that had not been envisaged at all. That evening I wrote in the fieldwork diary, “There is such a wealth of language located somewhere between individual words and the longer narratives,”³³ and later that, “It is so hard for the participants to think when put on the spot.”³⁴

This interview took place at a crucial stage of the research. It drew attention to the range of speech genres that could be classed as local or mining related and that demanded accurate description and explanation. It underlined the value of remaining open to data at this stage in the project and highlighted the importance of involving the participants too in the early stages of the data collection phase in order to ascertain which taxonomies and themes occurred frequently. This reflexive nature of the study would mean that the topics around which the interviews centred were always, in part, informed by the preceding

³³ Fwd, 14/11/96.

³⁴ Fwd, 10/12/96.

participants. If the topic list related to their knowledge and covered a wide range of subjects, there was surely a greater chance of creating rapport. At this stage in the research the interview with Alan and the one with the ex-colliery manager were to have a profound effect on the form of the topic list used in subsequent interviews. A range of additional questions was developed for this latter interview so that, as well as asking about the verbal genres that were already starting to emerge as being significant, the third person to be interviewed, Steve, was asked about his relationship with the men. By mid-December 1996, the topic list to be used in the semi-structured interviews had been constructed, although it remained open to modification if future data collected suggested new leads.

The topic list centered around three key issues. Firstly I wanted to know if there were any stories that really stood out, that had been told to interviewees by older miners or older members of their families. It seemed appropriate to try to unearth third-person narratives prior to moving into the personal experience narratives. The question asked was usually, "Can you remember any stories told to you by older miners, by your granddad or your mam or dad?" They were then asked, "Are there any stories or memories that stand out from your own experience or of other miners you have worked with?" Quite often there was at least one story that stood out. Some participants, however, claimed that there were no such stories, even though they might go on to reveal them at a later stage in the interview. The second section of the topic list aimed to engender talk that centred on a number of points. I wanted to know more about the influence of the pit on language at home and in the wider community. "Are there any pit words that you use at work that you hear people say at home?" Detailed information was also sought concerning nicknames, as this was rapidly establishing itself as an important genre for this occupational group. I asked about taboo words, terms of endearment and the excommunication of 'scabs' in the local community. The topic list foregrounded humour, in its various guises. People were also asked about superstitious beliefs and about any firsthand, or reported, supernatural occurrences connected with mining. The third and final part of the interview concerned the extent to which the pit closures had affected the contexts available for sharing the multifarious aspects of local mining lore. Questions asked at this stage included: "Where did you tell stories when the pits were open; how has that changed now; and where do you meet your old work friends?" Here I was forcing the interview on from the past, ensuring

that it moved continually between the past and the present. Data of this kind would allow the researcher to ask the appropriate questions relating to the function of socio-occupational language variety in the present context, where the mines have disappeared and ties between work colleagues have weakened. This topic list was one of the major research tools of the study and is presented as figure 2:7 below. (Other versions of the topic list are presented in appendix 'A').

Figure 2:7

Topics list 2 –used for interviews conducted between December 1996 to December 1997

<p><u>1 Stories</u> Can you remember any old stories told to you by older miners or members of your family? Are there any stories that stand out? What about your personal experience memories?</p>
<p><u>2 Words or sayings</u> Are there any words or sayings from the pit that you use outside of work, at home for example?</p>
<p><u>3 Nicknames</u> Were there a lot of nicknames at the pit? Why did they have that nickname? Did you have a nickname?</p>
<p><u>4 Terms of endearment</u> How would you address a fellow miner?</p>
<p><u>5 Greetings and leave-takings</u> What do you say to a workmate that you meet in the street? What would you say when leaving a mate after work?</p>
<p><u>6 Swearing</u> Are there any words you wouldn't use at work? Are there any swearwords that people didn't like to hear?</p>
<p><u>7 Jokes-</u> Do miners have a good sense of humour? How would you describe it? Can you remember any funny incidents?</p>

<p>8 <u>Initiation/ practical jokes-</u> Was there much practical joking at the pit? What happened to you when you first started, did they play any jokes?</p>
<p>9 <u>Superstitions</u> Do miners have any superstitions? Any superstitions at home? Any on the way to work? Any at the pit?</p>
<p>10 <u>Ghosts</u> Were there any ghosts at your pit? Did you, or anyone you know, ever see a ghost at the pit?</p>
<p>11 <u>Changed context.</u> Where were stories told before when the pits were open? Now the pits are closed? Do you still see mates from work? Do you still talk about things to do with the pit?</p>

The topics for the semi-structured interviews were not always introduced in the same order, and sometimes topics would be covered by the participants without prompting. There was a wide disparity in the mood and pace of the interviews, which affected my role as researcher; sometimes I had to prompt more, while on other occasions I could let the encounter run its course. As more interviews were completed, it became apparent that some aspects of the local mining lore were more suited to the communicative constraints of an interview than others, and therefore these aspects were encouraged. The interview often remained informal, which contributed to the production of many personal experience narratives. However, evidence of sayings was almost non-existent, perhaps because they required a different communicative context. Although the literature reviewed suggested that singing was popular among coalminers, in practice the participants provided little evidence of this being part of the local mining lore and therefore it was not dwelt upon. It is also worth noting that semi-structured interviews were often theme led, with 'humour', 'conflict', and 'method of working' quickly establishing themselves as major themes running through many of the different verbal genres.

Because of the large volume of data being collected it was decided to create a detailed table of contents immediately following each semi-structured interview (see figure 2:8). This within-case analysis helps the researcher to become intimately familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity, and this allows the unique pattern of each case to emerge

before the investigator attempts to generalise patterns across cases. Writing a table of contents is in fact one of the earliest stages of data analysis.³⁵

As the fieldwork progressed, specific patterns began to emerge in the table of contents, both in the available range of local speech genres and in the themes contained within those genres. This meant that the semi-structured interviews could now incorporate probing questions about some of these emergent themes as well as the nature of specific speech genres, for example joking relationships or nicknaming. In essence, the format of the topic list remained the same throughout the interviews conducted. However, there were cases where it altered significantly enough to warrant further discussion: the interviews with the women, the one with the colliery manager and his wife, and the interview with Ian T.

The interview with Ian T was used to explore some of the dominant themes that had emerged in the research so far. By this stage far more participant observation had been undertaken, and the data from this, collected in the fieldwork diary, contributed to more in-depth questioning of the regional and socio-occupational language varieties and communicative styles discovered outside the interview context. Based on the original topic list for semi-structured interviews, this 'focussed interview' also attempted to explore such issues as the complex nature of humour among groups of coalminers. One issue which the research now tried to address was how and why miners continue to signify their membership of the mining group via interaction despite the lack of any coalmines. This was a response to the data that increasingly pointed to the use of local mining lore as an emblem of identity in certain contexts. Extending the range of topics to include emergent themes allowed previous data, collected via participant observation, to be checked and commented upon by a member of the community in a more controlled interview situation. (Below, figure 2:8, is the table of contents for the interview with Ian T; its focus on humour among miners is evident).

³⁵ Eisenhardt, Kathleen, M., "Building Theories from Case Study Research", *Academy of Management Review*, 1989, no. 4, 539-540.

Figure 2:8

Interviewee: Ian T
Place: Shafton

Interviewer: Andy Cave

No. of tapes: 2

No. of sides: 4

Date: 18/1/99

Length of tape: 2 hrs 25 mins

Tape	side	count	Topic of discussion
1	1		General chat, explaining his job in education, communities on line, social exclusion, Grimethorpe electronic village hall,
		3.0	Film documentary,
		3.5	Electronic project
		5.3	Local councillor
		5.5	His ambition, writing a paper
		6.3	It gets boring like working?
		7.	Start of topics
		8.13	*Grandad story accident on coal cutter, 'cutter knot',
		9.3	***'mussel fall' in beamshaw
		10.2	His dad didn't want him to go to the pit
		11	***Games, kids pretending to be workmen, miners walking up pit lane with his dad, 5-7yrs old
		12	Grandad and dad -cutter men,
		15	Leaving school, not underground because of his eyesight, dad good worker therefore easy entry
		17	Other miners going to night school, his involvement in politics, confidence in speaking
		19	Big difference studying, discovering the outside world, meeting people
		21.15	Reading the New Scientist at work but no friction
		22.1	One day depressed with job and went and looked into higher education, he got grade 'a' in A level biology.
		24.2	Got a place at University, his anxiety, couple
		25.2	'a couple years darn t' line'
		25.5	**The biggest hurdle, fretenet to death of public embarrassment in a new environment, official side of it, fear of authority, his new found confidence. Makes jokes about him being from Barnsley to break ice.
		27.4	'I've worked with people who could blind these', Made him think about things the class system, some very witty and intelligent people at the pit.
		28.4	*Sense of humour was amazing, practical jokes
		29	***'Ayo' burning of the finger, cabin, ambulance man, 'take it through' we're cremating thi a bit at a time
		31	***Doggy Dent, hacksaw next to his wrist, they'll put thi hand back on.
		33.1	***Arthur W. squashed, 'some cunt talkin to somebody talkin to a blue bottle'
		33.4	***'Nooky Coates', laughing at him despite his broken leg, crude wit
		34.5	Jez callin', Tacklebary Bates, bad tempered and horrible kid *' fairground freak',
		36	**Acker Bilk, and then Tommy Toolbox behavioural name, full bag o' mashins, a 'big lump' – machinery. Doesn't know his real name*
		38	Paul was known as Tex, after his father short for Terry, or Young Terry,* 'Doggy Dent', (stupid guy), Games to alleviate boredom, Cucumber
		40	I've never worked anywhere as good for the crack, other places are maungy *(me: Maungy a big crime?)
		41	*A leaving do collection for somebody at the school vs pit baths collection a different culture, no crack, 'what you saw was what you got.'
		42.1	How easy his life is now, loadin'tackle all day vs marking school books.
		43	His mates in bad conditions, 'you've seen no snow' a phrase he would say to people

			with nice jobs.
		43	***Nicknames explained, Sailor Sid, Chicken George, Nook, Abdullah Shaw, Tommy Toolbox, Terry Toad, Doggy, Rotting Gob, Chocolate Teeth or Gargoyle, context out of pit – Shoes, Honey Monster, Screaming Ayo, Nogger – wood, outside usage, not behind the back, Brut
1	2	0.2	***Gaffas' nicknames, sometimes behind their back, slate Lewis, some didn't have a n.name, shaggy – Pritchards, Dog Fox – Rounds' family, old warrior as a greeting, now Trub as a greeting,
		4	***Pit words outside, it'll not be a pair o' plates out that' from his dad even though Paul's never been underground
		4.5	*Paul enjoys his linguistic heritage, not ashamed of his background,
		5.5	***'They not worth a chew', or 'a waste a snap an' bacca'
		6.5	Colourful language used by Paul at school, his sharing in the kid's subculture language, helps build respect. 'his on one', *'Mr Tarn the man from Barnsley' is what the kids say to him. Me: Barnsley as exotic as something different,
		8.45	*Greetings, 'warrior' at the pit, Trub, 'sithee', 'father',
		10.5	Charba, 'axeman', (mental hospital) 'get bathed in it' – saying for heavy drinking**
		13.4	**No attempt to cover up people's weaknesses, so many characters, strange sense of humour, influence from underground, the bonding, the sharing, explains snap time, no other distractions, friends crack and a lamp, the closeness and all this came out onto the surface,
		16.24	Many ex- miners on the stockyard,
		17.0	*Sad that the crack is going, poet in the powder mag, talking about old times, wanted to organise a reunion, he enjoyed the crack,
		19.30	*'The Shaft men', different, enigmatic, elite,
		21.5	Loading gear for shaft story, respect for people who had been doing a job for many years,
		23.3	*'He in't a full shillin' like', market man, 'laiking', knutter
		25	***'Chopper cook', gifted in a certain department, how the disabled lad was treated, Paul and Gough treated him cruelly but he liked that, because they were treating him normally,***
		27	Practical joke tying him up, nailing nooky coates' bag.
		31.3	**Me: asking about sayings prompt him More shears among older ones, sayings in a new work context, he wants it to live on,
AC		33	Scabs
PT		34	Grey area, undecided about the foundations of the strike, 'if you keep your powder dry' saying**. Those going back at the end of the strike not scabs. Spitting on scabs, silences ostracized completely, you couldn't work at the pit and you couldn't live in the community.
		39	Taboo words, great story about 'B'***
		42	Moffa Gryce legendary character,
		42.2	Hand got not hand filling Geordie's saying. Then a story about old vs young. Mythical work ethics, hand picking of the big hitters, pilikin' satirical, serious wind up. Breaking down the myth, The enormity of the work ethic, *'idleness' as a label for the family – fating talk,
		47	*Big hitters a lot ended up on the union,
		47.3	***Story in manager's office, Bill the Geordie vs manager in negotiations, the humour and skill as an orator.
2	1		His descendants came in 1912 from Cleveland, family history,
		2.1	***Albert Clarke the ghost of Grimethorpe colliery, well known, many occurrences, 3 rd person knowledge, he had heard many stories
		4	***Pillocking what is it? Regional but rooted in coalmining, taking the Micky, e.g. Funny story about doggy who ends up back at home, then seal in the drains at Brierley,
		7.3	Tall story, having them on,

Interviews with women aimed to collect data relating directly to the effect of mining on the wider community and especially its influence on the narratives and other related speech genres of women. The original topic list was adapted and extended to ensure that it had direct relevance to the women. Reviewing recent sociological, linguistic and oral history literature which focuses on women in mining communities, along with the participant observation undertaken with the women in Royston, made it possible to formulate the appropriate questions for the interviews. In broad terms the premise of these interviews was to determine a deeper understanding of what it meant, and continues to mean, to have a sense of belonging to a mining community, to be married to a miner and to have had children working underground. This involved collecting personal experience narratives that centred on some of these themes, themes which had kept appearing in the participant observation undertaken and recorded in the fieldwork diary. Other more specifically linguistic questions remained unanswered, too, regarding the verbal behaviour of the women. Did the women from mining backgrounds share in the occupational lore of the men or had they developed their own? How did they interact with women who belonged to families where men had worked during the long strike of 1984-5? Did they have nicknames for each other?

As well as describing aspects of their own verbal behaviour, the study aimed to elicit comments from the women concerning that of the men, as they held the privileged position of being in close contact with the men while being able to see their behaviour at a relative distance, something men themselves could not do. This proved productive, as, for example, with reference to greeting and leavetaking routines. Previous data collected from the men on leavetaking behaviour had never suggested that anything extraordinary existed, but now data from the women painted a different picture. A number of women told of how ex-miners would say to each other before parting, "I'll see thi tomorrow on t' tail gate,"³⁶ a place where they had worked together for many years before being made redundant. Although these utterances are short and told in reported form, data of this kind helps to fill

³⁶ Underground a 'gate' is a tunnel and the 'tailgate' is a supply tunnel that leads to the coal face and which the materials pass. Half of the men travel down this gate to and from the face. The return air passes down this gate too after having travelled along the 'maingate' and along the coal face.

in vital gaps in the accurate description of how occupational identity is produced and maintained through ritualised verbal exchanges.

Building rapport

The aim of this section is to examine how the interviews in this study were conducted and how the competing demands of reliability and validity were managed. The importance of building rapport during ethnographic type interviews is underlined. To ensure reliability the questions asked in an interview should be standardized. If during each interview the same questions are asked, in the same order, with exactly the same intonation, then a subsequent researcher should be able to replicate the exercise. However, strictly maintaining such a formal interpretation of standardization would be impossible without using a computer programmed voice to conduct the interviews. It is probable that a researcher asking exactly the same questions in exactly the same order would destroy any modicum of rapport and provide a very poor context for the production of local mining lore, which was the principal aim of this data collection exercise. One of the earliest interviews lacked much of the rapport evident in subsequent ones. There were a number of reasons for this, but perhaps the most important was that the topic list was followed too religiously and often the communicative encounter emulated a teacher-pupil dynamic. If interviews had continued to be conducted in such a tightly controlled manner, standardization could have been claimed and therefore a respectable level of reliability, but the data as a whole would have been inadequate in terms of its validity. The greatest fault in this particular interview was in failing to encourage Terry the interviewee to digress from the questions asked. This might have spurred him into talking more about his role as the branch secretary for the National Union of Mineworkers during the year-long 1984-5 strike. That evening I wrote in the fieldwork diary:

“On the day, Terry seemed a little nervous as is evident when you listen to the recording of the interview - you can actually hear his breathing. He frequently stared at the recorder, too, as if it was a third person. All this was augmented by the way in which I conducted the interview. It was only the third interview I had carried out and was relatively early in the morning. More importantly, the formal and structured approach I adopted didn't help. I started with the biographical data sheet, which in this instance would have probably been better left until later. It seemed hard to get the

conversation flowing and when I finally introduced the various topics for discussion, regarding aspects of mining lore, Terry often answered, 'I don't know' or, 'I can't think of any off hand'. In retrospect perhaps Terry could have been allowed to lead the conversation more, which he did on occasion, especially when talking about his role as an NUM official at Houghton Main Colliery - obviously a key part of his identity. (Incidentally Terry didn't drink the tea that his wife had given to us at the start, as if unrelaxed during the ordeal).

...I left Terry's, promising myself to let the other interviews run by feel, letting the interviewees take more control and to use my sheet of topics as a loose guide when or if the conversation dried up, rather than as a shopping list."³⁷

Allowing a reasonable degree of freedom to the participant(s) during the interview means that the data collected is more empirically valid, and that the tie between theory and data is tighter, leading to a degree of intimacy. Tonkin's advice encourages researchers involved in the collection of verbal constructions of pastness to steer away from such rigidity. Instead she recommends that researchers allow the participants to take the lead. "It could be more fruitful to tap into tellers' expertise and not to insist on their conforming to the interviewer's genre."³⁸ It was learnt in subsequent interviews that allowing participants to digress, within reasonable confines of the research's focus, frequently led to seemingly insignificant data which ultimately proved invaluable in understanding the data as a whole.

As the interview with Terry highlighted, building rapport and maintaining standardization in interviews are difficult to reconcile. However, as the semi-structured interviews were to be the main method of data collection, the importance of rapport between the researcher and the participants was crucial. Only in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere would valid, meaningful interaction take place. The topic list was designed primarily to encourage the production of local socio-occupational lore not as a test of the participants' knowledge.

Charles Briggs has indicated that one of the problems of the interview situation is that to some extent it has its own communicative norms, or accepted rules, for conducting talk. This fact, combined with the role of the interviewer who may bring very different sociolinguistic expectations to the encounter, can mean a failure to provide a context where

³⁷ Fwd, 10/12/96.

³⁸ Tonkin, Elizabeth, *Narrating our pasts: The social construction of oral history*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 54.

native communicative routines can be realised.³⁹ In the semi-structured interviews undertaken for this study no two interviews were alike; each one had its own unique milieu. Out of the researcher's control is the extent to which an individual possesses, for example, a repertoire of narratives related to occupation, as well as the individual's capacity to provide a performance of the narrative or indeed the individual's willingness to enter into a performance because of a range of social communicative pressures.⁴⁰

The majority of the interviews undertaken were very informal in tone, with participants taking the lead much of the time, leaving the topic list in the background, a technique which certainly contributed towards creating a rapport. I always met people with a personal recommendation and, in the case of some of the men and all of the women, I had spent a lot of time observing and talking with them in informal pub and club settings. My background also contributed to the rapport. Although they have been designated interviews in the study this is a relative term. The intimate relaxed nature of many of the interviews means that they can be considered to be what Gary Butler has termed "Performance framed situations".⁴¹ Not once did any of the participants, or the researcher, refer to the meetings as an 'interview'. Instead people would say, "Tha wants to gu an' have a word wi' my mate, Alan," or "Aye, I'll 'ave an hour wi' thi." In many cases it became a forum in which stories burst forth with the force of an argument. The researcher had an agenda of themes and verbal genres, which early research had indicated as central to the study, but the majority of participants interviewed had a life story, a vast narrative of experience, that was often impossible to ignore.

Every interview was a unique communicative event, and within each there were shifts in how the conversation was controlled. For many people the meeting was a great opportunity to talk about the pit and its influence on their lives. When asked if there were any stories that stuck in his mind, Ted A announced, "I've got a tale for thi an' it's a reight tale an' all."⁴² The tale took so long to tell and digressed up and down so many side avenues that there seemed little point in continuing through the checklist of topics. Seventy-

³⁹ Briggs, Charles, L., *Learning how to ask: A sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social science research*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

⁴⁰ For a more detailed discussion of these issues see Butler, Gary, R., *Saying Isn't Believing: Conversation, Narrative And The Discourse of Belief In A French Newfoundland Community*, St. John's, The Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1990, pp. 141-145.

⁴¹ Butler, *ibid.*, p. 9.

eight year-old Joe M, who had pneumonicosis due to the coal dust inhaled during his life underground, sprang out of his chair and onto his knees acting out some scene from his memory.⁴³ During this episode, where he transports the narrative back to the 1940s, when he was a 'face-man' working a thin seam of coal alongside his colleagues, one sensed his overwhelming desire to tell this incredible story. Responding by forcing the narrative back into the researcher's topic list would have destroyed the very essence of the data being collected.

The narratives from the men were often 'newsworthy' or humorous to me, which gave the whole encounter an element of authenticity. As more participant observation had taken place with the women prior to the interviews with them, then obviously some of the material recorded had been heard before and there was an element of artificiality in getting them to retell some of this material. For many of the men, talking about the pit and having a beer were linked. Today, in the absence of the coalmine, (and in the past when the mines were open), many people exchange occupational lore in all its various forms in the situational contexts of pubs and clubs over a drink. Time and time again I was told, "Buy him a couple o' pints and he'll talk to thi." Two miners interviewed together brought a bottle of whisky to the venue. Perhaps it made it easier to talk about the pit. The alcohol certainly made our meeting less formal, almost akin to some of the communicative encounters observed in the pubs and clubs.

Undoubtedly, the interview situation, even if informal, must have a bearing on the communicative proceedings. As well as the participants' own repertoire of local speech genres and the interviewer's topic list, other factors are at work affecting what is produced during such encounters. The participants often questioned the identity of the researcher. The fact that the researcher was familiar with some of the local ways of speaking and with the world of coalmining must have affected the interaction that took place and which was recorded on tape. As Elizabeth Tonkin points out:

"...Whether the past orientated reference is a long, structured discourse, or just a brief comment or allusion. In either case, too, interlocutors must share knowledge of language rules and conventions of phrase to make sense to one another... The

⁴² Interview with Joe M, 12/12/96.

⁴³ Interview with Ted A, 10/7/97.

representations of pastness that these interconnections involve include the occasion, when teller and listener intersect at a point in time and space, as well as the times recounted. So the temporalities in question include the teller's own pasts, till that moment of telling, and the adjustments they make to their tales on account of their listeners' pasts."⁴⁴

This is yet another example of a way in which the researcher is not considered to be a neutral observer in sociolinguistic fieldwork but an active co-participant in the data being collected. This is especially true when the researcher is a 'local'. At the beginning of interviews people often wanted to know details of my family background, asking for example, "What do they call you' Dad?" "Which pit did he work at?" On other occasions participants would stop in the middle of a long personal experience narrative and check that I was familiar with the world they were describing, asking, "Tha worked at t' pit didn't tha?". Another narrative concerning a group of militant miners was interrupted with the question, "Cos tha knows what they were like dunt tha?" Some aspects of the world they were describing were familiar and I often played down my knowledge so that what participants had to say retained the 'newsworthy' element. Another researcher would have produced a different response, as the participants would change their talk according to the past of the listener.

Although some anthropological researchers still advocate taking written notes during ethnographic style interviews,⁴⁵ it was decided not to do so here. The researcher taking notes would have reinforced the image of the teacher-pupil relationship. In fact even having a written topic list caused some concern to participants, as the fieldwork diary records:

"During the interview I could see Jill staring at the topic list that I had on my lap. 'Andrew, what are them papers you've got for?' I could tell by the tone of her voice that she was uneasy about the paper and wanted to know exactly what it was. I explained that it was a list of questions that I could use, in case I couldn't think of anything."⁴⁶

In any case, because of the focus on linguistic analysis, it was imperative that the semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded, allowing direct transcription prior to

⁴⁴ Tonkin *ibid*, p.3.

⁴⁵ Spradley, James, P., *The Ethnographic Interview*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979, p. 75.

⁴⁶ Interview with Pete and Jill, 23/9/98.

analysis. Undoubtedly the presence of the tape-recorder had an effect on what was said during these interviews. On two occasions, once the tape recorder was turned off, participants started to reveal narratives containing sensitive material that they did not want recorded. However, on one occasion a participant demanded that the researcher, who had just stepped out of the house, come back immediately and switch the tape-recorder back on because he had just remembered more material. Details of such observations prior to, and following, taperecording of the interviews was entered in the fieldwork diary.

One of the chief ways in which the semi-structured interviews and participant observation methods of data collection differed was that, for the former, arrangements were normally made by telephone in advance; they were tape-recorded and were always conducted in the participant's home. The interviews were informal in nature and some of the informants had been questioned about their experiences of mining previously by media reporters. But nevertheless, the interview is a speech event standing outside of everyday sociolinguistic practices. In this study, it was also a speech event in which a number of potential participants refused to participate. A few people had suggested that I go and talk to one particular local ex-miner, allegedly a 'real character'. A landlady of a local pub had said that she had heard him and his colleagues recount mining anecdotes regularly. When telephoned he explained that he was extremely busy and in a very polite way declined my proposal to meet up to talk. It was frustrating knowing of someone who was a reputed storyteller but who declined to talk to me. Perhaps a more personal introduction would have helped. It tested the confidence of the researcher for a while and the next time I telephoned a potential participant, I was nervous at first and then relieved once they had agreed to meet up.⁴⁷

Figure 2:9 A record of the interviews conducted

Date of interview	Name(s)	Number of people	Place	Length of interview
14/11/96	Alan	1	Darfield	
7/12/96	Steve	1	Newcastle	1 hr
10/12/96	Roy	1	Darfield	1 hr 15
10/12/96	Harry and Mavis	2	Darfield	2 hr 15

⁴⁷ Fwd, 4/11/98.

12/12/96	Joe	1	Wombwell	2 hr 45
10/12/96	Neil	1	Oakwell	1 hr 15
10/12/98	Dave and John	2	Royston	2 hr 30
10/7/97	Ted	1	Grimethorpe	2 hr 45
23/9/98	Pete	1	Royston	1 hr 30
24/9/98	Colin	1	Royston	½ hr
24/9/98	Sam and Maggie	2	Royston	2 hrs
22/10/98	Clarry and Mary	2	Royston	1hr 10
24/10/98	Harold	1	Royston	2 hrs
29/10/98	Ray and Cathy	2	Royston	2 hr45
5/11/98	Harry	1	Royston	1 hr 25
17/11/98	Frank	1	Royston	1hr 25
18/1/99	Ian	1	Shafton	2hr 25
4/2/99	Paul	1	Royston	1hr 15
7/2/99	Anne, Shiela, Pat, Joan,	4	Royston	2 hrs
8/2/99	Joy, Sandra, Barry	3	Havercroft	2hrs 30
Total	20 interviews	30 participants		33 hrs 40mins

Participant observation

In this section the use of participant observation as a means of data collection will be described. These encounters were not tape-recorded; instead the researcher entered a precise recollection of the verbal exchanges into the fieldwork diary, or into a dictaphone and then transcribed this into the fieldwork diary. Such encounters consisted of visits to pubs and clubs as well as any chance meetings with people in and around the community. The fieldwork diary also records details of 'talk' between the researcher and interviewees prior to and immediately following the recording of semi-structured interviews. This data is viewed as valuable participant observation. The most important reason for collecting data in an ethnographic participant observation style is that it provides a different body of material with which to triangulate the data collected via the semi-structured interviews. Ultimately this combination of data will provide a more accurate portrait of local socio-occupational talk complex.

The central question the research is asking here is whether or not the verbal expressive behaviour of this group recorded in interviews accurately reflects the linguistic behaviour of the group outside the constraints of the interview situation. Preliminary

analysis suggested that certain speech genres, for example miners' sayings, were only produced in the appropriate situational contexts, with the interview failing to provide the necessary place and audience that this communicative act seemed to demand. Although sayings were seemingly insignificant initially, participant observation underlined the fact that they were instrumental in maintaining the close ties of a shared past of place and work.

In other cases, however, data collected via participant observation closely mirrored that collected via semi-structured interview. One fieldwork encounter in particular drew attention to this fact. A miner named Jack, who had been recommended by a number of other people as someone that I should talk to, approached me one Friday night in the local working men's club. He explained how he did not want to be interviewed and then, proceeded to tell me his work history through a series of anecdotes in a chronological fashion. Although the encounter was not being recorded and the topic list normally used to impose a structure on the proceedings was not employed, the data shares some features with that collected in the interviews, covering many of the same themes and using similar forms. That evening I wrote in the fieldwork diary:

“Undoubtedly the major event of the evening was my extended encounter with Jack. I had mentioned the possibility of an interview a couple of months previously as I passed him on Midland Road. He and Pete were lifting a heavy looking chest of drawers into the back of a small car. That day I asked Pete if he had told Jack about the project I was doing and the fact that he and I had met for a chat. He obviously hadn't mentioned it to Jack, and this happened again where Sam E, a very good friend of Jack's, hadn't either. Was there an embarrassment about having met with me? Maybe it was letting the group down, opening up to relative strangers like myself. However, the encounter began in the toilets. He had acknowledged me earlier on when saying hi to John. In the toilets, however, he struck up conversation. I didn't know him at all really. I had chatted with him and Sam for a while some months earlier in the same club.

‘I'm not gunna talk to thi tha knows.’

‘That's fine. I'm not gunna push anybody into talking.’ I replied.

After this opening, Jack spoke non-stop more or less for one and a half hours. The conversation started in the toilets and then after a few minutes we went outside into the corridor between the toilets and the main club room. Out of view from everyone, except those visiting the toilets, he started to open up about pit life and his personal experiences, not just about work but his whole life experience, his home and his family too. After some time, we moved back into the club where he went and sat

down and signalled for me to join him. Here there was none of the control that I had always experienced to at least some degree in the tape-recorded interviews.”⁴⁸

The central feature of this encounter was that Jack remained fully in charge of the proceedings, which amounted to him recounting a series of personal experience narratives, or ‘tales’. Although I had thought that Jack had not wanted to be interviewed, it was obvious that he really needed to share his tales of his unique life experiences. When I commented that I had never heard of a particular term, that he had just used, he remarked “Fix it in thi mind and dunt forget it.” In a sense, this reminded me of when one interviewee told me to switch the tape-recorder on again as he had just thought of something else to say. In these two separate encounters the participants felt an overpowering urge to tell me of their past.. But I also understood their narratives, I had the cultural capital on board to share and make sense of their narratives that were so deeply rooted in these communities and mining life. They knew this and combined with the fact that in me they saw someone they could confide in, as I stood outside the community, it encouraged them to open up.

One of the strengths of participant observation is that it provides a flexible research tool that can take advantage of spontaneous situations. Such fieldwork is not restricted by the focus of the interview topic list, in turn informed by emergent themes derived from literature and preliminary fieldwork. Sometimes data collected in this way and recorded in the fieldwork diary appeared to have no important value. Frequently people’s advice, for example, was to visit the Miner’s Institute or Working Men’s club. “You want to get down to t’ club,” they would say. “That’s where all t’ old ones are,” as if the old ones are the most authorised to tell the stories. This sort of detail, often at the end of an interview session, provides researchers with insight into group perceptions of community hierarchies.

Many of the miners interviewed are aware of their oral traditions and that aspects of ‘truth’ and skill in the telling of stories is important. As one ex-miner reminded me, after telling me the name of a club I should visit on a particular night of the week, “Only believe half of what you hear.” He then walked away, pausing to add, “Mind you, some of the stories are beautiful.”⁴⁹ Again such throwaway comments can become vital clues in the

⁴⁸ Fwd, 21/1/99.

⁴⁹ Fwd, 10/10/97.

explanation phase of case study research and therefore need to be documented. Details of the participant observation can be seen in the table presented in figure 2:10 below.

Figure 2:10 Principal fieldwork undertaken

Date	Place	Details
15/10/96	Woodhorn Colliery Museum	Visit to the museum in the north-east.
18/10/96	Shirebrook Community Centre	Meeting with a community worker and a local ex-miner
24/10/96	Northern college, Barnsley	Meeting with Steve Brunt an ex-miner now lecturing at the college.
30/10/96	Acorn Centre Grimethorpe	Meeting with Dave Hunter, local outreach community worker and ex- miner.
11/96	Questionnaire pilot Royston	Test the lexical questionnaire designed
12/12/96	Red Rum pub Grimethorpe	Observing an evening organised by the Acorn Community Centre
14/3/97	Red Rum pub Grimethorpe	Observing an evening organised by the Acorn Community Centre
3/5/97	Acorn centre Grimethorpe, memorabilia open day	Visit of mining memorabilia exhibition organised by Acorn centre and local people
15/8/97	Railway club, Royston	Observing a Friday night out
10/10/97	Barnsley market	
10/10/97	Night out in Royston	Observing a Friday night out in The Pockets, The Ship and Railway Club
10/96-10/97	Royston	Various recollections of language forms heard in the clubs over a year period
11/9/97	Blaenavon Big Pit museum, Wales	A trip underground with a tour guide who is an ex-miner.
27/9/98	Royston	Telephone conversation
2/10/98	Royston	Telephone conversation
22/10/98	Royston	3 telephone conversations
4/11/98	Royston	Telephone conversation with Katie and Harry Wilkinson
13/11/98	Ship Hotel Royston	Details of 'talk' heard in the tap room of The Ship
15/11/98	Ship Hotel Royston	Observing a Royston Women Against Pit Closures Group meeting.
21/1/99	Railway Club Royston	Night out at the club.
7/2/99	Ship Hotel Royston	Observing a RWAPCG meeting
2/3/99	Royston	Telephone call with GM
3/3/99	Royston	Lexis overheard
7/3/99	Royston	Telephone conversation with GM

16/3/99	Royston	GM has gone on holiday
30/3/99	Royston	Conversation with Sam E.
2/4/99	Royston	Local speech usage
4/5/99	Methodist Chapel, Royston	Meeting with Ladies Methodist group.
21/5/99	Whitby	A weekend fishing with Royston men.

Biographical data

A certain amount of biographical data was collected from participants during the semi-structured interviews. The main information sought was age, occupation and brief details of family background. This data was important as it ultimately helped the target sample to be achieved. Initially this information was asked for at the beginning of the interview and this acted as a useful icebreaker, especially as the researcher had not met many of the participants before. However, in the early interviews this took too long and brought an air of formality to the very start of the encounter. It became evident that often much of this data emerges in the course of the participant's achieved life history, and that by not having such a formal opening to the interview, better rapport was achieved, leading to the production of narratives. If any details had not arisen in the course of the interview then this could be asked for at the end.

Questionnaires

One of the objectives of this study is to provide a contextualising background to the analysis of local occupational lore by describing aspects of the regional and occupational dialect and in particular lexical variation. Initially it was thought that the lexical data required would be best collected via a questionnaire similar to those used in traditional, large-scale dialect surveys, such as the Survey of English Dialects.⁵⁰ Two reasons in particular make this method of collecting linguistic data attractive. Firstly, it allows the same exercise to be repeated by subsequent researchers. Secondly, the data collected allows measurement of lexical variety across the range of the sample, which may highlight differences in usage, for example between different age groups. However, there are also

considerable problems associated with using formal questionnaires to elicit linguistic data. In this study, for example, it is difficult to know on which part of the mining lexicon to focus. As Elmer has asked, should one focus on the underground world of the miner or the social world of the miner?⁵¹ Also, as lexical analysis forms only part of the focus of the research, how much time should be devoted to designing and administering a questionnaire of this sort? Perhaps the most important issue of all is the formal nature of a questionnaire and its effect on the rapport built between the researcher and the participant. The degree to which the data collected via a formal questionnaire represents actual language usage is also questionable. Lexical items produced from questionnaires are not uttered in a meaningful discourse continuum, and might represent a relatively different and cautious style. Chambers and Trudgill point out some of the pitfalls of such an approach:

“...A persistent criticism of the elicitation techniques for dialect surveys is that they result in only one style of the informant’s speech, a relatively formal or careful style. It is well known that more casual styles increase the occurrences of regional accents and homelier vocabulary. To elicit casual speech, however, requires a close rapport being established in the interview, and that in turn requires a freer form being given to the interview, especially by encouraging the informant to speak at length on matters that affect him intimately...”

And they continue, commenting:

“...The use of questions designed to elicit particular responses, however indirect, maintains a level of formality. Many of the questions have the flavour of an interchange between a schoolmaster and pupil, and not a particularly happy interchange at that...”⁵²

In this study the decision was taken to collect lexical data in-situ during the semi-structured interviews and, to a lesser extent, during the participant observation, rather than via a questionnaire. It is believed that this engenders a more relaxed atmosphere, which means that the discourse is more newsworthy and therefore ‘natural’. It does not allow for the measurement of data across the sample, but ensures that the data is tied to a meaningful context, making it more valid than that produced by formal dialect survey questionnaires.

⁵⁰ Orton, Harold, *Survey of English Dialects (A)*: ‘Introduction’, Leeds, E.J. Arnold, 1962.

⁵¹ Elmer, p. 245.

Such data reflects local usage more accurately, as well as providing the potential to observe lexical items in a myriad different contexts.

Archival data

Archival data is used in this study alongside the data collected via semi-structured interviews and participant observation. It was felt that an additional data source would be helpful on a number of counts. As fieldwork progressed, the researcher was made aware of a whole range of materials, including locally produced videos capturing mining life and a whole range of autobiographical writing, including poetry written mainly by women. Some of the writing was handwritten, some type-written. This material was kept in the home, along with plastic bags full of other material relating to the strike, including newspaper cuttings and letters from the management as well as letters from the union. There were also photographs, and old wage slips hidden in cupboards. There were sketches of life underground and paintings of life on the picket lines up on the wall, as well as ornaments made out of coal. Sitting proudly next to almost every fireside was the brass, mining safety lamp.

This material did not fit into the neat categories envisaged, yet was so much a part of the mining households visited during the fieldwork. Whilst different to linguistic markers such items do share a symbolic significance. Almost every household had something reminiscent of a way of life almost gone.

The material in this archive is only a sample of the objects that exist in the houses of mining families and is made up principally of printed or handwritten texts. These texts are of central importance in helping unravel the structure and function of local occupational talk. Many of the poems and autobiographical writings collected contain a wealth of socio-occupational and regional language usage, as well as many of the recurring themes found in the local lore collected via interviews and participant observation. In this sense the archival data provides yet another source for triangulating prior data, thereby improving the reliability of the findings.

⁵² Chambers, J.K. and Trudgill, Peter, *Dialectology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 24.

Summary

The principal aim of this chapter has been to describe the data collection phase of the study. It is believed that a detailed explanation of the successes and difficulties encountered increase the data's trustworthiness and therefore its reliability. The chapter has discussed the study's point of departure, including the background of the researcher and the choice of community on which the study is based. Also discussed was the 'ideal' sample of informants to be interviewed and the difficulties experienced in accessing various groups in the community.

The chapter has provided an overview of the methods used to collect the multiple data sources. Attention has also been drawn to the importance of 'rapport' in semi-structured interviews employed to elicit sociolinguistic data. Rapport is understood as a vital concept in the 'reliability versus validity' debate. The importance of having reliable but flexible research tools became apparent, as is evident in the discussion of the topic list and its adaptation for use with more focussed interviewing. Participant observation also provides a flexible research tool capable of taking advantage of spontaneous situations during fieldwork. Having different data sources also helps to illuminate genre and theme across a variety of situational contexts.

Chapter 3

Regional speech and local identity

“The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts.”¹

¹ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, London, Fontana, 1993, p. 28.

Introduction

This chapter has two distinct but related sections. The first provides an overview of the typical language features used by the occupants of Royston and neighbouring communities in the study. The lexis of the regional dialect is presented in a glossary, which is followed by the analysis of the dialect's prominent phonological and grammatical features. The phonological features described include short, long and diphthongised vowels followed by consonants. The grammatical features include unmarked plurality of nouns of measurement, definite articles, pronoun usage, verb usage, and adjective usage. This section essentially involves comparing frequently occurring features of the local vernacular with standard English and the local pronunciation with Received Pronunciation. These varieties, standard English and RP, are used simply as effective contrastive measurements. Their use is not intended to imply that the dialect spoken in Royston and surrounding neighbourhoods is in any way less acceptable, or communicatively ineffective. The dialect spoken in Royston, like other regional varieties of English, has its own independent history along with its own conventions governing grammar and other linguistic aspects. The use of standard English and RP as linguistic comparisons in most descriptive dialectological work is not an ideal situation as it brings with it an 'implicit prescriptivism'.² However, it is an effective way of allowing readers unfamiliar with the speech of Royston to understand its features. Such an analysis here will contextualise the study as a whole and help to familiarise the reader with some of the typical regional features, thereby increasing the accessibility of transcriptions of oral data throughout the rest of the work.³ The study does not claim to be a quantitative sociolinguistic one. Nevertheless, certain features warrant such an analysis and this issue is highlighted in the final chapter.

Following the linguistic analysis of the local regional dialect, part two of the chapter begins by analysing dialect variation and then investigates how some of these linguistic features act as strong markers of regional identity in local lore. Sociolinguistic and folklore theory are used to investigate collected examples of jokes and personal experience

² Foulkes, Paul, and Docherty, Gerard, eds., *Urban Voices: Accent Studies in the British Isles*, London, Arnold, 1999, p. 12.

³ The description of the local dialect here focuses predominantly on those features that differ markedly from ones typically found in Northern English. For a background study dealing with Northern English refer to: Wells, J.C., *Accents of English, vol. 2: The British Isles*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

narratives, as well as participants' own (emic) notions of regional dialect difference. The chapter concludes by arguing that emphasising regional dialect difference in local lore helps to maintain idealized notions of a separate speech community.

Local regional speech

The following description of the local regional dialect forms an important part of this chapter but it is not the sole aim. The descriptive linguistic analysis is followed by a discussion of how the local vernacular and perceptions of it operate, consciously and unconsciously, to create regional boundaries. Therefore, it has been decided to limit the linguistic analysis to the major features of the local dialect. The following phonological and grammatical analysis is based on data collected via the semi-structured interviews and focuses primarily on the speech of 16 participants. All these participants live in the village of Royston and comprise eight males and eight females. The glossary presents lexis found in a wider range of data sources, including participant observation fieldwork as well as semi-structured interviews, and also includes some material collected via interviews with those participants living in the surrounding neighbourhoods of Royston. Although the lexis presented in the glossary is considered primarily as part of a regional dialect variety, some of the material could equally be described as 'slang'. In a dialect variety such as this, which is dominated by the usage of one occupational group, the boundaries between argot, slang and dialect become even more unclear. Slang continues to be interpreted slightly differently by linguists, but essentially refers to informal lexis functioning to mark the social or linguistic identity of the speaker. Slang usually involves a colloquial departure from the standard language and is often vivid, imaginative and colourful.⁴ Following this definition language forms such as 'horsework' and 'dahn't line' presented in the glossary are clear examples of forms that could be considered as features of either the local dialect or slang, or even a mixture of the two. Slang differs from argot or jargon because it is normally widespread and familiar to a large number of speakers.⁵ However, in the glossary terms as 'horsework' and 'dahn't line' are presented as part of the regional dialect variety.

In this study there was no collection of regional dialect data via a survey style questionnaire. The topic list used in the tape-recorded semi-structured interviews asked participants for information primarily concerning coalmining and life in a coalmining community. Such an approach has advantages and disadvantages for the description of

⁴ Crystal, David, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 53.

⁵ Trask, R.L., *Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp. 279-280.

regional dialect. Although there is less volume of data that can be analysed comparatively than is the case in a traditional survey of dialects using a lexical questionnaire for example, the data collected is produced in context in 'natural speech'. As noted in the methodology chapter (2), such data has a greater validity as it represents more closely language used in actual everyday interaction. Also, the contextual details accompanying these utterances allow us to hypothesise more confidently about dialect variation.

Importantly, it is worth noting that the linguistic data analysed and described here is biased towards the male speaker. Although speech from eight female speakers has been analysed, five of these were recorded in just two interviews. The other three female speakers played minor roles in interviews which centred primarily on the man's knowledge of the mining workplace. The range of ages of the males comprised one speaker of 36 years, one of 42 years, four in the 55-65 range and two speakers between 75 and 85 years. The females were all aged between 45 and 60 years.

One final point must be made with regard to the transcribed data presented throughout this chapter. Any digressions of topic, repetitions of words or variety in a word's pronunciation by a single speaker are all included. For example a speaker might suddenly stop one narrative and start another, repeat a word two or three times as a filling device while trying to remember the rest of a story or switch between /ɑ/ and /aɪ/ for the pronunciation of the word 'I'. Such features are of course common to most 'natural speech'.

A glossary of the Royston dialect in South Yorkshire

Key:

The abbreviated letters in italics denote the word class(es) to which the individual entries belong: *adj.*-adjective, *adv.*-adverb, *exclam.*-exclamation, *conj.*-conjunction, *n.*-noun, *phr.*-phrase, *pl.*-plural, *vb.*-verb.

The phonetic transcriptions of the local dialect use the International Phonetic Alphabet. Such data occurs between parentheses, e.g. [blak 'brait]. The symbol ' , denoting primary stress, indicates that the following syllable is the one that is stressed during pronunciation.

afire [ə'faɪə] *adv.* On fire.

anyroad ['ɛnrɔʊd] *adv.* Anyway.

ah [a:] *n., adv.* Yes.

ahr [a] or [a:] *adv.* How, as in 'ahr' tha goin' ', meaning 'how are you doing'.

baht [ba:t] or [ə'ba:t] *adv.* About. 'Baht is used when commencing a sentence for example 'eight months ago'. 'Abaht' is used when in mid or final position of a sentence.

bairn [bɛən] *n.* A child.

bat [bat] *vb.* Smack, as in 'he got a bat in the eye'.

beer-off shop [biə 'ɒf ʃɒp] *n.* Off-licence.

bin-hole ['bɪnɔɪl] *n.* Dustbin.

black bright [blak 'brait] *adj. phr.* Filthy, covered in dirt.

blaggies ['blagɪz] *n., pl.* Blackberries.

bloke [blɔʊk] *n.* Man, fellow.

bozz-eyed [bɔz'aɪd] *n.* A turning inward of one or both eyes towards the nose, an abnormality caused by malalignment.

bray [brɛɪ] *v.* To hit something or someone with force, to hit hard.

cadge [kɑdʒ] *v.* To ask for something from someone, for example money or food. Used to express disapproval.

cadgie ['kɑdʒɪ] *n.* A trolley used by children to play with. Normally it is built using discarded materials such as old wheels from prams and scrap pieces of wood.

cal [kɑl] *v.* To gossip or chat, a social activity, normally referring to women meeting up to talk.

cards [kɑ:dʒ] *n.* If someone is given their cards they are being sacked by the employer, for example "The manager said 'come to my office and collect thi cards' ", meaning he is sacked.

chip-hole ['tʃɪpɔɪl] *n.* Fish and chip shop.

coal-hole ['kɔɪlhɔɪl] *n.* Coal place.

course [kɔəs] *adv.* Of course.

coarsie ['kɔ:si] *n.* Pavement.

cock [kɒk] *adv.* A term of endearment, used frequently as a greeting, as in 'arait (alright) cock?'

cos [kɒz] *conj.* Because.

cozzie ['kɒzi] *n.* Swimming costume.

courting ['kɔ:tɪŋ] *v.* To be going out with or intending to get married. A man and a woman court when they are going out with each other, as in ' how long's tha bin courtin er?'

cut [kʊt] *n.* Canal.

dahn t' line [dɑ:n tʃ 'lain] *n., phr.* If someone is sent 'dahn t' line' they are sent to prison.

dahn't road [dɑ:n tʃ rɔʊd] *n., phr.* To be given the sack. Someone who is sent down the road is someone sacked from work.

feast [fi:st] *n.* The fair or fairground, especially the travelling fair.

flit [flɪt] *v.* To move house.

gorm [gɔ:m] *n.* As in 'he's got no gorm', meaning he has no understanding, someone who is slow-witted. Also used meaning take no notice as in 'take no gorm'.

ginnel [ˈɡɪnəl] *n.* A narrow passageway between two buildings.

gip [ɡɪp] *v.* To be sick, often used metaphorically as in ‘she makes me gip’, she makes me sick. ‘Gip’ is recorded in the EDD, meaning “To open the mouth for want of breath, to gasp; to retch, to hold the breath as in vomiting”.⁶

gob [ɡɒb] *n.* Mouth.

gobbed [ɡɒbd] *v.* Eaten, as in ‘she’s gobbed her dinner’.

hole [ɔɪl] or [oʊl] *n.* Place, frequently used in compounds such as *bin-hole* meaning dustbin. See also *coal-hole* meaning coal place, and *chip-hole* meaning fish and chip shop.

horsework [ˈɒswək] or [ˈɒswə:k] *n.* Hard work.

humping [ˈʊmpɪŋ] *v.* To carry or heave, especially in the sense of struggling with a heavy object.

kaylied [ˈkeɪlaɪd] *adj.* Extremely drunk.

kidding [ˈkɪdɪŋ] *v.* A particular form of joking common among local coalminers. Often practical joking similar to ‘taking the Michael’, ‘taking the piss’, a wind-up, as in ‘I was only kidding’. See also *pillocking*. ‘Kidding’ tends to be used in preference to ‘pillocking’ by older speakers, and by all speakers in more formal contexts.

lake [leɪk] *v.* 1. To play. 2. Also meaning to take time off work, normally without permission.

lass [lɑs] *n.* Girl or young woman

lig [lɪg] *v.* To lie, as in ‘he’s just liggig abaht (about)’.

lug [lʊg] *n.* Ear.

lug-hole [ˈlʊgɔɪl] *n.* Ear-hole.

⁶ Joseph Wright’s *The English Dialect Dictionary*, vol. II, London, Henry Frowde, 1900, p.619.

maungy ['mɔ:ndʒi] *adj.* Sulky, bad-tempered or peevish, especially relating to children.

monk on ['mʊŋk ɒn] *n.* 'To have monk on': a passing mood of being upset and annoyed about something.

muck [mʊk] *n.* Dirt.

natter ['natə] *v.* 1. To talk idly and at length. Prolonged idle chatter or gossip. 2. To worry, as in 'she was nattering about you'. Used frequently to verbalize a worry after the event.

nay [nei] *n., adv.* No

naow [nəʊ] *n., adv.* No

nowt [nɔʊt] *n.* Nothing

older end [ˌɔʊldər ˈɛnd]. *n.* Elderly folk, older people in the community.

owt [ɔʊt] *n.* Anything.

parson ['pɑ:sən] *n.* Vicar or parson

pictures, picture palace ['pɪktʃəz] *n.* Cinema.

pillock ['pɪlək] *n.* A fool or an idiot, as in 'you gret pillock', you great fool.

pillocking ['pɪləkɪŋ] *l.v.* A particular form of joking common among local coalminers. Often practical joking similar to 'taking the Michael', 'taking the piss', a wind-up, as in 'I was only pillocking thi (thee/you)'. Also used in a related sense to mean the telling of white lies for comic effect, 'I pillocked him', meaning 'I told him a lie'. See also *kidding*. *Kidding* is used by the older members of the speech community, c. 60 years or more.

pumps [pʌmps] *n.*, Soft gym shoes, used also to mean training shoes more generally.

road [rɔʊd] *l.n.* Way, as in 'which road is it?' See also *anyroad*.

roar [rɔə] *n.* To cry as in 'stop roaring [rɔərɪŋ] will tha (you)'.

si thi/ see thee ['sɪ ðɪ] *exlam.* Look here.

snap [snɒp] 1.*n.* Food in general, 'there's no snap in the cupboards'. 2.*n.* A packed lunch taken to work.

snicket ['snɪkɪt] *n.* A passageway between walls, fences or buildings.

spell [spɛl] *n.* A splinter of wood usually in a finger.

spice [spais] *n.* Sweets, confectionery.

summat ['sumətʔ] *n.* ⁷ Something.

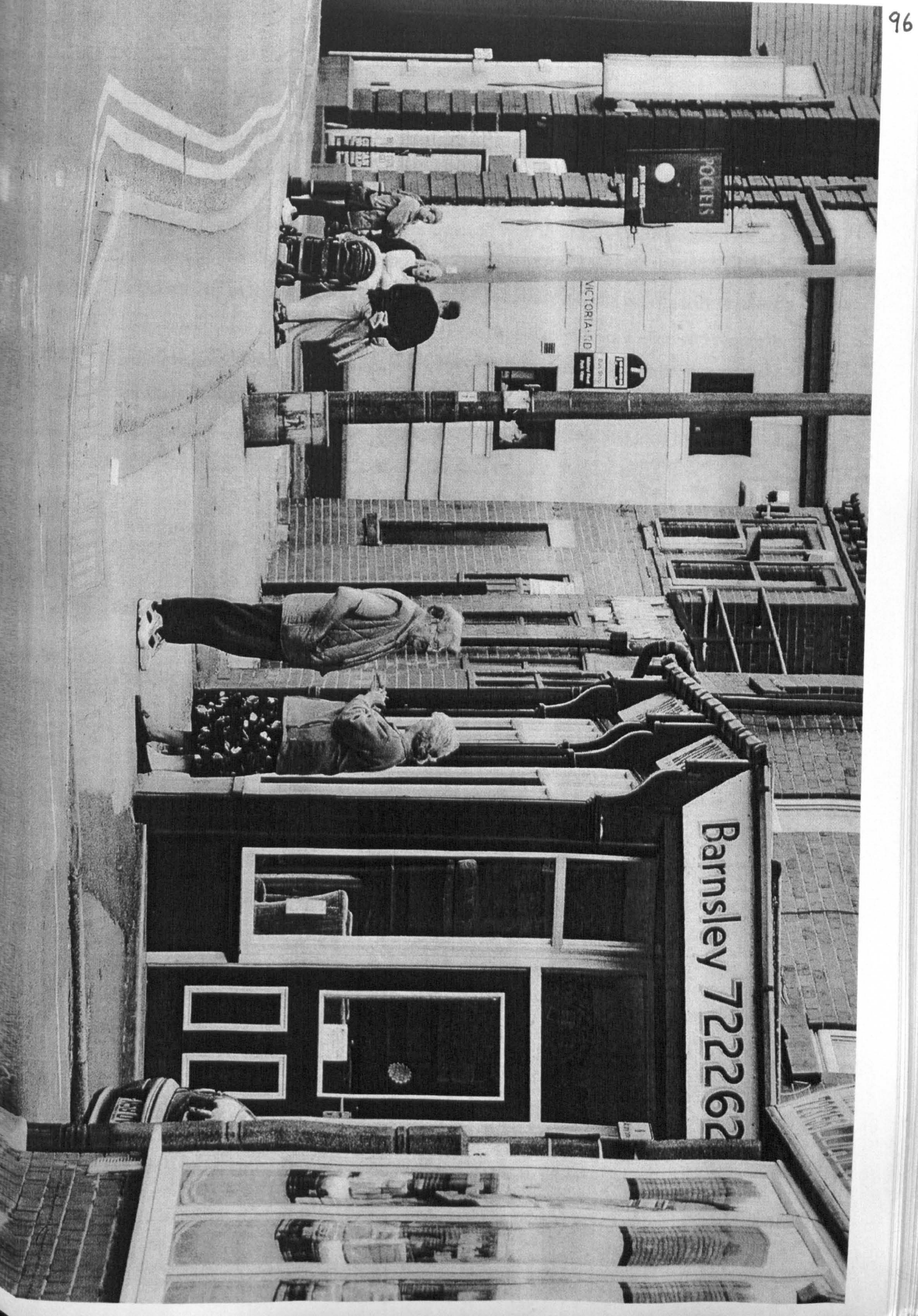
sup [sʊp] 1.*n.* A drink. 2.*v.* To drink.

tale [tɛil] *n.* Story.

taties ['tɛitɪz] *n.* Potatoes.

weskit ['wɛskɪtʔ] *n.* Waistcoat. In the Royston dialect glottal stops frequently reinforce the voiceless plosive 't' as in this example.

wick [wɪk] *adj.* Alive or crawling with, as in 'It wa' wick with banter', in other words alive with banter.



Phonological features of the dialect of Royston

Introduction to the vowels and consonants

In this analysis vowels and consonants are dealt with in order of their position of articulation, from high front to high back. This means, for example, that the short vowels are described in the sequence: ʌ, ɛ, a, ɒ, ʊ, ə. The study's focus is primarily on those vowels and consonants in words that are radically different from Received Pronunciation, and does not attempt to provide a description of all the vowel sounds produced by the speakers of Royston. Following convention, vowels are described in order of length, beginning with the short vowels, followed by the long vowels and then by the diphthongs.

Short vowels

/ʌ/

In the local dialect the standard English 'my' is frequently pronounced /mʌ/.

The long vowel /i:/ is realised as /ʌ/ in the case of 'seen' [sʌn], and 'been' [bʌn] by local dialect speakers. Older male speakers also use /ʌ/ in 'weekend' where RP has /i:/, it being pronounced ['wʌkɛnd].

/ɛ/

There are many cases where the RP diphthong /ei/ is realised as /ɛ/, as in 'break' [brɛk]. This is a major feature of the dialect. Other examples include 'great' [grɛt], 'says' [sɛz], 'taking' ['tɛkin], 'wake' [wɛk]. Some speakers use the short vowel /ɛ/ in 'thirty' ['θɛtʔtɪ]. Occasionally /ɛ/ is found in 'washed' [wɛʃt].

/a/

The diphthong /ai/ in the RP pronunciation of the personal pronoun 'I' is realised as /a/ in the dialect. This is a major feature among all ages and among both male and female speakers. The short vowel /a/ frequently occurs in the word 'water' ['watə].

The word 'father' is regularly pronounced with the short vowel /a/ /'faðə/. For example, 'who's thy father' [u:z ðl 'faðə]? This may be considered a core feature of the local dialect spoken by both men and women.

/ɒ/

The pronunciation of 'home' is /ɒm/. This vowel also occurs in 'nose' /nɒz/, 'stone' /stɒn/, and 'broke' /brɒk/. This appears to be a distinguishing feature of Royston's dialect, and local people differentiate themselves from 'Barnsley people' who they believe have a different pronunciation. When referring to 'Barnsley people', Royston speakers frequently refer not only the town of Barnsley but also to the surrounding villages, including Wombwell, Darfield and Grimethorpe. Such issues are considered more centrally in the second part of this chapter. A variant pronunciation of 'home' is listed under **Diphthongs** below.

The word 'spoke' is frequently pronounced /spɒk/, both in Royston and throughout the Barnsley region.

The short vowel /ɒ/ is often found in the word 'forty' /'fɒtɪ/, and also occurs in other words, for example 'horse' /ɒs/, 'fortnight' /'fɒtɪni:t/, and 'fourteen' /fɒtɪti:n/.

/ʊ/

A major distinguishing feature of the dialect is the pronunciation of 'go' as /gʊ/, in strong contrast with RP /gəʊ/. Another important feature of the local dialect is the pronunciation of 'found' as /fʊn/.

/ə/

The unstressed vowel /ə/ in this dialect often replaces certain RP diphthongs, especially under weak syllable stress in final position following the consonant /k/ as in the example [tə'bakə]. The initial unstressed /ə/ is commonly lost in the word 'about' which is realised as [ba:t]. /ə/ also replaces the diphthong /ei/ in 'they' becoming /ðə/. The diphthong /eə/ in RP 'there' and 'their' is often pronounced as /ðə/ in the local dialect, except when in final position of a sentence. For example, 'the' were pit ponies dahn t' pit'.

Long vowels

/i:/

A major phonetic feature of this dialect is the use of the long vowel /i:/ where RP has /ai/, as in 'night' /ni:t/. This is illustrated by the example 'I was working the night shift' [a wɒ 'wɛkɪn tʔ ni:tʔ ʃɪft].

Other high frequency words that have /i:/, in contrast with RP /ai/, are 'light' /li:t/ and 'died' /di:d/. Male speakers of all ages recorded used these varieties. The women's speech avoided such pronunciations of these words during the tape-recorded interviews, but occasionally used them outside the interview situation. This might indicate that women are sensitive to the interview situation. On one occasion the word /ni:t/ was quickly hypercorrected by a female speaker to /nait/. This is discussed in more detail in the second part of this chapter which deals more specifically with regional identity.

/a:/

The long vowel /a:/ as in the word 'down' /da:n/ contrasts markedly with the diphthong in RP /daʊn/. Not only is this pronunciation a feature of the speech of almost every individual speaker recorded, but it also occurs in a wide range of positions within a variety of lexis. Examples include 'about' [ə'ba:t], 'out' [a:t], 'trousers' ['tra:zəz], 'our' [a:], 'mouth' [ma:θ], 'round' [ra:n], 'now' [na:].

Diphthongs

/ʊə/

The long RP vowel /ɔ:/ is realised as /ʊə/ in the word ‘more’ [mʊə]. This is a core feature of the dialect and is present also in ‘of course’ [ə'kʊəs].

The diphthong /eə/ in RP ‘there’ is realised as /i:ə/, giving [ði:ə]. This is a particularly common feature among all speakers of the dialect and also occurs in the local pronunciation of the word ‘where’ [wi:ə]. The usage of the long diphthong /i:ə/ contrasts with the shortened version /iə/ exemplified below.

/iə/

The diphthong /iə/ is a particularly prominent feature of the speech of two male respondents. They pronounce the word ‘tea’ [tiə], using the diphthong /iə/ in contrast with the long vowel /i:/ in RP. Also the diphthong /iə/ is a core feature of their speech and is evident in the word ‘heard’ pronounced as [iəd], ‘again’ as [əgiən], and ‘death’ as [diəθ].

Interestingly both these speakers lived outside of Royston until they were in their twenties, one in Grimethorpe and one in Ardsley. Both these locations are associated with the broader speech of Barnsley by the inhabitants of Royston.

/ei/

A common pronunciation of ‘half’ is [eɪf], the diphthong /ei/ contrasting with the long vowel /ɑ:/ in RP.

A core feature of the local dialect is the use of /ei/ for RP /ai/, as in the second syllable of the word ‘alright’ [ɔ:'reit?], ‘fight’ [feit?], and ‘right’ [reit?].

/ɑʊ/

Some local coalminers pronounce ‘chew’ as [tʃɑʊ], contrasting with RP /ʊ:/ for the long vowel /ʊ:/. However, this pronunciation only occurs when the word is acting as a noun and refers to a ‘chew of bacca’, meaning a piece of chewing tobacco that was popular among some miners at work. It is normally only in this work context that the word ‘chew’ is pronounced in this way. When ‘chew’ is being used as a verb, in a wider context, it is normally pronounced [tʃʊ:].

/ɔi/

A major feature of the local dialect is the pronunciation of the words ‘coat’ [kɔit], ‘hole’ [ɔil], and ‘coal’ [kɔil]. Among female speakers however, recorded examples of this phonetic feature were restricted to the word [ɔil].

/ʊəə/

Two speakers in the sample recorded for this study used the diphthong /ʊə/ for the RP long vowel /ʊ:/ as in the word ‘cool’ [kʊə]. These speakers were identified earlier as having lived outside the Royston area until in their twenties. The diphthong /ʊə/ is also found in these speakers’ pronunciation of ‘home’ [ʊəm] and also more generally in ‘coat’ [kʊət], ‘go’ [gʊə], ‘road’ [rʊəd], and ‘hosepipe’ [‘ʊəzpaip].

Vowel syncopation

The word ‘regular’ was syncopated by two male speakers, (55 years and 82 years), becoming [‘rɛglə]. The same pattern also occurs in the pronunciation of the word ‘popular’ [‘pɒplə].

Consonants

/t/

Medial /t/ is often absent when positioned on a morpheme boundary in the local dialect. For instance ‘want to’ is pronounced [ˈwʌnə].

The consonant /t/ is often realised as a sort of ‘linking r’ in word final position, wherever the next word begins with a vowel.⁸ This is exemplified in the example ‘get up’ becoming /gɛrˈʌp/. Other examples include ‘get out’ and ‘let off’. This is a crucial feature of the local dialect, but also a very common feature in a wide range of middle north English dialects.

/d/

When positioned on a morpheme boundary, the consonant /d/ is absent, especially when preceded by /n/. ‘Mind you’ is frequently pronounced [ˈmaɪnjə], and was pronounced [ˈmaɪns-jə] on one occasion by an older speaker of 81 years. /d/ is almost always absent after /n/ in unstressed position; for example, ‘and’ /ən/, ‘round’ [ra:n], and ‘found’ [faʊn].

/ŋ/

The RP /ŋ/ in final position in –ing words is realised as /n/. This is a widespread feature which affects many of the –ing forms of verbs in the continuous tenses; for example ‘going’ /ˈgɔɪn/, ‘doing’ /ˈdɔɪn/. This pronunciation is illustrated in the following greeting which one speaker said he used among work colleagues: ‘ahr tha goin’ on old ‘and’? [a: ðə ˈgɔɪn ɒn ɒld ʌnd]?

/v/

The finally positioned /v/ in the preposition ‘of’ is lost in this dialect and replaced by a ‘linking r’; for example ‘there were two of them’ [ðə wɛ tu: ə rəm].

⁸ Petyt, K.M., *Dialect and Accent in Industrial West Yorkshire*, Amsterdam, Benjamin, 1985, p. 151.

The medially positioned consonant /v/ is occasionally absent as in ‘over’ /ɔə/. For example, [am nɒt 'gʊlɪn ɔə ði:ə]. Also in the word ‘for’ the full vocalic [ɔ:] is realised as /ə/ to give the pronunciation [fə] in unstressed position.

/ð/

A core feature of this dialect is the absence of final /ð/ in the word ‘with’, which is pronounced [wɪ], found in both male and female speech.

/s/

The finally positioned /s/ is frequently absent in the word ‘since’ [sɪn]. For example [ba:t eit? mʌnθ sɪn].

/z/

Almost exclusively, the finally positioned consonant /z/ in the word ‘was’ is absent, the word being pronounced /wɑ/. For example, [ɪt wɔr 'ðreɪt]. This is a high frequency word, making it a distinguishing feature of the dialect.⁹

/h/

The consonant /h/ is often missing in initial position for example ‘have’ /æv/, ‘horse’ /ɔs/, ‘him’ /ɪm / ‘her’ /ɜ:/. This is a common feature of many non-standard dialects in Britain.¹⁰

/l/

The medially positioned consonant /l/ is absent in ‘only’ /ɔ:ni/. This is a major feature of the local dialect. The example ‘I was only pillocking thee’ [a war 'ɔ:ni 'pɪləkɪn ðɪ] shows the sound clearly.

⁹There is a possibility that [wɔr] is used to denote ‘were’ rather than ‘was’, making it more a feature of grammar than pronunciation.

¹⁰ For an in-depth investigation of ‘h dropping’ in West Yorkshire refer to: Petyt, *ibid*, pp. 104 – 109.



Grammatical variation

Morphology

Unmarked plurality of nouns of measurement

A widespread feature of many nonstandard dialects is that when immediately preceded by a cardinal number many nouns of measurement are not marked for plurality.¹¹ The local Royston dialect is no exception and this is exemplified below,

- ‘nine year’ not ‘nine years’,
- ‘12 month’ instead of ‘12 months’,
- ‘four inch’ not ‘four inches’,
- ‘three or four foot’ not ‘three or four feet’, and
- ‘14 pound’ instead of ‘14 pounds’.

Definite article

The definitive article is commonly lacking in contexts in which it appears in standard English. Examples include ‘they used to work at pit’, ‘where’s tha think tha are, in post office at York?’, ‘he couldn’t get it out o’ cellar’, and ‘we dunt seem to kick arse aht o’ it’. This is a core feature of the local dialect which is present in the speech of all those interviewed, irrespective of age or gender.

The definite article ‘the’ is also sometimes realised as glottalised /t/, as in [da:ntʔ pʌt]. It is also realised as /ʔ/ and in some cases totally absent. The variability of the representation of the definitive article in the local speech variety warrants further investigation.¹²

¹¹ Milroy, James, and Milroy, Lesley, *Real English: The Grammar of English Dialects in The British Isles*, London, Longman, 1993, p. 234.

¹² Petyt has noted that in West Yorkshire there appears to have been considerable expansion of /ʔ/ at the expense of /tʔ/, Petyt, *ibid*, p. 200.

Pronouns

Personal, possessive, and reflexive pronouns in the Royston dialect are displayed in Figure 3:1 below:

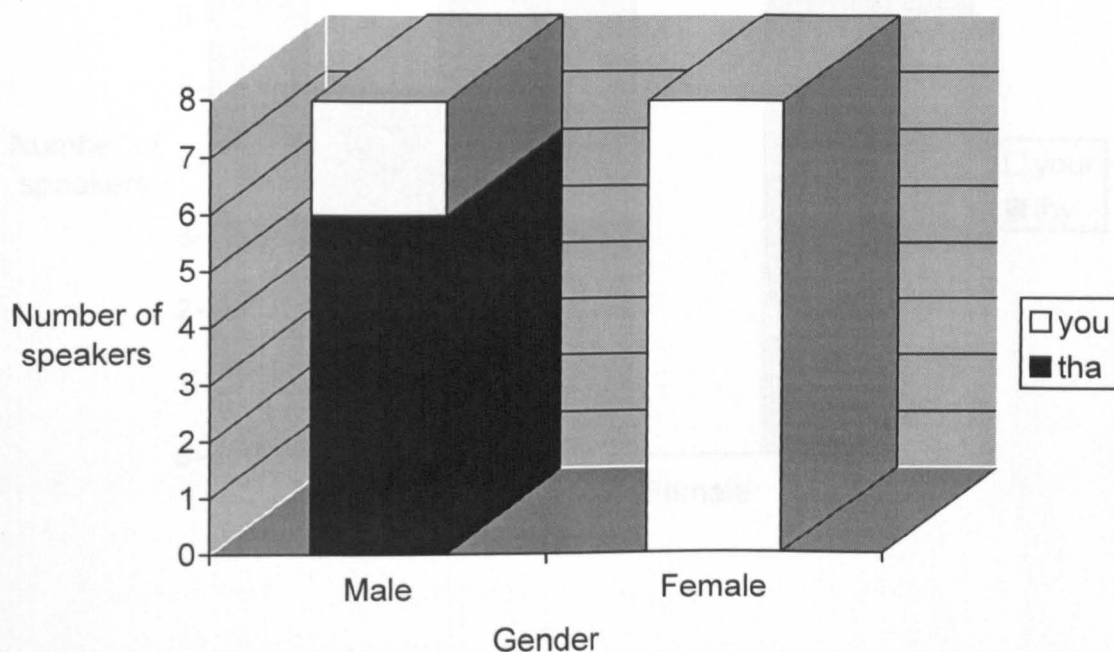
Figure 3:1 The pronoun system in the dialect of Royston, South Yorkshire

		Personal pronouns		Reflexive pronouns	Possessive pronouns	
		subject. case	objective case		det. function	nominal function
1 st person	singular	I [a]	me[mi]	mysen[mɪ'sɛn]	my[mɪ]	mine[main]
	plural	we[wi:]	us[ʊz]	ussens[ʊz'sɛnz] or oursens[a:'sɛnz]	our[a:] or us[ʊz]	ours[a:z]
2 nd person	singular	thou[ðə]	thee[ði:] or thi[ði]	thysen[ðu'sɛn]	thy [ði]	thine[ðain]
	plural	you[ju:]	yor[jɔ:]	yoursens[jə'sɛnz]	your[jɔ:]	yourn[jɔ:n]
3 rd person	sing	mas	he[i:]	hissen[ɪz'sɛn]	his[ɪz]	
		fem	she[ʃi:]	hersens[ɜ:'sɛn]	her[ɜ:]	hern[ɜ:n]
		neu	it[ɪt]		itsen[ɪt'sɛn]	its[ɪtʒ]
	plural	they[ðei]	them[ðɛm]	theirsens[ðə'sɛnz]	their[ðɜə]	theirn[ðɜən]

Personal pronouns

Because personal pronouns are relatively high frequency words in everyday speech, many examples were recorded during fieldwork. This means that a closer description and analysis of their form and usage can be attempted. The speech of eight males and eight females was tape-recorded and then analysed with regard to pronoun usage. This highlighted that male speakers of the Royston dialect have retained the older distinction between the informal singular second person pronoun 'tha' (thou)/ 'thee' and the formal and plural form 'you'. The subject case 'tha' appears in the example 'Tha worked at t' pit di'n't tha?' This analysis strikingly revealed that none of the eight female speakers used the vernacular form 'tha' compared with six out of eight men. These results are displayed in the graph below.

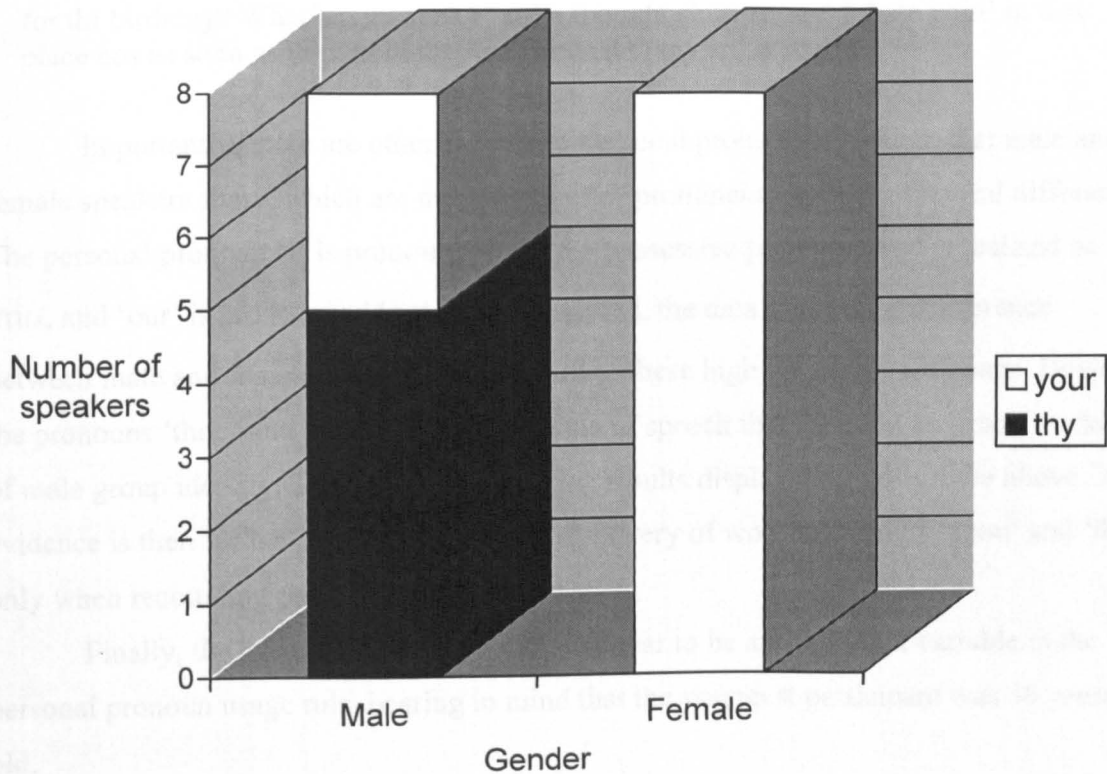
Figure 3:2 Subjective case pronoun usage among male and female speakers of the Royston dialect



However, an exception is where reported male speech is recounted, normally as part of a larger narrative. In this instance more men and importantly more women use the form 'tha' to help recreate an authentic sounding dialogue. One woman tells the story of her husband starting out as a coalminer: "When he left school his dad said 'Right, up t' pit. Tell 'im tha'll start on t' Monday.'"

A similar pattern also emerges among Royston speakers with the objective case of the personal pronoun. 'Thee' /ðu/ is frequently used as the objective case by male speakers of the dialect, as in 'I'll phone thee next week'. In the speech of the 8 males and 8 females analysed, 3 males regularly used 'thee' whereas females always used the 'you' form, except in cases when reporting male dialogue. The use of one form of personal pronoun for general speech, ('you'), but a more locally marked variety when reporting male dialogue, ('tha' and 'thee'), emerges as an important aspect of speech among the females of Royston.

Figure 3:3 Second person singular possessive pronoun usage among male and female speakers of the Royston dialect



It is worth mentioning that the pronoun ‘tha’ is frequently realised as ‘thy’ [ðai] when preceding a word which begins with the vowel /a/. Examples recorded here include ‘where’s tha think thy are’ and ‘thy ant got a bad back’.

Possessive pronouns

The speech analysed revealed that second person singular possessive pronouns in the Royston dialect follow a similar pattern to the personal pronouns. As the graph below shows, the local variety of second person singular possessive pronouns functioning as determiners forms part of the male speakers’ repertoire, but not the females’.

Once again, female speakers use the local variety when reporting male dialogue as part of a larger narrative. The following example illustrates this:

“ An’ I went in t’ other room an’ honestly ‘Is it thi birthday lass? T’ brought thee aht for thi birthday? What’s a matter...?’ an’ a thought shurrup, an’ I hate goin’ in that place cos as soon as you gu in they’ve summat t’ say an’ it really...”¹³

Importantly, there are other aspects of the local pronominal system that male and female speakers share, which are more features of pronunciation than of lexical difference. The personal pronoun ‘I’ is pronounced /a/, the possessive pronoun ‘my’ is realised as /mɪ/, and ‘our’ is pronounced [a:]. When analysed, the data revealed no difference between male and female speakers with regard to these high frequency pronouns. However, the pronouns ‘thou’ and ‘thee’ are clearly forms of speech that function as strong markers of male group identity. This is supported by the results displayed in table three above. This evidence is then further strengthened by the discovery of women’s use of ‘thou’ and ‘thee’ only when recounting past male dialogue.

Finally, the age of participants did not appear to be an important variable in the personal pronoun usage rule, bearing in mind that the youngest participant was 36 years old.

The older form of the second person singular possessive ‘thine’ is a central feature of the local male dialect and, as with many central England traditional dialects, some of the nominal plural possessive pronouns were found to end in –‘n’.¹⁴ Noticeably the second person ‘yours’ is realised as ‘youm’ and the third person ‘theirs’ is realised as ‘theirn’. Occasionally, the second person ‘yours’ is pronounced [juəz]. However, these varieties were found to be used by both male and female speakers of all ages. As such these pronouns act as strong markers of regional identity.

Reflexive pronouns

The local dialect has a regularised pronoun system where ‘self’ is realised as ‘sen’ as the following inventory shows. Neither age nor gender appears to influence reflexive pronoun usage locally, these forms frequently taking precedence over their standard equivalents. The following examples illustrate the local reflexive pronoun usage more fully:

¹³ Interview with Barry B., Sandra, B., and Joy, M., 9/3/99, tape 1, side 1, 23.0.

'I'll do it misen' [ɔl du ʌt mɪ'sɛn], 'sit thisen down' [sɪt ðɪ'sɛn da:n], 'we did it oursens/ussens' [wɛ dɪd ʌt a:sɛnz / ʊzɛnz], 'suit yoursens' [su:t jɔ:'sɛnz], 'wash theirsens' [wɒʃ ðə'sɛnz].

Demonstrative pronouns

The local dialect has a more extended system of demonstrative pronoun usage than standard English, especially among older male speakers. The standard forms of 'this' and 'these' (near), and 'that' and 'those' (distant), are used, but the form 'yon' is used to refer to more remote objects. When referring to people 'yond' is sometimes used for 'yon' as in 'yond bugger up t' street' meaning that man who lives at the top of the street. In this sense 'yond' refers to someone or something more remote than when using 'yon', although insufficient examples were collected to justify establishing a rule. This three way system of demonstrative pronoun usage is common in many languages of the world and occurred in Old English.¹⁵

To conclude, we can hypothesise from the data analysed that although female speakers share in local pronunciations of pronouns, for example /mɪ/, and /a:/, they use standard pronoun forms in a tape-recorded interview situation much more than men. Interestingly, one woman revealed that she used the pronouns 'thee' and 'tha' only when talking to her husband at home, in an informal manner and with no audience present.¹⁶ This indicates that the local dialect has preserved a formal – informal distinction in personal pronoun usage 'you' – 'thou' as in earlier English, and currently in French and German.

Miscellaneous

The pronoun 'me' sometimes acts like a reflexive pronoun and partially as an emphatic pronoun when in final position; for example, 'I went to school in Wakefield me.' Other

¹⁴ Trudgill, Peter, Chambers, J.K., eds., *Dialects of English: Studies in Grammatical Variation*, London, Longman, 1991, p. 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁶ Fwd, conversation with Beryl C., June 2000.

examples include emphatic finally positioned pronoun ‘them’ as in ‘it was the way they used to talk them’.

Verbs

Regular verbs in standard English have identical forms for the past tense and the past participle, as used to conjugate the perfect verb form; ‘I worked’, ‘I have worked’.

However, many irregular verbs have distinct forms for the past tense and past participle; ‘I broke’, ‘I have broken’. In the local dialect of Royston, as with many nonstandard dialects of English, the irregular conjugations are brought into line with the regular verbs.¹⁷ Only the auxiliary ‘have’ signals any distinction; ‘I broke’, ‘I have broke’. The local pronunciation of these verbs is distinct too: ‘break’ /bræk/ and ‘broke’ /brɒk/. Lexical variation helps further to create a unique local variety. Two examples below will illustrate the point:

Standard English

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Present perfect</i>
give	I give	I gave	I have given
hide	I hide	I hid	I have hidden

Royston dialect

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Present perfect</i>
gi’	I gi’	I gid	I’ve gid
hiddy	I hiddy	I hiddied	I’ve hiddied

It is noteworthy that the stems of both these irregular verbs are radically different from the standard English infinitives, yet as with the earlier examples, the past and present perfect tenses are almost identical.

Other variations in verb formation recorded here include the past tense and present perfect tense of the verb ‘tell’ (I told/I have told) becoming ‘I telled’ and ‘I have telled’. Sometimes speakers of this dialect use the S.E. present tense to signify the simple past. For example; ‘we come here last week instead of ‘we came here last week’. Another feature of

¹⁷ Trudgill, P., and Chambers, J.K., p. 52.

verb usage recorded here is the second person singular of the verb ‘be’ past tense indicative, normally ‘were’ becoming ‘was’. For example, ‘you wasn’t here last week’. Finally, the past simple of the verb ‘say’ (I said) becomes ‘I says’; this is especially common when used to denote reported speech. For example:

“Well what do you think you are doing?” I says.

“I don’t know,” he says.

Contracted negatives

Negative auxiliary verb constructions frequently undergo secondary contraction in this local dialect, for example ‘didn’t’ being realised as /dʌnt/ and ‘couldn’t’ as /kʌnt/.¹⁸

Adjectives

In the Royston dialect double comparatives were recorded, for example ‘Barnsley’s more broader’ and ‘yet Wakefield’s more softer’.

Prepositions

‘Of’ is sometimes realised as /ən/ as in [sʌks ən əm/ or in /ðə rɛst ən əz].

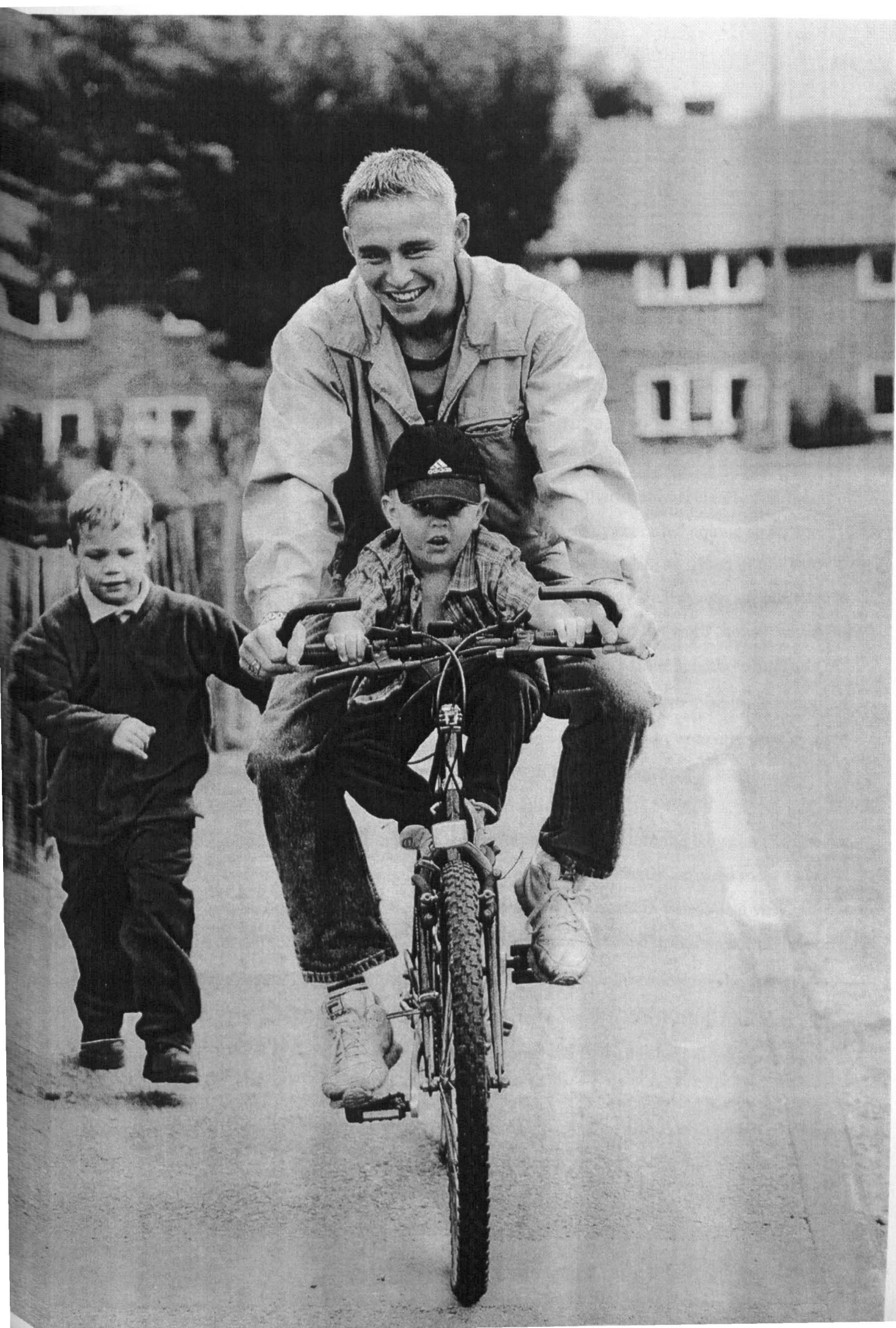
Summary

The principal aim of this chapter so far has been to establish that Royston has a distinct regional dialect variety of speech. The intention has been to present an overview of the more characteristic features of this locally important system by analysing tape-recorded, free-flowing conversations involving eight men and eight women from the locality. However, on closer inspection it is evident that the gender and age of speakers, as well as contextual factors, such as the place where speech takes place and who is present, influence the use of the phonetic, lexical and grammatical features of the dialect considerably. This linguistic variation among speakers of the dialect is now examined more closely, firstly by analysing the use of vowel sounds and then personal pronoun choice. This raises issues about the validity of the idea of a clearcut regional dialect boundary.

¹⁸ This has been noted as a salient feature of West Yorkshire speech, see: Petyt, *ibid*, pp. 179 – 189.



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Dialect variation

Vowels

Data presented earlier in this chapter highlighted 15 vowel sounds as being important markers of the Royston dialect. However, only seven of these appear to be used regularly by male and female speakers of all ages. These are: /a/ in the local pronunciation of ‘I’ [a], /a/ in ‘father’ [ˈfɑðə], /ʊ/ in ‘go’ [gʊ], /ʊə/ in ‘more’ [mʊə], /ɑː/ in ‘down’ [daːn], /ɔɪ/ in ‘hole’ [ɔɪl], and /iːə/ in ‘there’ [ðiːə]. These distinct vowel sounds are not used exclusively by Royston speakers. Additional data recorded during fieldwork shows clearly that these sounds are widespread throughout the Barnsley region, being recorded among speakers from Grimethorpe, Darfield, Wombwell and central Barnsley. Data analysed in this study reveals that regionally distinct vowel sounds spoken exclusively by Royston speakers are in fact extremely limited. The only example is the pronunciation of the word ‘home’ which among Royston speakers is normally /ɒm/ but among speakers from neighbouring parts of Barnsley is realised as /ʊəm/. Although limited in the recorded data to this single feature of pronunciation, this variation is recognised by Royston speakers and frequently used as an emblem to illustrate the separate linguistic identity of their village. Such issues are discussed more specifically in the ‘Dialect lore’ section below.

Gender is also an important factor affecting variation within the Royston dialect. As seen earlier in this chapter, personal pronoun usage differs markedly between male and female speakers. Further analysis reveals that vowels within certain words also vary, depending on the speaker’s gender. For example the speakers who pronounced ‘night’ /niːt/ were all male, even if some occasionally also used [nait]. Female speakers, however, always used [nait]. Only on one occasion did a female speaker use [niːts], (meaning the night shift at work), and this occurred outside a tape recorded interview situation and the

speaker immediately corrected the pronunciation, saying to the researcher, “[’sɔɹɪ lʊv a mi:n naits]”.¹⁹

Pronoun variety

The description of the Royston dialect at the beginning of this chapter does not highlight the fact that within an individual’s repertoire there is often a striking amount of variability, perhaps in the choice or pronunciation of a word, for instance. Such individual variability may be due to internal linguistic constraints, for example a word’s position in a sentence or to larger socio-contextual factors, for example the setting or audience present. As noted earlier, when analysing personal pronoun usage it was found that only male speakers use the local second person singular personal pronoun ‘tha’, females instead using the ‘you’ form. However, as noted earlier, there is evidence to suggest this may be different when women are in informal contexts, for example when speaking with close family within the home, and when there is no one else present.²⁰

Local perceptions of linguistic identity

The analysis of vowel sounds and pronoun usage has revealed important variations in the local dialect system which point to the complex nature of local ‘ways of speaking’. The chapter now moves on to examine notions of a separate speech community, based on the speaker’s attitudes towards the local dialect. The data analysed includes additional material collected from participants living in central Barnsley and the neighbouring villages of Darfield, Wombwell and Grimethorpe.²¹

Regional language variety is not the only marker of cultural distinctiveness among the people of Barnsley and surrounding villages such as Royston. People are often keen to point out that their locality has customs and foodways as well as language that make it

¹⁹ Fwd 15/11/98.

²⁰ Fwd, 15/4/2000.

²¹ Royston people often refer to those living in a variety of villages around Barnsley, apart from their own, as ‘Barnsley people’.

somehow different.²² However, regional language appears to be a marker that almost everyone interviewed during the fieldwork had something to say about. The challenge lies in determining which linguistic features people perceive as being specific to an area and then comparing those with the lexical, phonetic and grammatical data presented earlier in the chapter.

For the purposes of this study, narratives, jokes and general commentary regarding dialect difference are termed ‘dialect lore’. Often the jokes and narratives collected were highly polished, presumably a product of numerous tellings. The ‘lake district joke’ is a perfect example and featured in four of the recordings with men from different parts of the Barnsley area, including Royston. Although each telling has minor variations the punchline is always the same:

“Story always goes dunt it, when that bloke from London comes and (*says*) ‘Can you tell me where t’ Lake district is?’ He says “Tha reight in t’ middle on it lad, they’re always lakin’ here.” (*Laughter from Bill and Mavis*).”²³

To interpret this joke correctly the audience needs a grasp of the local linguistic system and the local cultural context. The verb ‘to lake’ in the Barnsley area means ‘to play’, but often, and especially in this context, it can mean to have a day off work, and is used frequently in this sense by coalminers. The outsider from London is ridiculed because he has no grasp of the local meaning, and this allows the narrator and the audience to celebrate their distinctive lexis as well as their apparent carefree attitude towards work as coalminers. There is evidence to suggest that these jokes are part of a sub-genre of dialect jokes distributed throughout the country, featuring prominently in districts with strong vernacular loyalty for example in Tyneside.²⁴

Another narrative told in the style of a joke also requires the audience to have an understanding of the local linguistic system, this time regarding the pronunciation of the word ‘nights’, meaning the ‘nightshift’ at work.

²² For example the ‘pork pie’ is an important foodstuff locally. A number of jokes were collected concerning pork pies. The dish ‘peas and pie’ is extremely popular among locals, and is for sale in many pubs and in all the cafes of Barnsley market.

²³ Bill and Mavis S., 10/12/96 tape 1, side 2, 32.0.

²⁴ Personal communication with Dr. Joan Beal, May 2001.

Bill S: “Mi brother ala’s tells tale he went to a nightclub in,
 what they used to do they used to work at pit wi’ this Mick F., but he talks reight
 polite you know,
 an’ they’ve gone in this nightclub but they were working at a pit up Durham an’ this
 girl says, ‘Oh we don’t see you (often)...’
 He says, ‘Oh I’m in charge of all these men you now’ and all the rest of it (*imitates a
 more standard voice*), Wombwell lad he is.
 So she says, ‘We don’t see you here very often.’
 He says, ‘Oh yes we come every week, don’t we Albert?’
 So Albert says, ‘Ah’, (*sarcastic tone*).
 (*She*) says, ‘Oh you wasn’t here last week.’
 ‘No’ he says, ‘We was on neets,’ (*laughs*).
 Now that’s a dialect, i’n’ it ?”²⁵

The pattern that emerges in both these examples is that the butt of the joke is always
 the individual whose language is non-vernacular. In the first example the ‘bloke from
 London’ uses the pronoun ‘you’ in contrast with the miner who uses the local ‘tha’ form.
 The miner makes no concessions to the stranger, addressing him as ‘lad’, a common form
 of address among male Barnsley dialect speakers. This, combined with the local pronoun
 form, help to distinguish quite clearly the outsider from the insider - the one being laughed
 at as opposed to the ones laughing. In the second example, a similar effect is achieved, but
 by different means. Mick is obviously trying to impress the girl, and masks his local dialect
 speech by avoiding the pronoun ‘tha’ and local pronunciations such as ‘dunt’ for ‘don’t’.
 He also uses ‘yes’ rather than the local ‘ah’, unlike his work colleague Albert, who
 continues to use ‘ah’. Mick maintains the pretence successfully, even sounding the ‘s’ as in
 the standard pronunciation of ‘was’ when all of a sudden he says /ni:ts/ instead of ‘nights’
 and his authentic linguistic identity is revealed, much to the amusement of his colleagues
 and us, the audience. Once again it is vital that the audience understand the local dialect
 pronunciation system. Mick has tried to place himself above the level of the group by
 avoiding his vernacular language variety. He has failed, and this is celebrated via humour.
 Although set in occupational contexts, it is regional identity that is being contested in both
 instances. As in the first example, the local dialect is promoted as an important marker of
 regional identity. The linguistic features that the joke and the narrative pivot upon - ‘lake’,

²⁵ Interview with Bill and Mavis S., 10/12/96, t 1, s 2, 17.4.

‘tha’, and ‘neets’- are very much core features of the Barnsley dialect and are being held up as emblems of that speech community.

By analysing less structured talk, such as covert and overt commentary on dialect difference, a similar pattern emerges. The following example is an extract taken from a personal experience reminiscence, and deals with a miner’s experiences of working alongside Bevin boys during the 1940s. Bevin boys were normally men from outside the area selected by ballot to work temporarily at a coalmine instead of doing conventional military service during the Second World War. Such an influx of outsiders into a mine was an unusual event, as the dialogue suggests:

Joe M: “I’d Bevin boys working under me, I’d one from Cleckheaton,- I’d one from York. He used to say ‘Peter speaking’ (*imitating a more standard voice*) I said ‘tha’ll get bloody Peter speaking-where’s tha think tha are in post office at York nah? Tha dahn t’ pit nah lad-tha one o’ us.’ (*serious tone*) A could sympathise wi’ some on ’em but some on ’em were reight nannas.

AC: What, these Bevin boys?

JM: Ah. The’ wa’ one bloke he wa nice, he wa from Southampton, Dougie Best they called him – he lived at Great Houghton he married an Houghton lass. An’ he used to talk like ‘Oy right, oy right Colin, ‘Aye oy right Dougie’ ‘Oye right, do you tink’, he dint say ‘do you think’, ‘Do you tink’ ‘Don’t you tink we ought to get this out of here’ A said ‘Dougie, does tha want this bloody tub gettin’ aht or what?’ ‘Yes I tink so, I tink so’ a says ‘Tha either, either wants it aht or tha dunt.’ (*serious tone*).²⁶

As with the jokes discussed earlier, tension is created by the contrasting regional dialects. The speaker’s own dialogue contrasts markedly with that of the two Bevin boys. He speaks with the local pronoun form ‘tha’ on every occasion, while the visitors use the ‘you’ form. More important here is the fact that the speaker overtly draws attention to the way the two Bevin boys speak, insinuating that their lack of local speech is combined with an inability to manage the work underground. These exchanges serve to undermine the regional identity of the Bevin boys whilst at the same time, intentionally or unintentionally, strengthening the speaker’s own regional and occupational identity. However, interestingly Dougie appears to be treated more favourably than Peter and we can only surmise that this is because Dougie, although not a local, is a regional dialect speaker whereas Peter’s speech is presented as being much closer to a standard variety.

²⁶ Interview with Joe M., 12/12/96, t 1, s 2, 11.0.

Such dialect lore establishes that people from the Barnsley area perceive themselves as having a distinctive linguistic identity. However, people from Royston believe they speak in a way that separates them again from the wider population of the Barnsley region. They account for this perceived difference in two ways. Firstly, there is widespread and popular belief that the people from Staffordshire who migrated to Royston at the turn of the century to work at the Monckton collieries have left their mark culturally and linguistically on the village. Secondly, local people emphasise the different pronunciation of some words. The Staffordshire influence is remembered through narratives concerning family history and village characters, as the following extract highlights:

Harold W: All Roystoners come from Staff, me father comes from Staff, me grandad Wilson, me grandad Glover who had fish and chip oil, erm they used to walk it all way from Staffordshire to Royston to get a job at pit, things were that bad.

AC: Had they been miners in Staffordshire?

HW: I suppose so because they called Royston Staffordshire, Little Staff, and if you speak to anybody that's older than me or as old as me, you can perhaps guarantee that they were relations from Staff, Staffordshire. Me gra'ma used to have that Staffordshire talk, everybody had that Staffs, there's still Staffordshire, when I am nah, automatically wi' aht thinking ahr am talkin', it more o less comes aht, rather me wife's from Liverpool, now although she's been married all these donkeys years over 'ere there's still that eminent Liverpudlian scene. So if you get speakin' to, if there's any left, well there is some left, an just take notice – we aht sayin' anything, an it 'ill come back, as you can say at one time they come from Staffs."²⁷

Although the speaker refers to the existence of speakers with a distinctive dialect, which he refers to as 'that Staffordshire talk', he never actually elaborates to give specific examples of lexis or pronunciation. We have to take his word for it that there are some people still alive with a distinctive dialect influenced by the influx of Staffordshire migrants. In the next example another speaker attempts to recreate the speech of a reputed village character.

Pete A: "The' were a big bloke called 'Big Ern Street', he worked dahn, – he's dead and gone, he wa a big he wa a Staffordshire man, – tha sees Royston wa built o' Staffordshire people – a lot o' Staffordshire come to live at Royston.

AC: So did they talk differently then?

²⁷ Interview with Harold W., 24/10/98, t 2, s 1, 26.4.

PA: Ooh ah, ‘oo bye ah, come here my little one’, they used to call ‘my lickle one come here’, I once went workin wi’ him and we wa’ doing some back rippin’ what they call back rippin’, makin’ these gates bigger for tubs to go through, - he used to say ‘Come on my lickle men - I may get it down and yo may shift it’, way the’ used to talk them – they were Staffordshire people, and they say he built a barrow that big down t’ cellar that... he couldn’t get it out o’ cellar (*Jill laughs*)... An’ if if ever I wa’ workin’ wi’ him an’ I’d got a complaint he used to say: ‘I’ll bring you a tablet tomorrow my lickle one,’ he says. ‘Yo take it an yo’ll be able to shift all that, I’ve got some rubbin’ oils ’ill clear your back up, tha ha’n’t got a bad back,’ - all like that he used to say.”²⁸

The attempt to create authentic dialect of a Staffordshire miner is successful at least in distinguishing it from everyday Royston dialect. However, equally important is the reference to the man’s size and the fact that he had tablets and oils that he claimed could cure any aches and pains the young Royston miners might have. There are several local literary references to Staffordshire miners being huge men. There are also references to them having a great sense of humour. It is these attributes, when combined with their apparently distinctive speech, that helps to set them apart. This reminds us of the fact that although speech is an important cultural marker of regional identity, it is not the only one, and not necessarily the most important one.

The belief that Royston speakers have a dialect that distinguishes them from others in the Barnsley area is widely held and supported by data collected during fieldwork, from speakers living both inside and outside the village. In the ‘dialect lore’, vowel sounds in particular appear to be what local people think sets Royston apart. The following joke was delivered totally unprompted:

Bill S: “Same as I say other day, I think when I spok to you, you said you were from, you’ grandfather wa’ from Royston, well tale al’a’s gus that this Royston bloke took his cat to t’ vets and he says, to vet, he says ‘will you have a look at my cat?’ so he says to him ‘Is it a tom?’ He says ‘No a brought it wi’ me.’ (*laughs*), and that’s how they talk i’n’ it and they say ‘next wik’ (*laughs*)”²⁹

This polished joke revolves around the pronunciation of the word ‘home’, which is realised as /ɒm/ in contrast to the Barnsley pronunciation /ʊəm/. That the speaker has a readymade joke at hand reveals that there is conscious belief that differences exists between

²⁸ Interview with Pete and Jill A., 24/9/98, t 1, s 1, 45.

his own speech community of Wombwell and that of Royston. After the joke has finished he comments on another vowel sound of Royston speech that of /wɪk/ in 'week'. Both the pronunciation of home as /ɒm/ and 'week' as /wɪk/ were considered important features of the speech of 16 people analysed during the first part of this chapter. The short vowel /ɒ/ replacing /əʊ/ in 'home', 'stone' and 'nose' is a consistent feature of Royston speech.³⁰ The following personal experience narrative by a female Royston speaker adds further weight to this sound being central to the idea of the village having its own linguistic identity:

Annie W: "I mean Royston there's a lot o' Staffordshire, from Staff, that's where you get you' dialect

Sheila B: Yeah

AW: Cos you say 'hom' 'it's hom time', instead o' as Trevor 'd say: 'hooem time', cos Trevor comes from Barnsley, - what other things do they say in Royston eh?, But there's definitely a link to Staffordshire in Royston,

AC: Cos you were tellin' a story about that weren't you when you worked in Barnsley?

AW: Yeah yeah yeah at er, when a worked at Woolworths they used to say 'Go on June say it again, say it again' I used say 'what'? 'Cos they'd say 'Is it hom time yet?' and they used to say, 'Say it again - I love it, I love to hear her say 'is it hom time?' And I still do it.

SB: Because Barnsley is more broader.

AW: Very broad, Trevor's very broad.

AC: Have you noticed a difference coming from Dodworth to here?

SB: Yeah.

AW: The' were nicer spoken in Royston."³¹

The latter part of this exchange reveals that some speakers believe there is a hierarchy when it comes to the local dialects of Royston and Barnsley, and that Barnsley speech is somewhat broader or 'rougher'. This is obviously a comparison with local dialects only; they are not comparing their local variety with standard English. However, implicit in the concepts of 'nicer spoken' and 'broad' is the strong belief that some dialects are closer to standard English than others. Speakers from Royston, 'nicer spoken', and speakers from Barnsley, 'broad', provide much anecdotal evidence via dialect lore to

²⁹ Interview with Bill and Mavis S., 10/12/96, t 1, s 1, 1.0

³⁰ Note, this feature is not recorded as a Staffordshire or West Midlands feature in either the EDD or SED. (Upton, Clive, Parry, D, and Widdowson, J.D.A., *Survey of English Dialects: The Dictionary and Grammar*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 212 -213).

³¹ Interview with Anne W., Joy B., Barbara M., and Sheila B., 8/3/99, t 1, s 1, 34.16

substantiate their claims that there is a dialect boundary separating their speech from that of the surrounding area. The example below highlights vowel sounds as local regional markers. The Royston speakers' shorter vowel sounds are considered more refined among Royston miners, and there is much dialect lore that acts to distance them from the broader Barnsley speakers:

Barry B: "I think Barnsley's one on its own though, you get like North Notts or Nottingham, don't you, where it's all drawl.

AC: Royston shares a bit I think wi' Barnsley doesn't it sometimes?

BB: It does a bit yeah. I mean I worked wi' a lot o' people from Birdwell, Waaard [wa:d] Green as they call it

Sandra B: Yeah Ward Green

BB: You know not Ward Green, Waaard [wa:d] Green, an' Worsbrough and places like that, rough as bear's arses to listen to 'em talk. I mean I used to talk a lot better than I do now because I went to school in Wakefield me. I mean I wa' brought up in Wakefield kind o' thing, you know schooling I'm talkin' abaht, and then my accent got worse and worse from workin' dahn t' pit.

SB: Definitely.

AC: Mixin'?

SB: Mixin', unbelievably so.

AC: Definitely what?

SB: It got worse.

BB: Oh I it got a lot worse. It went downhill...

...*BB:* Yeah it is yeah, mean like a say that kid they called him Michael Ward his name but if he answered phone at t' pit it wa' always 'Mick Waaard', he used to call himself 'Mick Waaard' not Ward or Michael Ward it wa' al'a's 'Mick Waaard', 'who's that?' 'Mick Waaard'.

SB: Your own name (*all of us laughing*).

BB: They used to call 'em, Warts, that's what they called 'em from Barnsley, cos, we used to call 'em, Royston, other end o' Barnsley team³² Warts because that's ah they used to say it they used to say 'waaart' not 'wart' they used to say 'waaart' and so we used to call em 'waaarts', that's a nickname for you.

AC: No it's true.

BB: They called a roadway darn t' pit a headin' h-e-a-d-i-n-g headin' and they used to call it hee-erd-in, hee-erd-in which wa' twice as long to say as proper name like, they used to call it hee-erd-in. No I mean I think a bit rubbed off on me like, well it's got to do an' it like, talkin' to 'em every-day. Yet Wakefield's more softer i'n'it and towards Leeds and that way.

AC: No it's different i'n't it, it is different I wa' just interested to see, and here then suppose as you go to Kirby similar to here?

³² 'Barnsley team' here is used to mean 'Barnsley people', in other words the miners with 'Barnsley accents' who live outside of Royston.

BB: Yeah.

AC: And to Grimey maybe different?

BB: I mean Grimey, you might as, you can class them wi' Barnsley team can't you? Grimey, Cudworth and Barnsley I think."³³

The idea of a local dialect hierarchy is clearly evident in this extract where we receive a qualitative assessment of local speech. The speaker starts by explaining that he attended school in Wakefield. He then blames some features of his own dialect on working underground with broad Barnsley speakers, whereupon his own speech 'got worse'. There is a sense here in which speakers from other regional speech communities are placed on a linguistic continuum and judged in relation to one's own speech community. Sometimes, people are labelled publicly, as in this particular instance by the nickname 'Waaarts' [wa:tɪs]. This underlines the fact that, among this particular group of miners, regional identity is perceived as enlivened by a visible and important linguistic difference. In fact, when questioned, it was evident that many Royston speakers, female as well as male, perceived their own dialect as 'posh' compared with the speech of people living in neighbouring communities. Two female speakers voice their opinions in the extract below, this time comparing Royston speech with Havercroft, which is one mile to the north east, and with Barnsley, five miles to the south west of Barnsley:

Joy C: "...When a first come here they used to think 'where do you come' an' I talked you know....

Sandra B: Posh.

JC: Yeah, they used to think I talked 'posh' (*exaggerated tone*), you know?

AC: Compared to here?

JC: Compared to here. Like I'd say, would you like a cup o' tea? An' it wa', they'd say it completely different – coffee, a lot of words and I dunt think....

AC: Can you think o' any words an how they'd say it here?

SB: Well....

JC: Let me think

AC: Cos it's probably nearer to Hemsworth?

JC: Like 'there' even 'there' to say 'there'[ðɛə].

SB: You need Barry. He's a right good ear for dialects. I don't wanna bull him up like, but he's a right good ear for er dialects an' things an' when we were first married he used to pull my leg somethin' terrible, 'cos he used to say that I said

³³ Interview with Sandra B. and Barry B., and Joy B., 8/3/99, t 2, s 1, 41.45.

'case' [kɛɪs] and I'd been to the 'ace'³⁴ [ɛɪs] and here (*Havercroft*) they said 'ace' [e:s] and 'case' [kɛ:s].

AC: He's from here then is he?

SB: Yeah and he always used to say oh listen 'o Roystoner.

JC: And a dunt think you ever really lose that.

SB: No, an' I wa' never aware of saying it, but he used to draw this 'ee' out o' me.

AC: Do you think he was similar to Barnsley then?

JC: Ooo I think Barnsley's completely different altogether, different again, I've a sister-in-law who talks, Janet, she's really broad."³⁵

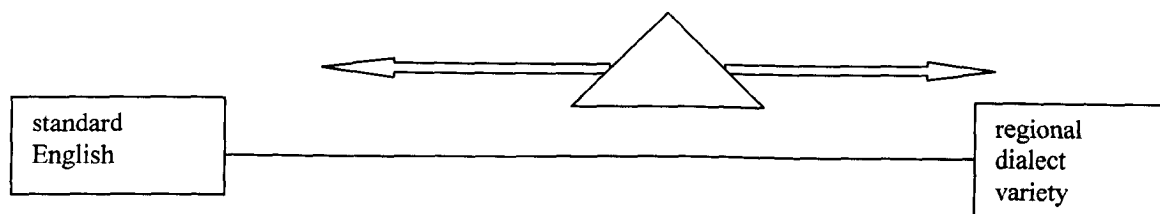
The two women provide qualitative commentary on local pronunciation features in a sophisticated manner. Unsolicited, Sandra reveals that she has a sophisticated understanding of local vowel sounds. In the previous example her husband Barry claims the speech of Havercroft to be less 'rough' than Barnsley, in other words nearer the standard variety. However, Sandra provides evidence that Royston is nearer the standard variety than is Havercroft. Previously Barry ridiculed her for saying [kɛɪs] and [ɛɪs], which are standard pronunciations, whereas he pronounced them as the local variants [e:s] and [kɛ:s]. To summarise the previous two examples then, firstly we have a male speaker in Havercroft claiming his speech is nearer the standard than that of 'Barnsley' speakers, followed by two female speakers, originally from Royston, claiming that their speech is nearer the standard than that of Havercroft speakers.

The model below represents the linguistic continuum along which speakers seem to position their speech in relation to that used by members of neighbouring speech communities.

³⁴ The 'Ace' was a ballroom and then a night club in Royston.

³⁵ Interview with Sandra B. and Barry B., and Joy B., 8/3/99, t 2, s 1, 8.36.

Figure 3:4 Model showing individual positioning relative to perceived speech communities



This model illustrates the fact that individuals maintain ideas about regional speech communities, as realised in our exploration of local dialect lore. Such a model is wholly flexible, with individuals being able to adjust their position depending on the circumstances. We saw earlier how one speaker used his broad dialect in the retelling of a personal experience narrative about working with Bevin boys. The speaker positioned himself as close to the regional variety as possible and portrayed the outsiders as speaking much closer to a standard variety. However, we saw evidence of other speakers employing such a model to distance themselves from the ‘broad’ dialect, claiming their speech to be ‘posh’ or nearer a standard dialect. Although such a model is simplistic and idealistic, it attempts to demonstrate that people regularly use the idea of a language scale with positive and negative gradation.

Language is frequently used as a marker of identity with such positive and negative connotations, as is evident in the examples of dialect lore explored above. Such lore normally celebrates the speaker’s own speech community, reinforcing its boundaries at the expense of other varieties. Although people believe there are big differences between these local varieties, they often provide little information regarding the linguistic features that vary. However, occasionally a speaker has formulated elaborate and coherent commentary on local regional dialect differences as can be seen below:

Paul M: “The’ dunt talk like we do. The’ wunt dream o’ (it), although people in Royston are not, are not really a broad Barnsley accent are the’? When you think

abaht it you couldn't compare us to say Dod'o'th could you? You know like fuckin' hell when the Dod'o'th people talk sometimes you 'ave to slow 'em dahn, dunt you? An' that, when the' really run off on one an' that, on abaht the 'cups o'tay' an' 'the stooens' an what the've 'throoen' an' but like Royston people, this is what I think anyway, I think Royston people talk nicest aht o' all Barnsley villages misen, cos we dunt, we dunt seem to kick-arse aht o' it do we? We that, like we call a 'stone' a 'stone' dunt we? There i'n't many Royston people you'll hear say 'stooen' or like you wunt say a 'cup o' tay', you'd say 'a cup o' tea' wunt yeh. But, but there is that Barnsley, that Barnsley twang to us because even where I work people say I talk like a fuckin' caveman an' things like that you know, because I still say 'thee' an like, like, like that's the part o' it we've got in'it like? 'What the fuck tha doin'?' an' that an' like it's thy instinct to just say it an' that and we get, I get telled I'm a caveman for talkin' like that so I love it when when nah an' again -somebody, a drop on somebody, say from Athersley...''³⁶

This speaker acknowledges that the dialect of Royston and Barnsley overlaps, citing the personal pronouns 'thee' and 'tha' as being a feature that the dialects share. He also provides specific examples of vowel sounds that he believes differ in the two speech communities. He claims Barnsley speakers pronounce 'tea' [tɛi] and 'stones' [stʊənz], whereas Royston speakers would say [ti:] and [stəʊnz]. Importantly, it is the vowel sound within words such as 'stone' which has been part of much dialect lore discussed earlier here, but which revolved around the pronunciation of the word 'home'. However, this particular speaker believes that Royston dialect speakers pronounce 'stones' as in standard English [stəʊnz], whereas in the main data collected and analysed here the Royston pronunciation was in fact [stɒnz]. It is significant that it is this vowel sound that is chosen as an emblem of a separate speech community. However, although he is convinced that separate speech communities exist his own speech is full of lexical, phonetical and grammatical features that we identified earlier in the chapter as distinctive not only for Royston dialect speakers but Barnsley speakers too. For example, he uses the lexis ' 'cos' for 'because', the possessive pronoun 'thy', and the personal pronoun 'misen'. His speech is also full of local vowel features identified in the earlier discussion on dialect variation as being central to both the Barnsley and Royston dialects. These include the long vowel /a:/ in local pronunciations of the words 'about', 'out', 'our' and 'now', as well as the short vowel /ʊ/ in the local pronunciation of 'won't' and 'don't'. He also pronounces the name of

³⁶ Interview with Paul M., 27/1/99, t 1, s 2, 25.58,

the village of ‘Dodworth’ as [ˈdɒdɔð] which is precisely how Barnsley speakers pronounce it. There is clearly a mismatch between the speaker’s idea of locally distinct speech communities and the reality of his own speech as analysed here. His own speech includes many of the phonetic features we have found to be core features of the Barnsley dialect. Although his commentary may be elaborate and coherent it is not entirely accurate when compared with the results of the earlier phonological investigation as summarised above. However, he projects his identity as being affiliated to the geographical locality of Royston by emphasising specific symbolic dialect features. To his credit he does acknowledge a considerable amount of dialect overlap between local speech communities, but there are many lexical and phonological features that he also ignores. His commentary also includes vital information on the recurring theme of local dialect hierarchies. He is frequently reminded of his broad accent by negative comment from outsiders, and yet still he perceives Royston’s dialect, including his own, as the ‘nicest’ of all the Barnsley villages. The speaker is relieved when, in a work context, he meets someone from an area known for its broad accent, such as Athersley, as he feels it makes his accent sound relatively mild. What is important is this overwhelming desire for speakers to exaggerate their own dialect and claim its independence from neighbouring communities. This enhances feelings of being tied to a distinct regional locality. Ultimately, this is achieved, at least in part, by ignoring the complex reality of individuals being affiliated with a range of overlapping groups and participating in a variety of interactional situations.

Discussion

By examining dialect lore from speakers of Royston and Barnsley it has been possible to gain an insight into local perceptions of regional language and identity. The numerous polished jokes and personal experience narratives dealing centrally with regional dialect issues underline the importance of the topic locally. Frequently, dialect lore appears to function to reinforce a sense of ‘insiderness’. This insiderness operates both on a macro level, for example, in the wider Barnsley area, as exemplified by the narrative recalling conversations with Bevin boys during the 1940s, and also on a smaller scale, distinguishing villages within the Barnsley area, for example Royston. In each case, dialect lore is

operating to reinforce a speaker's sense of regional identity, often in the male and female workspace where people from different parts of the region meet on a frequent basis. Royston speakers' sense of separate linguistic identity is attributed to links with incoming Staffordshire miners. In particular, vowel sounds manifested in high frequency words are believed to be the crucial distinguishing linguistic features. Both male and female speakers believe the Royston dialect to be 'posh' and less 'broad' than that of Barnsley. These emergent themes drawn from the examination of this dialect lore led to the formulation of a linguistic continuum model. The model helps us to understand how speakers position themselves within a community of speakers by comparing themselves favourably with other regional dialects. In some cases they are proud that their speech is broad, especially when in contact with accents deemed nearer the standard English. In other cases speakers distance themselves from broad dialects, claiming their own variety to be 'posh' in comparison with others. Therefore the model is wholly flexible, always allowing the protagonist to be seen in good light.

It is argued here that dialect lore is a vital mechanism by which communities create and maintain the idea of their speech as being part of a distinctive, stable dialect. However, the linguistic data collected and described during the first part of this chapter provides grounds to suggest that such a view is an exaggeration. The reality is that there is actually considerable overlap. In the data collected here only a single vowel sound could be considered a reliable shibboleth and radically separating the two idealized speech communities. However, although few, such features are seized upon and are central to much of the dialect lore which is used symbolically to vouch for the locality's separate identity.

Where considerable variation does exist is between the speech routines of men and women - something totally ignored in the dialect lore. Analysis of male and female pronoun usage provides substantial evidence that Royston's speech community is demarcated along gender lines. Further, it was found that the type of speech event and the perceived audience present during recorded interviews greatly influences the language spoken, which on a linguistic continuum may be closer to or further away from the local vernacular. For example one speaker used the local pronoun varieties, 'thou' and 'thee', not haphazardly but in specific social contexts; the contexts of recounting mining anecdotes, as well as when addressing

the researcher (an ex-miner). Such switching between social dialectal varieties according to the constraints of the speech event, in this instance, is related to the perceived male, socio-occupational peer group. The pronouns 'thou' and 'thee' can be seen to operate locally as markers of covert prestige.

By contrasting local perceptions of regional dialect boundaries with the close linguistic analysis it has been possible to uncover insights into local ways of speaking. What is argued here is that 'dialect lore' exaggerates the core features of a dialect, which serves to bolster the idea of Royston and Barnsley as separate speech communities.

4

Continuity and change in the coalmining sociolect of Barnsley

“Along with farming and inshore fishing, coal-mining seems to me linguistically the most interesting of our industries. But whereas the first two continue on a fairly steady course, more and more pits are closing, and at an ever-increasing rate. At present, mining language is still vigorous and often closely attached to particular areas, and it will be some time before its terms die out altogether from the speech of the older or even younger generation. Nevertheless, the writing is on the wall, and so, in this rapidly changing world, it would well repay the linguist to study coal-mining language while he may still do so.”

Peter Wright, 1972¹

¹ Wright, Peter, “Coal-mining Language: a recent investigation”, in ed. Wakelin, M.F., ed., *Patterns in the Folk Speech of the British Isles*, London, Athlone Press, 1972, p. 49.

Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated how regional accent and distinct lexis function as markers of regional identity. However, even within a particular geographical locality, such as Royston, people can be affiliated to different overlapping social groups, participate in a variety of interactional situations, and therefore end up speaking different varieties even though they share a subset of regional language features.² The language variety focused on specifically in this chapter is the occupational sociolect used principally by local coalminers.³

During the 1980s and early 1990s, all 16 of Barnsley's remaining pits were closed and all the shafts filled in and capped. Most of the colliery winding wheels, or 'headgear', for so long symbols of coalmining's importance locally, have been demolished. Travelling through villages such as Royston, Grimethorpe and Darfield today, one has to look hard for the few physical markers of its industrial past. Even Royston's muckstack, once an enormous blue-black mountain towering on the horizon has now been levelled and covered with grass. In the minds of the local coalminers however, there survives a wealth of local mining terminology.

Although coalmining has been one of the dominant industries economically and culturally in South Yorkshire for over a hundred years, surprisingly few attempts have been made to capture the local coalmining terminology. Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* is an excellent source of mining language from a variety of regions, including the old West Riding of Yorkshire.⁴ More recently Wright, (1972),⁵ and perhaps more significantly Elmer, (1989),⁶ collected a number of local mining terms, using standardised lexical questionnaires, in an attempt to analyse variation of coalmining terminology across different parts of England. However, no

² Wolfram, Walt, "Dialect in Society", in Florian, Coulmas, ed. *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, Massachusetts, Blackwell, 1997, p. 116.

³ Separating the regional and socio-occupational varieties into different chapters for analysis is of course an idealisation, speakers do not consciously differentiate between them during interaction.

⁴ Wright, Joseph, *The English Dialect Dictionary*, vol. 1., London, Henry Frowde, 1898.

⁵ Wright, Peter, *ibid.*

⁶ Elmer, Willy, "A Questionnaire for the Terminology of Coalmining", *The History and Dialects of English: Festschrift for Eduard Kolb*, ed., Fischer, Andreas, Heidelberg, C. Winter, 1989, pp. 245-253.

studies in the Yorkshire coalfield have been undertaken that are as extensive as Ceri George's scholarly dialect investigation of the Rhondda valleys in south Wales.⁷ Both Wright and Elmer focused on the language of the underground coalminer, ignoring the surface worker. This may in part be due to the notion that language of the underground world has more exotic appeal being perceived as older and somehow untainted.

Data collection

The vast majority of entries presented in the glossary here were embedded in the larger genres of joke, anecdote and personal experience narrative that emerged during the course of tape recorded semi-structured interviews conducted during the fieldwork. The fact that words or phrases were collected via free flowing 'naturalistic' speech means that informants used local terms in preference to the possible alternative standardized, textbook variety. Eliciting terminology by a standardized questionnaire makes it easier to compare results across groups but fails to show a word being used in context. The system adopted here ultimately provides a more accurate and valid picture of a language forms' use and meaning. During the final stages of fieldwork additional data was elicited by more direct questioning, also tape recorded, and by participant observation in the communities.

Entries into the glossary were checked against written sources produced by coalminers. Dave Douglass's *A Miner's Life*⁸ and *Pit talk in County Durham*⁹ both contain glossaries. However, the collection *Essays from the Yorkshire Coalfield*¹⁰, edited by McFarlane was a particularly useful document. These essays were written by miners of different ages and who performed different jobs at a variety of local pits. The language is raw, uninhibited and imitates the style of the oral personal-experience

⁷ George, Ceri, "Community and Coal: An investigation of the English-language dialect of the Rhondda valleys, mid Glamorgan", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wales, Cardiff, 1990.

⁸ Douglass, Dave, and Krieger, Joel, *A Miner's Life*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

⁹ Douglass, Dave, *Pit Talk in County Durham: A Glossary of Miner's talk together with Memories of Wardley Colliery. Pit Songs and Piliking*, Oxford, History Workshop Pamphlets, No. 10, 1973.

narrative. The essays provide a larger context in which to understand a word's meaning and, although not used as a source, the collection proved valuable for verifying the words collected here. Ultimately however, the glossary of local mining terms presented in this chapter is more extensive than previous attempts and contains much language not found within McFarlane's collection.

¹⁰ McFarlane, James, ed., *Essays from the Yorkshire Coalfield*, Sheffield, Division of Adult Continuing Education, University of Sheffield, 1979.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

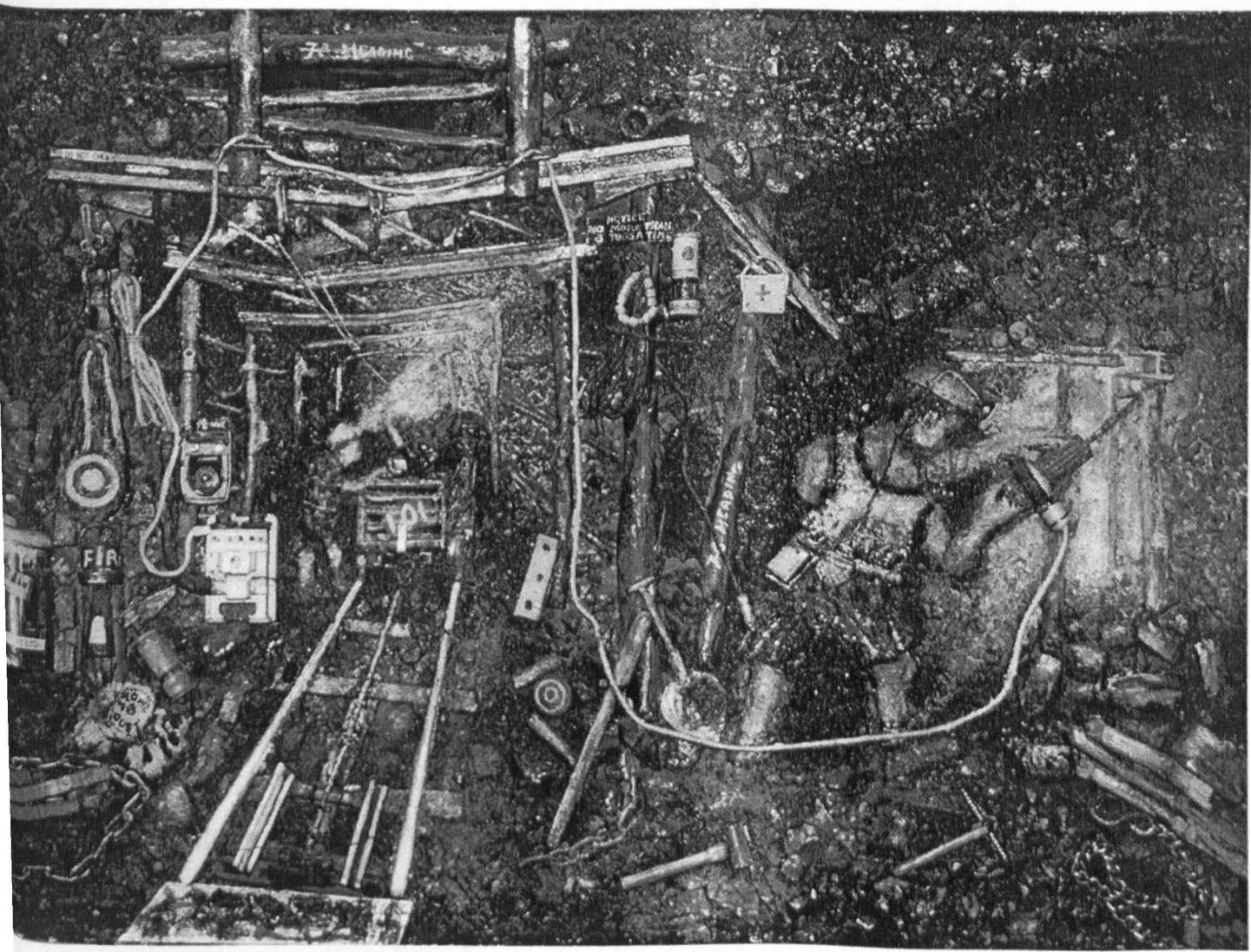


Figure 4

Glossary of Barnsley coalmining terms

advance *v.* To move forward, to develop a *heading* or a *face*.

advance face *n.* A coalface where the maingate and tailgate tunnels are driven as the coal seam is worked; unlike a *retreat face* where the gates are driven first and then the coal is worked out in reverse.

afterdamp *n.* Deadly, poisonous gas that is the result of a methane explosion. See also *choke damp*.

afters *n.* Shift of work that normally starts at 2pm and follows the day shift and precedes the night shift. See also *days* and *nights*.

air doors *n.* Doors that allow entry through partitions that divide a road junction. Such partitions help lead the air current through the mine.

ambulance room *n.* Place on the surface where all non-major accidents are treated.

ambulance-man *n.* Person who works in the ambulance room.

arcin *in v.* The act of making the first cut under a seam of coal on a face or a *heading* with an *undercutting machine* or *tupper*.

arse-hole pit *n.* Colliery where coal output from a number of neighbouring pits, that are linked underground, is transported to the surface. The South side drift at Grimethorpe pit was known as an *arse-hole pit* as it received coal from Houghton Main, Darfield, Deame Valley and Barnsley Main.

bacca *n.* Chewing tobacco.

bacca juice *n.* Saliva created when chewing tobacco.

back catches *n.* Safety devices connected to tubs that aim to prevent them from descending whilst being pulled up inclines.

back chain *n.* Chain connecting the rear *tub* to the haulage rope.

back ripping *n.* The process of resizing the *gate* after the roof or the floor have been adversely affected by pressure, such as *weight on* or *floor-blow*.

BACUM *n.* British Association of Colliery Management.

banjo 1. *n.* Shovel. See also *idiot stick*, *pillocking stick*, *thirty six*.
2. *v.* To banjo is to shovel, e.g. “to banjo coal out”.

banjo coal *v.* To extract coal at a fast rate. For example, “they were banjoing coal out o’ their pit.”

bank 1. *n.* Area on top of the pit immediately around the opening of the shaft. See also *pit bank* and *pit hill*.

2. *n.* An archaic term for an area of the *face* allotted to a group of miners during the *post and stall* system of mining; sometimes called the *benk*.

bank level *n.* Area in a seam around the shaft side.

banksman *n.* Man who operates shaft signals at the pit top. He also carries out searches for *contraband* material and collects the miners’ *checks*.

banickers *n.* Long shorts, formerly worn by underground miners. Also called *pit nicks* or *football knickers*.

bar *n.* Wooden spar used as horizontal roof support. Normally, a section of tree trunk has been cut down the centre to produce two bars; sometimes called *split bar*.

bat *n.* Hard piece of coal or shale: “He got a bat in the eye”.

bath attendant *n.* Man responsible for the changing area and ensuring the showers are cleaned.

baths *n.* Place where miners get changed and showered.

battery *n.* Unit that powers the miner’s *cap lamp* and which is carried on a belt around the waist.

belt *n.* Conveyor belt.

belt filling face *n.* Early mechanised face with a conveyor belt to carry the coal down to the gate. This system replaced *hand filling faces*.

belt man *n.* Miner responsible for repairing and maintaining the *belts* on the surface and underground.

belt riding *n.* Widespread illegal practice of travelling on the coal-carrying conveyor belts to save time during the journey back to the pit bottom, or up a *drift*, normally at the end of a shift.

benk *n.* Section of a coalface allocated to several colliers. See also *bank* and *stall*.

Bevin boys *n. pl.* Men, normally from outside the area, selected by ballot to work temporarily at a coalmine instead of doing conventional military service during World

War II. An eponym derived from Nye Bevin who was the British prime minister at that time.

bible *n.* Piece of wood, 12 to 18 inches long - roughly the shape and size of a Gideon's bible, used above a prop to ensure a tight fit to the roof. See also *lid*, *wedge lid*, *deputy's head*, and *top piece*.

big hitters *n.* Miners who work in *development* or *headings* and normally in charge of a group of workers. See also *butty man*.

black damp *n.* Carbonic acid gas.

Black Friday *n.* Friday immediately preceding a holiday, and believed to be a day when bad accidents may occur. A superstitious belief held mainly by miners over 65 years of age.

blackleg *n.* Miner who crosses picket lines and choose to work during industrial disputes. Strike-breaking miner. See also *scab*.

black the knackers *n.* Common rite of passage for young miners, involving miners daubing the new recruit's genitals with a greased brush.

blast hole *n.* Hole drilled into strata so that explosives can be inserted during *shotfiring*.

blindsides of the belt *n.* Opposite side of the conveyor belt to where people normally walk, and where there is little room between the belt and the side wall; a redundant area.

blowback *n.* Gas escaping from fissures in the coal.

bonus scheme *n.* Financial incentive introduced in the late 1970s and linked to a worker's status and the output of the colliery. A face worker receives 100 percent of the bonus, a haulage worker 65 percent and a surface worker 50 percent.

borer *n.* Man who drills the holes for the shotfiring or to take a geological sample from the strata.

boring *v.* Drilling holes either for shotfiring or to take geological samples from the strata.

boxhole *n.* Cabin at the pit bottom, built from brick and used by the *onsetter* and *deputies*.

brass *n.* Gold-coloured vein running through the coal. See also *cod-balls*.

brattice-cloth *n.* Formerly strong tarred canvas used for controlling the flow of air through a mine at the junction of *roadways*, normally a temporary arrangement. Now, the material used is a heavy-weight polythene. More permanent fixtures that control air flow at junctions underground are known as *airdoors*.

bread and dripping *n.* A favourite food, locally, taken to work for *snap* by many miners.

breaking in 1. *v.* Firing the initial *shots* into the centre of the strata, either when advancing a *heading* or on a coalface.

2. *v.* Another term for *arcing in* when undercutting the coal for the first time during a new cut on a *hand filling* face.

breast plates *n.* 1. Steel plates that form the base of the early mechanised face conveyors. On a modern face the steel *inspection covers* of the *panzer* were sometimes referred to as *breast plates*.

bull chain *n.* Chain that fastens one *mine car*, or *tub*, to another.

bull week *n.* The week, usually before a holiday, when miners work overtime to make more money.

bunker *n.* Place where coal can be stored before being brought out of the mine.

buried *v.* To be covered or struck by falling debris from the roof of a mine or the coalface.

buttock end *n.* End, or start, of the *face* on a *hand filling* face.

button *n.* Push-pull switch that turns a conveyor belt on and off.

button job *n.* Task of controlling a conveyor belt, usually the responsibility of one miner per shift.

button man *n.* Person who controls a conveyor belt, normally at a transfer point.

butty man *n.* Stall man or contractor who has a few men working under him, during the former system of sub-contracting. This man receives the wage and then distributes it to his team.

buzzer *n.* Siren used to signal to miners that they are needed to work that day. This was common during short-time working in the 1930s where miners might only be required to work three shifts a week due to the lack of demand for coal.

cabin *n.* Simple structure built of brick and with wooden tables used by surface workers at *snaptime*.

cable man *n.* Person responsible for the cables that service the shearer on the coalface.

cage *n.* Steel frame in a coal pit, that works between slides in a shaft, and that transports workmen and/or materials down into the pit and up to the surface.

canteen *n.* Workers' cafeteria on the surface, frequented by the surface workers as well as some underground miners before their shift.

Ceag lamps *n.* Early battery-powered lamps, named so because they were made by the company Ceag, ['si:ag lamps].

centregate *n.* The central tunnel leading from a *hand filling* face and down which the coal is carried by conveyors towards the shaft. Sometimes referred to as the *maingate*.

chair *n.* Steel lift fixed to a rope that transports men or materials up and down the mines' shaft.

chapel man *n.* General term for a religious miner.

chargehand *n.* Miner in charge of a group of face workers. See also *chargeman*.

chargeman *n.* Miner in charge of a group of face workers. See also *chargehand*.

checks *n.* Small round brass chips with a personalised number used by each miner working underground. One check is handed to the *banksman* before *goin' dahn*, the other is handed in on return to the surface.

checkweighman *n.* Man who checks the weight of the coal at the surface on behalf of the men.

cheese blocks *n.* Wedge-shaped pieces of wood placed in the middle of the haulage track underground, especially at the base of inclines, which function to arrest runaway tubs. A cheese block is normally a foot high at its highest point and about two feet long, with a handle at its rear.

chew *n.* Piece of chewing tobacco.

chock block *n.* Square block of wood, used to support the roof of a coalmine.

chock lump *n.* See *chock block*.

chocks *n.* Hydraulic roof supports.

chock up *v.* Job of building a timber support from *chock blocks* or other materials to secure the roof.

choke damp *n.* Noxious gas resulting from a colliery methane explosion. See also *afterdamp*.

Christmas tub *n.* Money earned from the first tub filled with coal on each shift which is set aside and shared among a *butty man* and his team-mates at Christmas time. Some miners claim this was common during times of *hand got* mining.

clamp *n.* Device used to secure trams to the haulage rope.

clean side *n.* Area of the *baths* where miners leave their clean clothes in lockers before walking through the showers to the *dirty side* at the start of a shift.

cleaning up 1. *n.* Tidying up a work area.

2. *v.* Shovelling coal back onto a conveyor belt after it has spilled off.

cleat *n.* Grain or fibre of the coal in a seam, running in one direction longitudinally.

cleating (the coal) *v.* Driving a pick along the natural lines of weakness to bring coal onto the ground in the *hand-getting* era of coal mining.

clotch *v.* Formerly, miners were paid an agreed amount per tub, but if a tub was badly filled or the coal not properly dressed, it was *clotched*, that is to say, not recognised, not weighed and not paid for.

clotcher *n.* Person who checks tubs on the owner's behalf.

club *n.* To be off work sick, normally for more than a few days: "He has gone on the club". It is possible that this term is an archaism, referring to an earlier era when miners who became incapacitated through illness or injury relied on support from miners' relief funds. Many miners contributed to such funds weekly, prior to the establishment of national social support mechanisms.

coal cards *n.* Every miner is entitled to some *concessionary coal*, details of which are logged on his coal cards.

coal carving *v.* Art of sculpting coal.

coal cutter *n.* Electrical powered machine used to undercut the coal seam on the face. Also known as a *tupper* or *undercutting machine*.

coalman *n.* Person responsible for delivering coal to people's homes, often a private contractor.

coal mate *n.* A coalman's assistant who helps unload the coal sacks at each house.

coal picking *v.* Searching for coal on old *muckstacks*, former mine sites or railway embankments in order to burn at home. Coal picking is especially common during difficult times, such as the 1984-85 strike.

coal prep. *abbr. v.* Short for coal preparation; to clean, sort and grade coal.

coal scratting *v.* Searching for coal on old muckstacks, former mine sites or railway embankments in order to burn at home. See also *coal picking*.

coal wagon *n.* Lorry that delivers coal to people's houses.

cod balls *n.* Deposits of iron pyrites, sometimes found among the coal strata, that can create sparks when hit by the teeth of the high-speed cutting machines, named *shearers*.

collier *n.* Slightly archaic term for a miner, especially one working at the coalface and involved in the extraction of coal. See also *man*.

colliers' crouch *n.* Squatting position miners used to adopt instead of standing when out in the village. Allegedly, they found it more comfortable as their bodies had been conditioned to operating in confined spaces working on low seams.

colliers' Monday *n.* Humorous term used to refer to miners deciding not to work on the first day of the week.

colliers' ham *n.* Rhyming slang for *bread and jam*, a local favourite.

colliery sister *n.* Qualified, female sister nurse, who normally worked in the ambulance room and who attended any serious injuries underground. Also known as the *nurse*.

company man *n.* Someone thought to have an allegiance with the owners, i.e. British Coal, and not the workers.

concessionary coal *n.* Coal that miners claim free or at a reduced rate for use at home. See also *home coal*.

contraband *n.* Material of any sort that could ignite volatile gases underground is illegal to take underground and in particular referring to smoking materials such as matches, lighters, cigarettes.

contractor *n.* Man employed by private companies, not British Coal, who often undertakes development work.

control room *n.* Room on the surface where different parts of the colliery, above and below ground, are monitored.

cops and pickets *n.* Game played by local schoolchildren in the playground during the 1984-85 strike. Essentially, those children from the families of striking-miners would pretend to be pickets and all other children acted as the police. The idea was for the pickets to try and get past the police. Similar to the game of British bull dog.

corn sacks *n.* Bags used to bring the food for the ponies underground.

cornering out *v.* System of cutting out the corner at the end of a coalface during the undercutting process of a *hand filling* longwall face.

COSA *n.* Colliery Officials Staff Area, affiliated to the National Union of Mineworkers. Primarily, a union for white-collar workers, including most surface foremen.

crocodile bars *n.* Steel bars used for supporting the roof of a coalface that have castellated indentations allowing them to sit snugly on *friction bars*.

crown *n.* The central upper section of a three-piece girder or *ring*. The crown sits on two *legs* – refer to diagram, p.152.

cut and blow *n.* Method of extracting coal by undercutting the coal seam and then firing it with explosives. See also *cutting*.

cutter knot *n.* Knot tied to secure the steel cable that the *cutting machine* is fastened to.

cutter nog *n.* Piece of wood placed under the coal once it has been undercut on a *hand filling* face, and which supports it until bored and fired.

cutting *v.* Method of undercutting the coal seam before firing shots to bring it down. Sometimes called *cut and blow* method.

cutting machine *n.* Hydraulic powered machine with a rotating blade used to undercut the coal on the face during the *hand filling* longwall system of coalmining.

day hole *n.* Small passage or vent from a drift or seam close to the surface that goes out to the surface.

day off for t' Queen *n.* Humorous term used when a miner decides to take an unofficial day off.

days *n.* Shift that starts early in the morning, normally at about 6am. See also *nights* and *afters*.

daytaller *n.* Day wage worker, usually employed in repair work underground. Sometimes pronounced [dɛɪklə]. EDD records *daytal* "...a day-labourer, a man who works by the day and not by the piece." and "One who makes preparation for the coal-getter or collier coming in to the coal-face. *w. Yks.* Such work as repairing the roads or keeping the roofs in order at a colliery, distinguished from the roofs in order at a colliery, distinguished from the coal-getters, who work by the piece or per ton."¹¹ See also *day wage*.

day wage *n.* System of payment whereby the miner is paid per day worked. See also *daytaller*.

deployment (board) *n.* An area in the pit bottom which normally has a noticeboard that tells miners without a regular job what work they are expected to undertake.

deputy *n.* Underground supervisor in charge of a *district* of the mine.

deputy's head *n.* A piece of wood, 12 to 18 inches long, which is laid horizontally on a prop that supports the roof of a mine to give it additional firmness. See also *wedge lid*, *bible*, *top piece*, and *lid*.

deputy's stick *n.* One metre high wooden stick carried by all officials of the mine. Although it is often used, in conjunction with a *balloon*, in order to take samples of air from the roof of a mine so that the gas levels can be checked, it functions more as a symbol of authority.

dets *n.* Abbreviation for detonators, electrical charges used to detonate explosives.

development *n.* Work on new projects, such as *headings*, *drifts* or *gates*, often taken on by contract workers.

dinosaur *n.* *Shearer* cutting machine.

¹¹ Wright, EDD, vol. 2, p.37.

dint *v.* Digging up sections of the floor to lower it, or in order to find a more solid floor. see also *dinthead*.

dint and blow *v.* To make an impression in the floor by digging and the use of explosives, in order to lower it and to find a more solid floor. See also *dint* and *dint header*.

dint header *n.* Machine used for removing stone, coal or dirt in order to lower, or *dint*, the floor.

dip side *n.* The lower side of an incline relative to the position of an area, object or person; the area below.

dirty side *n.* Lockers and changing area in the *baths* where work clothes are stored. After a shift, miners leave their dirty clothes here, take a shower and then go to the *clean side* and change into clean clothes.

district *n.* Area of a seam underground for which a deputy is responsible.

dog nails *n.* Nails used to fasten haulage rails to wooden sleepers.

double un *n.* A double shift. Working the afternoon shift followed by the night shift is known as 'doing the *double un*'.

downcast shaft *n.* Shaft that leads fresh air into the mine.

drag *v.* To earn. e.g.: 'I was dragging good money.'

draw in *v.* To bring the hydraulic chocks forward as the coalface advances.

drawing off *v.* Process of removing props or supports from the worked out part of the face and allowing the roof to collapse.

drift *n.* Sloping tunnel, often connecting two seams of a mine or a seam to the surface.

drift mine *n.* Mine entered from a sloping passage or tunnel.

drum *n.* Revolving cylinder which the *rope* moving the *cage*, or *skip*, up and down the shaft is wound around.

dudley *n.* Large, oval-shaped vessel made of tin used by miners to carry drinking water underground. Also, more recently, any large vessel used for carrying drinking water, especially a quart-sized glass or a plastic beer jug.

dust *n.* Fine particles of coal or stone in the air underground, especially on the return airway side of the coalface cutting machine.

dust mask *n.* General term used to describe a variety of devices worn over the face designed to reduce the amount of dust breathed in.

elephants' feet *n.* Steel base plates that are placed under hydraulic props and which attempt to prevent the props sinking into the soft floor. See also *foot pads*.

empty *n.* Empty *tub*, *mine car*, or *wagon*.

endgate *n.* End of a level as far as it has been driven.

endless rope haulage *n.* System of transporting tubs and mine-cars underground by attaching them to a continuous loop of haulage cable.

face (coalface) *n.* Part of the coal seam that is being extracted.

family pit *n.* Colliery with a dense network of kinship ties and where few men are employed from outside the local village.

fast end *n.* End of a coalface

fastening on, fastening off *v.* Attaching tubs onto the haulage rope.

fault *n.* Step up or down in a seam of coal.

fill *v.* To move newly cut coal with a shovel either into a tub or onto a conveyor belt.

fillers *n.* Men who shovel the coal, originally, into tubs, and, later, onto a face conveyor belt.

fire damp *n.* Potentially explosive methane gas given off by coal.

fire *v.* To detonate explosives underground for the purpose of moving rock. See also *relief shot*.

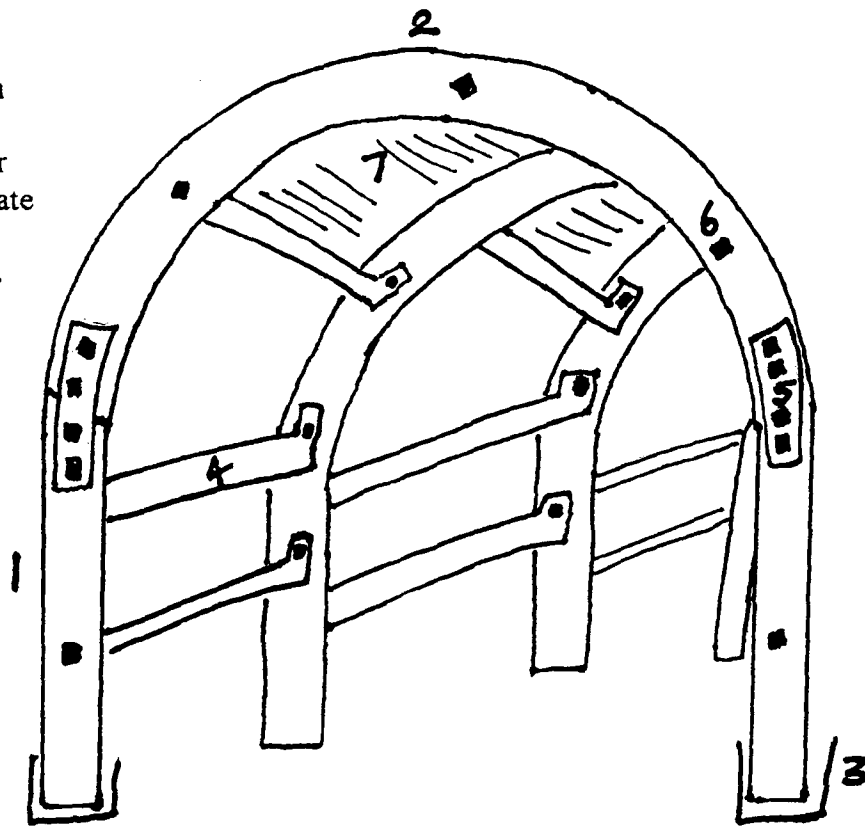
fish plate *n.* Two metal plates with four nuts and bolts used to secure the legs to the *crown* in a three-section steel *ring* girder – refer to diagram, p. 151.

floor blow *n.* Event caused when the ground of a mine is forced up by geological pressure.

4. A three section 'ring' girder used to support the roof of a 'roadway' or 'gate' down a modern coalmine

Key

- 1 legs
- 2 crown
- 3 stilts
- 4 tie-bar
- 5 fishplate
- 6 bolt
- 7 sheets



foot pads *n.* Steel base plates that are placed under hydraulic props and which are intended to prevent the props sinking into the soft floor. See also *elephant's feet*.

football knickers, *n.* Long shorts, formerly worn by underground miners. Also called *pit nicks* or *banickers*.

friction bars *n.* Adjustable, steel roof supports that are set to the height of the roof and then held by steel pins. They were used to support *crocodile bars* and were eventually replaced by the hydraulic *chocks*.

gas *n.* General name given to methane gas found underground.

gate *n.* Tunnel that leads to the face.

gate phone *n.* Underground telephone, often situated at a junction of roadways.

getting the coal in *v.* Moving the coal delivered to the house with a shovel, and sometimes a barrow, into the coal hole; normally either a cellar, a coalshed or a coalbunker.

girders *n.* General term for any steel used as supports underground. See also *rings*.

glassback *n.* An idle worker.

gob *n.* The worked-out part of a coalmine; that part of the mine from which the coal has been removed.

go down *n.* To descend underground. For example 'men like to have a smoke afore the' gu dahn'.

golden mile *n.* Area of a pit, underground or on the surface, kept neat and tidy in case of inspection.

good worker *n.* A hard worker.

grafter *n.* A hard worker.

gum flingers *n.* Miners responsible for shovelling the *gummings* onto the face conveyor belt or into the *gob*.

gumming nog *n.* Small wooden chock used to support the coal as it is undercut, sometimes called a *sprag*.

gumming out *v.* Act of moving the *gummings* off the face.

gummings *n.* Coarse debris of coal, stone or dirt that is produced when undercutting the coalface during the *hand filling* system of coalmining.

gummings rake *n.* Long-handled rake used by some miners for *gummings*.

hand filling *n.* System of long-wall face mining where the coal is undercut by hydraulic-powered cutting machines. The coal is fired and then shovelled by *fillers* onto a conveyor belt which carries it to the *centregate*.

hand got *n.* An early system of mining coal which involved no mechanical machinery or explosives. Normally the coal was cut with picks and hammers and then moved by shovels. Also called the *pillar and stall* system, it was replaced by the *hand filling* system during the 1930s.

hand-picked *adj.* Workers given preferential treatment by being specifically chosen for a task by a senior miner or official. Sometimes a manager would *hand pick* those he considered key workers to accompany him when he transferred to another mine.

haulage *n.* Transport system used to move materials underground, especially materials from the pit bottom to the coalface.

haulage road *n.* Gate or road used primarily for the haulage of materials.

haulage rope *n.* The long steel cable that runs along roadways and which tubs are fastened to in order that they can be transported around the mine. It is powered by a haulage engine and can often be a continuous loop or endless rope haulage.

heading *n.* Dead-end tunnel driven off the main roadway or *gate* that has no through ventilation and that, in turn, has 'stalls' driven off it. E.g. "I worked in t' headings."

heading man *n.* Miner who drives *headings*, *drifts* or *gates*, more recently named a *development worker*.

holing out 1 *v.* Making a hole in the roof to secure a bar which can then be used as a temporary anchor. See also *stamp hole*.

2 *v.* Firing the initial *shots* into the centre of the strata, either when advancing a *heading* or on a coalface. See also *breaking in*.

home coal *n.* Coal that miners claim free or at a reduced rate for use at home. See also *concessionary coal*.

horsehead brackets *n.* Clamps fitted to the girders immediately behind an unstable area of *ripping*. They support temporary girders, or *L bars*, which function to secure the newly exposed roof of a mine until permanent supports are erected.

horsework *n.* Hard work.

hoss man *n.* Man in charge of the ponies and stables underground, also called *hoss keeper* or *stable man*.

hoss keeper *n.* Man in charge of the ponies and stables underground, also called *hoss man* or *stable man*.

idiot stick *n.* Shovel. See also *pillocking stick*, *banjo* and *thirty six*.

inbye *n.* Area underground towards the coalface: 'I was working inbye', meaning on or close to the coalface.

inspection covers *n.* 1. Steel plates that form the base of the modern mechanised face conveyor or *panzer* sometimes referred to as *breast plates*.

intake *n.* Shaft carrying fresh air into the pit. See also *downcast shaft*.

jack catch *n.* Catch working on a pin, which allows a *mine car* or *tub* to pass over it but not back again. It grips the axle of the *mine car*, and holds it until a sufficient number of cars arrive to form a train to send to the pit bottom.

knee pads *n.* Protective pieces of rubber worn over the knees and fastened by two leather straps. Worn primarily by those miners who frequently worked on their knees.

knockerupper *n.* Person formerly employed by miners to go round the community early in the morning to wake up miners employed on the day shift.

L bars *n.* Temporary girders that protrude forwards to protect the newly exposed roof of an advancing roadway or gate. They are held in position by 'horse head brackets'. See also 'runner bars'.

lad *n.* Young miner who worked alongside a more experienced collier or *man* in the *stall* on the pre-mechanised faces.

lake *v.* To take an unofficial day off work.

lamp *n.* Cap lamp worn by all underground miners.

lamp hole *n.* Room where miners collect their lamps before going underground.

lashing on *v.* Fastening *tubs* to the *haulage rope*.

laving gown *n.* Vest.

legs *n.* The two straight sections of a steel girder that support the crown in a three-section ring girder, commonly used to support underground tunnels or *gates*.

levels *n.* The different floors in a mine.

lid *n.* A piece of wood, 12 to 18 inches long, which is laid horizontally on a prop that supports the roof of a mine to give it additional firmness. See also *wedge lid*, *bible*, *top piece*, and *deputy's head*.

listening t' props *v.* Formerly, miners would listen to the wooden supports and be able to detect any untoward weighting which may result in the roof lowering. See also *listening to t' roof*.

listening to t' roof *v.* Miners listen to the roof supports and are able to detect any untoward weighting which may result in the roof lowering. See also *listening t' props*.

Little Staffs *v.* Name given to Royston by those living in the village and surrounding areas, due to the influx of miners who came from Staffordshire in the early twentieth century to work at the local mines.

loading tackle *n.* The job of putting materials and machinery required underground onto *mine cars* and into *tubs*. This task is done on the surface in the *stockyard*.

locker *n.* Metal or wooden rod placed in the spokes of a *mine car* wheel to secure it.

locking up *v.* Securing a *tub* by placing a locker in the wheel, which acts as a brake.

lockers *n. pl.* Two metal compartments that are provided for each miner, one for clean clothes and one for work clothes.

loco *n.* Underground locomotive used to transport men, materials or both.

long-wall cutter *n.* Early electrical machine used to undercut the seam of coal, which made it possible to then *cleat*, or cut, the coal onto the ground in a measured method.

low side 1. *a.* Below.
2. *n.* Low lying, level side.

lump *n.* Large piece of coal.

machine driver *n.* Coalface worker who operates the *shearer* coal cutting machine.

machine got *n.* A coalface where coal is extracted by powered machines, as opposed to *hand got*.

machine man *n.* Coalface worker who operates the coal-cutting machine.

magnito battery *n.* A particular make of battery used to produce an electrical charge which activates the detonators that ignite the explosives used underground.

maingate *n.* Tunnel out of which all coal comes.

maingate ripper *n.* A *ripper* who advances the maingate tunnel.

man *n.* Older, more experienced worker who works with a *lad* on a pre-mechanised coalface.

manager *n.* Person with overall responsibility for both surface and underground operators and personnel.

manhole *n.* Hole cut into side of the roadways every ten yards where a miner can take refuge if the haulage tubs are coming.

manrider *n.* Underground conveyor belt for the transport of workers.

market man *n.* Underground worker in a particular seam but without one specific job, who is normally given a task to perform on a daily or weekly basis.

mats forward *abbr. phr.* Materials forward: the job of carrying materials to the face workers or *rippers*.

mechanisation *n.* The introduction of powered machinery onto the coalface, and underground more generally.

methane drainage *n.* System for draining methane, especially from old workings or waste areas. The methane is piped to the surface and sometimes used as a fuel.

methane house *n.* Building on the surface where methane levels underground are constantly monitored.

militant pit *n.* Colliery notorious for industrial disputes.

militant shift *n.* Group of miners who work on the same shift underground and who are notorious for industrial action.

mine car *n.* High-sided metal cart used to transport materials around. Prior to mechanised conveyor belts, mine cars were used to transport coal to the *pit bottom* and were made partially from wood. See also *tub*.

monkey pole *n.* Rollers that are suspended from the roof supports on the coalface and which support the top of the coal-carrying conveyor belt.

motty *n.* Metal disc displaying a number and fastened to *tubs* being filled with coal so that miners output can be calculated by the *colliery checkweighman* on the surface. Also called *motty check*. See also *motty numbers*.

motty check *n.* Metal disc displaying a number and fastened to *tubs* being filled with coal so that miners output can be calculated by the *colliery checkweighman* on the surface. See also *motty numbers*.

motty number *n.* Number formerly given to a collier and displayed on a *motty check* which is fastened on the *tubs* he fills so that payment could be calculated.

motty shouters *n.* Someone formerly employed by the colliers to identify and shout out the *motty number* on the *tubs* of coal to ensure they were being noted and weighed accurately by the *colliery checkweighman* on the surface.

mottying *v.* The heinous crime of switching *motty numbers* on tubs so that one miner benefits from another's tubs of coal.

muck *n.* Dirt, especially coal dust: "He come home in his muck".

muck shovels *n.* Large, round shovels used for shifting coal. E.g. "He had hands as big as muck shovels."

muckstack *n.* Mound of waste material deposited on the surface of the mine. See also *stack*.

NACODS *abbr.* National Association of Colliery Deputies, Overmen and Shot firers.

nationalisation *n.* Process whereby in 1947 much of the mining in Britain became state owned under the Clement Atlee Government.

nigger's pillock *n.* Black pudding.

nights *n.* The shift between *afters* and *days*, normally starting at ten pm. The first shift of the week is Monday night/Tuesday morning.

nipgaud *n.* Metal or mesh cover fitted to conveyor belts, haulage engines and other moving machinery as a safety measure to prevent operators' clothing being caught.

nipsy *n.* Game formerly played by Barnsley miners.

nog *n.* Wooden *chock block* widely used to help support the roof, among other things.

note *n.* Note given to men working in wet conditions by the deputy of their district, which entitles them to leave up to one hour early. See also *water note*.

NUM *abbr.* National Union of Mineworkers

nurse *n.* Qualified, female sister nurse, who normally worked in the ambulance room and who attended any serious injuries underground. Also known as the *colliery sister*.

office *n.* The manager's office.

offices *n.* General term, for any office on the surface.

official *n.* Deputy, overman, undermanager or manager.

oil lamp *n.* Brass lamp used to detect methane levels by miners working in *development*, and always carried by officials.

old hand *n.* Term of address for an older, experienced miner.

old workings *n.* Areas of a pit from which all the coal has been extracted.

on bord (face) *adj. phr.* Refers to the *cleat* of the coal on the coalface: on such a face, the miners work the coal at right-angles to the grain, or *cleat*, of the coal, which can be advantageous if the coal is flaky and loose. Compare *on end*.

on end (face) *adj. phr.* Refers to the *cleat* of the coal on the coalface: on such a face, the miners work the coal parallel to the grain, or *cleat*, of the coal. Compare *on bord*; sometimes a face can be half *on bord* and half *on end*; in other words, at an angle of forty-five degrees to the *cleat*, or grain, of the coal.

one RB, one right bastard *n.* Shovel.

onsetter *n.* Person who operates the shaft signals either at the pit bottom or at the shaft side of any other seam.

opencast *n.* Method of mining in which coal is extracted at or from a level near the surface, rather than from shafts.

outbye *n.* Area underground away from the coalface, heading towards the pit bottom.

overman *n.* Official, above a deputy but below the undermanager, who is in charge of part of the mine, often a seam.

overtime ban *n.* Form of protest involving the workers' union refusing to allow any overtime to be worked.

pack *n.* Wall of material and debris used to support the waste side of a tunnel.

packing *v.* Building walls out of waste material and debris to support the roof of a mine as the face advances or retreats, and to form a roadway for air. Packing is normally followed by *drawing off*.

paddy *n.* Underground train used to transport men and/or materials.

paddy driver *n.* Driver of an underground train.

pads *n.* Kneepads worn to protect the knees when crawling or working in confined spaces, such as the coalface.

panzer *n.* Heavyweight steel and chain conveyor belt that transports coal cut on the face down to the gate conveyor.

panzer creep *n.* The movement of the panzer on the coalface as a result of nearby machines, such as hydraulic chocks, or pressure from the strata.

papers *n.* Certification for specific duties, e.g. haulage, deputy etc.

parish *n.* Relief fund set up by working miners, prior to adequate compensation by the coalmine employers, for those suffering directly or indirectly as a result of an accident or death at work.

pass-by *n.* Section of double track with points where *tubs* may pass.

peggy *n.* Type of pick used by *hand got* coalminers.

pick, hammer and shovel days *n.* Terms used to refer to coalmining prior to mechanisation, the pick, hammer and shovel being the main tools of a coal getter.

pickle fork *n.* Three-pronged metal device fitted to the rear of a line of *tubs* and which acts as a brake should the tubs slide backwards whilst travelling up an incline.

pigshead *n.* Hydraulically powered hand-held machine used to drill holes underground. Different drill bits and tips can be used to drill a variety of holes, for example to bore holes for shotfiring or to stabilise the roof or side walls of a face or roadway with wooden or steel supports. See also *spinner*.

pil lad *n.* A young miner who makes the clay that packs behind explosives in the shot hole used by a deputy or shot firer.

pillocking stick *n.* Shovel. See also *idiot stick*, *banjo* and *thirty six*.

pillar *n.* Solid area of coal left to support the roof of a mine, especially during *pillar and stall* methods of mining. See also *post*.

pils 1. *n.* The explosives used underground to blast rock or coal, sometimes called *shots*. 2. *n.* Mixture of clay and water used to block the entrance to the bored hole containing explosives, during the shotfiring operation.

pit bank *n.* Area on the surface immediately around the shaft side. See also *bank* and *pit hill*.

pit bottom *n.* Area immediately around the bottom of the shaft underground, where men and/or materials are loaded and unloaded from the cage.

pit-bottom work *n.* Work undertaken in the pit bottom area.

pit bus *n.* Bus that takes workers to and from the mine. See also *pit paddy*.

pit hill *n.* Area on top of the pit immediately around the opening of the shaft. See also *bank* and *pit bank*.

pit knicks *n.* Long shorts, formerly worn by miners. Sometimes called *banickers*, or *football knickers*.

pit meat *n.* Bread and jam. See also *collier's ham*.

pit muck *n.* Dirt.

pit paddy *n.* Bus that takes workers to and from the mine. See also *pit bus*.

pit ponies *n. pl.* Horses used underground to transport materials to the coalface and to carry coal to the pit bottom. See also *ponies*.

pit prop *n.* Vertical roof support, made of wood. See also *props*.

pit rags *n.* Clothes worn at the mine.

pit talk 1. *n.* Swearing, foul language.
2. *n.* Talk whose topic is centred around mining.

pitch and toss *n.* Popular form of gambling on payday among miners, involving tossing a coin and guessing which side would land face up.

pit top *n.* General term for the surface of a mine.

plucking *v.* Removing loose debris from the roof and side walls of a newly fired *rip*, using a pick or a long steel bar.

pneumo claim *n.* Attempt to get compensation for suffering lung disease, (pneumoconiosis), due to breathing in coal dust whilst working underground.

ponies *n. pl.* Horses used underground to transport materials to the coalface and to carry coal to the pit bottom. See also *pit pony*.

pony driving *v.* Delivering materials underground using *tubs* pulled by a pony.

pony feed *n.* Food given to the *pit ponies*.

pony lad *n.* Young miner in charge of delivering the *tubs* carrying materials to various parts of the mine, pulled by pit ponies.

pony man *n.* Man in charge of the general welfare of the ponies and the stables, normally situated near the pit bottom.

post *n.* Solid area of coal left to support the roof of a mine, especially during post and stall methods of mining. See also *pillar*.

post and stall *n.* Method of mining whereby large pillars are left and coal excavated between them. See also *pillar and stall*.

powder *n.* Explosives.

powder bags *n.* Hard cased bags used for the safe carriage of explosives from the surface to the place required underground.

props *n.* Vertical supports for the roof of a mine, originally made from wood cut two and a half to three inches shorter than the thickness of the seam of coal, and set upright underneath a *bar*. See also 'pit prop' and 'bar'. Nowadays, a *prop* is normally made of steel, and its height is adjustable via a hydraulic pressured system.

pump *n.* Machine used underground to move water from one place to another, often into the *sump*.

rag up *v.* To stop work, normally as a form of protest.

ramming over *v.* To move the hydraulic chocks forward on the coalface, normally using a hydraulic prop.

rap v. To signal; as in, to “rap the haulage engine driver,” or “rap the banksman”.

red ragger n. Someone frequently involved in disputes with the management, normally having socialist political motives.

regular job n. A clear role with definite tasks to perform; for example a *machine man* was someone with a regular job, as opposed to a *market man*.

regular shift n. Shift a particular worker always does, for example regular days.

relief shot n. Illegal practice whereby a shot that fails to be detonated during a firing underground is put into a subsequent explosion to try to exterminate it. See also *fire*.

retreat face n. System of mining coal which involves driving the *gates* first and then extracting coal in reverse. Compare with *advance face*.

rings 1. n. Circular spout or crib in the shaft of the pit used to collect the waste water.
2. Three-section steel girders that support the roof of a gate or tunnel in a coalmine. See also *legs* and *crown*.

rip n. Short for *ripping*. For example, “he’s working up in t’ rip.”

ripper n. Man whose job it is to advance the roadways at either end of the coalface. This includes bringing down material in the roof after *firing* and then setting the *rings*. Normally, there is one team of three in the *tailgate ripping* and another in the maingate.

ripping n. Material brought down and removed in order to advance the roadway.

ripping lip n. Unstable roof of a newly shotfired roadway that awaits the supports of *sheets* and *rings*.

rise side *n.* Upper part of an incline relative to the position of an area, object or person; the area above. See also *dip side*.

road *n.* General term for passageways underground.

road ligger *v.* Laying rails and sleepers for a *tub* to travel along a roadway.

roadway *n.* General name for a tunnel or passage underground. See also *gate*.

roof *n.* Ceiling of a passage underground.

roof fall *n.* The collapse of the ceiling in a roadway or on the coalface.

rope *n.* The steel cable which is used to move the *cage* or *skip* up and down the *shaft*.

runaway *n.* *Tub* or *mine car* that has become disconnected from the other linked tubs on an incline or the flat, and is out of control.

runner bars *n.* Temporary girders that protrude forwards to protect the newly exposed roof of an advancing *roadway* or *gate*. They are held in position by *horsehead brackets*. See also *L bars*.

salvage *n.* Job of retrieving machinery, supports and materials in worked out areas of the mine. Normally, there is a salvage team at each pit that undertakes such work.

scab *n.* Someone who returns to work during a strike. See also *blackleg*.

scotch 1. *n.* Wedge-shaped piece of wood placed just in front of the wheels of a *tub* to reduce its speed or stop it completely, or to secure stationary *tubs*.

2. v. To stop a *tub* from moving. To wedge firmly using a *scotch*.

screens *n.* Place formerly used on the surface to wash, sort and grade coal. They were noisy, dusty places, and often operated by the newly recruited miners and older miners. They were eventually replaced with sophisticated *coal preparation* plants.

seam *n.* Layer of coal in the underground strata. A mine may have people working in several horizontal seams of coal.

self rescuer *n.* Device worn on the waist belt of all miners that turns carbon monoxide into breathable amounts of carbon dioxide.

shaft *n.* The deep hole into the ground down which the cage travels.

shaftmen *n. pl.* People who undertake inspections and maintenance of a colliery's shafts.

shallow cut *n.* Irregular cut, normally used to maintain a level horizon along the length of the face.

sharing up *v.* Distributing the week's earnings between a *butty man* and his fellow contractors, normally done in a pub.

shear *n.* Unit of measurement for a complete cut of the coalface in one direction by the *shearer*.

shearer *n.* Modern machine designed to cut strips of coal as it moves horizontally along a coalface. See also *dinosaur*.

shearer pushing *v.* Cynical term referring to *deputies* or other officials trying to increase production by pestering the miners but not actually doing any visible work themselves.

shearing *v.* Cutting coal with a *shearer* machine.

shift *n.* A standard shift underground is seven hours, fifteen minutes, and on the surface it is eight hours. See also *days*, *afters* and *nights*.

shots *n. pl.* The detonaters used to fire explosives underground.

shotfiring *v.* Using explosives underground to blast rock or coal out of the way.

shotfirer *n.* Man legally certificated to detonate explosives underground.

shovel *n.* The ubiquitous tool used all over the mine. The shovel head has a large surface area, a round profile and is relatively light. See also *idiot stick*, *pillocking stick* and *thirty six*.

shoving down *v.* Pushing *tubs* of supplies from the *stockyard* down to the *shaft* side and then onto the 'cage'.

slabbing up *v.* Building a *chock* to support the roof.

slack *n.* Small piece of coal or dust. See also *sleck*.

sleck *n.* Small piece of coal. See also *slack*.

slit *n.* Temporary *wind-gate* maintaining airflow in a coal mine. Sometimes referred to as a *bottom slit* or a *top slit*.

sludge wagon *n.* *Tub* used occasionally to transport mud out of the mine.

Smallman clip *n.* Type of *clamp* used for securing *tubs* to the *haulage rope*.

snap *n.* Packed lunch, normally a couple of sandwiches. The filling is frequently jam or dripping.

snaptime *n.* Official twenty-minute break when coal production ceases and miners eat their sandwiches. A relatively new phenomenon, post-1960s.

snatch out *v.* The action of the chain connecting *tubs* to the *haulage rope* suddenly jerking tight when travel commences.

snuff *n.* Finely powdered tobacco for sniffing up the nose; extremely popular among underground workers.

sod cutting day *n.* Celebration of the first piece of earth cut when establishing a new colliery.

soup kitchens *n. pl.* Temporary eating places established during strikes offering free food to miners and their families.

spinner *n.* Hydraulically powered, hand-held machine used to drill holes underground. Different drill bits and tips can be used to drill a variety of holes, for example to bore holes for *shotfiring* or to stabilise the roof or side walls of a *face* or *roadway* with supports. See also *pigshead*.

split bars *n.* Wooden spar used as horizontal roof support. Normally, a section of tree trunk has been cut down the centre to produce two *bars*.

sprag 1. *n.* Small wooden chock used to support the coal as it is undercut, sometimes called a *gumming nog*.

2. *v.* To support or prop up something, normally with a piece of timber.

sprays *n. pl.* High-powered water jets on the disc of a shearer that suppress dust.

squeezers *n. pl.* Haulage safety devices comprising wooden bars that are set apart by less than the width of a *tub* and placed on the haulage tracks, preventing the passing of uncontrolled ‘tubs’. They are opened and closed either manually or by hydraulic power, and are normally positioned immediately next to the *shaft side*.

stable hole *n.* The corner of a coalface where the *shearer* can be moved forward. On *hand filling* faces, this was the place where the undercutting machine was made secure or stable.

stable man *n.* Man in charge of the ponies and the stables in the *pit bottom*, see also *hoss keeper* and *hoss man*.

stables *n. pl.* Underground accommodation for the horses, normally positioned in the *pit bottom*.

stabling out *n.* Creating a space at the end of the coalface where the *machine* can be moved forward ready for the next cut of coal.

stack *n.* Mound of waste material deposited on the surface of the mine. See also *muckstack*.

stall *n.* Formerly, the area of coal designated to *a man and a lad* to work. Stalls are driven off one heading.

stamp hole *n.* Small hole made with a pick for the insertion of a wedge in a bed of coal or stone.

stapple shaft *n.* Name given to a shaft that does not reach all the way to the surface.

steel rams *n.* Powerful, hydraulic steel rods used to move heavy objects, especially in confined spaces such as the coalface.

stem *n.* Material, normally clay, pushed behind a *shot* before firing, which enhances the explosive force.

stemming *v.* Pushing down the explosives and filling up the drilled *blast hole* with clay prior to shotfiring.

stemming lad 1. *n.* Young man responsible for making the clay pils and for filling the drilled holes with clay.

2. *n.* Man who works with a deputy to assist in the shotfiring process.

stemming rod *n.* Brass, iron or yellow-metal rod used for ramming down the clay in a *blast hole*.

stilts *n.* Extensions that can be added to the *legs* of a three-section *ring girder* if the roof is too high – refer to diagram, p. 152.

stint *n.* Amount of coal cut during a shift, or the work achieved.

stockyard *n.* Place where all materials required above and below ground are stored. Normally positioned close to the shaft.

stonedust *n.* Powdered limestone used on the floors of roadways to prevent coal-dust rising into the air. Also used on *stonedust barriers*.

stonedust barriers *n.* Devices designed to prevent coal-dust explosions.

stood *v.* To be doing nothing, especially during a machine breakdown, e.g. “we were stood.”

strikebreaker *n.* Person who returns to work during a strike, normally brought in from a different location by the owners or management.

sump 1. *n.* Place in a mine to where underground water flows.
2. *n.* Bottom of the pit shaft.

super scab *n.* Someone who returns to work very soon after a strike begins.

swan-necked coal cutting machine *n.* Coal cutting machine used in development work or *headings* during the 1960s and 1970s; sometimes known as a *waffler*.

swing dough *v.* To avoid one’s share of work, to be lazy.

Sylvester *n.* Mechanical pulley device used to move heavy appliances underground or machinery required to be brought under tension. Especially useful in confined spaces. Sometimes called a *turfa*.

tailgate *n.* Tunnel down which materials are delivered to the *face*. The return air often flows down this *gate*.

tailgate ripping *n.* The end of the *tailgate* tunnel that is being advanced by the *rippers*.

tailgate ripper *n.* A *ripper* who advances the *tailgate* tunnel. Considered to be a difficult and dangerous job. See also *maingate ripper*.

tannoy *n.* Underground communication network accessed via regularly positioned radios, separate to the underground telephone system.

tasking *n.* Undertaking the jobs allocated to a miner during a shift.

thirty six *n.* Large shovel. see also *banjo*, *pillocking stick* and *idiot stick*.

three shifts *n.* System of working which ensures that the coalmine is manned for 24 hours Monday to Friday. Most people are required to work a week of each shift and then rotate, e.g., one week of *days*, followed by a week of *afters*, followed by a week of *nights*.

tie-bar *n.* Tubular piece of steel one metre wide used horizontally to link sets of *rings* together.

timber *n.* General term for the different shapes and sizes of wood used for support underground.

timber lad *n.* Person responsible for supporting the roof rather than cutting or transporting the coal.

timbering up *v.* Supporting the roof using timber and making places safe after a roof fall. Timber is used less following the introduction of metal girders.

time office *n.* Place where the amount of time worked by each person is logged, where underground workers collect their *checks* and surface workers *clock on*.

tippler *n.* Machine used underground to hold and turn over *tubs* in order to spill their contents into a bunker before returning them to the tracks. A similar machine might also be found on the surface.

tippler man *n.* A miner responsible for operating the ‘*tippler*’ machine.

tit bolts *n.* Bolts used to secure sections of the armoured face conveyor, or *panzer*, together.

tommier *n.* Bar of iron or steel used as a lever. See also *tommy bar*.

tommy bar *n.* Bar of iron or steel used as a lever. See also *tommier*.

tam o’ shanter *n.* Large, flat cloth cap, formerly worn by miners.

tool box *n.* Secure box on the coalface where men on a particular shift can lock up some of their tools.

top *n.* Surface of the mine, for example “he works on t’ top.”

toppers *n.* Wooden block used above a prop to help it reach the height of the roof. See also *top piece*.

top piece *n.* Wooden block used above a prop to help it reach the height of the roof. See also *toppers*.

tossing schools *n.* Fields where miners used to congregate and gamble by tossing coins, especially on pay day. They were frequently raided by the police.

tram *n.* Low, flat, open truck used underground for carrying timber and steelwork.

trammer 1. *n.* Person responsible for taking materials on trams to the workers at the coalface.

2. *n.* Old term for haulage worker.

trammng *v.* Moving trams, or *tubs*, around the mine using pit ponies, including getting them back onto the tracks if derailed.

transfer *n.* Process of a miner being moved from one colliery to another.

transfer point *n.* Place where one conveyor belt loads coal onto another, either because of an acute change in direction or because a belt has become too long and unmanageable.

tub *n.* High-sided metal cart used to transport materials around. Prior to mechanised conveyor belts, tubs were used to transport coal to the *pit bottom* and were made partially from wood. See also *mine car*.

tub greaser *n.* Device fitted to rails that greases the bearings of *mine cars* and *tubs* each time they pass.

tupper *n.* Electrically powered machine used to *undercut* the coal seam on the face. Also known as an *undercutting machine* or *coal cutter*.

turfa *n.* Mechanical pulley device used to move heavy appliances underground or machinery required to be brought under tension. Especially useful in confined spaces. Sometimes called a *Sylvester*.

undercutting machine *n.* Electrical powered machine used to *undercut* the coal seam on the face. Also known as a *tupper* or *coal cutter*.

undermanager *n.* Person responsible for a particular area of a mine, for example a whole seam. The level below a manager.

union badge *n.* Badge worn on jacket to signal that one is a member of the union.

union man *n.* Miner who is recognised by a workgroup as a spokesman for any negotiations with management.

upcast shaft *n.* Shaft through which used air escapes.

ventilation officer *n.* Engineer responsible for ensuring the mine is properly ventilated.

viewer *n.* Name formerly given to the manager of a colliery.

waffler *n.* [wɒflə¹] Coal cutting machine used in development work or *headings* during the 1960s and 1970s; sometimes known as a *swan-necked coal cutting machine*.

wagon *n.* Railway truck used to take coal from the colliery to, for example, the power station.

warwick *v.* To fasten with ropes or chains.

warwick it up *v.* To secure a load on a *mine car*.

washer *n.* Place on the surface of a mine where the coal is washed and separated from stone and dirt. See also *coal prep.*.

water note *n.* ['watə nout] Note given to men working in wet conditions by the deputy of their district, which entitles them to leave work up to one hour early. See also *note*.

wedge lid *n.* A wedge shaped piece of wood used to tighten a prop to the roof of the mine. Also known as a *wedge*, or *wedgelet*.

wedge 1. *n.* A steel sharp or flat-pointed implement used to split coal.
2. *n.* A wedge shaped piece of wood used to tighten a *prop* to the roof of the mine. See also *wedge lid*.

weight on *n.* Pressure from the strata above, often causing the roof of a roadway to sink. For example "weight comin' on".

winder man *n.* Man operating the cage in the shaft.

windgate *n.* Tunnel in a coalmine that is built to facilitate the desired flow of air and therefore ensuring adequate ventilation of the mine. See also *slit*.

winding gear *n.* System of wheels and cables that raises and lowers the cage.

winding house *n.* Building above the shaft where the *winder man* sits and controls the *cage*, and where the *winding rope* and *drum* are housed.

workings *n.* Area around and on the coalface. See also *inbye*.

workman *n.* Coalface worker.

whirler *n.* Piece of material that miners used to wear from the shin down over clogs to prevent small pieces of coal getting between the sole of the foot and the clog, normally tied on with string.

yardage *n.* Amount of coal cut per shift; a measurement commonly used prior to the introduction of cutting machines.

yardwork *n.* Coal cutting done by the yard, or partly by the yard and partly by the ton.

Summary

Although an in-depth etymological analysis is not the aim of this chapter, it will be useful to consider some of the main influences on the miners' sociolect and to try and draw some tentative conclusions concerning the continuity and change of the local miners' language.

Along with influences from older types of mining, such as tin, copper and lead, the language of coalmining has been influenced by the language of agriculture. Words such as *bull chain*, *bull week* and *breast plate* have their origins in agricultural terminology. This is not surprising as a large proportion of coalminers who began working when the coal industry boomed in the latter half of the 19th Century had come from an agricultural background. Some words, such as *daytaller*, recorded in the EDD as *daytal*, had general use among a number of occupations it seems, not just in farming, and has survived, albeit with a modified meaning, in the miners' terminology to this day. As we would expect, the miners sociolect borrowed and influenced terms from the sociolects of other occupational groups associated with mining. For example, surface workers involved in the preparation and weighing of coal before it goes to the market place borrowed words from railway workers, such as *wagons*, *shunter* and *sidings*.

Despite such overlaps there is a sense in which the miners' occupational jargon helps to maintain a distinct identity. Writing about miners in America, Kent Ryden argues that:

“Miners as a group also share an occupational vocabulary, a set of terms describing their workplace and equipment that outsiders will not understand and that serves to create and reinforce group cohesion.”¹²

An example of how the distinctive language of mining is celebrated among coalminers throughout the Barnsley region is realised through a joke that was heard repeatedly during fieldwork for this study:

¹² Brunvand, Jan, H., *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, New York, Garland, 1996, p. 487.

“Story always goes dunt it, when that bloke from London comes and (says) ‘Can you tell me where t’ Lake district is?’ He says “Tha reight in t’middle on it lad, they’re always lakin’ here.”¹³

The joke revolves around a local meaning of the word ‘lake’, which as well as having a general meaning ‘to play’ has a special sense among coalminers meaning ‘to have a day off work, usually unofficially’. The outsider, ‘the bloke from London’, takes the butt of the joke as he does not understand. Jokes like these contribute to the idea of mining language having group-exclusive usage. In this case the miner’s sociolect maintains a social boundary marking function. In fact local miners pride themselves on their sense of humour and this is reflected in the number of humorous terms for an unofficial day off. As well as ‘laker’, they use the metaphorical phrase ‘a day off for t’ Queen’ and ‘colliers’ Monday’. This latter term is frequently used and infers, tongue in cheek, that taking a certain amount of Mondays as unofficial holidays is so common place in the area that it can be considered a calendar custom.

A relationship between language and group identity does exist to an extent. Many of the mining terms collected here, for example, are regionally distinct. At times this is due to the regional dialect itself in forms such as *lamp hole* for *lamp room*, at others it is the mining term itself which is distinctive, such as *gummings*. In other instances the terms collected might only be used at one particular colliery, in one seam or among just one group of workers. Names for materials and machines underground for example seem to vary enormously. *deputy’s head*, *bible*, *lid*, *wedge lid* and *top piece* were all collected in the Barnsley area as denoting the ‘piece of wood, used above a prop to ensure a tight fit to the roof of the mine’. It is also common for miners in Barnsley to have two names for a tool, machine or particular material, a standard term and a local or folk term. Of particular note is the influence of animal names and animal body parts. According to coalminers spoken to during the fieldwork for this study, the standard term *shearer* can be the *dinosaur*; *foot pads* are often referred to as *elephant’s feet*; and the *spinner* is commonly known as the *pig’s head*.

¹³ Interview with Bill and Mavis S., 10/12/96, tape 1, side 2, 32.0

However, many terms are used throughout a region such as *gob* and *getters*. Other words are used by coalminers throughout Britain or occasionally, as in the case of *panzer*, of German origin, throughout Europe. This evidence suggests that there would be zones of ever decreasing mutual intelligibility among miners as one travelled from the level of local pit, to regional coalfield, to country and then miners throughout Europe and the United States. Of course, in reality, such a situation would probably never arise unless a miner migrated. More important is the fact that the sociolect used among one's peer group is distinctive within the local speech community.

The idea of mining sociolect delimiting a distinct social group is in some respects problematic. A number of informants said that as children they had listened to their fathers or grandfathers recounting experiences of underground life and were therefore exposed to mining terminology before entering the profession themselves. Women interviewed during fieldwork, all of whom were wives and often daughters of local coalminers, also had at least some understanding of mining terminology, presumably through speaking with their families.

Many of the surface workers interviewed had an extensive knowledge of underground terminology, once again due in part to the fact that they were from coalmining families. People who worked on the stockyard were responsible for preparing materials and machines to be sent underground and therefore knew the appropriate terminology. Men who worked in the *coal preparation plant* used some machines that were used underground such as *panzer*, *bunker*, *belt*. Obviously with each particular job performed there would be some words known principally by that group. However, it was common for miners to work in a variety of jobs within the mining industry throughout their careers, both above and below ground and often at a number of different pits. It is for these reasons that I have tried to show how an extreme form of group-exclusivity is difficult to maintain, and how the reality of this social language variety is that it is used by individuals who are associated with coalmining in multifarious and overlapping ways.

The data presented in the glossary here reflects terminology known by individuals of different ages. The oldest coalminer interviewed started work in 1932 and important changes in mining techniques and technology have taken place between that time and the present. Certain terms have remained impressively resilient to change, especially underground place names, whilst terms for new materials and machines that have been introduced have, in some cases been named with existing terms, or in other cases, a new term has entered the local parlance. Broadly speaking, terms associated with the extraction and transportation of coal underground can be categorised into three systems or methods of working; pre-mechanised, semi-mechanised and fully mechanised. As well as changes in the way that coal was extracted and transported, changes also took place elsewhere, such as how the roof of a mine was supported, or how the mine was ventilated. Individual collieries and indeed individual seams and faces within these collieries had their own localised conditions, which to some extent dictated tools, materials and techniques employed. These could also change over time depending on the terrain or strata encountered during the life of a particular coalface.

Having said that, there are a remarkable number of very old mining terms that have survived until the present day, especially underground terms. Many underground terms can be found in the EDD¹⁴ even if their meanings have altered, sometimes slightly, occasionally significantly. Proof that much language used by Barnsley coalminers during the middle of the 19th Century has survived until the present day is evident when comparing data in the glossary presented in this study with data located in transcripts of miners' reports during official enquiries. Following the famous 1886 Oaks Colliery explosion, in Barnsley, where 350 people were killed, such an enquiry took place. Cedric Sellars in his article "Barnsley Dialect in Evidence" provides a modest glossary of some of the underground terms used by informants to the enquiry. Almost half of the terms were still in use underground in the Barnsley area at the time of the recent colliery closures and others were remembered by older informants, such as *motties*. Some terms had undergone modification, for example *goaf* to *gob*, and

¹⁴ Wright, Joseph, *ibid*.

benk to *bank*. Many of the consistencies refer to places underground, such as *box-hole*, *downcast*, *intake*, and *sump*, indicating that although machinery may have changed due to mechanised systems of coal extraction and supporting the roof of the mine, underground places have had no reason to change.

In some cases, new materials that have entered the industry have taken the name from an existing, older term. For example the central arched section of a three section steel girder or *ring*, ubiquitously used to support the roof of a *gate* underground, is known as a *crown*. In non-mining construction industries such a material would be named a ‘reinforced steel girder’ or ‘RSG’. The EDD records *crown* as being a wooden support in the wall of the colliery shaft. It is not unreasonable to assume that the modern steel support took its name from the older underground mining support *crown* as recorded in the EDD.

Discussion

The sociolect described here and used among the people affiliated with coalmining in Royston and neighbouring communities is a trade argot with a long history. It connects people to a local industrial landscape, above and below ground, most of which is now invisible. It provides a vital link with a collective past or local ‘folk history’. Hudson, whose recent compelling book *Coming Back Brokens* charts the rise and fall of a mining community in County Durham, comments that:

“In East Durham, even in Peterlee, you were still called marra as a matter of course. There, the language and ethos of the mines were still inescapable. It was easy to conceive of the world below as an inverse image, dark and hellish, of the world above. But listening to the miners, who had created the upper and lower worlds for me with their words, one often felt that it was the subterranean world that had the greater reality, while the daylight hours which one drank and gambled away were the illusion – carefree but insignificant.”¹⁵

However, Hudson also believes a lot of mining language is disappearing from the region. Almost thirty years ago Peter Wright urged linguists to collect mining language before it vanishes. The tape recordings undertaken during fieldwork in this

study, along with the glossary presented here, are a modest contribution towards this task. It is difficult to tell how much of the coalminer's sociolect will survive the miners themselves in the Barnsley area, as well as other in other former mining areas. There is little evidence of such language being passed on directly to younger generations in the case of Royston as there are no mines open and only two men were reported to continue to work in mines in Pontefract and Selby. This could be investigated by a survey, incorporating interviews, with young people in the locality. Notwithstanding, there exists the possibility that some of this sociolect will be maintained via lexis being embedded in larger units of discourse, for example sayings, leavetakings, greetings, jokes, anecdotes and narratives, which continue to be part of the local talk complex in the post-mining era. As such the mining terms would become socially prestigious. This line of enquiry is investigated in the following chapter.

¹⁵ Hudson, Mark, *Coming Back Brockens: A year in a mining village*, London, Vintage, 1995, p. 238.

5

Linguistic routines as acts of identity

“Dahn t’ pit they’d cut thi throat for a tanner, but in t’ offices they’d do it for nowt”.

Joe Marchant, Wombwell, Barnsley, 1996¹

¹ Interview with Joe Marchant, 12/12/96, tape 1, side 2, 12.5

Introduction

Although narratives had originally been the principal topic for investigation and analysis in this study, as soon as fieldwork began it was realised that a plethora of other language also existed and demanded attention. After the very first meeting with a local miner, I wrote into the fieldwork diary that “such a wealth of language is located somewhere between individual words and the longer narratives.”² Whilst undertaking tape recorded semi-structured interviews therefore, as part of fieldwork to collect aspects of occupational lore from a coalmining community, participants were asked for examples of, or information concerning, the minor verbal genres of ‘sayings’, ‘greetings’, ‘leavetakings’, linguistic ‘taboos’, and ‘ostracization’. When requesting examples of the genres of ‘sayings’, ‘greetings’, ‘leavetakings’ almost exclusively the response was limited, participants answering negatively ‘no, not really’, or ‘I can’t think of any’. However, as the fieldwork progressed I began spending more time undertaking participant observation in the social centres of the community and recorded details of this in the fieldwork diary. Short utterances, that could be considered loosely as sayings, along with greetings and leavetakings, began to emerge as a small but significant aspect of the local talk complex. The discovery of these utterances led me to focus on them more centrally in the last group of recorded interviews. This meant, for example, that if respondents could not think of any sayings on the spot, I could prompt them by asking about their knowledge of a specific saying or leavetaking, thereby verifying the importance of such utterances locally. This helped to distinguish between widespread linguistic routines perceived as common to the group as opposed to those used by a single speaker. These verbal genres are viewed as linguistic markers of social solidarity in this study. Examples of the verbal genres of ‘taboos’ proved comparatively easier to collect during the interviews. Data concerning ‘ostracisation’ and the naming of ‘scabs’ however, was of course much more sensitive and required supplementary data sources. These verbal genres are seen here to operate primarily as linguistic markers of social distance and are dealt with in the second half of this chapter.

² Fwd, section ‘b’, 14/11/96.

Linguistic markers of social solidarity

Greetings

Observing people greeting one another, or greeting me, did not appear in any way unusual at the outset of the fieldwork. As is to be expected, people spoke in the local dialect when greeting each other. For example, 'A'rait Arth?' would receive the reply 'Ah, not bad, cock.' Frequently the men would refer to each other by their respective nicknames, for example, 'Alrait Nerka. Ahr tha goin'?', 'Not bad, Ping'. However, during fieldwork it emerged that greetings were sometimes quickly followed by references to the fact that some coalminers have difficulty breathing because they are suffering from industrial diseases such as pneumoconiosis. The first time this occurred was during one of the early tape recorded interviews in Royston. While interviewing one miner, John C., a second, Dave A., arrived a little later, as arranged. After the initial greeting, I began asking him some general questions concerning his age and where he had been brought up. But John C. intervened, saying, 'let him get his breath.'³ As Dave was in his forties and had only walked for a very short distance from his car parked just outside the house, this comment stuck me as a little peculiar at the time.

The next time this comment came up was at a pub in Grimethorpe during an evening organised by a local community worker, Dave Hunter. The idea was to try to motivate village people to undertake a local oral history project. The following extract is taken from the fieldwork diary and records the arrival of an older miner, probably in his early sixties, at the pub:

"Then came Jacksy, a friend of Maurice's, who was dressed impeccably. The men I sat with commented upon his smartness of dress in an affectionate way as soon as he entered the pub. He came and sat down next to us, his lungs working extra hard. He said that he was suffering with his chest. 'It's bronchitis,' he exhaled, one hand resting on the pub table. When John asked him to take a look at the photos that we had pinned up around the room, he replied: 'Ah a will, but let me get mi breath back first'."⁴

³ Interview with John C., and Dave A., 10/12/96, tape 1, side 1, 7.5

⁴ The 'Red Rum' pub, the White City housing estate, Grimethorpe, 7 pm - 11.30pm, Fwd, section 'a', participant observation, 14/3/97.

Given that industrial lung disease is a common problem for anthracite miners, I now began listening out for such comments believing that they were symbolically significant in some way. The next time it occurred, I was convinced that this was part of a local, occupational speech repertoire. The fieldwork diary records:

“I had been advised to speak to a local man who had been both a miner and then a deputy. He had also taken a spell out of mining once, working as a ‘gas-man’ for the local gasboard. When I arrived, he was down at the bottom of the long, narrow garden. His wife called him up. He left his shed and started to walk up the path but before he reached us he stopped, having covered a distance of perhaps twenty yards. He was noticeably short of breath. ‘It’s dust on my chest,’ he explained.”⁵

These were the first words he said to me and, although the reference to the link between his breathlessness and the dust breathed during his life as a coalminer was more direct than in previous cases, it seemed reasonable to view the comment as part of the same tradition.

This linguistic routine of announcing publicly that one is short of breath or that one has dust on the lungs has no emic label. Even when I became aware of such utterances, collecting sufficient examples from which to draw reliable conclusions was a difficult task for a number of reasons. First, not all coalminers have ‘bad chests’. Secondly, and more importantly, on many occasions I went directly to the homes of miners, where they were already sitting down comfortably and so had no reason to be out of breath. There is always the danger of misconstruing the meaning of such linguistic routines, especially when interpreting from a relatively small data set. However, in this case, additional ethnographic description of the significance of ‘dust on the chest’ as a local topic was collected via tape-recorded interviews. This valuable evidence provides a larger cultural context in which to view the smaller utterances. In the following extract, a retired miner, Harry W., a reserved, quiet man, not known for boasting or for making unsubstantiated claims, talks about pneumoconiosis and the failure of the authorities to acknowledge his disability:

“They used to keep sending me for x-rays and from 1959 when t’ first mobile x-ray come to Monckton, and they, – everybody had to be x-rayed, and they sent for me, I had t’ go to Sheffield, for a’ x-ray for pneumonicosis and when I went they said ‘you

⁵ Clarry and Mary W., Fwd, section ‘b’, interview data, 22/10/98.

ha'n't got pneumonicosis⁶ you've got bronchitis'. Anyway abaht two or three year after it wa' one o' t'pits, oh it wa' when I worked at north Gawber, mobile x-ray come there, and they sent for me to – have – be x-rayed. I went an' got x-rayed, they sent me through again to Sheffield, x-rayed me and telled me a wa' bronchitis. They telled me that four times and then when bronchitis come payable, they sent me to be x-rayed and they said you've got pneumonicosis. This is ahr they twisted it abaht, an I'm twenty percent pneumonicosis, that's if they tell you t' truth abaht that 'cos there's somedays I can hardly breathe. Mindsha they put it dahn, an' all, 'well you're eighty one year owd', you know. They twist everything up and dahn, but from when I started in pit to what it is nah there's been a big difference, but there's mooer dust nah than there's ever been in t' pits, ah it's – I wouldn't like to think I wa' startin' again in pits I wunt no."⁷

It is a fact that as mining technology advanced, many aspects of safety improved, for example, by the ability to support the roof along the coalface with steel hydraulic 'chock' supports. This led to a dramatic decrease in roof collapses. The method of cutting the coal, too, became easier, due to the high speed cutting machines, such as the 'shearer'. However, concomitant with this development was the increase in coaldust, as Harry explained. This fact is reflected once more in the passage below, which is an excerpt from an interview with another retired Royston coalminer, Ted A. Ted had operated the coal cutting machine and shearer on the coalface:

AC: What abaht the dust?

Ted A: There want much you could do abaht that wa' the'?

AC: Some people have said that maybe dust, probably got worse wi' t' big machines (disc shearers).

TA: Oh dust wa' worse yeah, when you've got a shearer wi' gret big disc spinning round just spewing coal onto a panzer it – you used to come t' you couldn't see ya hand in front of you, but 's not a lot you could do abaht it. There were many a time we had upsets abaht it because in the direction that the air wa' goin' them at that end o' the face used to be playing hell up. They used to sort o' rag up, you know what that means? Do you know, go on strike, an' go an' sit aht in the clear airway aht o' the way and let the job stand and there were more arguments than a few abaht that, an' all I can do is say 'well we've got water on, you know we've got water on tryin' to kill the dust'. That's one thing they never managed to kill the dust, and I've got it now, on my lungs.

AC: Have you got...

TA: I'm not gettin' owt for it though, no I've got an x-ray the doctor's shown me. He said 'look that's the dust on your lungs'. That's all the dust I've swallowed in all

⁶ This represents Harry's use of the word, as opposed to the standard spelling 'pneumoconiosis'.

⁷ Interview with Harry W., 5/11/98, t 1, s 1, 9.5.

them years, both as a machine man and a shearer driver and what not, you know. It's a lot o' dust that."⁸

What is evident in both these extracts is the sense of injustice felt by the miners. They portray the authorities as being untrustworthy and failing to deliver any compensation. In this community, when a coal miner requests time to 'get his breath' or when his colleague demands it on his behalf, those present recognise it as a necessary pause, an integral part of the greeting process. The pause functions on a number of different levels. It is of course, in the majority of cases, a genuine physical pause to ease the breathlessness, but it is also a symbolic pause which pays respect to a fellow miner. To utter the words 'let me get mi breath' is to draw attention to one's poor state of health due to industrial disease, but in an acceptable mode, without seeming to demand unnecessary attention. Against a wider cultural context these linguistic routines operate as clear acts of identity, acknowledgements that during their working lives some men have swallowed a lot of dust and importantly most of them are 'not gettin' owt for it'.

Sayings and leavetakings

The importance of 'the pit' as a continuing topic of discussion was constantly underlined in all four areas of Barnsley visited during fieldwork. Dave Hunter, a local community worker and ex-tailgate ripper in Grimethorpe, explained: 'The pit is in the shops, it's in the people, it's everywhere.'⁹ The topic of the pit can be claustrophobic, and even annoying and tedious at times to those never directly involved in the work. Neil S., a former underground electrician at Barnsley Main colliery, spoke of how even now, during the local pub fishing club trips to Whitby, talk always ends up revolving around 'the pit', much to the chagrin of the fishermen who never worked there:

"One o' t' lads is gettin' married and we had his bachelor do in Whitby last week, so there were thirty o' us, most of us from pit and all, all weekend it wa' pit, pit, pit, you know funny stories abaht who did this and who did that, you know."¹⁰

⁸ Interview with Ted A., 17/11/98, t 1, s 1, 18.1.

⁹ Fwd, 30/10/96.

¹⁰ Interview with Neil S., 10/12/1996, tape 1, side 1, 13.35.

In Royston, the idea of miners continuing to talk about the pit was confirmed by a local landlady who could actually pin down the afternoons and evenings of the week in her pub where miners regularly meet and share anecdotes.¹¹ As will become evident later, throughout the fieldwork other women also emerged as important ethnographic sources of data, not only concerning their own direct experiences of living in a coalmining community but as perceptive, reliable informants commenting on male linguistic routines.

Many women themselves have their own sayings to deal with the situation whereby their husbands start to reminisce at length about life at the pit when out socialising. Sheila B. revealed that she normally looks at the other women present and sighs ‘Oh we’re down the pit again’.¹² However, the most varied and most frequently heard sayings used to deal with ongoing mining talk are used by the men. The prevalence of ‘the pit’ as a topic of conversation among miners, both formerly, when the pits were open, and now the pits are all closed, is a great source of amusement for the miners themselves. Perhaps the most well known and widely heard saying is that ‘there’s always been more shears cut in the club than dahn’ t’ pit,’ meaning that local miners are constantly talking about the world of work when they are out socialising in the clubs and pubs and that they are prone to exaggerate their achievements at work.¹³ This humorous saying, and others associated with it and discussed below, are part of a repertoire found throughout Royston and neighbouring communities. Similar sayings are in evidence in mining communities farther afield, and are part of a well established tradition. In the classic 1950s sociological study of a mining community, *Coal is our life*, the authors write:

“The great majority of men who frequent this club spend most of their time at the bar, drinking and talking. The topic which surpasses all others in frequency is work – the difficulties which have been encountered in the course of the day’s shift, the way in which a particular task was accomplished, and so on. A whole series of jokes are based on this fact. It is said that more coal is ‘filled off’ in the clubs than is ever filled off down below and that the men come back exhausted from a hard shift at the club. Among some of the retired miners preoccupation with this subject is extreme. Their

¹¹ Telephone conversation with Mrs Naylor, Fwd, ‘a’, 22/10/98

¹² Interview with Ann W., et al., tape 2, side 1, 4.3.

¹³ A ‘shear’ is one complete strip of coal cut from the coalface by the ‘shearer’. It is used as a measurement in the trade.

rendezvous in one of the rooms of the club is nicknamed ‘The Pick oil (i.e. ‘The Hole’)- (the room where the picks are sharpened, stored, or used).”¹⁴

Further evidence of such humorous sayings being part of the coalminers’ linguistic repertoire is provided via the Durham miner and songwriter Jack Elliot’s folksong *Shovellin back the slates*. This is a north-eastern re-make of a song originally composed by an Irish miner, Ed Foley, in 1892, and which is currently also known as *The celebrated working man*, and *In the bar room*.¹⁵ The song reinforces this theme of miners, reflexively, laughing at themselves for talking so much about their occupation, as the following extract illustrates:

“I can judge a shot of powder to a sixteenth of a grain.
I can fill me eighteen tubs though the water pours like rain.
And if you’d like to see me in the porpendicular vein,
It’s when I’m settin’ timmer in the bar room.

In the bar room, in the bar room, that’s where we congregate,
To drill the holes and fill the coals and shovel back the slate.
And for to do a job of work, I am never late;
That’s provided that we do it in the bar room.

And now me song is ended, perhaps we’ll have another.
Now don’t you fire any shots in here or we will surely smother.
The landlord here would rather draw beer than go to all the bother
To put the ventilators in the bar room.”¹⁶

During interviews, when participants were asked if they knew any sayings, the response was minimal, unless they were prompted. However, during participant observation in the social centres of pubs and clubs, this tradition of joking reflexively about one’s own topic of conversation was found to be alive and well. The theme of most such sayings is connected with the saying ‘there’s more shears cut in t’ club than dahn t’ pit.’ Such utterances are used when miners are waxing lyrical, perhaps about what hard work it

¹⁴ Dennis, Norman, Henriques, F., and Slaughter, C., *Coal is our life: An analysis of a Yorkshire mining community*, 2nd edn., London, Tavistock, 1969, p. 144.

¹⁵ Lloyd, A.L., *Come All Ye Bold Miners - Ballads and songs of the coalfield*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2nd edn., 1978, p.345. Note that the reference to ‘slate’ in the original title means slate found underground, above and below the coal seam, and has nothing to do with slate mining. Also the spelling of the word ‘porpendicular’ is how it appears in this version.

¹⁶ Lloyd, *ibid.*, 1978, p. 90-1.

was at the pit. The comment would either be directed to the immediate group speaking or as an aside to a nearby colleague who is not party to the ongoing conversation, for example the landlord. A specific example of this occurred one particular night in a crowded pub in Grimethorpe, as the fieldwork diary records:

“There was a lot of barracking and jocularly going on and at times it got rowdy, and it became impossible to keep up with the crossfire. As expected, there were comments concerning the atmosphere of the club and the amount of pit talk going on. One man shouted: ‘The’ll be loads of pneumo. claims cos there’s no sprays on.’ This is part of the traditional stock of phrases used by miners today, mocking themselves for still talking about the pit even though it no longer exists.”¹⁷

Although varied in nature, these short linguistic forms are responses to common situations. They may be thought of as “the cliches of speech, the standardized utterances we habitually employ to deal with recurring situations and problems”.¹⁸ Supporting this view is the fact that when informants were prompted and pushed during recorded interviews, they were able to reel off a number of these sayings, for example: “Put sprays on”, “More shears...”.

What appears to be important for the production of these ‘cliches of speech’ is not only the place where they occur but the situation and the audience present. In the main the most likely place for a group of miners to be found talking about ‘the pit’ is in the local pubs and clubs. However, when these people travel outside of their communities, evidence suggests that an appropriate context for such talk can arise. Two women interviewed told of how, during a recent holiday to Spain, two husbands had made frequent use of such utterances. Leaving a bar after a few drinks one miner turned to his mate and said ‘that was a hard stint,’ and the other asked, ‘how much have we got aht today?’¹⁹ These transportable utterances are flexible in their construction, but follow the same general theme of referring metaphorically to coal being extracted, to coal dust being swallowed, and the like. These sayings, are central to local patterned behaviour, which means that a fellow miner can understand the linguistic form and the cultural context and therefore respond appropriately.

When informants were asked, during recorded interviews, about their usual leavetaking routines with fellow miners, the common response was, ‘I’ll sithee in t’

¹⁷ Fwd, Grimethorpe, 14/3/97.

¹⁸ Goodenough, Ward, *Co-operation in Change: An Anthropological Approach to Community Development*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1963.

¹⁹ Interview with Barry B., Sandra B. and Joy B., 9/3/99, tape 1, side 1, 31.5.

morning'²⁰ or 'see you later', with no allusion to the pit. However, it was discovered that the local men have specific leavetaking routines that refer humorously back to their pasts and 'the pit'. Interestingly, it was the female informants who were able to provide examples of such leavetaking routines, and these were then substantiated by some of the men in focussed interviews. A common leavetaking among some underground Royston miners is reported to be 'I'll sithee on t' tailgate.'²¹ This utterance, used in the post-mining era, is of course hypothetical. Most of the pits in the Barnsley area extract coal by making two tunnels or 'gates in a seam of coal which lead to a longwall coalface. One of these is known locally as the 'tailgate' and the other as the 'maingate'. Air enters down the 'maingate', goes along the coalface and then out along the 'tailgate', this means that the air is often much warmer and dustier by the time it reaches the 'tailgate', and it is therefore generally thought of as a more difficult place to work. The 'tailgate' might well have been where the men bidding farewell worked in the past. A statement like this functions on an informational level in the same way as 'goodbye' or 'I'll sithee' but it also speaks unfathomable truths about a shared past, about lives bound together through work, long strikes and the experience of a similar social and economic reality, it is confirmation of a relationship that has been maintained for better or worse. From the same linguistic repertoire other versions of these leavetaking routines recorded include, "What gate are we on?" and "Are we on days in t' morning?"²² Again hypothetical in nature. Perhaps these amusing retorts fill a gap that would be otherwise very painful. Alternatively they may help to hide the fact that without comments such as these the two men might not have much left to talk about.

A recurring theme in these sayings is the black humour, the local coalminer's enduring trait. When everything looks bleak, when all the miners are made redundant, and all the pits closed, still they manage to laugh at themselves and their predicament. This lightheartedness allows them to maintain a feeling of pride in the face of social, economic and political adversity. And as Royce Turner rightly points out, in his recent book *Coal Was Our Life*, 'pride' is enormously important to the mining fraternity:

²⁰ It was also noted that 'sithee' was part of the male regional dialect, women claiming not to use the form and certainly not as a greeting..

²¹ Fwd, 15/11/98.

²² Interview with Anne W. et al., 8/3/99, tape 2, side 1, 2.4.

“One of the most prevalent psychological characteristics of a mining town was pride. You were proud to be a man, you were proud of your strength, you were proud of your culture, you were proud of your village.”²³

As already intimated, most of the greetings, leavetakings and sayings collected during fieldwork and presented here involve mining-specific lexis being used outside of the work environment. However, some sayings used exclusively underground were collected via interviews, and are noteworthy. They commonly use everyday, above ground lexis. One miner, Alan, told of how on his coalface they would call, ‘bring the ships in’ when moving the ‘chocks’, or hydraulic roof supports, forward once the coalface has advanced.²⁴ Another miner, Neil, reported that his colleagues used secret calls over the tannoy systems that the bosses could not understand. In particular, ‘the crows are flying low’ was the call given when some of the men were intending to leave the pit early and illegally ride the coal-carrying conveyor belts towards the shaft bottom to save time and energy.²⁵ The miners would jump onto a fast moving conveyor belt and then lie on their stomachs, getting off and then back on at any junctions. The idea behind the call was to let other underground miners know what was happening so that they could warn them of any bosses in that particular area of the mine. Being caught going out of the pit early was a major offence, as was riding the coal-carrying conveyor belts; therefore there was an enormous risk of being fined or sacked if caught by a boss. However, data collected here suggests that such sayings, used solely in a work context, were the exception; the numerous sayings, greetings and leavetakings collected during fieldwork are used in a variety of contexts above ground and are instrumental in bringing mining-specific language into the wider community.

The use of using mining-specific lexis such as ‘sprays’, ‘shears’, ‘tailgate’ or ‘pneumo claims’, in the streets, pubs and clubs of Royston gives these utterances privileged status. It is an exclusive argot, used only by those qualified to do so, even if it is understood by a marginally wider audience of partners, families and non-mining locals. In this respect, the sayings discussed here can be thought of as ‘esoteric utterances’, meaning those that are only interpreted adequately by insiders with the appropriate background cultural

²³ Turner, Royce, *Coal Was Our Life*, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2000, p. 136.

²⁴ Interview with Alan S., 14/11/96.

²⁵ Interview with Neil S., 10/12/96, tape 1, side 2, 19.5.

knowledge.²⁶ However, many of the utterances described, for example ‘I’ll sithee on t’ tailgate’, are in a sense doubly esoteric as they combine regional dialect with occupational lexis. This raises an important linguistic methodological issue too, for it is difficult for the researcher to recognise and therefore collect the utterances in the first instance, let alone interpret them. As the utterances did not always emerge in the tape recorded semi-structured interviews, but rather in the observed ‘everyday’ contexts of pub and club, there is the problem of background noise or of the researcher being some distance away from the speaker. A good knowledge of the dialect is therefore imperative, as is a familiarity of coalmining lexis. As already noted the researcher is an insider, to a large degree, but nevertheless recognising sayings, such as ‘he’s not worth a chew’ or ‘he’s a waste o’ snap an’ bacca’,²⁷ was sometimes difficult when listening to interactional exchanges in such contexts. I had to capture and retain the immediacy of the language and then record it on a dictaphone or in the fieldwork diary afterwards.

There is limited but reliable evidence to suggest that esoteric utterances in coalmining communities have survived for long periods, being constantly reinvented by each generation of workers. As already mentioned, during the early 1950s whilst collecting data in Featherstone, just seven miles from Royston, for their book ‘*Coal is our life*’, the authors recorded hearing the saying: ‘More coal is filled off in the clubs than is ever filled off down below.’ The saying collected for this study in 1997, ‘More shears cut in the club than dahn t’ pit,’ is essentially the same, with only the modern mechanised method of coal cutting being different.

In other cases, sayings belong less to a recognizable large group than to individuals or a family. Joy B., a miner’s wife, always remembers her mother saying: ‘It was a dear price to pay for a ton of coal.’²⁸ As is the case here, frequently the researcher has no idea about how to interpret such individual, esoteric utterances and is reliant entirely on the informant providing an adequate explanation. Joy B. explained that her mother often used

²⁶ ‘Esoteric utterances’ is a term coined by Small in his analysis of minor verbal genres in a small Newfoundland fishing community; Small, L.G., ‘Traditional Expressions in a Newfoundland Community: Genre change and functional variability’, *Lore and Language*, vol. 2, no. 3 (July, 1975), 15-18.

²⁷ Interview with Ian T., 18/1/99, tape 1, side 2, 5.5. ‘Not worth a chew’ and ‘waste o’ snap and bacca’ are used to mean someone who is considered useless. It is normal protocol to always offer someone a ‘chew’ of tobacco if they ask for it and therefore by saying a person is not worth even this basic gesture then they are considered worthless.

²⁸ Interview with Neil B., Sandra B. and Joy B., 9/3/99, tape 1, side 2, 19.3.

this saying and was referring to the fact that she had remarried a coalminer and was therefore entitled to a free ton of coal every month. However, it was ‘a dear price’ as he was a man who spent much of his leisure time drinking which brought with it the common social problems, such as domestic violence, and this more than cancelled out the value of a ‘free ton of coal’. Sometimes such utterances gleaned from a family member, for example a parent, become part of an individual’s linguistic repertoire. This is the case with Ian T., who makes a concerted effort to try to keep his linguistic heritage alive by using some of his father’s sayings. In particular He will say, ‘it’ll not be a pair o’ plates aht that’ even now in his job as a school teacher, even though it is highly unlikely anyone will successfully interpret it.²⁹ Sayings such as these, which blend regional, occupational and oblique metaphorical referencing, are esoteric in a more complex manner, but they exemplify the different ways in which emblematic language can be maintained by individuals or families as well as by larger social groups such as the local occupational community.

There are numerous examples of mining lexis contained within esoteric utterances that make up the repertoires of the people observed and interviewed during the fieldwork, and although many of the utterances discussed so far are lighthearted in tone, this is not always the case. When giving his opinion of the honour and integrity of underground miners compared with the clerical workers on the surface, Joe M. suddenly looked up and said in a grave voice, ‘Dahn t’ pit they’d cut thi throat for a tanner, but in t’ offices they’d do it for nowt.’³⁰ Another man, Sam E., talking about returning to work as a miner after a spell in a different industry, said, ‘I fetched my pads back aht.,’³¹ meaning that he would be needing his knee pads once again following his decision to go and work underground. This use of figurative language is idiosyncratic, and is part of the individual’s repertoire, but at the same time it is understood by the wider occupational group as well as being part of the wider tradition of group sayings discussed earlier. Once again the audience can interpret these esoteric allusions because they are ‘insiders’.

One evening during the early part of the fieldwork, I went to a pub in Royston with my father. It was an extremely quiet night with less than a dozen people in the tap room and

²⁹ Interview with Ian T., 18/1/99, tape 1, side 2, 4.0. Ian explained that this saying referred to having a pair of steel plates, used to bolt ‘ring girders’ together, lined up neatly before bolting them together.

³⁰ Interview with Joe M., 12/12/96, tape 1, side 2, 12.5.

³¹ Interview with Sam E., 24/9/98, tape 1, side 2, 16.0.

only a couple of people in the best room. The landlord had worked as a miner at Royston Drift Mine before being made redundant in the late 1980s. After we had got our drinks, we went and sat in the best room. Once we had sat down I voiced my concern over the lack of people in the pub these days and, without hesitation, my father replied, ‘ah he’s got top weight on here.’³² Although I understood the intention of the utterance immediately, and recorded it later in the fieldwork diary, the wider significance of this short remark intrigued me for some time. ‘To have the top weight on’ or ‘weight coming on’ is a phrase used underground to describe the pressure exerted by the strata on the roof supports. If made of wood, the roof supports can actually crack and groan audibly under the strain. The metaphor of the landlord being under immense pressure because business was poor, in turn a result of the local pit closures and lack of alternative employment, is easily grasped by a listener possessing adequate cultural background knowledge, (though, presumably, most would not ponder on the significance of the remark for so long). However, the interesting point here is that my father, although coming from two generations of Royston underground miners and having worked on the surface of the mine most of his life, never once set foot underground in a coalmine. ‘Weight coming on’ is clearly an underground phenomenon but in this context of being in a pub where his own son and the landlord, the audience, are both ex-underground coalminers, the utterance appears wholly appropriate and is instantly intelligible. A separate factor that might be related to the use of this utterance by my father is contained in a narrative that he told in an interview the previous year. When asked if there are any stories that stand out, he quickly told one that his stepfather had told to him.

Arthur C: He wa’ a pick an’ shovel man.

AC: Ah long did he do that for?

ArC: Ooh all his life dahn t’ pit.

AC: Yeah.

ArC: His worked in t’ fifteen inch seams. Winter seam fifteen inch.

AC: Yeah, did he have any good stories mi grandad Round?

ArC: He would o’ done wunt he.

AC: But can you remember any?

ArC: He telled mi he worked at, what they call Carlton Long Row. Know where that wa’? An’ he sez he’d never seen anything like it in his life. Face had come on t’

³² Fwd, 10/10/97.

weight – he sez it wa’ on’y time he wa’ terrified dahn t’ pit – an he sez he wa’ absolutely petrified, they didn’t know which way to go he says his never seen anyth..., an’ it wa’ Haighmoor seam, an’ weight come on, on t’ face, an’ they didn’t know whether to gu up face o’ come dahn. An’ he says all face just lowered off in one bumff like that (*gesticulates with hands coming together*).

AC: The whole lot?

ArC: All lot, just one – ‘cos it wa’ that hard rock it wouldn’t brek.

AC: So it wa’ just squashin’ down?

ArC: It just lowered off an’ they just got off in time. he says...

AC: The whole face come down then?

ArC: All the lot from one end t’ other it just lowered off in one.

AC: An’ what would it ‘a’ been propped up wi’ then?

ArC: Wooden props, bricks an’ things like that you know, he said they were binging(*pinging*) and breking, everything went he says they wa’ coits, watches and t’ bloody lot, snaps, all lowered off in one gu....”³³

How much we can read into the connection between this narrative and the inventive utterance in the pub concerning the ‘weight on’ is difficult to ascertain. However, what it underlines is the interconnectedness between verbal genres and, vitally, the importance of having different data sources with which to triangulate linguistic data. On a more general level, this example highlights how people who are not necessarily underground workers themselves may have a clear understanding of that world and a grasp of the lexis because of experiences related to them by friends or family.

One of the difficulties with the presentation and description of these linguistic routines is that they tend to portray a set of people still tied to a way of life that no longer exists. To a certain extent the sayings, greetings and leavetakings discovered among this community of speakers is clear evidence that close social ties still exist. However, one question that needs to be addressed in the present discussion is the extent and significance of mining as a continued topic of conversation in Royston and the neighbouring communities. Although many people remarked that the pit is still an important and regular topic of conversation, a significant number disagreed. The events of the 1980s and 1990s, including a year-long strike and the closure of every colliery in the area, have left a bitter taste in the mouths of many. It is a misconception to believe that miners and their families sit in the local pubs and clubs continuously sharing anecdotes about the pit. As Mary W.

³³ Interview with Arthur C., 10/12/96, t 1, s 1, 6.0.

explained, recent events have ‘kicked the shit aht o’ everybody’. Clearly, people are not indulgently romanticising about the past, because the effect of the industrial meltdown is still affecting their lives in important tangible ways. In addition, the decline of the local economy has meant that many people cannot afford to socialise as much as they did when working at the pit. This decline is reflected in the large number of local shops, pubs and clubs that have closed down over the last ten years.

One informant claimed that although he still meets former work colleagues on a regular basis, when out socialising, they seldom talk about mining related matters:

AC: What abaht now a mean, obviously pit’s shut ... do you still meet wi’ people from t’ pit do you think?

ClarryW: Oh ah, every night o’ wik tha meets somebody a mean if I wen’ aht this afternoon probably up to t’ Pockets I’d probably come into contact with Don.

AC: Wa’ he a deputy as well?

CW: Yeah he wa’ a colleague or I’d probably come into contact wi’ Mick who wa’ – these were all blokes you’ve worked with all your life.

AC: And do you ever talk abaht pit now or not really, or occasionally?

CW: No not, not very often..

MaryW: Well it’s knocked shit aht o’ everybody ha’n’t it, you know, ‘cos if they got aht in t’ afternoon nah there’s nobody there hardly...

CW: I mean we still talk abaht it in disgust...

....

AC: You wunt say that when you gu out to Pockets or something or you wunt really talk abaht old times so much?

CW: No not really unless it – you know sometimes you’d have a laugh as a say you’ve asked me if could think abaht any things I just can’t off hand but sometimes some’dy ’ll come up wi summat ‘can tha remember? An’ then we have a reight good laugh cos we can, you know probably somebody who’d come to work drunk or whatever.’³⁴

Another ex-miner from Darfield believed the pit was no longer a central topic of conversation when asked if he thought the social network of work colleagues had been eroded:

TerryV: Oh it is, it’s certainly eroded. I mean at one time you could go to, well I go to the Longbow for instance up here where Alan goes and one or two more lads – but the topic now no longer is of course the pit which was – invariably cropped up in

³⁴ Interview with Clarry and Mary W., 22/10/98, t 1, s 1, 32.2.

conversation but yeah a lot of the older end have gone and ehr they've gone to different places and they've gone deceased wise you know so ehr there's not the same, it in't the same climate obviously not, it's not the same."³⁵

However, when asked about the continuing tradition of these sayings, one Royston miner confirmed that he still hears them, though less frequently:

AC: ...When a lot o' miners get together they might start talkin' abaht pit an' there's all sorts o' little sayings they have?

Frank C: Well what they used to say when you're aht havin' a drink they used to say, 'they've shifted moorer coal in here tonight,' but down t' pit they don't talk abaht coal down t' pit they talk abaht drinking and what not, and when they're aht drinking they talk abaht fillin' coal.

AC: Is that right yeah?

FC: Ehm it was yes.

AC: Do you hear 'em now a mean do they still - do you hear people talking abaht...

FC: Last time I was talking to someone abaht pit somebody else says 'bloody hell i'n't it bloody dusty in here, they can't bloody move in here, can't see in here for dust,' an', 'they've filled moorer coal in here tonight'... (*laughing*).

AC: So they still say them sort o' things yeah?

FC: Yeah oh they still say them things you know, but you don't get it talked abaht as much now as you used to, it's sort o' fadin' away now you know."³⁶

The paradoxical situation of miners talking of drinking when down the pit and talking about the pit when out drinking is further proof that mining-related sayings, leavetakings and greetings are used in a routine manner in the wider social spheres of pubs, clubs and streets. However, most people agree that the local economic decline means that they can no longer afford to socialise as frequently as they did when in regular employment at the pit. Informants state that the combination of the pit closures and the death of the older miners mean that the topic of the pit and its associated sayings are heard much less today.

Summary

- A central feature of many of these utterances is that they employ coalmining specific lexis.
- Much of this lexis belongs to the underground environment and is associated in particular with the coalface.

³⁵ Interview with Terry V., 10/12/96, t 1, s1, 8.5.

³⁶ Interview with Frank C., 17/11/98, t 1, s 1, 22.1.

- In this way the lexis brings the normally 'hidden space' of the underground world into the wider social arenas of the pub, club and street.
- Many of the utterances are esoteric, requiring an understanding of coalmining lexis and its occupational context, as well as local customs. In fact they are often doubly esoteric as they use regional speech as well as the occupational lexis.
- With some exceptions, many of the sayings, leavetakings and greetings presented here can be considered as routine utterances, that occur when ex-miners meet in the social spheres of pubs, clubs and streets.
- Although women use some sayings related to coalmining, the majority of the utterances collected during the fieldwork belong to the male speech repertoire.
- The utterances dealt with here can be viewed as emblems of occupational identity.
- Humour is an important part of many of the sayings and leavetakings.
- Many sayings are used only by a small number of people, or often by just one individual. Therefore they are personal markers of local and occupational identity, not group identity.
- Local perceptions of the continued importance of the pit as a topic of conversation in the wider social sphere are divided. Some of those people interviewed believe that reminiscing about the pit is a frequent occurrence whilst others believe it is an exceptional one.
- The perception of the 'pit' as a prominent topic in local interaction is divided in part due to different individual experience, including the social network one is part of and the varying degrees of emotional attachment each has to mining. Some men who worked at pits located in neighbouring villages, not the village they reside in, rarely see their former work colleagues. Younger men have found other jobs, or, if unemployed, have less money to spend on socialising. For some older miners interviewed, many of their former work colleagues had died. Certain individuals simply have a greater emotional need to feel part of the socio-occupational group and express this through narratives about past experiences and by using routine linguistic expressions.
- Ethnographic commentary, collected from participants in this study, seems to support the idea that the socio-occupational network has been eroded and that the utterances discussed here are still heard in the community, although they are becoming less

frequent. This is attributed to older miners passing away and the fact that there is less money available generally for socialising.

Discussion

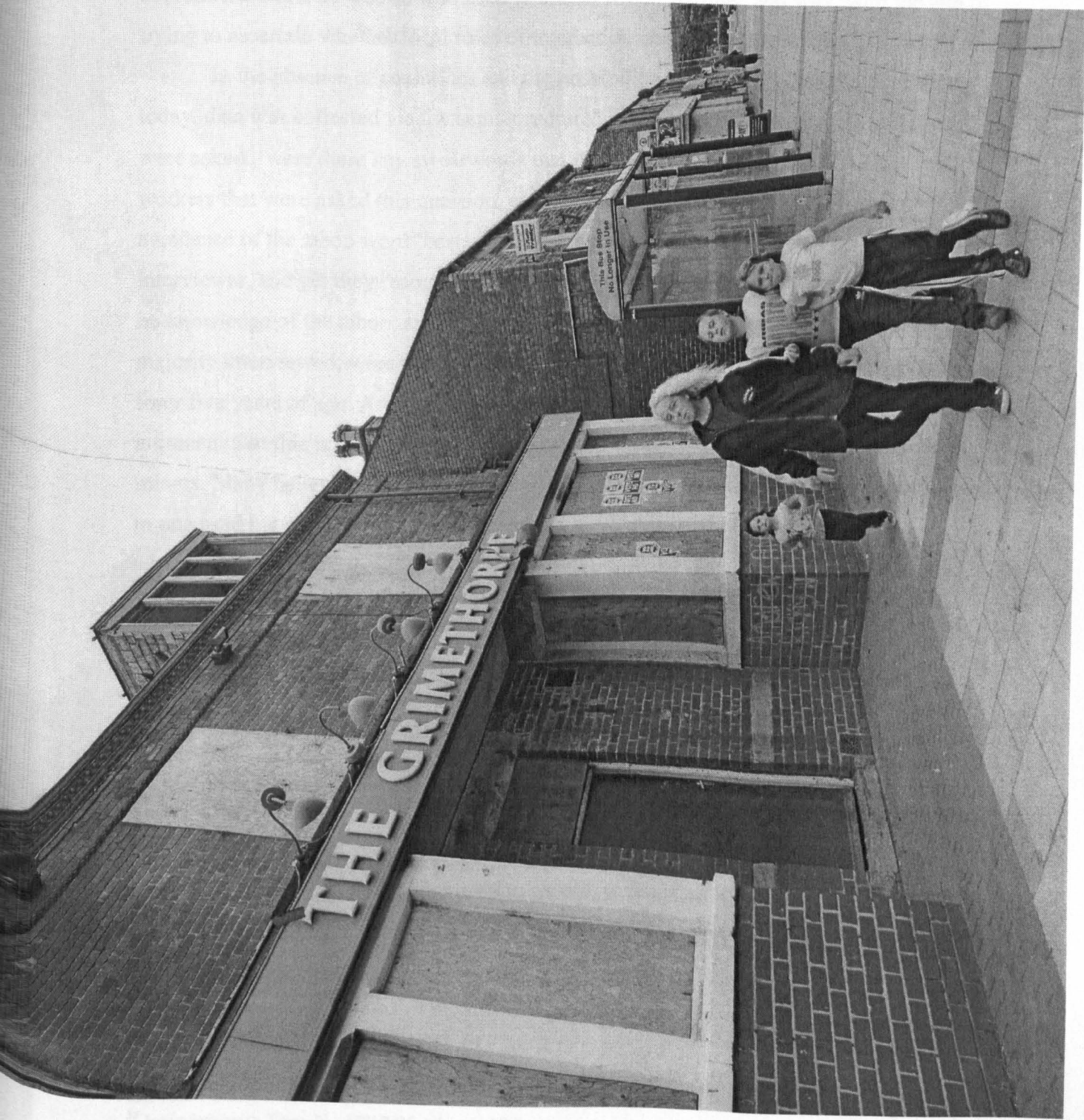
The utterances collected and presented here differ from each other in one important aspect which relates to the fact that coalmines no longer exist in the locality. The greeting 'let me get me breath' and many other sayings that deal with ongoing pit talk, such as 'turn t' sprays on,' are to a large extent unaffected by the present context, in other words, life without pits. They are well established linguistic routines that continue to function as a symbolic resource. They are emblems of identity that precis a shared past into appropriate and usable forms. However, the leavetaking routines described, such as 'al sithee on t' tailgate,' are deeply ironic statements. They are referring to places that no longer exist, to imaginary places. We can say tentatively that they are established routines, but with an ironic twist when used in the present context. But, like many of the utterances considered here, such routines can be considered as a symbolic resource which continues to allow the maintenance of people's occupational identities in a period of intensive change. As Cohen pointed out in his study of a former crofting community on the isle of Whalsay, there is something paradoxical in the fact that contemporary circumstances mean that a community needs to reassert itself, but it often achieves this via idioms that are actually threatened by those present circumstances.³⁷

A different but similar functioning linguistic repertoire probably exists in other industrial communities. Although they may differ in the regional dialect employed and in the technical jargon used, they would presumably function in the same way: to maintain working relationships both during a vibrant working era and subsequently in order to signal to each other the continuing importance of their distinctive identity.

Taboo words

This continuity of the group boundary is also apparent via taboo words among local coalminers. During the four years that I worked at Grimethorpe colliery, I noticed that the word 'bastard' had restricted use among the workers. Despite the common usage of profane

³⁷ Cohen, A.P., *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, London, Routledge, 1985, p. 98-9.



Photograph by Terry S. WILKINSON, 1974

language in the work setting, the word appeared to be generally avoided, and particularly so in a direct accusatory sense to another worker. In this research, I sought to understand who avoided the word, as well as who used it, and in which settings, and why, with the aim of trying to ascertain whether local rules of interaction could be established.

In the absence of coalmines and the possibility of observing mining life directly today, data was collected via the semi-structured interviews. Normally male participants were asked, ‘were there any swearwords that people didn’t use at the pit?’ Of the male workers that were asked this question, eighty percent claimed that they observed the avoidance of the taboo word ‘bastard’. These miners had not been given the word by the interviewer, and yet they recognised it instantly. Interestingly, those workers who claimed no knowledge of the taboo, and therefore violated the rules of interaction in the eyes of the majority interviewed, were predominantly surface workers and without exception under forty five years of age. Analysis of ethnographic commentary that I collected, supports the argument that this is an old taboo and one which was not always adhered to by younger miners. Many believe that over time the taboo declined: it went from a word never uttered to one used but not as a mode of direct insult, as Terry explains:

“TerryV: There’s a certain word they’d never say and that wa’ ‘b’. Of course you know they never did at one time, but it gradually became a common used word you know.

AC: Do you think that changed then?

TV: Oh aye it did. It wa’ never used at one time, you’d certainly never call anybody that, but that gradually crept into t’ general conversation you know call somebody one aht o’ fun never seriously of course cos o’ consequences to follow but...

AC: Why’s that then do you think?

TV: I don’t know– I’ve no idea –it just crept in and it became common usage and it was just accepted, just like ‘bloody’.”³⁸

It is worth noting that Terry, who is 60 years old, is reluctant to say the word ‘bastard’ in the interview context, and chooses instead to refer to it simply as ‘b’. This in itself highlights the sensitivity of the word among this age group locally.

³⁸ Interview with Terry V., 10/12/96, t 1, s 1, 19.0.

For many miners during their working lives between 1930 and the present day, however, this rule of avoidance was observed, and some even claimed that the word was avoided in the wider community as well as at work. Another miner, Pete A., claimed that it could provoke violent confrontations between males:

ClarryW: Yeah it wa' used plenty as regards if tha caught thi, knocked thi elbow, caught thi finger, dropped summat on thi foot or summat wunt gu reight or whatever thy used it plenty. But it was a taboo word to use directly to another colleague.

AC: And can you remeber that right back even when you first started?

CW: Oh yeah, in fact actually when I first started it wa' more taboo, it wa' really taboo, if tha called a man that, he'd probably gu at thee wi' a pick."³⁹

The ethnographic commentary, elicited and presented here, supports a hypothesis that, over time, the observance of the rule lost its potency. To begin with no one, old or young, used the word 'bastard' as an insult. Then there was a transition to a situation where some used it and some did not. Finally the younger workers used it without adhering to the taboo rule. When the ethnographic commentary collected here is combined with the fact that twenty percent of younger miners interviewed claim not to follow the rule, this hypothesis is strengthened.

A more problematical fact is to try to ascertain in which geographical areas the taboo operated. Two Royston miners claimed independently that miners at the local Monckton colliery adhered to this taboo in a strict sense, whereas miners at other collieries they worked at did not:

AC: And that wa' in all different pits?

PeteA: ...they used it a lot at number six, number three pit I think—I think the' used that a lot at number three, but they never used it at Monckton (shafts one and two), never that wa' a taboo word—

AC: And outside as well, int club or something?

PA: Tha never heard 'em not that that, I mean that wa' a taboo word...

.. Until young uns started wi' it, I mean older end wa' leaving then an' younger uns were tekin the' jobs, and then there wa' middle when some used it an' some didn't."⁴⁰

AC: Some people said that there were some words or one word that they didn't used to use?

HarryW: 'Bastard'.

³⁹ Interview with Clarry and Mary W., 22/10/98, t 1, s 1, 22.5

⁴⁰ Interview with Pete and Jill A., *ibid.*

AC: Did they not?

HW: No, up here, at Monckton an' that, very rare you'd ever hear 'em use that, 'bastard', but other pits where I've worked at, same as in Nottingham an' Crig. an' that, they used to use it up there – but no that's one thing never heard 'em use at Monckton pit, called one another a bastard ah. But t' other pit talk (swearing) you hear it reglar an' ah."⁴¹

However, despite this Royston miner Harry W.'s experience, extensive ethnographic data that I collected allows different views to emerge. For example conflicting evidence from Pete A. suggests that not all Monckton men adhered to the habitual avoidance of the word. Furthermore, miners in different parts of Barnsley claimed they avoided it, for example at Barnsley Main, Wombwell Main, and Houghton Main, as well as miners in parts of north Nottinghamshire. One man remembers it being a taboo in the steel foundries of Sheffield too:

NeilS: You didn't call nobody a bastard,

AC: Even when you were there?

NS: Yeah ,yeah

AC: I wonder why that is, then?

NS: I don't know, I suppose it wa' a sort o' a social stigma if you were one.

AC: That's what I thought.

NS: I can remember this in t' pit, but I can remember in t' steel works, starting work and a guy I wa', - served mi time wi', an' I called him a bastard, an' he gave me a crack, he gave me a right wallop."⁴²

This miner is the first one during fieldwork to attempt to explain why the taboo exists. Having such a social stigma in a mining community, or on the shop floor of a steel foundry, would be a slight on one's character and on one's family's character. As Turner has pointed out, in mining communities there was a realisation that being miners meant that they were close to the bottom of the social heap. However, to have pride in the community, and in one's family, was a way of sustaining self-respect and a way of showing outsiders from "another social class, from another social background: 'Tha no better than me.'"⁴³

One extraordinary anecdote concerning the taboo came from an ex-colliery manager from north Nottinghamshire. Steve C. was not from a mining family but entered the industry after completing a mining engineering degree at university. Whilst on holiday with

⁴¹ Interview with Harry W., 5/11/98, t 1, s 1, 44.4.

⁴² Interview with Neil S., 10/12/96, tape 1, side 1, 32.28.

⁴³ Turner, Royce, p. 166.

his wife and children, he became involved in a motoring incident whereby another driver thought Steve had made an error and wound his window down and called him a 'bastard'. This sent the manager into a fury and led to violent scenes. Steve C. said that only now in retrospect does he realise that he had become engrained in the local mining culture and therefore sensitive to the taboo nature of the word. As with all the other extracts presented here, there is a sense that the observance of avoiding the word was related to the occupational setting and to the wider mining community.⁴⁴

Summary

- Despite the high frequency of profane language in the coalmining industry, the word 'bastard', especially if used as an insult, was a tabooed word among the men who worked in the industry interviewed in this study.
- There are indications that it was also tabooed in mining areas further afield, as well as in other heavy industries such as steel.
- The taboo was predominantly upheld by older miners although younger miners acknowledged its existence.
- Some miners commented that it was a taboo word at their pit but at neighbouring pits it was not. However, the evidence for this is confusing and contradictory.

Discussion

Attempting to establish a set of linguistic rules for the exact usage of the taboo is difficult as evidence collected from participants in this study is contradictory. However, we can draw some tentative conclusions. Certainly most people interviewed agreed that, over time, the significance of the taboo dwindled. Also, most were in agreement that the sense in which 'bastard' is used is what renders it taboo rather than the word itself. The taboo rule appears to have been an important part of the miners' speech repertoire in Royston as well as in other collieries in the area. It may well also have been a taboo adhered to in other local industries such as steel. However, questions remain regarding the use of the taboo in wider society and among female speakers during the twentieth century. Questions remain too over the precise function of the taboo rule in this particular mining community. In particular,

⁴⁴ Interview with Steve C., 7/12/96.

why was it that this particular insult was avoided so assiduously in an environment where other profane language proliferated? Taking the wider working-class culture into account, however, gives some insight into the local significance of the taboo. In the recent past, pre-marital sex could lead to a woman being labelled as 'loose' in working-class communities. The real offence, however, was for a girl to become pregnant out of wedlock. Among the working classes, illegitimacy rates were high during the 1940s, especially the mid-1940s, and these rates were not exceeded until the 1960s.⁴⁵ A woman could ruin her chances of having a 'white wedding' and securing a good partner if she bore a child out of wedlock, especially in a coalmining community.⁴⁶ Perhaps, making 'bastard' a taboo word underlines the significance of the issue within these communities. To be called a bastard was to be associated with 'loose women' and this was perceived as an attack on ideals of working-class respectability, and especially on one's own family name and reputation.

In Royston, as in many British, working-class communities, bearing an illegitimate child was still considered a social stigma perhaps until the early seventies. Naming somebody a 'bastard' was perceived as threatening the integrity of that person's family unit. In a mining community, such as Royston, kinship networks are characterised by strong ties. It was not uncommon for a number of men who were related to each other, including sometimes fathers and sons, to work in the same seam, or even in the same team. To call someone a bastard was to question the morality of a family in a very public setting, perhaps in front of someone's work colleagues. Reputations of families and individual men and women were critical in such a close knit mining community. Workers entering the industry often relied on their family's name as a source of kudos. A young miner who did not know the origins of his father was unlikely to establish a 'pedigree'. Such a socio-occupational network has probably intensified and prolonged the life of the taboo rule more than in wider society. However, local comment suggests that its significance has dwindled, due to the disappearance of the mining industry, and the associated clearly defined social mores, along with an increase in the use of swearwords generally. Mirroring this decline in the taboo rule of the word 'bastard' is a decline in another aspect of the moral code. A

⁴⁵ Bourke, Joanna., *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, class and ethnicity*, London, Routledge, 1994, pp. 30-31.

⁴⁶ Craddock, Mary, *A North Country Maid*, London, 1960, pp. 88-89.

feature of mining communities has been the rule of not swearing in front of women in public, and especially in the best room of a pub. Turner, in *Coal Was Our life*, writes that:

“The moral code was also one which provided sanctions on those who transgressed it. It forbade swearing by men in female company, for example. Swearing was reserved for the pit or the pub, if the company was all male. Breaking this rule could often initiate a fight, if the offender ignored requests to tone down the language.”

Nevertheless, this rule is as losing its significance as part of a general breakdown of the old social order as a result of the closure of the mines.

GRIMETHORPE
M.W. SOCIAL
CLUB LTD



GRIMETHORPE
MINERS WELFARE
SOCIAL CLUB LTD

Linguistic markers of social distance

Ostracism and naming rituals

Much of the language discussed so far in this chapter has been viewed as enhancing social solidarity among coalminers. Sayings, leavetakings and greetings, and adherence to linguistic taboos are seen to operate as emblems of occupational identity, particularly among males. Consideration will now be given to linguistic aspects that function conversely, primarily to isolate individuals from the main social group. In many occupational communities throughout Britain, including this one, if workers are called 'scabs' they are normally viewed as traitors in the eyes of the occupational group to which they belong. Calling someone a 'scab' normally occurs when an individual returns to work during a strike, and the implications often extend beyond the workplace to the wider social community. The aim here is to investigate the ramifications of the use of the word 'scab' in this community, and to understand how 'scabs' are ostracised.

As Saville-Troike highlights, by their nature linguistic taboos and silences are difficult to elicit in a speech community.⁴⁷ How do we know from observation who is denied language contact? This basic problem is also compounded by the local context. As the local mines are now closed, it is impossible to observe how those labelled as 'scabs' continue, or fail to continue, to interact with other workers. Additionally, asking informants during interviews for details of how the 'scabs' are treated was not an easy task, bearing in mind the enduring sensitivity of strikes and their accompanying tensions. Most people did not want to be recorded talking about such matters, although it was on the topic list for the semi-structured interviews. When asked about how non-striking and striking miners behave towards each other, one man replied, 'I am not prepared to say what happened to them.'⁴⁸ Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, by the end of the fieldwork enough data had been collected to attempt some tentative conclusions concerning the manner in which the local linguistic system can be used by the majority to isolate individual workers and their families. The data used here was collected via tape-recorded semi-structured interviews,

⁴⁷ Saville-Troike, Muriel, *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989, p. 219.

⁴⁸ Interview with Sam E., 24/9/98, t 2, s 1, 4.0.

participant observation, a written personal account of one incident by a participant and my own experiences of observing the treatment of non-striking miners underground. The description of ritual avoidance strategies and ostracism employed in the community relate to the tensions created in the 1984-1985 national coal strike.⁴⁹ It is included here as a valuable insight into the speech behaviour of this particular speech community.

The word 'scab' was not heard much during fieldwork, the main reason being that it has serious connotations and is rarely used lightly. The fact that attention was drawn to the word in the first instance was a response to the researcher's vivid memories of observing the treatment of one 'scab' in particular underground at Grimethorpe colliery shortly after the end of the strike in 1985. Colliery management had banned the use of the word 'scab' in an attempt to minimise the abuse these individuals received. In theory, anyone found guilty of using the word could be sacked. One morning, I was on the middle deck of the cage. The cage at Grimethorpe had three decks, each carrying a maximum of forty men and, as normal on this day shift, it was full. Unfortunately, one poor soul, who had returned to work partway through the strike, had to travel down the pit on my shift and stood on the edge of the middle deck. We were working in the Parkgate seam, nine hundred metres below ground, and for some reason the banksman had left the side gate of the cage open. With all lights turned off, the descent began and, through fear of punishment for uttering the word 'scab', the men hissed the first letter 'sssss'. The sound generally rose and fell but continued incessantly for the whole of the journey. The combination of the sound and the image of the man standing on the edge of the deck with a chasm of 900 metres just in front will never leave me. Grimethorpe colliery was notorious for its militancy and for its support of the National Union of Mineworkers. However, similar incidents were not uncommon at neighbouring mines, with strained relationships between those who went on strike and those who did not during 1984-1985. Royce Turner notes that hissing was common at Ackton colliery in Featherstone during the same period and that "In Barnsley,

⁴⁹Some of the tensions created in the community during the strike were discussed in the introductory chapter. However, for an excellent comprehensive discussion on the subject consult Waddington, D., Wykes, M., and Critcher, C., *Split at the Seams? Community, Continuity and Change after the 1984-5 Coal Dispute*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1991.

the name and address of the first man to break the strike was scrawled in many telephone boxes.”⁵⁰

During the fieldwork for this study, it was discovered that a variety of words could be used to refer to someone who had worked during the strike. The women observed and interviewed revealed that often an individual would be renamed by prefixing his surname with the word ‘scab’: for example ‘scab Bedlington’. In this way, perhaps, a greater degree of accuracy of identification is achieved, because presumably in a village the size of Royston there are a number of mineworkers with that particular surname. Another term used is ‘super scab’, to denote someone who returned to work at the beginning of the strike, as opposed to those who perhaps returned near to the end. A minority of those interviewed indicated that they felt there was a difference between the actions of the two types of strikebreakers, and they reserved the term ‘super scab’ for those who abandoned the strike early. However, the majority gave the impression that they did not believe there was a difference and classed anyone who returned to work as a ‘super scab’. An excerpt from Waddington et al.’s *Split At The Seams* will exemplify that there are enormous differences about this idea of a ‘scab’ among mining communities in the north of England, and in particular between those of Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire:

“In Nottsco the small minority of employees who stayed out on strike had endured little more than occasional leg pulling. In Derbyco there was a distinction between those men and women who worked throughout the strike (‘true scabs’ or ‘day oners’) and those who returned out of financial necessity and were therefore not regarded as scabs. Yorksco strikers were unwilling to recognize this distinction....”⁵¹

On one occasion during fieldwork the researcher observed an interesting interchange between a nineteen year-old miner’s son and older miner. The episode is documented in the fieldwork diary:

LeeB: I’m goin’ shoppin’ tomorrow.

ArthurC: Where tha goin’?

LB: I’m goin’ to scabland.

ArC: Tha goin’ wheer?

⁵⁰ Turner, Royce, *ibid*, p. 48.

⁵¹ Waddington, D., Wykes, M., and Critcher, C., 1991, p. 171.

*LB: I'm goin' to scabland, dahn to Nottingham. (laughter).*⁵²

Even though the young man never worked at the pit, he is aware that some miners refer to the Nottinghamshire area as 'scabland' and uses it to build rapport with the older miner. Perhaps he had heard his own father use it.

However, moving beyond gradations and regional joking, clearly in this community the term 'scab' is never used lightly. During the fieldwork it was discovered that today, more than thirteen years after the end of the strike, the issue of identifying and naming 'scabs' and the protocols for how the majority in this community should behave towards them were ongoing processes, far from clearcut and still being contested. During an interview, one miner revealed how he had been wrongfully accused of working during the strike and named a 'scab'.⁵³ This had upset him as he had been an ardent supporter of the NUM and been on regular picket duty throughout the year-long strike, at one point being arrested by the police for his militant action. Many non-striking miners were transferred after the strike because of the strained relationship between them and their striking work colleagues. This unfortunate miner had been transferred to another pit, and the men at the new workplace assumed that he had been sent for these reasons. Such misunderstandings are potentially grave, and in this case the victim had to get the union representative to come to the new workplace and convince the workforce that he had been a committed supporter of industrial action. Once convinced the men accepted him.

A separate incident occurred when, after the strike, one Royston miner was out walking his dog and chatted to another miner also walking his dog. Although the two men live on the same street they work at separate collieries. A few days later the first miner was questioned by another colleague as to why he had spoken to this man as he was a 'scab'. The miner apologized, revealing that he had no idea that the man was a 'scab', and promised to join in the ostracism and suspend all verbal communication with him.

Another example was discovered via a handwritten note slipped to the researcher, as the informant refused to be interviewed, which in itself underlines the strong feelings about,

⁵² Fwd, 10/10/97.

⁵³ Interview with John C. and Dave A., 10/12/96, t 1, s 2, 40.0.

and sensitivity to, the subject of strikers and non-strikers. The information provided is presented in full below:

“*Ron* asked *Jack* why he was sat with this bloke.

Ron said he’s a Super Scab.

Jack’s wife asked him straight out if he was a scab and he denied it. If he worked the Thursday and Friday before they went back apparently this is ok because there were a few that did. His wife was heard to have said ‘I saw to my telly and video’.

Informant: I had enough trouble keeping us from being hungry. With two strikers in my home I’m not ashamed to admit that we had to go to the soup kitchens and queue for our dinners two or three times a week.

Jack said he would apologise to *Ron* if it was wrong, but *M.* said you won’t need to apologise, because in other words she knew it was right.

Informant: This amazed me! Because she must have known he was a scab all along.”⁵⁴

Importantly, the researcher was reliably informed that, over two years after this particular incident, the man accused of being a ‘super scab’ and his wife have never been seen in that club again. Such is the power locally of naming someone a ‘super scab’ and the custom of ostracizing strike breakers and their partners. It points to the continued influence of past experiences and the way in which social boundaries are kept in force via linguistic routines. All the people in the incident are ex-miners or ex-miners’ wives. Clearly there is unresolved territory regarding what past action is considered to mark someone off as a ‘super scab’. The majority of the group obviously feel that, despite the passage of time, the man overstepped an important social boundary by returning to work two days before the end of the strike. That names were given to the researcher in abbreviated form highlights the sensitivity of the incident. Even if the researcher had been present during that interchange, to tape-record it would have been both difficult and inappropriate.

Being a relative inside researcher and having built good rapport with informants meant that during interviews some people opened up and provided details about being on the receiving end of local antagonism. In the following extract a woman tells of how her brother was treated by local striking miners:

ShielaB: He had to go back into work, for one day and then come out. It wa’ to keep the sick money, what wa’ it for?

AnneW: It wa’ - I can remember summat abaht that.

⁵⁴ Fwd, 15/8/97.

SB: So the union said to him like you go in and we'll let you in and stay there for one day and you'll be alright. So it wa' to keep the sick money – it wa' summat that wa' law. An' he went in but he ha' to come out because they smashed his windows an' that and called him a scab

BarbaraM: Scab.

AC: Smashed his windows at home?

SB: Yeah.

BM: God.

AC: It wa' pretty black an' white wasn't it.

BM: Yeah, there wa' no grey areas were there.⁵⁵

The final line here suggests that this woman herself recognises a distinction between those who returned to work immediately and those who returned just a few days before the end of the strike, or to maintain sick pay by going to work once in a while. In this, she is in a minority. Only one of the people interviewed had returned to work before the end of the strike. This fact, was only discovered towards the end of the interview with this particular respondent, who began recounting how he had been treated by striking miners. The man, in his sixties at the time, had been accosted on a number of occasions by large groups of striking miners, including “fifty o' 'em wi' pick-axe handles” during one confrontation.⁵⁶ Although the respondent himself never used the word ‘scab’, it was clear that he had been made to feel isolated by the local community, and he believes that these events led to the deterioration of his health, such is the severity of this insider-outsider ranking locally. What he terms “I cracked up” most probably means he had a nervous breakdown.

‘Scab’ in this community is perhaps the most powerful of all symbols, and leads to people being denied any form of social interaction. It is, of course, used in many speech communities, frequently on a temporary basis, as Saville-Troike has noted. She states that “perhaps the most stringent linguistic form of social control is social ostracism, where collective or group silence is a weapon”.⁵⁷ However, the findings in the present research suggest that, in Royston, people are isolated on an indefinite basis, not temporarily.

What is evident in this particular community is that the symbol of ‘scab’ is interpreted differently by different individuals. This is clear in the interchange recorded and discussed earlier, where locals argue about whether or not a couple are ‘scabs’ or not, based on the fact that they returned to work two days before the end of the strike. In one interview

⁵⁵ Interview with Anne W., Joy B., Barbara M., and Sheila B., 8/3/99, t 1, s 1, 9.2.

⁵⁶ Interview with Joe M., 12/12/96, t 1, s 2, 20.15.

conducted during fieldwork, an ex-miner confided that he believed there was a difference between strike breakers who returned to work immediately and those who returned near the end of the strike. However, the community's symbolic use of the term 'scab' masks these differences of opinion. Cohen argues that it is exactly because community symbols are imprecise and can gloss over difference that they are so effective. The word scab, and the associated behaviour it entails, acts as a strong marker of community belonging in Royston. However, behind the word is individual interpretation and, as Cohen states:

“These interpretations are not random. They tend to be made within the terms characteristic of a given society, and influenced by its language, ecology, its traditions of belief and ideology, and so forth. But neither are they immutable. They are, rather, responsive to the circumstances of interaction, both among individuals, and between the society as a whole and those across its boundaries. The vehicles of such interpretations are symbols. By their very nature symbols permit interpretation and provide scope for interpretive manoeuvre by those who use them. Symbols are often defined as things ‘standing for’ other things. But they do not represent these ‘other things’ unambiguously: indeed it is argued above that if they did so they would be superfluous and redundant. Rather, they ‘express’ other things in ways which allow their common form to be retained and shared among the members of a group, whilst not imposing upon these people the constraints of uniform meaning. Because symbols are malleable in this way, they can be made to ‘fit’ the circumstances of the individual. They can thus provide media through which individuals can experience and express their attachment to a society without compromising their individuality. So versatile are symbols they can often be bent into these idiosyncratic shapes of meaning without such distortions becoming visible to other people who use the same symbol at the same time.”⁵⁸

It is with such an understanding that the label ‘scab’ is interpreted here. It is seen as contested symbol, a mental construct, which although used by individuals, is imbued with a pre-existing meaning and heavily scented by the past.

Summary

- Data concerning ostracism and the procedure of calling strike-breakers ‘scabs’ or ‘super scabs’ is difficult to elicit, due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

⁵⁷ Saville-Troike, *ibid*, p. 218.

⁵⁸ Cohen, A.P., *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, London, Routledge, 1985, pp. 17-18.

- After the end of the 1984-1985 strike the Coalboard banned the use of the word 'scab' and miners instead resorted to hissing the word's initial letter 's'.
- More than fifteen years after the end of the strike, feelings towards strike-breakers are still very passionate.
- Informal social controls, such as banning people from certain pubs and clubs, and continued ostracism still operate in Royston.
- Differences of opinion exist between those who believe all strike-breakers should be viewed as socially 'cancerous' and those that believe there is a difference between those who returned to work at the start of the strike as opposed to those who returned towards the end.
- The word 'scab' and the ostracising process are symbolic markers of a locally important social boundary. The different interpretations of the symbol of 'scab' are conveniently masked by the imprecise definition, and as such the word is a powerful tool which the community uses to socially isolate certain individuals.

During fieldwork it became evident that the use of the word 'scab' is, to a large extent, a 'hidden linguistic marker'. The variety of names used towards strike-breakers and the severity of ostracism even today can only be understood via the collection and analysis of a wide variety of data sources. This raises an vital methodological point in highlighting the importance of drawing on a range of different data sources when investigating the linguistic routines of a speech community. The strength of the ethnographic approach, of making an emotional commitment to the community being investigated, allows more sensitive data to be collected. This in turn enables the investigator to portray the linguistic behaviour of the speech community with a greater level of complexity, in this instance revealing 'socially motivated' linguistic routines whereby individuals mark their allegiance to a socio-occupational group in a very aggressive manner.

The word 'scab' remains a powerful symbol in the everyday lives of local people, despite the fact that they live in a post-coal era. Although the actual meanings attached to the word 'scab' vary among individuals, emotional attachments to it are significant. In this

way old linguistic routines are maintained and serve to reinforce a sense of distinctive identity among members of the local socio-occupational group.

Discussion

This chapter has attempted to show how a socio-occupational language variety extends beyond the lexical level to incorporate a number of linguistic repertoires. Greetings, leavetakings and sayings are seen as important features of local speech behaviour. These routines employ local coalmining terminology and in this way provide a vehicle for its maintenance. This is seen in the examples of the greeting 'Al sithee in t' morning on t' tailgate', and the saying 'He's got top weight on'. As well as containing occupational lexis, the greetings, leavetakings and sayings simultaneously comprise the regional language variety incorporating many of the core features of local pronunciation, lexis and grammar. Whilst remaining specific to the area, both the socio-occupational variety and the regional variety of language are to an extent part of larger language variety frameworks. The socio-occupational dialect described here shares some features found throughout the Yorkshire coalfield, whilst the regional language variety overlaps considerably with other northern dialect varieties. Ethnographic participant observation, alongside tape recorded interviews, has facilitated the collection of sufficient data in order to establish that these linguistic repertoires are locally significant and to continue and sketch out some of the basic rules of interaction. However, it is also necessary to draw some conclusions regarding the function of the socio-occupational variety in the local speech community, bearing in mind the post-coal context.

Beyond the description of the various linguistic repertoires, that make up the socio-occupational language variety, the present study views the repertoires as functioning symbolically. Theoretically the study follows Edward's summation that language can be understood ordinarily as a 'tool of communication', but also 'as an emblem of groupness'.⁵⁹ Before commenting further on this emblematic use of language to signal group identity, it

⁵⁹ Edwards, John, *Language, Society and Identity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985. Note; Edwards is treating language as a 'mutually unintelligible' system, whereas in the present study what is referred to is a 'language variety'. Nevertheless, it is argued here that this dual function of language is still evident in a 'language variety' or 'dialect'. For more detailed discussion of this aspect of language function see Tabouret-Keller, Andree, 'Language and Identity', in Florian, Coulmas, ed. *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, Massachusetts, Blackwell, 1997, pp.321-326.

is useful to underline the recent dramatic social changes that have affected this particular speech community.

It stands to reason that in Royston, and neighbouring communities, the disappearance of the pit is going to impact on the local social, economic and cultural fabric in a very real, tangible sense. Coalmining had been a constant in people's lives for such a very long-time. Royston's coalmining community was an ordered world, a world perceived as predictable and stable. As Turner comments in his sociological study of the nearby town of Featherstone: "...the elements of continuity are overlain by a new sense of insecurity and an 'identity' crisis which is reflected individually and collectively....".⁶⁰ Turner tells us that the 'loud, noisy, boisterous world' of the pit has been replaced by silence, and highlights the breakdown of local social networks and general male fraternity. Ethnographic evidence collected in Royston during fieldwork for the present study reveals a similar situation.

What is argued here is that the particular regional and socio-occupational environment has created a distinct series of linguistic forms locally, evident in the regional language variety and the socio-occupational language variety described. The drastic changes locally might lead to changes to the linguistic repertoires that make up the socio-occupational language variety. However, despite the closure of mines, strong friendship and kinship ties continue to exist, and in the contexts of pubs, clubs and the street some of these language forms continue to be used. 'Ostracism' and the pejorative identification of 'scabs' continue to exert influence as an extreme form of social control in isolating individuals from the majority of the speech community. Although linguistic taboos appear to be in decline, greetings, sayings and leavetaking routines still feature prominently in local interaction. These are prestige forms that function as emblems of group solidarity and to protect group distinctiveness.⁶¹ When the man in Grimethorpe shouts out 'there'll be loads of pneumo claims tonight.' he is showing pride by asserting his membership in the local socio-occupational group. He is claiming allegiance to a shared existence, an 'insider's world', a man's world that is on the edge of extinction. Although these linguistic forms are

⁶⁰ Turner, Royce, *ibid*, p. 7.

⁶¹ For examples of such an explanation among other groups see; Jackson, Jean, "Language Identity of the Columbian Vaupes Indians", in Bauman, Richard, and Sherzer, Joel, eds., *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 50-64.

brief, they are highly significant to the group, and sustain feelings of pride and continuity at a fragile time. To underline the potential significance of such minor language forms, it is appropriate to quote from Edwards, who agrees with Steiner that:

“The symbolic value of language, the historical and cultural associations which it accumulates and ‘the natural semantics of remembrance’ all add to the basic message, a rich underpinning of shared connotations. It is in this way that we translate when we communicate, and this ability to read between the lines, as it were, depends upon a cultural continuity in which language is embedded, and which is not open to all. Only those who grow up within the community can, perhaps, participate fully in this expanded communicative interaction.”⁶²

As noted earlier in many of the examples described and analysed in this study the ‘shared connotations’ are twofold: they are both regional and socio-occupational, and they require an audience to have a double insider-ness.

Sociologists such as Turner, Warwick and Littlejohn refer to the ‘spirit’ or ‘social’ or ‘cultural capital’ of these coalmining communities as being in decline.⁶³ The starting point in this research is a linguistic one. The aim is to show how the socio-occupational language variety is a core feature of this very cultural capital. Although local people interviewed and observed speak frequently about the topic of ‘the pit’ moving on and about social networks disintegrating, it is clear that at present the idea of group distinctiveness is maintained via particular language routines and rules of interaction. These function to build solidarity or in other cases to create social distance. To what extent these routines and rules of interaction have diminished or flourished compared with former times is difficult to assess. Further research undertaken in the future might provide evidence on the stability or decline of this particular language variety.

⁶² Edwards, John, *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶³ Turner, Royce, *ibid.*, and Warwick, Dennis, and Littlejohn, G., *Coal, Capital and Culture*, London, Routledge, 1992.

Personal naming processes as protest, play and social control

Ian T: Axeman, Mad Axeman cos, he like, he did once try and chop somebody up wi' an axe and they put him in t' mental home for a few (*laughs*), for twelve month, that wa' before he came to pit like....

AC: So I mean there were no secrets at pit wa' there?

IT: Oh no, and there wa' no respect either 'cos once they fan aht he wa' Axeman an' that's what he got, full monty ah, Axeman, Mad Axeman, and that's all they called him...."

Ian T., 18/1/99¹

¹ Interview with Ian T., 18/1/99, t 1, s 2, 10.5

Introduction

During fieldwork it became evident that, in this coalmining community, a variety of personal naming processes exist which are used to replace or accompany a person's firstname and surname. Nicknames, in particular, were found to be significant in the local talk complex. However, prior to examining the practice of nicknaming in this speech community, it will be beneficial to survey local idioms whereby people are named with relation to job performed at the mine, along with one's reputation as a worker and one's family lineage.

Local idioms of occupation and kinship

In this community miners are known by the job they performed at the pit, and this helps others to identify them. In one of the later focussed interviews carried out, Ian T explained:

IanT:if you wanted to identify somebody in community, so if you went up into Red Rum (*a local pub*) tonight said to somebody to identify someone, anyone in community, they'd be referred to like the job they did at pit, reight, nah they wunt refer to where the' lived cos nine times aht o' ten they di'n't know wheer they lived, they wunt refer to 'em by even their full name, they wunt refer to 'em by who they were married to....

AC: Cos they didn't know the' real name?

IT: Yeah. They referred to 'em by what job they did, 'You knew him cutter man', 'You knew him he wa' on RO fives... he wa' in tailgate for a while', 'Market man', 'He wa' on haulage on, in Parkgate dahn wet side', or 'Fenton dahn wet side', and they referred to each other by what they did at the pit, so they all get like -the' identity is like what they are, their function at pit."²

Such commentary gives a superb insight into how people are remembered by the specific job they held at the coalmine as well as the precise location in the mine they performed it. Such locally used forms raise two important issues. The first point is the fact that so often the mode of naming workers involved the suffix 'man', forming, for example, the compound forms 'cutter man' or 'market man' thereby signalling what exactly it was they did at the pit.³ Older speakers, when speaking of the past, mentioned the 'bell man',

² Interview with Ian T, 18/1/99, t 2, s 1, 10.17.

³ Evidence suggested that this system is widespread throughout the speech community, both with women who work in local factories and men who previously worked on the local railway.

‘pikelet man’, ‘cabbage plant man’, ‘rag and bone man’ and ‘coal man’.⁴ However, the compound form with ‘man’ as the second element is most prevalent currently in discourse relating to the pit. In this way, the form operates as a marker of local distinctiveness, contributing to the maintenance of a local argot, understood by insiders only.

Secondly, although an individual’s real name might not be known, or their exact whereabouts, to be able to locate them in reference to the pit was to frame them in a locally important status hierarchy. Frequently, during participant-observation fieldwork, miners would point to another man in a pub, and say to me, ‘He wa’ a Monckton man’, or ‘He wa’ a Grimey man’.⁵ This emphasised which colliery the man had worked at, not necessarily the village he resided in. In fact, frequently people did not know exactly where the person lived. The ‘man’ form is also used to locate a person in a particular era, whereby an older miner might be referred to as a ‘pick, hammer and shovel man’, meaning that he had worked underground many years ago on a pre-mechanised coalface or what is commonly referred to as a ‘hand got’ or ‘hand filling’ face. This label, in particular, brings with it a great deal of prestige, as these older systems of extracting coal are known to have been especially arduous and dangerous, which in turn underlines the importance of the man’s contribution to the local mining world. However, irrespective of the pit worked at or the era lived in, each person had a job and each job held a position in a local hierarchy. The precise location of where that job was performed might also increase or decrease a person’s prestige on this scale. As a general rule, greater credibility was awarded to those men that worked underground and in difficult, unpleasant circumstances, for example notoriously damp places which were usually termed ‘wetside’, or in a hot and dusty place such as the ‘tailgate’. A specific example illustrates the point. The job of a ripper is a particularly strenuous and potentially dangerous job, and these men have paramount status among other workers. However, to be a tailgate ripper meant that you worked in the return airflow which means it is even hotter and dustier, hence superior status. Likewise, working in a particular seam might affect one’s status. At Grimethorpe, for instance, the Beamshaw was a notorious seam known for its awkward roof height, which was in-between crawling and walking height, and which meant that men spent a lot of time stooping in the gates.

⁴ Interview with Ted A., 10/7/97, t 2, s 1, 33.5

⁵ Fwd, 21/1/99.

Although it is exceptionally difficult to place each job precisely in order of importance, there are some underlying principles that persist. As a general rule, the more strenuous or dangerous the work the greater the prestige. The perceived, idealized hierarchy places all underground miners above those working on the surface. Among the underground miners those working inbye held more kudos, and at the very top of the tree sat those miners involved in the extraction of coal or in development work, which involves the driving of new gates, headings or drifts. The man in charge of a group involved in such work was formerly named a 'butty man', and before the introduction of the day wage, when miners were paid on a contractual basis, he would be in charge of distributing the money earned at the end of the week among his team. These men were also known as 'big hitters' and had enormous status locally. At collieries in the Barnsley area, underground tunnels were frequently named in honour of the butty man whose team developed them, for example 'Bowles' slant' at Wombwell Main.⁶ More recently, when each man was paid directly for the work done, a leader of a development team became known as a 'chargeman', although the term 'big hitter' is still used. It is interesting that, throughout the twentieth century, these men held much more status and respect locally than deputies, who are recognized as colliery officials and, in theory, have much more power. Naturally these status distinctions shift according to one's own position in the hierarchy, but having said that, the differences described were to a large extent reinforced through the pay structure, both in the previous butty system and subsequently through the incentive bonus scheme introduced in the early 1980s.

A related distinction observed by others describing coalmining communities concerns whether or not a man was perceived as a 'good worker' or not.⁷ In this study, informants commented on this, and highlighted the seriousness of being labelled 'idle'. A young miner from Grimethorpe explained:

"IanT: This work ethic wa' a massive thing, it wa' just massive, if somebody wa' idle –worse thing you could call 'em wa' idle. I can remember me grandad, me grandad like, he'd gu 'bone idle', do you know what I mean like? 'Never seen, –he wunt have work', like you know 'a scrounger' like. So like you'd three or four people, or three

⁶ Interview with Joe M., 12/12/96, t 1, s 1, 1.34

⁷ Hudson, Mark, *Coming Back Brockens: A year in a mining village*, London, Vintage, 1995.

or four families, in Grimey who wa' labelled like, you know, 'wouldn't, wouldn't have it'.

AC: So that wa' a really bad label?

IT: That wa' really bad, If you called somebody idle oh ah that wa' feighting talk, tha can get ready then.

AC: Yeah

IT: Definitely. Especially older end."⁸

The job held at the pit and the reputation of a miner are both strong markers of prestige. They earn a man respect from many people, not only in the past social hierarchy of work but also in the present day local community. A good reputation is something to be proud of and, if you were a young miner just starting out, your father's reputation, or to a lesser extent your uncle's or your elder brother's, had a great bearing on your own status. If your father had been a 'heading man' or a 'big hitter' and a 'good worker', then you had an enormous reputation to maintain. The son of a well-known Monckton Colliery butty man and big hitter commented that:

"First thing I got asked when I went underground was who mi dad wa', and when I telled 'em (they said) 'If you're half as good as him you're right'. But some of 'em who wa' asked who their dad wa', when they telled them they got branded, you know, as a poor one.... so you were quite proud as a young lad to go t' pit, well I wa' cos mi dad wa' one o' them people."⁹

Nepotism was rife in British coalmining. It was a well-known fact that it was always much easier to get a job at the local mine if your father, or other close relative, worked there. In 1982 the only reason I got an interview at Grimethorpe in the first instance was because my father worked there. I lived in the village of Royston, but I would not have got a job at Royston pit. It was Grimethorpe or nothing. These were unwritten but widely understood rules. Your own lad following you to the pit was not always what you had hoped for, but it was part of a tacit agreement that by having worked hard yourself for so long your sons were entitled to a job. Indeed, of the 20 males interviewed during fieldwork for this study 75 percent were sons of local coalminers. More than 30 percent of them were grandsons of coalminers, sometimes great grandsons. On top of this, 62 percent of the men interviewed had at least one brother or brother in law who worked at the pit. This meant that there was a

⁸ Interview with Ian T., 18/1/99, t 1, s 2, 42.2

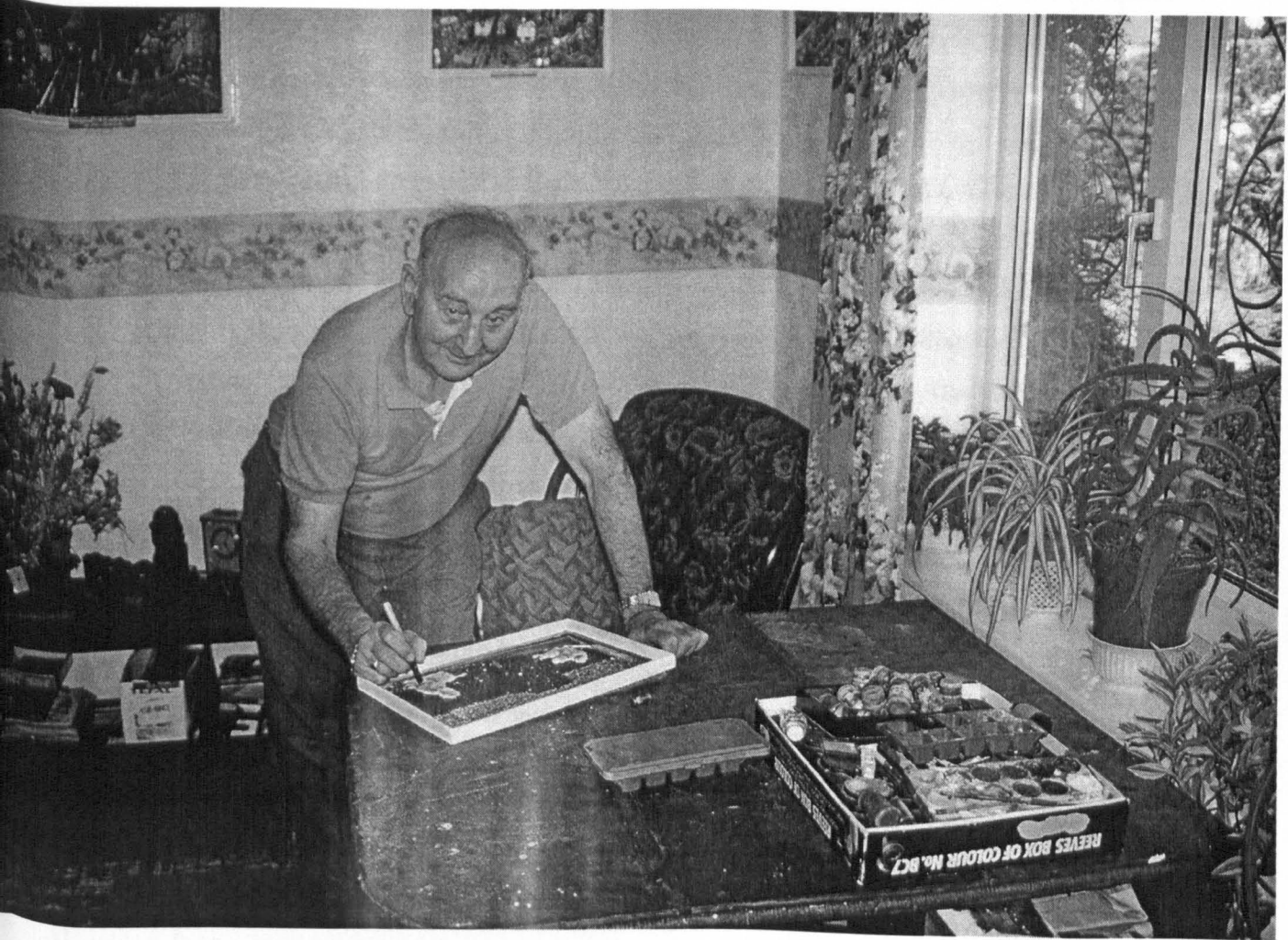
parochial atmosphere at some of the collieries where whole families of males might have worked at the same place, perhaps in the same seam of coal, or indeed together, on the same coal face and on the same shift. Such pits were thought of as distinct from those where miners came from different areas. The number of the latter type increased as more and more pits closed during the late 1980s and early 1990s, causing men to transfer to collieries further afield so as to remain in the industry. One miner revealed how, although he had been working on the same coalface for more than thirteen years, he was frequently referred to as the 'new lad', as he had transferred from a nearby pit, only two miles away, and had no relatives at this particular pit.¹⁰

The importance of the status distinctions among coalminers cannot be overestimated. It is a male, working-class world where the harder, dirtier and more dangerous the work the greater the prestige. Undoubtedly, people's perception of their own position in the local hierarchy had a bearing on the collection of data during fieldwork. One man that I asked for an interview declined saying, 'You dunt want to talk to me, I on'y worked in workshops, on top'.¹¹ He clearly thought of himself as being unqualified to speak on mining related matters, because he had only worked on the surface and in a workshop a mile or so away from the pit itself. Personal perceptions of occupational identity such as these are interlinked with the status of other miners in one's kinship network and their reputation as 'good workers' or not. This underlines the extent to which kinship, region and occupation become intermeshed via social roles and relationships. The terms of address described here provide an insight into the complexities of the local male occupational hierarchy and will prove invaluable when exploring the significance of nicknaming in this speech community in the following section.

⁹ Interview with Ray K., 24/10/98, t 1, s 1, 9.3

¹⁰ Interview with Neil S., 10/12/96, t 1, s 1, 16.1

¹¹ Fwd, 15/9/97.



and any potential misadventures of it of colour. It would have the long to be in this particular study.

There are essentially two extreme opinions among researchers about what constitutes a nickname. This is reflected among the relatively small number of researchers who have collected and analyzed the nicknames found in community communities. For example,

Nicknames

Introduction

The collection and analysis of nicknames in this speech community were motivated by four broad aims: to find out who has a nickname; to ask what these names tell us about socio-occupational group norms; to ascertain the context in which nicknames are used; and finally, but perhaps most importantly, to attempt to explain why nicknames are so common among this particular group.

Data collection included eliciting examples of an individual's nickname along with anyone else's they could remember. Frequently, nicknames were used spontaneously during the telling of a narrative or anecdote. In all cases, explanations of their meaning and origin were sought, although such detail was not always known. Altogether a total of 120 different nicknames were elicited, almost exclusively via the semi-structured interviews conducted with 30 men and women. After examples had been given, respondents were encouraged to comment on the usage and significance of nicknames in the local coalmining community in the hope that some conclusions could be drawn concerning their function.

Nicknames as an identifiable genre

Nicknames have been collected and analysed by researchers from a variety of different but related disciplinary backgrounds, including onomastics, oral history, social anthropology, sociology, psychology and folklore. Although many of the researchers agree that nicknames are relatively easy to collect compared with other modes of social interaction, there appears to be confusion among them as to exactly what counts as a nickname. To avoid any potential misunderstanding it is necessary to explain how the term is to be used in this particular study.

There are essentially two current opinions among researchers about what constitutes a nickname. This is reflected among the relatively small number of researchers who have collected and analysed the nicknames found in coalmining communities. For example,

Davies states that nicknames function primarily to help differentiate between individuals in smaller close-knit communities where there are dense kinship networks and therefore many people have the same surname,¹² whereas Skipper's interpretation is that nicknames function to tell us more about the individual's personality, physical appearance or mannerisms, rather than simply as a means of easier identification.¹³ Bearing in mind the relatively limited research that has been undertaken into the language and lore of coalminers in Britain, and especially in the Yorkshire area, the present study takes an inclusive stance on the matter of what is considered a nickname. Some researchers have considered the diminutive of a name, such as 'Ex' as a substitute for the surname Exley, as not qualifying as a nickname, but such forms are included in the data here. In fact, of the total number of nicknames collected and presented in this study, only a fraction consist of diminutives. However, it is argued that such forms warrant inclusion as they are not used as a matter of course among all groups of people. They are idiomatic forms that frequently require explanation to an outsider, and are part of the local linguistic fabric. Also included here are what some researchers have called 'inevitable nicknames'.¹⁴ By this term it is implied that a tradition exists whereby individuals with a particular surname are given a pre-existing nickname: for example, someone with the surname Thompson would receive the nickname 'Tommo', Webb would receive 'Spider', and Bell 'Ding dong'. However, the term 'inevitable' is potentially misleading. The 'inevitable' aspect is only apparent in the specific local cultural context of the time. Among the data collected here, a coalminer with the surname Wood received the nickname 'Nogger'; a 'nog' underground refers to a piece of wood used to support the roof of a mine. Such linguistic forms are inevitable among a group of coalminers working in a specific region during a specific period of the twentieth century, but not necessarily to anyone else.

Ultimately, in this study, a nickname refers to a name that is used as a substitute for an individual's surname or as an affix or suffix to an individual's surname, thereby forming

¹² Davies, Lynn, "Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales", *Journal for the Society of Folklife Studies*, vol. 9 (1971), 79-107.

¹³ Skipper, James, "Nicknames, Coal Miners and Group Solidarity", *Journal of the American Name Society*, vol. 34, no.2 (June, 1986), 134-145.

¹⁴ Beale, Paul, "'And so nobby called to Smudger...'" Nicknames Associated with Individual Surnames', *Lore and Language*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1990), 3-18.

a compound. Importantly, where possible, the nicknames collected have accompanying details explaining their meaning and local significance.

The distribution of nicknames

Prior to a close examination of the nicknames in terms of their local meaning and significance, it is important to note the relationship between the sample population of informants and the number of nicknames collected. This will give an indication of who in the speech community has a nickname, as well as who claims to know of nicknames. Any significant results that arise from analysing the data in this way can later be compared with the informants' own perceptions of and attitudes towards the practice of nicknaming, thereby adding substance, or not, to emerging patterns. The fact that the sample of people interviewed had been designed with regard to gender, age, specific job at the pit, and official status, facilitated an analysis of the linguistic data collected with reference to these sociological correlates.

With respect to gender, only a third of the sample of informants were women. Notably, when asked, some women knew a number of nicknames, but, these were exclusively the nicknames of men, normally belonging to their partners, or work colleagues of their partners. When asked to comment further, women said that nicknaming was not a tradition among their gender set. This was the usual response, both in interviews and during participant observation.

When all the providers of nickname data were correlated with age, no significant relationship was found. This discredited any belief that the practice was something dying out, or associated only with older members of the speech community. In fact, the man who provided the greatest number of nicknames was the youngest informant in the sample. Age was not an important factor, either, in terms of people having a nickname themselves, as informants of all age groups provided details of their own particular nickname.

In the article "Nicknames, Coal Miners and Group Solidarity", James Skipper hypothesises that the greater the need for solidarity in a group, the more likely the use of nicknames. He links the need for group solidarity to the dangerous, unpredictable underground working environment. In this way, Skipper's line of enquiry follows the

Malinowskian anxiety-ritual theory popular among some folklorists and social anthropologists in the 1970s and 1980s who were studying the beliefs of groups with dangerous occupations.¹⁵ Although this is a plausible line of enquiry, Skipper's data set is limited, being collected only from underground workers. In the present research, nicknames were sought from miners working on the surface as well as those working underground so that the two could be compared. All four miners interviewed who worked on the surface claimed to have had a nickname, compared with just eight of the 16 underground miners asked. In addition, surface workers' knowledge of other miners' nicknames provided a mean average score of 10 nicknames per person asked, compared with a mean average score of just four and a half for nicknames provided by underground workers. Similarly, many of the names provided were nicknames of surface workers who the informant had worked with. Assuming that the working environment on the surface of the mine is generally considered to be safer than underground, one would expect nicknames to be more prevalent underground, following Skipper's hypothesis. However, although the data collected here comes from a relatively small sample, and the results could therefore be a factor of random selection, it does serve to question that hypothesis. This point is developed further below.

Of the mining officials interviewed 66 percent said they had a nickname. Interestingly, two officials who claimed not to have one were both underground deputies. This is important when viewed alongside informants' commentary which frequently stated that deputies were often given nicknames clandestinely and not used to their face. Supporting this view is the fact that 10 examples of deputies' nicknames were collected from ordinary workers, not deputies. This raises an important methodological issue, as it highlights the importance of collecting people's perceptions about the practice of nicknaming as well as collecting actual examples. Having dual data sources facilitates triangulation and therefore enhances reliability. In this case, it allows us to predict more accurately how nicknames are used by different people within this community. For example, here we learn that a given individual may not always know their own nickname.

¹⁵ Poggie, J. J. and Gersuny, C., "Risk and Ritual: An interpretation of fishermen's folklore in a New England community", in Oring, E., ed., *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres, A Reader*, Logan, Utah State University Press, 1989, pp. 137-145.
 Malinowski, Bronislaw, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*. Garden City, Doubleday, 1948.

A final important statistic is that, despite the high number of nicknames collected, only 60 percent of male informants claimed to have a nickname themselves. 90 percent of male informants provided at least one example of a nickname and 70 percent provided a minimum of three examples or more. There is clearly a mismatch here. Once again it could be that nicknames are not always known by the individuals concerned, as they are being used clandestinely. A different explanation might be that they are too embarrassed to reveal their nicknames in public, or certainly to a researcher. The latter point is plausible, as many nicknames can be considered stigmas. A closer examination of the nicknames themselves, and the associated commentary, might shed light on this and other issues raised in this section, as well as opening out the debate to consider what the nicknames reveal about socio-occupational group norms.

Classification of nicknames

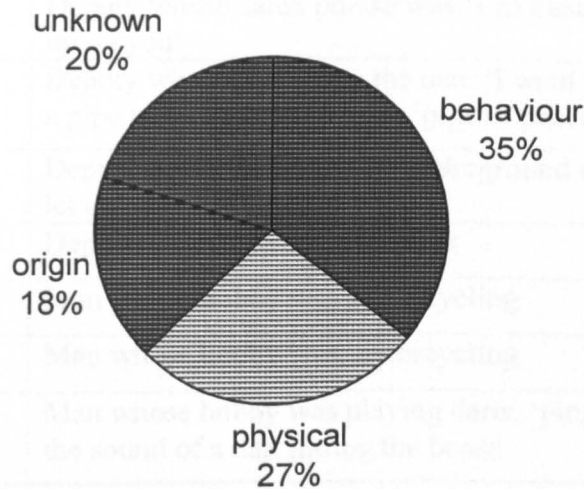
The 120 nicknames collected have been classified according to the chief characteristic referred to in each case. These include behavioural peculiarities or, physical peculiarities, or relate to a person's place of origin or given name. Twenty percent of nicknames were collected where informants were unable to say how the nickname had come about. Other scholars have used a similar approach to classification and, although somewhat arbitrary in a sense, it helps to make sense of a large amount of data.¹⁶ Figure 6:1 below presents nicknames categorized by chief characteristic and as a proportion of the total number collected.

¹⁶ Bardsley, Charles, W., *English Surnames: their sources and significations*, (1873), Newton Abbot, David and Charles Reprints, 1969, p. 428.

Reaney, P.H., and Wilson, R.M., *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1991, pp. xlii – xlv.

Although a classification system is not explicitly discussed many nicknames are also included in Hanks, Patrick, and Hodges, Flavia, *A Dictionary of Surnames*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.

Figure 6 1 Nicknames categorized by chief characteristic and presented as a proportion of the total number collected



The nicknames themselves, including a brief description of the motivation for their attribution, are given below. The nicknames are then discussed in terms of what they reveal about the social norms of the socio-occupational group.

Nicknames pertaining to behavioural characteristics

Nickname	Description
Grave Digger Bill	Deputy with hump back
*Blackie ¹⁷	Manager who always got his face dirty underground
Al Jolson,	Manager who gets his face dirty and also has huge hands and wore gloves
Chalkball	Deputy always writing messages with chalk on the tubs for men underground
Rembrandt	Deputy whose catchphrase was 'how are things, put me in t' picture?'
Mozart	Deputy whose catchphrase was 'now look, play it by ear and we'll see what we can do'

¹⁷ Items that are preceded by an asterisk are examples of an individual having two nicknames. The alternative nickname normally follows the first one. In this case for example the individual is known as 'Blackie' or 'Al Jolson'.

Barna-check	Deputy whose catch phrase was 'I'm bahna check up on you'
Hiawatha	Deputy who once said to the men 'I want you to get a pipe apiece'[word play on 'pipe of peace']
Balloon	Deputy whose catch phrase underground was 'don't let me down lads'
Wiggy	Deputy who wore a wig to work
*Charlie Brown	Man whose hobby was motorcycling
Crasher	Man whose hobby was motorcycling
Ping	Man whose hobby was playing darts, 'ping' being the sound of a dart hitting the board
Socka	Man who had been an amateur boxer
Dog Hollins	Man who kept and trained greyhounds
Dogman	Man who kept and trained greyhounds
Old Dog Jack	Man who kept and trained greyhounds
Whistler	Man who was always whistling
Chicken George	Man whose mannerisms and posture reminded his work mates of a chicken
Swampy	Man who worked in water underground
Rebate	Man always claiming rebate, or sickness benefit
Shirley	An idle worker named so 'because he is like a fucking woman'
General	Man whose catch phrase was 'put me dahn for general work'
Silver Birch	Name given to a grey haired strike breaker
Scab Bedley	Name given to a strikebreaker
Gunna	Man always claiming 'I'm gunna do this and I'm gunna do that'
Ram	Man who was renowned for masturbating at work
Young Zuk	Man who predicted the winner of a horse race, 'Zuk'
Jumping Joe	Man who was hyperactive, never sitting still
Screaming Ayo	Man who was always yelling and shouting
Doggy Dent	A stupid person
Chockblock	An unintelligent person

*Tommy Toolbox	Man who carried lots of unnecessary tools on his waist belt for self-importance
Tacklebary Bates	Man who carried lots of unnecessary tools on his waist belt for self-importance.
Cloggy Ennis	Man who continued to wear clogs underground when everyone had switched to wearing boots
Clean 'D'	Man who always wore gloves underground.
Shoes	Miner who wore a pair of shoes, akin to the ones worn by Neil the hippy in the TV series 'The Young Ones'
Rowdy Yates	Man who was reputed to like fighting after drinking alcohol
Axeman	Man who had attacked someone with an axe and had been sent to a psychiatric hospital for a while, prior to working at the pit
Chocka Reeves	Man who worked with the chocks on the coalface
Red Billy	Man known for his left-wing socialist party activities
Cocoa Cabal	Man who was always clowning around, a joker

Nicknames pertaining to physical characteristics

Nickname	Description
*The Gnome	Miner who was small
Little Harry	Miner who was small
Little Joey	Miner who was small
Little Jonny	Miner who was small
Titch	Miner who was small
Big H	Miner who was big
Big Harry	Miner who was big
Big Ern Street	Miner who was big
Honey Monster	Miner who was big and fat
O'Marley Mix	A thick-set man named after a concrete mix called

	Marley mix
Fatty, Fatty Coy	Miner who was fat
Cowhead	A man with a big head
Chopper Cook	Man with large penis
*Red	Red headed miner
Ginner [dʒɪnə]	Red headed miner
Big Cat	Miner with long red hair
Red	Red headed miner
Slaphead	Bald miner
Acker Bilk	Man who looked like the musician Acker Bilk
Fairground Freak	A big ugly miner
Fuji	A man with hair, looks and complexion of a Japanese person
Terry Toad	An ugly looking man
Chocolate Teeth,	A miner with crooked, damaged teeth
Gargoyle	A miner who was thought of as being ugly
Midnight	A black miner who miners claim was harder to see underground
Abdul Shaw	A miner with a dark complexion. The miners thought he looked like an Arab.
Rotting Gob	Man with bad breath
Trigger	Miner that had a skin disease and a problem with his body odour, the men claimed he smelled like the horse 'Trigger'
Brut	A miner who always smelled of deodorant spray
Baby	The youngest man among a group of workers
Kebab	A miner who was skewered by a wooden dowelling in an accident underground and lived
Cag Linford	A left-handed miner

Nicknames referring to regional, kinship and occupational origin, or given name

Old Staffy Harry	A miner originally from Staffordshire
Geordie Bob	A miner originally from the north-east of England
Alfie Pole	A miner from eastern Europe, not necessarily Poland
Georgie Pole	A miner from eastern Europe, not necessarily Poland
*Tex	A miner given his father's name
Young Terry	A miner referred to in relation to his father
Gibbins	A miner referred to in relation to his father
Ezra	A miner referred to in relation to his father
Dog Fox	Man belonging to a particular family, many with the compound – 'Fox' as a nickname. Exact origin unknown.
Sailor Sid	A miner who had been in the navy prior to working at the pit.

Joe Filey	Man whose surname was Scarborough but the deputy couldn't spell it so he renamed him Filey
Nogger	Man with the surname Wood
Nogger	Another man with the surname Wood
H	Man with the first name Harry
Ex	Man with the surname Exley
Active Arthur	Alliteration of a miner's first name
Rocket Ronnie	Alliteration of a miner's first name
Lazy Les	Alliteration of a miner's first name (Not because the man was thought of as idle)
Budgie	A derivative of a man's surname Burgess
813	Man who couldn't pronounce his check number, 813, correctly and therefore everyone named him precisely that
Andy Pandy	Rhyme of a man with first name Andy
Slate Lewis	Man with the surname Lewis

Nicknames with unknown origins

Yoz

Chicken

Lefty

Nerker

Codger

Aker

Pop

Minky

Cheddar

Old Nigger Harris

Tug

Muller,

Chief Muller

Lady Bountiful

Wep Senior

Juddy Chin

Knocker Edwards

Bronk

Chick Marsden

Nooky Coates

Shaggy

Orky Bob

Wart

Peggy

Discussion

Analysis in this section of the study stems from the premise that the examination of nicknaming, and naming generally, within sufficiently closed social groups, tells us much about the ground rules and cultural assumptions of both the group and the individuals who comprise it. Although their research is based on children, Morgan et al support this view, by stating that:

“...the norms of appearance and behaviour are promulgated and enforced, at least in some such societies, through nicknaming. By marking, emphasising and stigmatising the abnormal, nicknames serve to publish what is acceptable among those who promote such names and who direct their contempt upon those unfortunate enough to be their bearers.”¹⁸

Some of the nicknames presented above have clearly negative connotations and in some cases function as stigmas. In this sense, the first three categories of nicknames described – physical, behavioural and origin – fit well with Goffman’s concept of three different types of stigma:

“First there are the abominations of the body – the various physical deformities. Next there are blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behaviour. Finally there are the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion, these being stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family.”¹⁹

The difficulty is that Goffman implies here that there is a group of universal social norms, whereas in fact what is considered a behavioral abnormality among one group of people is not necessarily the case for a different group. One of the limitations of Goffman’s research is that he frequently makes general claims from his data, rather than being sensitive to their validity only when viewed in relation to the specific local context

¹⁸ Morgan, Jane, O’Neil, C., and, Harre, R., *Nicknames: Their origins and social consequences*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979. p.69.

¹⁹ Goffman, Erving, *Stigma, Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, London, Penguin, 1968, p. 14

and time of production. Imprisonment for a coalminer, for example, might not necessarily mean that he is stigmatised in the workplace. In some cases such a label might operate positively, especially say if a miner was arrested and imprisoned for offences committed on the picket line during an industrial dispute. On the other hand, as we saw in the previous chapter, someone who is named a 'scab' in this community for crossing a picket line bears an huge stigma, but in a different coalmining community, perhaps in Nottinghamshire, such behaviour might not be a deviation but the norm. Contextual relativity apart, although many of the nicknames presented here can be seen to have negative connotations, they cannot be treated as being stigmatic to the same degree as is being named a scab. Lesser stigmas include those of being perceived as an idle worker: 'Shirley', being stupid: 'Chock Block', or just trying to assume self importance: 'Tommy Toolbox' or 'Gunna'. Reviewing the nicknames relating to physical characteristics, we learn that the miners' social world can be a harsh one. Every feature is dealt with to such an extent that it is hard to imagine how anybody could possibly escape without receiving a nickname. Size, colour of hair, teeth, skin colour, bad breath, none of these escape the public gaze and recognition via a nickname. However, in many cases, perhaps stigma is too strong a term. Some individuals have acquired nicknames because of the peculiarities of their dress, for example the determination of one miner to wear his clogs to work instead of boots. Such habits are recognised as distinctive among the work group and the nicknames cherished. Many of these nicknames are neutral or positive in character, describing, for example, people's pastimes, such as 'ping', (darts), 'dogman', (greyhound breeding and racing), and 'crasher', (motorcycling). Such nicknames are not stigmas but acknowledgements that these people are passionate about a particular hobby. In other instances the nicknames show that a person is a member of a hardworking or respectable family, for example 'Young Terry' or 'Dog Fox'.

Some informants highlighted the fact that people were given their nicknames at school. As Clarry explained:

"Well nearly everybody had a nickname, probably what he'd left school wi' I can't remember many being called wi' the first names.... They all had some kind o' nickname... simply they'd had it all the' life from being at school."²⁰

²⁰ Interview with Clarry W., 24/10/98, t 1, s 2, 14.29

As some men obviously worked with old school colleagues, it is easy to see how nicknames, immortalised in the playground, are maintained via continuing social networks at work and in the social centres of street, pub and club. Although not all nicknames are related to coalmining, they thrive in this dense socio-occupational network that assigns status.

Nicknames categorised in this study as pertaining to origin allow people to be positioned according to their family lineage, or regional or national identity. The importance of the father's reputation, discussed in the previous chapter, arises once again, where a young miner is given his father's name. As one man explained:

Neil S: The nicknames used to follow 'em as well, I am trying to think of an example, some on 'em got same name that their dad got.

AC: Yeah.

NS: Yeah they were, what wa' name o' 'em nah? I know the' wa' Young so and so and Old so and so, they were father and son."²¹

In one example collected, the father has two names 'Terry' or 'Tex' and his son is referred to as either 'Tex' or 'Young Terry'. The case of Tex and Young Terry also underlines the fact that some people have more than one nickname, sometimes similar as in this example, but not always. An older miner told of how, as a boy, he received a number of names from other miners when he started work, but how they were always names of his older brothers, men already working at the pit and established in the socio-occupational network :

Harry W: Aye they called him Big Harry (*his grandfather*).

AC: And what abaht your dad, did he have a name?

HW: Who me dad?

AC: Yeah, a nickname or owt like that?

HW: Ah they called him Tug

AC: Tug, What wa' that for?

HW: I dunt know we used to ask him reglar, he sez 'I dunt know', but everybody in village called him Tug Wilson, ah.

AC: And what abaht you, did you have a name?

HW: No wi' - my name, well wi' me being youngest o' t' brothers, all older end, one day I used to get called Jim, another day Jack, another day Bill and me other

²¹ Interview with Neil S., 10/12/96, t 1, s 1, 26.4

brother say, It wa' very rare I wa' called Harry 'til I grew up a bit, and then them who I'd worked wi' and knocked abaht wi' you know it wore off then an' I got mi own name back(laughs) ah.

AC: And your brothers did they, did anybody call them?

BW: No, no they al'a's stuck to their own name....²²

The commentary above, of how a young coalminer struggles to reclaim his own christian name in the new sphere of the pit, is extraordinary. It reiterates once again the close proximity of the spheres of work and family. One wonders why no one simply asked him his name. Symbolically, when he arrives underground, aged fourteen, the fact that he is one of the Wilson brothers is sufficient identification. Only when he has 'grown up a bit', perhaps having a regular job underground, did he reclaim his name. Some nicknames that failed to fall into any other category appear to originate from linguistic play, and form a category of their own. The theme of play, and in particular linguistic play, is a theme that emerges continually through most of the nicknaming practices described here. Such nicknames are discussed later in the chapter in the section that attempts to explain the reason for so many nicknames among coalminers

Contextual constraints of nickname use

I wanted to know if nicknames were used exclusively in the work context or whether they were used in the wider community. This question was answered in part by the fact that many nicknames occurred spontaneously during the recounting of narratives in tape-recorded interviews and, when questioned, people frequently did not know the origins of these nicknames. Indeed, such cases account for 20 percent of all nicknames collected. Neil explained that there was often no switching between a person's nickname used at work and their christian name, even if they were met in a non-work context, as no-one knew their legal name:

"You didn't know their real name, ah there are some still nah, there's a kid an' I saw him in town other week an' I know his second name's Smith but I don't know

²² Interview with Harry W., 5/11/98, t 1, s 1, 17.56

his first name and we al'as called him Minky, Minky and I dunt know why, why he wa' called that, but 'Hey up Mink', 'A'reight ahr you goin' on?' ”²³

Often, even if a nickname borders on the stigmatic, it is used outside of the occupational context in the social centres of the pub or club. Alan claimed that most people use the nickname 'Trigger' to the miner who has repugnant body odour due to a skin and gland illness. He personally thinks the nickname is insensitive, uncomfortable and unnecessary, yet the majority of males use 'Trigger' all the time to the man's face, irrespective of where they meet him.

In a different way, some nicknames were reported to be used clandestinely, and this was particularly the case with derogatory nicknames for deputies. In one interview, in particular, the respondent implied that a certain deputy's nickname was used behind his back while his first name was used to his face. It is quite likely that the man concerned has no knowledge of the name the men called him.

Importantly, many nicknames in this situation function not as wordplay on the original surname or denoting a physical abnormality, but as a reference to some behavioural characteristic identified as challenging the group norm and therefore being unacceptable. Names like 'Chalkball', 'Chicken' and 'Barna-check' stem from the men's hatred of being told what to do. It is their way of coming to terms with someone who has left their group and acquired power over them. At the work level, the men and the deputies rely on each other both for production and general safety, yet at another level there is an attempt to disassociate themselves, to excommunicate the deputies from their private linguistic and moral code.²⁴ The interchanging of the nickname and first name points to an ambivalent relationship which is based on both co-operation and protest.

As one colliery manager pointed out, it is impossible to watch over the miners while they are working. Unlike a factory where one can see everything happening, when they are underground different teams of workers are isolated and spread out in many different locations connected by roadways. In fact, many miners detest anyone watching over them whilst they are working; having 'lamps on your back' irritates them, and they

²³ Interview with Neil S., 12/12/96, t 1, s 1, 25.4

²⁴ The deputy is the only man who can shotfire, which is a crucial part of many underground tasks, and especially that of extracting the coal. He also tests for gas, as well as performing other safety duties in his particular area or 'district'. The men's earnings are related to productivity and so they rely on him in a very important way. Usually the deputy himself has a lot of pressure from the management above.

view it as questioning their ability to perform a task. To plan a surprise visit to check on the men is usually quite impossible as a secret linguistic code normally operates to warn of any visits. Steve C, a colliery manager, admitted to knowing his own name 'Blackie', and to hearing it being called over the tannoy system as he approached a place of work. He believes the men thought he was unaware of his own nickname. Such a practice of clandestine nicknames ties in with statistics presented earlier in the chapter, which clearly show that although people claimed not to have a nickname themselves, they nearly always knew of somebody else's nickname. This implies that a significant number of nicknames operate behind people's backs, and not necessarily just those of bosses. This leads us conveniently into attempting to answer some of the questions raised so far.

The function of nicknames locally

The aim in this section is to try to explain why so many nicknames exist among coalminers in this community. Four separate but interrelated explanations of the function of nicknames are now posited and critically evaluated. Firstly, nicknames are viewed as a mode of easy identification; secondly, they are seen as contributing to a sense of insidership, operating as an argot of a subculture; they are then examined in terms of a form of informal verbal social control; and finally they are discussed as a means of language creativity and play.

Ease of identification

To some extent the plethora of nicknames in Royston and surrounding neighbourhoods serves as an important mechanism for allowing people to differentiate between others when a limited number of given names are shared by a number of people. This stance has also been taken by Mewett, studying the close-knit crofting community of Clachan on the Hebridean island of Lewis,²⁵ and Davies, describing the nicknames of Welsh coalminers.²⁶ Of the 120 nicknames collected here, 43 percent consist of a compound

²⁵ Mewett, P., "Exiles, Nicknames, Social Identities and the Production of Local Consciousness in a Lewis Crofting Community", in Cohen, A.P., ed., *Belonging: Identity and social organisation in British rural cultures*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1982, p. 234.

²⁶ Davies, Lynn, *ibid*, 102.

form, involving either the first name, for example 'Red Billy', the surname, like 'Slate Lewis' or, very occasionally, both, such as 'Little Jonny Turner'. Bearing in mind that some collieries employed upwards of a thousand men, drawn from the surrounding, close-knit communities, nicknames could be seen as a useful form of identification. Here the nomenclature is a replacement, still operating essentially as an informative tool to distinguish between individuals whose identities might otherwise be confused. However, it is impossible to substantiate such an explanation with reliable data. Without immediately wishing to dismiss such a probable explanation for the emergence and maintenance of a robust tradition of nicknames in this coalmining community, there is evidence to suggest that such an explanation is limited. Importantly, a person's original first name or surname were often unknown. As Harold from Royston said: 'You didn't know their real names.' This shows that often there was no choice of whether to call someone by their nickname or by their actual name. Another problem raised by this explanation is that women are not part of the local nicknaming practice. Three of the women interviewed had worked at a nearby confectionery factory, a large employer of local female labour. One would have expected women to report at least a few nicknames from their place of work, once again due to a shortage of surnames as described above, but this was not the case.

Among the men, a nickname could be used to identify a person, in the same way that he might be described in reference to where he worked, (a 'Monckton man'); the job he held at the mine, (a 'face man'); and exactly where in the mine that job was performed, ('dahn Fenton on t' wetside'); or whether or not he was a 'good worker'. It might be that a man's nickname dates from his school days or that the compound form of his nickname involves the surname of a well-known family with firmly established roots in the community. Once we enter this arena, individuals are still being differentiated, but we are receiving a wealth of social information too. Associational categories of occupation and family lineage, along with the inherent locally important status distinctions, now begin to merge. Being named 'Scab Bedlington' reveals more easily which member of that particular family is being referred to, but for those in the know, it also reveals a distinct social identity, an index to the individual's standing in the local

social hierarchy. It is for these reasons that the notion of nicknames functioning only as a tool for easier identification is treated as having limited explanatory power in this study.

Argot as an emblem of group membership

The focus now shifts to viewing nicknames as being part of a symbolic linguistic code that extends beyond the mere identification of individuals. The question raised here is to what extent nicknames operate as an argot to promote linguistic distinctiveness and to build and sustain a sense of group belonging.

As one retired Royston coalminer explained to me, 'You were proud of your nickname',²⁷ although, considering the insulting tone of some of these nicknames, there must be obvious exceptions. However, this idea of being proud of one's nickname links with the idea of a nickname being a badge of insider status. Mewett views nicknames as functioning to differentiate those people coming from families with long lineage in the crofting community as opposed to relative newcomers or 'outsiders'.²⁸ Green, in her study of dockworkers in New Zealand, collected many nicknames and argued that they functioned chiefly to build a sense of insiderness as well as representing expressions of a wider male, working-class culture. This explanation sits comfortably alongside the fact that, in the present study, virtually no female nicknames were collected. The nicknames found are strictly symbols of male belonging, a space where even if women know of men's nicknames (and this is something of an exception), they themselves are not part of it. A further question that needs to be asked is why do coalminers, in particular, need this insider distinctiveness?

Douglass suggests that the special cultural and linguistic habits of coalminers is a response to the peculiar environment in which they work.²⁹ Looking specifically at nicknames, Skipper argues that their use among coalminers promotes group solidarity which is vital to production and the safety of the group.³⁰ What is argued here is that the issue is far more complex. Skipper hypothesises that the greater the need for group solidarity in a group, the more likely it is that nicknames will be used. He also supports

²⁷ Interview with Harold W., 24/10/98.

²⁸ Mewett, P, *ibid*, p. 238

²⁹ Douglass, D., "Pit-Talk in County Durham", *History Workshop Pamphlet*, No. 10, 1979, p. 1.

the view that solidarity is needed as a weapon to combat difficult and potentially dangerous conditions like 'cave-ins, gas explosions, and flooding'. Skipper likens the need for group solidarity to that of military combat units. Whilst acknowledging that the extraction of coal is a remote, difficult and potentially dangerous task, it is suggested here that the need for solidarity extends beyond the day-to-day working environment. As was pointed out earlier, many of the surface workers interviewed in the present study had their own nickname and provided copious examples of nicknames, belonging predominantly to their surface working colleagues. Surface work at the mine is generally acknowledged as being relatively safe. Similarly, other occupational groups exist where the use of nicknames is prevalent and yet the working environment not particularly peculiar or dangerous. Research undertaken among shipbuilders³¹ and railway workers³² for example, shows that nicknames are a common feature. More important than a high risk working environment would seem to be a sufficiently closed social network that has developed its own linguistic codes.

Skipper's explanation of the nicknaming process among coalminers is part of a wider movement throughout the twentieth century, which views outdoor masculine occupations as romanticised folk groups. By emphasising the dangerous working environment as a reason for unusual linguistic forms, Skipper is following a functionalist approach based on Malinowski's ritual-anxiety theory.³³ This in turn enhances the notion of miners being an isolated and marginalized cultural group worthy of special status. This is a view portrayed in much of the left-wing, union-sponsored literature, as well as literature written by miners themselves, which focuses predominantly on embittered strikes, accidents and explosions, thereby highlighting the extreme at the expense of the everyday. The more commonplace detail of day-to-day life, along with the experiences of surface workers and women in the community, often goes unrecorded. The important

³⁰ Skipper, J., "Nicknames, Coalminers and Group Solidarity", *Journal of the American Name Society*, New York, 1986, Vol. 34 (2), p.134 - 145.

³¹ Morgan, D., O'Neill, C. and Harre, R., *Nicknames: Their origins and Social consequences*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1979, appendix 2, p. 148. Also Green, Anna, *ibid.*

³² Partridge, E., *A Dictionary of slang and unconventional English*, ed. Beale, P., Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984, p.1392-93.

³³ Malinowski, Bronislaw, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, Garden City, Doubleday, 1948.

point is to not to discredit the functional folkloristic view, but to be aware of its starting point and the fact it has tended to oversimplify complex cultural processes.³⁴

Folklorist Ryden Kent, in his book *Mapping The Invisible Landscape*, explains nicknames among Utah's silver-mining communities as functioning to engender a sense of insidership that ties a group of people to a place. He does not posit the idea that nicknames are a response to the dangerous working environment. Instead he writes:

“Along with their mining-based slang, nicknames like these provide members of the community with a private language whose referents are known only to them, an unofficial home-grown nomenclature to parallel or supplant the official, legal names which are known to the world at large. To be able to pick Milk Bottle out of a crowd, to know who Big Bill is while finding no meaning in the name Bill Bondurant, is to prove that one belongs in the place, that one is a member of an exclusive society whose members have been given new identities which are valid and meaningful only in this particular location.”³⁵

By foregrounding the fact that it is place which people are tied to as much as occupation, Ryden manages to sidestep the all explaining force of functionalism. Instead, nicknames are seen as contributing to people's sense of local identity. This point in particular is helpful in accounting for those nicknames collected in this study that were claimed to have followed people from school, such as 'Titch', 'Nerker' and 'Cheddar'. One of the informants, Harry, explained:

AC: “Did they have nicknames as well, some o' these people?

HW: Well in them days, same as me I di'n't know mi name until I wa' grown up 'Cheddar', but I don't know who named it but all through my life my name – they called me Cheddar, and everybody would have a nickname rather than, very rare that they called anybody with their own name....

....It was just automatic when you went to school, school kids used to make 'em up.... very rare that they went in the ordinary name, you were proud o' nickname, you didn't think anything abaht it....”³⁶

Clearly nicknames used in Royston and neighbouring communities operate as a specialized linguistic code, a code deeply rooted in a local context. In this respect they

³⁴ Mullen, P. B., “Belief and the American Folk”, *Journal of American Folklore*, 113, (2000), 128.

³⁵ Ryden, Kent, C., *Mapping The Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1993, p. 194.

³⁶ Interview with Harry W., 5/11/98, t 1, s 1, 23.0

can be likened to an argot, indeed the local miners' argot. These linguistic forms, such as the sayings, greetings and leavetakings discussed in Chapter 5, are badges of identity that only locals use and only locals understand. But local commentary claiming that at the pit 'there were hundreds of nicknames' and 'everybody had a nickname' are, in a sense, exaggerations. Firstly, as already noted, not everybody claimed to have a nickname. Also it appears that many nicknames were used behind people's backs, especially in the case of deputies. Other people claimed they had two nicknames, perhaps depending on who they were with and where they were. However, conflicting most overtly with this idea of a nickname being a badge of socio-occupational group membership is the fact that so many nicknames originate from individuals being measured against an idealized group of social norms, thereby exposing a local hierarchy which operates as a form of informal social control. This is the starting point for an alternative explanation of the use of nicknames in these coalmining communities.

Social control

In Chapter 5, extreme labels of stigma such as 'scab' were shown as operating to excommunicate individuals and their families from wider community life. Earlier in the present chapter, nicknames pertaining to behavioural origins were presented. At one level, individual behaviour is supported or attacked via a nickname. Although presumably some nicknames lose their original force and meaning over time, it is easy to view a nickname that has negative connotations as a response to behaviour seen to fall short of an idealized local social norm. When examined more closely the local social norms described here have definable characteristics, even if the boundaries are somewhat fuzzy. A sense of togetherness is a fundamental cornerstone of group behaviour and reinforced through militant union involvement in the local collieries. Scabs are perceived as betraying this togetherness and therefore treated as outcasts. Deputies, on the other hand, have left the ordinary working group by choice and ascended into the world of management, and for this reason they are treated with great suspicion and ridiculed mercilessly behind their backs. Men who try to set themselves above the group in any way are nicknamed accordingly, as in the previously mentioned case of the aspirational young miner who was always dreaming of escaping life at the pit and was nicknamed 'Gunna', 'because he is always going to do this and going to do that'.

Anyone who does not fit the local, narrowly-defined, working-class masculine role will be lucky to escape without a nickname. A man that is considered a poor worker is renamed with the feminine name 'Shirley', as already noted. Similarly, a young miner who reveals his given first name to be Jeremy would be laughed at relentlessly by the older men. Jeremy is simply not considered an appropriate male name locally.

Information about locally acceptable roles for men was also discovered through anecdotes collected during fieldwork. One Royston miner's wife told of how her husband normally refused to push the pram with his young daughter in. However, one day during the 1972 miner's strike, after poaching a load of potatoes from a nearby farmer's field he spread them out on the tray beneath the pram. This apparently reduced the stigma totally as no longer was he solely pushing a pram but he was using the pram to carry the food he had gathered with which to feed his wife and kids. This incident highlights the important yet arbitrary nature of the distinction between male and female roles as perceived by some miners. One night in a pub in Grimethorpe, a man told a joke of how he is constantly telling his neighbour, who is a deputy at the pit and whose kitchen window faces his own, to close his curtains when he is washing up, otherwise his wife might see him and demand that he too do the washing up. Household chores are stereotypically deemed as part of the female's role. Although often small structurally, anecdotes like these, are important local speech forms that create and reinforce much of the idealized local social order. Not necessarily every individual believes in them or adapts their behaviour because of them; nevertheless, the maintenance of such stereotypical norms cannot be overestimated.

Undoubtedly, one of the main ways that nicknames contribute to maintaining local social order is by being an exclusively male practice. As with many aspects of the coalminer's verbal repertoire discussed so far, women, although sometimes having knowledge of men's nicknames, are not part of the practice themselves. This itself is not surprising in an industry which totally excludes women. It may be the case that women use nicknames clandestinely, but that these just did not emerge during fieldwork. However, considering how easily nicknames were collected from the men, it is somewhat striking that none were collected from women. During fieldwork my attention was constantly drawn to the fact that the pit is a male space, but that this male space extends

far and wide into general community life. The following anecdote reveals how one woman feared entering a 'pit paddy', not for her own sake but for fear of the ridicule her husband might suffer from his work colleagues if they found out:

JoyB: I mean I once went dahn Royston, cos me mother lived in Royston for a long time before she come up here, and I'd gone to visit her. An' I missed last bus home and I thought oh my God, what am I gunna do, cos I mean he's brilliant nah I wish he'd been like he is nah, but he wa' very jealous (*her husband*).

So I missed the bus, I thought what am I gunna do? And this friend of his was stood at...on corner o' where chemist used to be on Wells. He sez 'what's up Joy?' I sez 'bus has gone Derek' I mean god love him he's dead nah Derek eh.. and he sez 'You'll ha' to get on pit paddy' I sez 'I can't get on pit paddy' He sez 'you can' I sez – cos this wa' Kirby pit paddy, and I have never been as embarrassed but I had to get home, – an' I got on this pit paddy like this (*she holds both of her hands over her face*) and Derek shoved me reight up I sez 'wha' if the' see me?' (*laughs*) I was frightened to *death* (*emphasis*), and I, I –and they knew who I wa' some on 'em, you know, would know who I wa' – and Derek' shouting 'you don't open you mouth, you all know what he's like (*her husband*), old... you know and it wa really..

Sandra B: I mean you really would have been ridiculed for that

JB: It made me poorly, it made me poorly, but I had to get home I mean I wouldn't ha' dared walk it, but I wished after I 'ad a done. But it never got back to him and that wa' very good.

SB: Oh it wa' definitely good (*laughing*). Can't have been pillocking season."

The embarrassment she feels for having entered a male designated space can only be understood in a local context where, in some cases, social roles are demarcated in very conservative ways. A separate incident occurred one night in a Royston pub where an important local football match was being shown on a big screen in the tap room. Men and women filled the room and at one point I observed a young man in his mid 20s say to a girl of a similar age, jokingly, 'who's let you in here? If I was the landlord I wunt ha' let you in'.³⁷ I listened carefully, as the young boy joked that the tap room was still a male space and even though the match was a special case he thought she had transgressed a local male boundary. Another woman revealed that she only went in that tap room on a Sunday night when they had a pub quiz. She added that she would never wear a skirt, always making sure she wore trousers.

³⁷ Fwd 13/11/98.



Instances such as these draw attention to the fact that Royston and neighbouring communities still have a very strong moral and social code that demarcates gender roles. Royce Turner recently described it as:

“...a code which governed relationships between men and women, behavioural patterns in a variety of settings and environments, a code which influenced aspirations and expectations. Like religious codes, it worked to make life easier by removing the need to make decisions about particular events or which life direction to follow.”³⁸

It is impossible to ignore the fact that many spheres of social life were dominated by men, and that the aspirations and expectations that were most sternly curtailed were those of women. Often the manifestations of the social norms emerge in subtle, understated ways, for example the fact that the local sewing factories are often named the ‘women’s pit’ or the fact that women are referred to in public spaces like working men’s clubs, not with their own names but in relation to their brothers. For example, ‘look here, it’s Harry Beasant’s sister’.³⁹

In his oral history study of men and women in the coalmining communities of Kent, Wayne Garvie has noted poignantly that, “the masculine culture which develops around pit work is furthered by an oral tradition which remembers the deeds of men but not those of women.”⁴⁰ What has become apparent in this study is that nicknames and anecdotes, in a small but very significant way, are a central part of this oral tradition and that these linguistic codes influence local social norms.

Creativity and play

Nicknames also point to the creative and playful way in which some miners from this region use language. This is an aspect of nicknames often neglected by researchers.⁴¹ I was personally made aware of the current vitality of the nicknaming tradition during

³⁸ Turner, Royce, *Coal Was Our Life*, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2000, p. 7.

³⁹ Interview with Joy B., 9/3/99, t 1, s 2, 14.0

⁴⁰ Garvie, Wayne, “Mill Hill: the making of a mining community”, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 1988, Summary.

fieldwork. I had been to two drinking establishments in Royston one particular Friday night and decided to spend the rest of the evening in the 'bottom Railway Club', a place usually packed with ex-miners of all ages, a number of whom I had already interviewed. As soon as I entered the door I overheard one man, who I had recently interviewed, say "Look who's here, it's Andy Pandy". I had never heard this before. Whether or not it had been thought of instantaneously, or whether the informants had begun using it among themselves was difficult to tell. It was not used directly to my face but in such a way that I was made aware of it. To some degree, I perceived the nickname as a comfort and perhaps as validation of my own place in the local social world. However, how the informants meant it is difficult to substantiate. It certainly underlined the ambiguous, playful element in local naming and the fact that it was a flexible resource and one that welcomed new additions.

Wordplay is a significant element in the assigning of nicknames. Sometimes it is purely childlike rhyme for example, 'Andy Pandy'⁴², or alliteration as in 'Lazy Les' and 'Rocket Ronnie'. In other cases the humour is more oblique, as in the following example which has become enshrined in one man's repertoire of polished anecdotes:

"....But tale went, which is another true story, abaht Joe Scarborough. He's, I think he's a Sheffield man, he wa' a Bevin Boy, Joe Scarborough, he's on television and radio sometimes, nah he went as a Bevin Boy an' this deputy sez to him 'what's you' name?' He sez 'Joe Scarborough'. 'Ah well', he sez, 'from now on thi name's Joe Filey,' (laughs). Cos he couldn't write Scarborough."⁴³

Such delight in wordplay means that the best examples are remembered and often repeated. Many coalminers, it seems, have a skill and a desire to make fun of the speech of others. Often the reason is purely for entertainment, to relieve the tedium. As noted earlier, a man who cannot pronounce his own check number 813 due to a speech impediment is nicknamed eight one three by everybody. The words 'a pipe apiece', (*a pipe each*), uttered by a deputy underground are punned on to become 'a pipe of peace' by the men working under him, which then leads to him receiving the nickname

⁴¹ One of the exceptions is Lynn Davies. In his paper humour is seen as a vital ingredient of Welsh coalminers' nicknames: Davies, Lynn, 102-106.

⁴² Andy Pandy was a TV character in a children's programme during the 1960s.

⁴³ Interview with Bill and Mavis S., 10/12/96, t 1, s 2, 10.0

‘Hiawatha’. It is doubtful he ever worked it out. Another form of linguistic creativity expressed in nicknames includes the tradition of likening people to famous figures because of a catchphrase they use. A different deputy who uses the phrase ‘put me in the picture’ to the men is known as ‘Rembrandt’. Another deputy who is reputed as always saying ‘now look, let’s play it by ear’ is renamed ‘Mozart’ by his subordinates.

A more direct mode of humorous nicknaming involves black humour where miners who have undergone personally distressing incidents are named accordingly. It seems that, among coalminers, nothing is sacred, and personal details or histories are never allowed to remain secret. To call someone who has been speared through the abdomen in a horrific accident underground ‘Kebab’ may appear bizarre to outsiders, but perhaps it is a way of normalising the danger and threats. The man who had a year away from the pit due to a serious cancer disease, including chemotherapy treatment, found that his donkey jacket had been signed by his workmates on this first shift back underground. The words read ‘welcome back you cancerous bastard’. Although shocking and extremely insensitive, the informant assured me that it was simply their way of welcoming the man back to the fold. It certainly circumnavigated any awkward, icebreaking conversations. Ridiculing anybody and everybody is a feature that emerged constantly during fieldwork. Highly personal facts that in most social spheres would be spoken only in secrecy were treated with great delight by miners, as Ian, a former surface worker reveals:

“Ian T: Axeman, Mad Axeman cos, he like, he did once try and chop somebody up wi’ an axe and they put him in t’ mental home for a few (laughs), for twelve month, that wa’ before he came to pit like....

AC: So I mean there were no secrets at pit wa’ there?

IT: Oh no, and there wa’ no respect either ’cos once they fan aht he wa’ Axeman an’ that’s what he got, full monty ah, Axeman, Mad Axeman, and that’s all they called him....”⁴⁴

This language play for comic effect can be linked to the more general business of mockery, insults and horseplay found to be common among coalminers in this area and described in the excellent article by Tony Green, “Only Kidding: Joking Among Coal-

⁴⁴ Interview with Ian T., 18/1/99, t 1, s 2, 10.5

miners".⁴⁵ Green, following Goffman's idea of subversive irony, suggests that such gallows humour, whereby awkward incidents are made reference to in a comic way, are in part a response to the dangerous working environment. This is a valid explanation and one of my own informants had come to this conclusion, commenting that underground "Sometimes you had to laugh, otherwise you would cry."⁴⁶ However, it is argued here that the context that produced and sustained this comic atmosphere extended beyond the underground working environment to include miners above ground who to some degree experienced dirty, awkward and sometimes boring work. We have also seen how humour, certainly through nicknaming, extends into the wider community where people often do not know a person's real name.

Discussion

Throughout this chapter local idioms of occupation and kinship, along with nicknames, have been shown to be an identifiable speech genre, playing a significant part in the local talk complex. The sheer number of nicknames collected during fieldwork for this study underlines this, and although the extent to which new nicknames are being created is difficult to ascertain, there are indications that it is not a static practice only to be associated with nostalgic reminiscence.

While nicknames have regularly been shown to be used among coalminers, no serious collection or analysis of them have been undertaken in the Yorkshire coalfield. In many studies of the language and occupational identity of coalminers, nicknames have generally been treated as an adjunct rather than a central concern. Perhaps one of the reasons why nicknames have received relatively little serious consideration by scholars of language is that, being relatively short, they lack complexity in terms of their construction. However, as the collection and analysis in this study have proved, classification of nicknames, along with attempting to explain what they mean to the speakers who use them, is far from straightforward and raises a number of ambiguities.

⁴⁵ Green, A.E., "Only Kidding: Joking among coal-miners", in Green, A.E., and Widdowson, J.D.A., eds., *Language, Culture and Tradition*, Leeds/ Sheffield, Institute Of Dialect and Folklife Studies, University of Leeds, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, 1981, pp. 47-76.

⁴⁶ Interview with Terry V., 12/12/96, Darfield, Barnsley.

Nicknames and local idioms are emblems of insiderness, markers of a specific socio-occupational identity. For example, to make sense of the nicknames 'Chockblock' and 'Young Terry' or the idiom 'Heading man' one must possess the necessary insider knowledge of mining terminology, perceived hierarchies of workers and local kinship networks. In his analysis of a silver-mining community in Utah, Ryden claimed that, for those with insider knowledge, nicknames "circulate within the local group serving to maintain and tighten its cohesion; and help cement a sense of identity."⁴⁷ He underlines this sense of insiderness by noting how, when a memorial was erected as a testimony to a group of local miners killed in an underground accident, no one recognised the names on the memorial plaque, because they were the official names and locals only knew the deceased by their familiar nicknames.

Feelings of having a distinct identity tied to a locality or an occupation can exist without objective markers such as language.⁴⁸ However, evidence strongly suggests that many people questioned here are intent on underlining the importance they attach to socio-occupational linguistic markers such as nicknames. This is clear in comments, such as, 'everybody had a nickname', 'there were hundreds of nicknames', and 'you were proud of your nickname', which suggest that local people themselves are committed to the idea of coalminers having a distinct local and occupational identity. Such comments help to bolster the idea of group exclusivity, along with feelings of pride, and prestige. This exaggeration of the extent of, and use of linguistic markers such as nicknames in this community, helps to reinforce the idea of a distinct group boundary. When asked directly, however, a number of informants reported that they did not have a nickname themselves, thereby conflicting with the above comments about how common they are.

One difficulty with the idea of an distinct group boundary is that many nicknames are formed in one context but then used in a different setting. For example, a nickname used at work might actually have been given at school, such as 'Nerka'. Someone called 'Nogga' at the pit because they have the surname 'Wood' may also be called 'Nogga' out in the wider social sphere of street and pub. While a nickname used only at work such as 'Young Terry', might relate to a man in terms of his father's name and reputation.

⁴⁷ Ryden, Kent, *ibid*, p. 194.

⁴⁸ Edwards, John, *Language, Society and Identity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985, p. 159.

Sometimes a person only knows an individual by his nickname, whereas he might know others by their actual name and nickname, and make a decision on which one to use depending upon the context. For this reason discrete boundaries of work, family and localness merge into one another, existing not in any real bounded sense but in overlapping and sometimes contradictory ways.

Paradoxically, nicknames, whilst creating a sense of group belonging, also operate as local forms of informal social control. Acceptable male social roles are created and maintained through the use of nicknames, thereby limiting individuality. Local idioms of occupation and kinship in their various guises reveal a wealth of information about how individuals are perceived and fixed in idealized hierarchies. Which pit a man worked at, what job he undertook, where he performed that job, whether he was a boss or not, who his relatives are, his reputation as a worker - this data is recorded and evaluated locally to a large extent via local idiomatic forms. Such terms as 'faceman', 'big hitter' or 'goodworker', are used as markers of toughness, of one's ability to perform physically demanding, dirty and sometimes dangerous work. These labels provide an index of one's social standing in relation to work, placing individuals in a local male hierarchy that extends beyond the workplace into the wider community. In its extreme form this involves not only parts of mines but also new streets in the local villages being named after famous big hitters. This dialectic of nicknames operating to build and sustain groupness and as a source of informal social control is critical to our understanding of why so many nicknames exist among the coalminers of Royston.

In attempting to explain the proliferation of nicknames among coalminers, the foregoing discussion has highlighted how they contributed to the wider sense of humour and play. Green commented that, among coalminers, humour can be described 'without exaggeration, as one of their most important modes of social interaction'.⁴⁹ The nicknames examined in the present research were seen to generate a lot of fun for coalminers, and this is reflected in the polished anecdotes that accompanied many of the nicknames.

In Royston the use of nicknames signals loyalty to the peer group, to the subculture of local coalminers. Nicknames such as 'Cancerous Bastard', 'Ram' or

⁴⁹ Green, A.E., *ibid*, 51.

‘Shirley’ that might be shocking to an outsider, if they knew the origins, do not cause offence here as locals are fully aware of the rules of composition and usage for this communicative style.⁵⁰ Ultimately, by being humorous, nicknames attack what is deemed inappropriate behaviour, but without severing relationships and thereby maintaining group solidarity.

⁵⁰ In this sense they can be compared to the linguistic behaviour in other subcultures, such as ‘doing the dozen’ among black teenage males in New York. These semi-humorous ritual insults, also known as ‘sounding’, or ‘signifying’, such as ‘your mother play dice with the midnight mice’, are fairly common among these speakers and have their own rules of composition and usage. For further reading see Montgomery, Martin, *An Introduction to Language and Society*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 178-179.

Locating the Boundary: Narrative and joking relationships as social practice

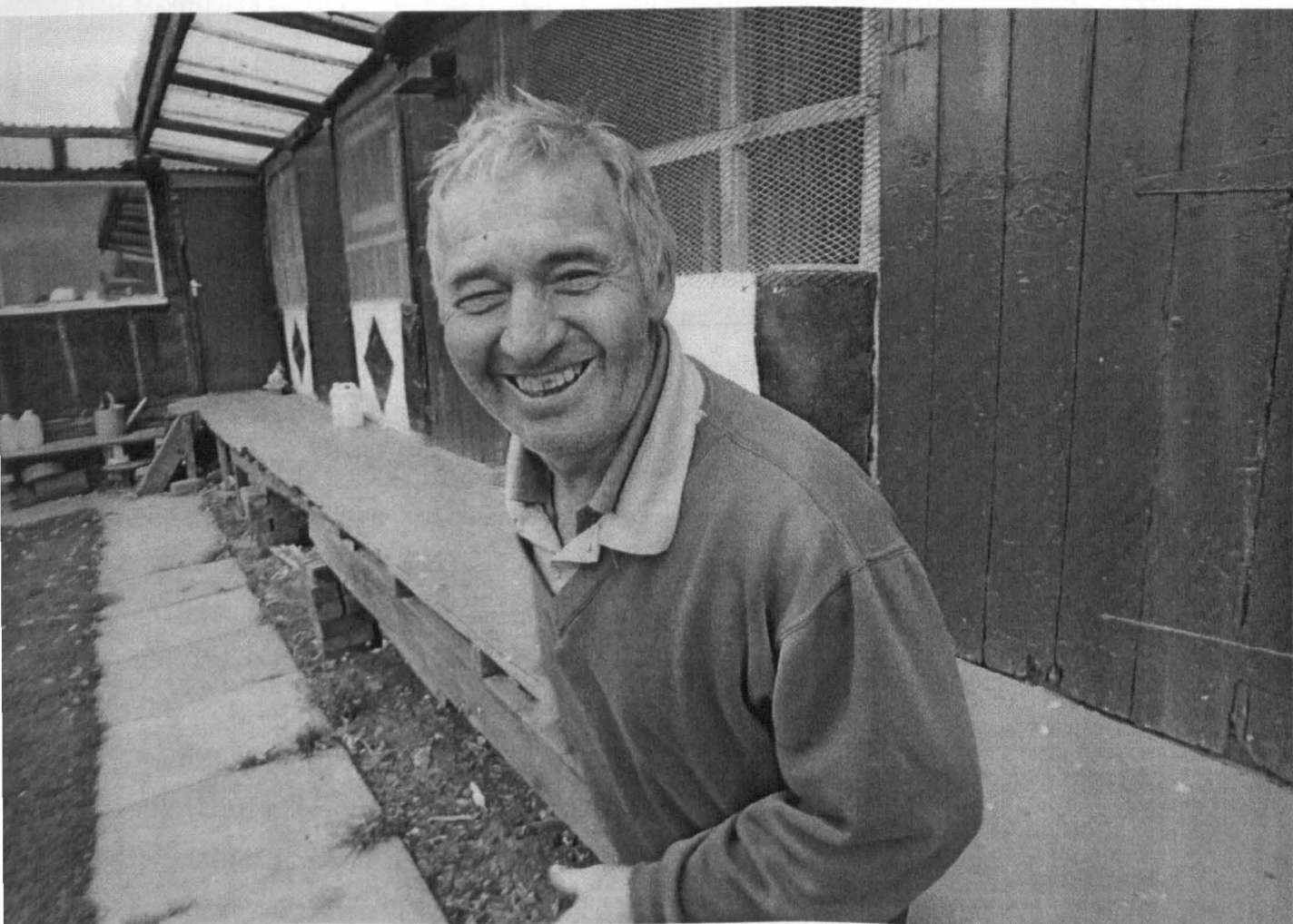
“Stories... elbowed and jostled each other, each man vying with his fellows in the humour and bravura of his stories. They seemed hardly to listen to each other as they stood, waiting to dive in with their next tale – bursting with their narratives.”

Hudson, Mark, 1995¹

¹ Hudson, Mark, *Coming Back Brockens: A year in a mining village*, London, Vintage, 1995, p. 178.

Introduction

The dialect used in Chapter 1 would be more precisely a sense of belonging to a particular locality, as manifested in that the 17-phoneme number of the particular regional language variety used. However, respondents' responses emphasized that a sense of being a local for many of the people interviewed in this study is not really associated with a geographical place but with feelings of belonging to a socio-cultural group. In this instance



of loss of competence,² is precisely a sense of belonging to a socio-cultural group.

¹ Bailey, Patrick, ed., *Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd Edition, London, Collins, 1988, p. 226.
² Yoniss, R.K., *Consequential Illness: A Guide to Symptoms and Diagnoses*, Indiana University Press, 1992, pp. 148-154.

This note was discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1 of this work, under the heading 'Local'

Introduction

The discussion in Chapter 3 noted that an individual's sense of belonging to a particular locality is manifested in part via the linguistic norms of the particular regional language variety used. However, subsequent chapters emphasised that a sense of being 'a local' for many of the people interviewed in this study is not only associated with a geographical place but with feelings of belonging to a socio-occupational group, in this instance affiliated to coalmining. This affiliation was demonstrated to exist to some extent through use of a language variety that incorporates a specialized occupational vocabulary; formulaic language routines such as greetings, leavetakings, sayings; taboos; and the practice of nicknaming.

The joint focus of this particular chapter is the performance of narratives and patterned customary joking relationships, both of which are shown to be vital aspects of this wider socio-occupational expressive culture. Interestingly, the greatest sense of loss expressed by the people interviewed in this study was what they termed 'camaraderie', 'banter' or 'crack'. The precise definition of the word 'camaraderie' in the Collins English dictionary reads: "A spirit of familiarity and trust existing between friends".² This definition provides a convenient departure for the analysis of narratives and customary joking relationships. 'The spirit of familiarity' can be viewed as being represented by performed narratives which recount individuals' past experiences and which simultaneously contribute to the idea of a shared past. Indeed, the central argument of this chapter is that the idea of a shared past is an essential requirement for the subjective feelings of groupness. Similarly, one of the principal ways in which feelings of mutual 'trust' and solidarity contribute to the idea of a socio-occupational group boundary is via the customary joking relationship.³ The chapter concludes that, despite the massive social, economic and cultural changes that have affected the local social networks, and the feeling of loss of camaraderie,⁴ in practice a sense of belonging to a socio-occupational group

² Hanks, Patrick, ed., *Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd Edition, London, Collins, 1986, p. 226.

³ Norrick, N.R., *Conversational Joking: Humour in everyday talk*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, pp. 148-150.

⁴ This issue was discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1 of this study, under the subtitle 'Loss'.

pervades for the majority of people, and this is constituted in part via the telling of narratives associated with mining life and through the continued existence of customary joking relationships.

Narrative

Narrative as an important local speech genre

Researching the link between narrative, place and identity in the former silver mining camps of Utah, Kent Ryden wrote that:

“Stories remain even when places change radically or vanish; the sense of place can outlast place itself. The actual physical place may drown or be blown up, but the layers of the sense of place remain, like stacks of valuable china on a table after the magician has whisked the tablecloth away.”⁵

The image that Ryden conjures up here is directly applicable to so many former pit villages in South and West Yorkshire, where (as noted in Chapter 1) many buildings that had stood for so long as reminders of the inextricable link between place and coalmining began to disappear during the 1990s.

During fieldwork for this particular study, people emphasised, in a number of different ways, that stories were an important and highly valued local speech genre. Many people recommended that I visit the local Miner’s Institute or Working Men’s Club. One man reminded me, after telling me the name of a club I should visit on certain nights of the week to, ‘only believe half of what you hear’. He then walked away, pausing to add: ‘Mind you, some of the stories are beautiful.’⁶ Numerous women noted that they too loved to listen to the miners telling stories, one woman saying that she enjoyed going to one club in particular as ‘you dunt have to do anything. You just sit there and listen.’ These comments underline the pleasure of listening to narratives, narrative jokes and anecdotes about mining for some people even if they themselves do not perform the narratives.

Writing about his experience of spending a year in the former coalmining village of Horden in the north-east of England during the 1990s, Mark Hudson noted that: “The story

⁵ Ryden, Kent, C., *Mapping The Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1993, p. 95.

was the primary mode of discourse.... There was no point that could not be better made by means of some tale or anecdote .”⁷

In Royston and neighbouring communities, the importance attached by locals to narratives, jokes and anecdotes that deal with mining life as a central theme was repeatedly underlined. Jack B., had declined the request to be interviewed and taperecorded, but in the informal setting of the local working men’s club, told tale after tale, non-stop, about his days as a miner. He commented that ‘Tha could write a book on just one o’ these tales,’ and when I remarked that I found one of his tales particularly remarkable he stared at me intently and said: ‘Ah, well fix it in thi mind and dunt forget it.’⁸ After interviewing a group of five women, Anne, who is the daughter of a Royston miner and now married to a former miner, told me how she had enjoyed reminiscing about mining life and how she had always made a point of telling her children about the hard lives that she and her forebears had lived through.⁹

The narrators, whose stories, jokes and anecdotes were taperecorded during fieldwork, often referred to these speech forms as ‘tales’ or ‘funny stories’. Narratives were frequently marked off from the surrounding discourse by a formulaic opening, thereby framing the discourse; for example, ‘The tale always goes...’¹⁰ or ‘I’ve got a tale for thi an’ it’s a reight tale....’¹¹ On one occasion when an unplanned visitor, who had inadvertently interrupted the narrative my informant was telling, departed, he commented ‘Reight Ted am off, I’ll let thi tell thi tale.’¹² These overt, self conscious framing devices, along with references to the native taxonomic labels, are further proof that narrative ‘performances’ are recognised and highly valued locally.

Collecting narrative performance

⁶ Fwd, 10/10/97

⁷ Hudson, Mark, *Coming Back Brockens: A year in a mining village*, London, Vintage, 1995, p. 178. Hudson continued that: “Stories that elbowed and jostled each other, each man vying with his fellows in the humour and bravura of his stories. They seemed hardly to listen to each other as they stood, waiting to dive in with their next tale – bursting with their narratives.”

⁸ Fwd,

⁹ Interview with Anne S. et al, Royston, 8/3/99, t 2, s 1, 12.2

¹⁰ Interview with Bill and Mavis S., Darfield, 12/12/96, t 1, s 1, 30.0

¹¹ Interview with Ted A., Grimethorpe, 10/7/97, t 1, s 2, 30.0

¹² Interview with Ted A., Grimethorpe, 10/7/97, t 1, s 2, 30.0

Despite the importance of these speech forms however, a paradoxical situation exists whereby the narratives, as well as the joking relationships that function as markers of group belongingness and expressions of a threatened identity, have limited contexts for expression due to the demise of the very local social world with which they are centrally concerned. It is important not to exaggerate the number of narratives that are told about mining whilst simultaneously understanding the tenacious quality of a 'sense of groupness' experienced by individuals. This tenacious quality of feeling part of a distinctive group, be it ethnic, regional or socio-occupational, is, as Edwards points out, "capable of surviving the loss of any objective markers", in this case the performance of narratives.¹³

The point here is that the feeling of having a certain distinctive identity can be strong, even if an individual cannot, or does not want to, continue to use the emblematic linguistic forms that signal group membership. It may be that there are fewer appropriate social contexts in which to perform such routines, combined with a breakdown of social networks. It could be that someone has taken up a different career, moved into education, or simply found the whole business of mining and the way the industry was decimated too painful to talk about.¹⁴

It is also important to note that analysts of mining communities and the individuals who comprise these communities generally agree that, whilst the recounting of narratives is recognised as a significant local speech genre, knowledge of, and individual skill in performing these narratives, is highly variable. Narratives can be viewed as belonging to a wider body of folk belief which, as Butler notes, "...is a set of cultural mentifacts, a body of knowledge or a cognitive frame of reference differentially distributed among members of a given traditional culture".¹⁵ In Royston, for example, only certain miners are known as 'characters', and their skill in performing polished narratives and their extensive repertoires are well known. This is underlined by comments such as a man having 'some reight tales' or that the researcher will need many tapes to record interviews, and that that it will take all

¹³ Edwards, John, *Language, Society and Identity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985, p. 160.

¹⁴ Without wishing to kill off the discussion about the place of these narratives in Royston and neighbouring localities, I believe it prudent to highlight the fact that there are real contextual factors influencing the frequency with which such narratives are told. Following the decimation of an industry, a way of life, a subculture, what remains in the first instance is an individual's subjective sense of identity. Language maintenance via a socio-occupational variety might, but does not automatically, follow.

day, (which is sometimes referred to as “It ‘ill be a snap an’ flask job”). And it is true that, undoubtedly, some people performed more polished narratives than others during the taperecorded interviews. These skilled storytellers were of various ages and comprised surface workers as well as underground workers.

As already noted, structural social and economic changes have meant that there are generally fewer opportunities for social contact, and therefore language contact, among former mining colleagues. Fortunately, sociolinguistic interviews provide longer turn taking sequences for individuals, legitimising the opportunity to hold the floor and recount narratives or narrative jokes. However, an important contextual constraint affecting any data collected via taperecorded interview is the audience present, in this case primarily the researcher. Wolfson has argued that narratives can be either ‘performed’ (with the accompanying features of historical present tense, sound effects, iteration and blow by blow accounts) or reported in a ‘shortened form’ depending on the audience present and whether or not the topic is appropriate - whether participants have shared background interests and reciprocal relationships, and therefore shared norms of interaction.¹⁶

Tonkin has also noted that “tellers adjust what they say according to listeners’ pasts.”¹⁷ Importantly, the narratives collected here were unknown by the researcher and therefore worth telling despite the fact that the narrator had told them before. As Goffman has stated “effective performance requires first hearings, not tellings.”¹⁸

One informant told of how if ‘non-miners’, whom he meets now in his new job, ask about life as a coalminer, he often tells them a few stories about pit ponies and glosses over the reality of mining life.¹⁹ In the interviews recorded for this study, to a large extent the researcher was treated as an ‘insider’, a local who had himself worked underground. Although difficult to quantify in any objective sense, this certainly contributed to good

¹⁵ Butler, Gary, *Saying Isn't Believing: Conversation and the discourse of belief in a French Newfoundland community*, St. John's, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1990, p. 8.

¹⁶ Wolfson, Nessa, “Speech Events and Natural Speech: Some implications for sociolinguistic methodology”, *Language in Society*, vol. 5, (1976), 206-7.

¹⁷ Tonkin, Elizabeth, *Narrating Our Pasts: The social construction of oral history*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 3.

¹⁸ Goffman, Erving, *Frame Analysis, An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975, p. 508.

¹⁹ Interview with Paul, M., Royston, 27/1/99, t 1, s 1, 33.0

rapport. It also meant that speakers did not have to break their narratives to explain technical language, or indeed use non-technical terms: they could speak as if to a fellow local. To recount the same narrative to an outsider, unfamiliar with the local socio-occupational world described would require greater elaboration and explanation which would alter its form and function.²⁰ As one man interviewed commented 'As tha knows, tha's worked dahn pit'. The researcher also recounted the occasional personal experience narrative himself, which helped build rapport and lessened the formality of the interview.²¹

Dominant themes in narratives

This chapter is concerned with how narratives collected during fieldwork contribute to a feeling of camaraderie, or group belonging. The focus is with the internal structures and dominant themes of such narratives and not the process by which narratives arise and are embedded within wider units of conversation or ongoing talk, (i.e. Conversation Analysis).

In villages such as Royston, the socio-occupational group of men and women whose lives have been inextricably bound up with coalmining is a locally important social category, and these people perform narratives that deal with locally important themes. Unlike many of the themes presented in union-sponsored literature, the narratives collected here are not preoccupied with underground explosions, roof falls and battles on the picket lines. Typically, they deal with everyday events but events that are significant in the lives of the tellers.

One of the most dominant themes evident in the narratives elicited during the semi-structured interviews for this study is the negative stereotyping of people from either outside the locality or those perceived as figures of authority, or a mixture of both these elements. It would seem that the recounting of these narratives maintains ingroup solidarity, strengthening a sense of both regional and socio-occupational group boundaries. Interpreting the function of narratives in this manner has its roots in social psychology, and particularly in 'Social Identity theory', (henceforth SI theory). A core idea of SI theory is

²⁰ McCarl, R.S., "Occupational Folklife, a Theoretical Hypothesis", *Western Folklore*, vol. 37 (1978), 156.

²¹ For an excellent discussion on the role of the sociolinguistic interview as a method of data collection, and especially the issue of reliability versus validity, see: Briggs, Charles, L., *Learning How To Ask: A sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social science research*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

that people are affiliated to a number of discrete, self-inclusive, social categories, which vary in overall relative importance to the 'self-concept'. The theory posits that members of these social groups are motivated to adopt strategies for achieving or maintaining intergroup comparisons that favour the 'ingroup', and thus the 'self'. In essence the theory claims that individuals have a fundamental desire and need to see themselves in a relatively positive light in relation to relevant others.²²

Negative stereotyping

One of the most pervasive themes contained within narratives told by informants for this study is hostility towards figures of authority. Police, doctors, government officials, clergymen are all selected as targets in the personal experience narratives of men and women. However, particularly in the men's narratives, bosses, in the occupational setting of the pit, are the ones that are repeatedly stereotyped in a negative manner. Harry, a retired Royston miner, tells a personal experience narrative that focuses on a dispute with a Nottinghamshire butty man over payment:

HarryW: I wa' abaht eighteen year owd an' I went wi' a youth on a motorbike to Nottingham, an' a went a got a job theer in pits, course they were workin' fulltime theer, an' I worked at Hucknall colliery.

AC: What wa' that like? ...

HW: Well, it wa' on long wall system theer. They used to cut it and then you used to gu an' fill it off. Well wha' a did - I wa' on'y eighteen year owd an' them that were, who I wa' workin' wi' they were all grown up married men. And, when I went for me money at weekend, him who paid yer aht he wa' butty man. An' he'd gen all others ten bob a day an' he gave me mine, an' he on'y gave me five bob a day.

An I sez to him 'what's this' an' 'what's trouble as (they) 'ave got ten bob, an' I've on'y got five?'

He sez, 'Well thy on'y eighteen, 'ere old lad, tha can't expect...'

I sez, 'I've filled same coal as them'.

Anyroad that wa' it. He wunt gi' me no mooer, so wha' I did I went to work day after, I on'y filled eightf o' wha' a should o' done (*laughs*).

An' he sent for me when I come aht o' pit.

An' he sez 'What's reasons thy hasn't filled thi coal as tha should o' done?'

I sez 'Well thy on'y paid me eightf o' money'.

²² Hogg, Michael, A., "Intragroup Processes, Group Structure and Social Identity", in Robinson, Peter, W., ed., *Social Groups and Identities: Developing the legacy of Henri Tajfel*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 1996, p. 67.

An' he sez, 'Ah, if tha dint gi' over lad'. Tha nos ahr the' talk dahn theer, 'I shall a' to sack thi.'

I sez, 'Tha's no need to sack me I'm sackin' mi sen' (*laughs*). An' I come back into Yorkshire to work."²³

The central feature of this narrative and countless similar ones collected is the dramatic reconstruction of conflict in dialogue between the narrator, an ordinary miner, and a figure of authority, in this case a butty man. There is a regional issue here too in the fact that the incident takes place in Nottinghamshire and, ultimately, the conflict is only resolved when Harry returns to the Yorkshire coalfield. The frequent recurrence of narratives, which have the narration of verbal conflict as their climax, has led some scholars to consider these narratives as a pre-existing repertoire, (Lovelace, 1979; Shorrocks, 1991).²⁴ These authors point to the narratives as having regular, predictable formal properties, including 'dramatic use of direct speech, the motif of the clash with authority, and the concern of the narrators with personal vindication – particularly when their competence within their sphere of work had been questioned'.²⁵ As we would expect, the 'narratives of verbal conflict' recorded here are told principally by the working men and only occasionally by deputies and managers. In the narrative presented above, the miner is appalled by the lack of fairness shown by the butty man.²⁶ He does not object to the hard work but is disgusted by the inequality of pay between workers. Rather than be dictated to by somebody just because they are in theory superior, Harry decides to quit his job. This lack of respect for figures of authority and a general disdain for orders is a key issue in the following narrative, told by a different Royston miner, named Sam:

"I wa' on a button one day, put me on this – they used to have, what they used to call a side, belt in Barrow, thi coil used to run reight into corner on belt, come up a channel at side an' come back aht into gate o' back o' rippers, cos rippers used to be further forward than actual face. An' this belt wa' runnin' cockeyed on its side, so I

²³ Interview with Harry W., 5/11/98, t 1, s 1, 5.2

²⁴ Lovelace, Martin, J., "We Had Words': Narratives of Verbal Conflicts", *Lore and Language*, vol. 3, no. 1, part A (July 1979), 29-37.

Shorrocks, Graham, "The Social and Economic Background to the Narrative of Verbal Conflict", *Lore and Language*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1991), 67-76.

²⁵ Shorrocks, 67.

²⁶ The buttyman was a very powerful figure in the days of contract work, prior to the introduction of 'the daywage'. He normally had the responsibility of distributing the pay between the men who worked under him.

stopped it an' went back an' altered a few pulleys and tried to get it to gu – an' it still wunt gu reight, an' as soon as the' started shearin' an' coil (coal) went on, all coil wa' gooin' dahn on floor dahn backside, the' were none goin' off o' end o' gate. So I stopped it an' got on t' phone to deputy an' telled 'im to get some belt men rahnd I sez 'This belt wants reightenin' its not running reight all coil's gooin' on floor' (*Increases volume and tempo*) An' this bloke wi' a stick comes bouncin' aht from under rippin' lip, 'Who's stopped this belt?' (*accusatory tone*).

A sez, 'I've stopped it'

A sez, 'All coil's gooin' on floor its not gooin' aht o' pit, it's just gooin' on floor,' (*relaxed tone*).

He sez, 'It dunt matter weer its gooin', let it gu', (*angry tone*).

I sez 'Nay 'fore long' a sez 'brek belt o' summat' a sez ' If tha gets heap o' coil in middle o' gate someweer', (*relaxed tone*).

'Ooohh' 'He sez, 'Out o't pit thee, wi' me now'.

I sez, 'Oh aye'

He sez 'Out o' pit, I'll send for somebody else to come an' run this button'.

Gets to near weer paddy sets off from, an' I naturally assumed we were gooin' to come aht on t' paddy an' he sez 'where's tha gooin'?'

'Well am gunna sit up theer an' - 'til paddy comes.'

He sez, 'Tha not waitin' for no paddy.' He sez, ' Tha can walk it all way, same as I 've got to do.'

I sez, 'Tha can please thi sen,' I sez ' I aren't walkin' all way back rooded I sez ' its on'y abaht four mile I sez they'll be a paddy here in ten minutes'. I sez 'Good mornin'.'

He sez, 'Tha what?'

I sez 'Thy heard mi,' I sez, 'Good mornin'.' I sez, 'Tha can please thi sen', I sez, 'Sithee 'a' my cards ready when I get aht', I sez, 'If tha gets aht afore me 'a' my cards ready, I've done.'

An' I come aht like, an' I went to look for Union men or owt, an' nobody wanted to tek any notice o' mi. Nobody cared a monkey's, an' I thought yes.

So I went to trainin' officer, I sez, 'Sithee I've done,' I sez, 'I'm comin' to work rest o' week but I've done, ha' my cards ready for Friday,' I sez, 'I'll find a job' (*confident tone*)."

As with the earlier narrative, the narrator here manages to put distance between himself and his supposed superiors. In this example, the attitude to authority is even more audacious as the man he argues with is a high ranking official, either a manager or an undermanager. His unrelenting, confident, relaxed but argumentative tone projects an even greater show of masculinity than the first narrative. By showing the boss's dogmatism to be the primary cause of the incident and his eventual resignation, the miner manages to put himself into a positive light. Similarly by projecting a negative stereotype onto the

manager, in this narrative, the miner retains his own personal respect and also enhances the ingroup image.

It is true that no manager is popular with the working-classes, and the notion of ‘us’ and ‘them’ can be seen as an absolute. Nevertheless, in the miners’ narratives collected here this theme was inescapable. The fact that such personal experience narratives are found so frequently can be attributed to their primary function in promoting a more general ingroup solidarity. In both the narratives described above, the miners’ attitude is plainly that ‘you may be a superior but, you do not rule me and you are no better than me’. This implacability towards those overtly displaying their superiority has been noted by others researching into the social behaviour of coalmining communities in Britain (Douglass, 1983; Hudson, 1995; Storm-Clark, 1972; Turner, 2000)²⁷, and especially those exploring the place of narratives in former mining communities in America (Ryden, 1993; Stewart, 1996)²⁸. This points to the fact that, whilst the regional and socio-occupational language varieties used are very specific to the local community (i.e. regional speech features of phonology, lexis and grammar, along with technical mining jargon), the recurring dominant themes within the personal experience narratives are part of a much wider coalmining culture. These narratives function as testimonies to the past, but also as vehicles for creating individual self-esteem, for projecting one’s self in a good light, whilst simultaneously building group pride.

The inclusive nature of narratives

The personal experience narratives and narrative jokes presented in this chapter so far have concerned disputes between facemen and management in an underground setting. However, data points to the fact that narratives about mining life which maintain a sense of belonging are recounted by workers from all aspects of mining, including surface workers, office workers, and even deputies and managers. Also, many of the events within the narratives are set within the wider community and not in the sphere of the pit.

²⁷ Douglass, Dave, and Krieger, Joel, *A Miner’s Life*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

Hudson, Mark, *Coming Back Brockens: A year in a mining village*, London, Vintage, 1995.

Storm-Clark, Christopher, “The Miners, the Relevance of Oral History”, *Oral History*, vol. 4 (1972), 72-92.

Turner, Royce, *Coal Was Our Life*, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2000.

²⁸ Ryden, Kent, C., *Mapping The Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1993.

The following personal experience narrative revolves around a clash with authority but this is not manifested via the dramatic use of direct speech. The events are set in Royston, October 1985, seven months into the year-long miners' strike. The narrator, a striking miner, was a surface worker at a local colliery, who during the strike had to support his wife and three children. I have named the narrative 'Just for a few taties', partly as a means of easier identification as the discussion unfolds.

JohnC: It was a Friday night, it was the autumn, the moon was growing. And we went dahn bottom fields, its dead reight this, and this field wa' taties, right, October time. And it wa' just like bloody Asda goin' in.

AC: Wa' the' loads o' people theer?

JC: Oh aye. They all wanted taties, they were ready, dead reight this, and they all swooped on this field fo' weekend veg and police raided this field. The' must 'a' been tipped off. There were pickin' field fo' taties. A'reight the' were nicking (*guilty tone*). An' they come on wi' bloody floodlights an' god knows what, they all fucking swooped on, it wa' just like bloody Asda dahn (*laughs*) – Friday neet it wa'.

Towd man jumped in fucking hedge that neet.

AC: You did?

JC: This is dead reight, I jumped in bloody hedgeside that neet, an' jumped on bloody barbed wire, a roll o' barbed wire that neet.

The' wa' police, cops, whistles blowing, hooting and fucking ahrring fucking...

An' am bloody sat theear, the' want ten yard off me, the' twats, blowing, hooting and fucking arring, semt like bloody ages sat on this bloody fucking barbed wire, wi' old fucking overalls on, just for a few taties.

An' I'll never forget that.

I'll tell thi what Dave it al'as summat – that will always (be) something that'll wrangle in my fucking mind, how funny or whatever it is but it'll al'a's wrangle here, (*points to his head*) but the taties that I come home wi', an' I walked along that fucking cut bank. Them few fucking taties in them carrier bags. I'll never forget. You know it wa' so important."²⁹

The scene portrayed in 'Just for a few taties' takes place under exceptional circumstances, where this man, and other Royston locals, were poaching from the land through absolute necessity. Miners often pride themselves on a strong sense of fairness,³⁰ and this creates conflict which is reflected in John's awkward comment, 'A'reight the' were nicking'. Whilst his commitment to the strike action is implicit, this draws attention to the

Stewart, Kathleen, *A Space at the Side of the Road*, New Jersey, Princetown University Press, 1996.

²⁹ Interview with John C. and Dave A., 12/12/96, t 2, s 2, 13.20

³⁰ For example, drinking anyone else's water underground without permission was a heinous crime according to most of the men interviewed in this study, and could result in a fight.

fact that whilst he holds 'authority' in contempt, he does maintain a sense of right and wrong.

Further points that draw attention to the fact that the events are unusual include the fact that it is Friday night, an evening when many people (if it was not for the strike), would normally be out socialising at the local pub or club. He uses the metonym of 'weekend veg' to signify a humorous comparison with the regular weekly shop that would take place on a Friday, which is pay-day, in normal circumstances. Although not quantified precisely, there are clearly a lot of people present. He describes it, metaphorically, as being akin to the local supermarket; 'Just like Asda'. Although this is very much a personal experience narrative, it is simultaneously a narrative that is dealing with a shared fate, and specifically with a sense of genuine hardship endured by many local residents. By justifying his own actions he manages to place himself, along with the other local striking miners, into a good light (SI theory), compared to the authorities, with whom the miners are in dispute, and specifically with the police who are trying to prevent the miners from poaching. This point helps to reinforce the feelings of solidarity and the notion of a socio-occupational group boundary.

The importance attached to the dramatic events is clearly evident in the closing frame that signals the end of the narrative encounter. The narrator draws the audience's attention to this importance by using phrases such as 'I'll never forget', which he repeats, and then by pointing to his head and saying 'that will always (*be*) something that'll wrangle in my fucking mind.' Finally he utters 'You know it wa' so important.' This closure contrasts noticeably with the opening frame where the narrator adopts a caricatured, pseudo storyteller's style, "It was a Friday night, it was the autumn, the moon was growing." Here the argot draws attention to the contextual detail in a stereotypical story telling manner. Significantly this is the only sentence of the whole narrative encounter which the narrator does not use the local vernacular, switching instead to SE. At the phonological level 'night' is pronounced [nait] instead of [ni:t] which is one of the most salient features of local dialect. The consonant /s/ is pronounced in final position in the word 'was', this is normally missing in the local dialect, as is the consonant /g/ which is pronounced in this sentence in the word 'growing'. This style shifting at the opening of the narrative is a violation of sociolinguistic appropriateness and achieves two things. Firstly, it helps frame the

narrative, marking it off from the surrounding discourse, i.e. as a keying strategy.³¹ Secondly, it is a statement from the narrator, that shows that if necessary he can switch to being a story telling virtuoso by using stereotypical dramatic opening and thereby parodying a complex literary style. Importantly, it is also a statement that aims to remind us that he is a linguistic virtuoso as he proves by underlining that he can speak standard English if required to do so.³² The style of the narrative's opening contrasts markedly with the remainder of the narrative and especially with the closing sequence. These style switching devices serve to dramatise the narrative as a whole. They succeed in conveying to the audience a sense that John feels an obligation to tell this particular story during the recorded interview, because it is a testimony to a highly personal and significant event in his own life.

Numerous narratives concerned with local mining life were related by Royston women. This alerts us to the fact that, unlike many of the shorter speech genres that comprise the socio-occupational language variety discussed so far (such as nicknaming, sayings, greetings and leavetakings) which are predominantly used by men, narrative is a much more inclusive genre and provides a means for women to locate a socio-occupational sense of 'self'. It is important to recognise the inclusive nature of narrative performance because many studies of coalmining communities, especially union sponsored literature, focus predominantly on the deeds of men, and in particular on the experiences of coalface men.³³

Women consider themselves miners' wives from a mining community, regardless of their husband's jobs at the pit, and regardless of whether they themselves are from mining backgrounds or that they originate from other parts of the country. Women's sense of belonging to a mining community is expressed in part through the telling of narratives. The

³¹ For an excellent discussion of code-switching in a variety of conversational situations, including story telling see: Alfonzetti, Giovanna, "The Conversational Dimension in Code-switching Between Italian and Dialect in Scicily", in Auer, Peter, *Code - Switching in Conversation: Language, interaction and identity*, London, Routledge, 1998, pp.180-211.

³² The fact that speakers use styleswitching to place themselves in good light and as a way of projecting different identities is discussed by: Mishoe, Margaret, "Styleswitching in Southern English", in Myers-Scotton, Carol, ed., *Codes and Consequences: Choosing Linguistic Varieties*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 162-177.

³³ For an excellent critique on the history of coalmining in England and Wales consult: John, Angela, V., "Scratching The Surface: Women, work and coalmining history in England and Wales", *Oral History Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Autumn, 1982), 13-26.

theme of stereotyping ‘outsiders’ negatively is frequently encountered in the narratives of local women. Often these narratives recount events that take place in the everyday settings of the local community, not in the masculine sphere of the pit. However, their ability to provide an index of socio-occupational identity should not be underestimated.

Anne, from three generations of Royston miners, told a narrative she remembers her mother telling, which revolves around the animosity local mining families felt towards local railway workers’ families:

“*Anne W*: They came from all over, they were a mixture, for railway sheds opening, an it wa’ as if they did think they were a cut above miners.

Barbara M: Yeah

AW: An’ they used to be a shop here, it’s still there, but they called it Blencarn’s, and mi mum, when you had a ration book you had to place it at a shop

AC: Yeah

...in t’ war an mi mum wa’ in gerrin her groceries an there were two people serving an’ they wa’ a railway woman in an’ mi mam saw her pass her a tin o’ fruit, which were - they were like specials weren’t they things like tins o’ fruit?

BM: Oh yeah when you were rationed yeah.

AW: An’ mi mum sez ‘ I’ll have one o’ them’.

She sez ‘Oh I’ve only got so many’. (*High pitched voice*).

She sez ‘You either give me one of those, (*thumping the table and speaking in a deeper voice*) or I’m taking my ration books elsewhere.’

BM: She did right.

AW: An’ they really did, they were a lot o’ bitterness.’³⁴

The ‘railway woman’ and railway workers’ families generally are negatively stereotyped in this narrative. We are told they perceive themselves as socially superior to mining families. This jealousy springs in part from the fact that, during the 1960s, the railway workers were given new houses that were well built, spacious and had inside toilets, whilst most of the mining families lived in smaller terraced houses in the pit rows and had outside toilets. However, when the railway goods-yard closed in the 1970s many of the men later worked in the mines. Numerous friendship networks and kinship networks associated with the two industries overlapped. Therefore in many respects the difference that is displayed in this narrative reflects feelings of a specific era and at a time when

³⁴ Interview with Anne W., Joy B., Barbara M., and Sheila B., 8/3/99, t 1, s 1, 16.3

resources such as food were limited. In such contexts local differences become more accentuated.³⁵

Summary

As these examples illustrate, by ordering events in a certain way, and in particular by negatively stereotyping 'outsiders', the narrators exaggerate difference which provides an effective means of demarcating local social groups. As Cohen notes, the difference between these social groupings, or communities, does not have to be based on anything grandiose or ceremonial:

"Since the boundaries are inherently oppositional, almost any matter of perceived difference between the community and the outside world can be rendered symbolically as a resource of its boundary. The community can make virtually anything grist to the symbolic mill of cultural distance, whether it be the effects upon it of some centrally formulated government policy, or a matter of dialect, dress, drinking or dying. The symbolic nature of opposition means that people can 'think themselves into difference'. The boundaries consist essentially in the contrivance of distinctive meanings within the community's social discourse. They provide people with a referent for their personal identities. Having done so, they are then themselves expressed and reinforced through the presentation of those identities in social life."³⁶

In the narratives presented and examined here however, there is a sub-plot. This is that they provide a subjective sense of belonging. This is manifested most frequently in narratives where the socio-occupational group is under threat. In the first example the underground Royston miner is involved in an aggressive dispute over pay. In the second narrative a manager tries to undermine a local miner's knowledge of how to perform a particular task. The third and fourth narrative performances examined both revolve around Royston people procuring food in times of exceptional difficulty.³⁷

³⁵ Conflict among families during times of scarce resources is discussed in: Bourke, Joanna., *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, class and ethnicity*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 159-163.

³⁶ Cohen, *ibid*, p. 117.

³⁷ Although not discussed here, there is plenty of poetry and autobiographical essay material that deals with issues relating to the 1984-1985 strike, written by local women. This too can be seen as a way of allowing, women in particular, the expression of a local identity and a sense of belonging, for example: Keating, Jackie, *Counting The Cost: A family in the miners' strike*, Barnsley, Wharnccliffe Publishing, 1991. Also: Ledger, Julie, Watkin, Pauline, and Wall, Janet, *Living in t' Pit Yard*, Halifax, Artisan and Woolley Colliery Writers

This data points to the fluid, situational and subjective nature of a 'sense of belonging' that becomes more pronounced during the recounting of narratives that relate to times of emotional or economic insecurity.

The states of being a 'miner' not a 'boss', or a 'miner's wife' as opposed to a 'railwayman's wife' are fragile and transitory, and this is precisely because they are located within narratives that are themselves founded on events that are chosen and constructed selectively, and which feed on the emotive power of nostalgia.

The continual testimony to the protest exhibited by the protagonists of these narratives helps to sustain feelings of pride and to celebrate how local people overcome adversity whilst retaining dignity. It is in this sense that the stories here continue to provide a group of individuals with a feeling of camaraderie and mutual understanding.

Joking relationships

Introduction

This chapter now focuses on 'joking relationships' among coalminers, to examine how they contribute to feelings of camaraderie, and to try and ascertain to what extent humour has survived as an important part of the local expressive culture in the post-coal era. In this study, joking relationships are understood to be ones which do not threaten established relationships, so where the subject of the joke does not take offence. The four specific areas of socio-occupational humour examined comprise sharp wit and ritual mock insults, narrative jokes, a brand of gallows humour and lying for comic effect.

'Joking relationships' have been identified as an important part of kin-based, tribal societies by anthropologists for some time, (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Douglas, 1968).³⁸ However, more and more scholars have examined the significance of joking relationships among non-kin based, industrial societies. Undertaking research in a Glasgow factory, Sykes (1966) found that joking relationships between men and women only existed

and Photographers, 1986. See also: Roberts, Robby, ed., *Write Then: Royston Writers Workshop*, Barnsley, Barnsley Community Education, 1989.

³⁸ Radcliff-Brown, Alfred, R., "On Joking Relationships", *Africa*, vol. 13 (1940), 195-210.
Douglas, Mary, "The Social Control of Cognition", *Man*, vol. 3 (1968), 361-376.

between those workers who were not potential sexual partners, due to differences in age.³⁹ Studying the expressive culture of Longshoremen in Oregon, America, Pilcher (1972) concluded that joking relationships based around the masculine sphere of work are not transferred into the domain of private and family life.⁴⁰ Linstead (1988) argued that joking relationships in a Northern England factory functioned to allow certain information to be risked, which he terms 'exploratory', as well as functioning to strengthen the occupational 'boundary' and as an occupational 'coping' mechanism.⁴¹ Meanwhile, Cook (2000) has argued that scholars of the joking relationship have generally focussed too much on utilitarian, working-class cultures, at the expense of ignoring a wealth of similar humour in many other spheres of social life, for example among politicians in Britain.⁴²

More specifically, verbal duelling, especially between males has been widely viewed as a release of aggression and a method of building a sense of solidarity. The use of ritual mock insults, and boasts, in public has been noted as a communicative style among black American males, and is sometimes referred to as 'doing the dozens', Abrahams (1962), Labov, (1974).⁴³ A similar joking language has been recognised among Turkish boys (Dundes et al., 1970)⁴⁴. Sherzer (1993) has argued that verbal duelling, and joking generally in Balinese culture acts as an essential mechanism in the creation and maintenance of social boundaries including caste, class, occupation, ethnicity and nation.⁴⁵

In his article "Only kidding: Joking among coal-miners", Green states that the business of 'kidding', or joking relationships revolving around work and including 'wisecracks, mockery, jocular insults and horseplay' and job-centred humour in general, 'can be described, without exaggeration, as one of their most important modes of social

³⁹ Sykes, A.J.M., "Brief Communications", *American Anthropologist*, vol. 68 (1966), 188-193.

⁴⁰ Pilcher, William, *The Portland Longshoreman*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972.

⁴¹ Linstead, Steve, "Jokers Wild: Humor in Organisational Culture", in *Humor in Society*, Powell C. and Paton, G.E.C., eds. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988, pp. 123-148.

⁴² Cook, Guy, *Language Play, Language Learning*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.

⁴³ Abrahams, Roger, D., "Playing the Dozens", *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 75 (1962), 209-220.

Labov, William, "The Art of Sounding and Signifying", in Gage, W.W., ed., *Language in its Social Setting*, Washington, D.C., Anthropological Society of Washington, 1974.

⁴⁴ Dundes, A.L., Leach, J.W., and Ozkök, B., "Strategy of Turkish Boys: Verbal duelling rhymes", *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 83 (1970), 325-349.

⁴⁵ Sherzer, Joel, "On puns, comebacks, verbal duelling, and play languages: Speech play in Balinese verbal life", *Language in Society*, vol. 22 (1993), 217-233.

intercourse'.⁴⁶ Green maintains that kidding among miners serves to reinforce a sense of insidership, acts as a form of social control, and provides a release of tension that arises from the underground working environment with all its dangers as well as from the constant threat of industrial action. Green's research draws on a combination of empirical data and examples provided by miners, particularly the work of Douglass, who worked in the mining industry himself first in County Durham and latterly in South Yorkshire.

Douglass (1973) claims that the 'violent banter' (verbal duelling), used between miners is specific to the Yorkshire coalfield and an important part of general joking relationships, called 'pillocking' (as opposed to 'kidding'), which serves primarily to reinforce a sense of insidership and to test outsiders.⁴⁷ Douglass also demonstrates that an important part of 'pillocking' is a sort of gallows humour that functions to combat the dangerous uncertain underground world, which he tells us, necessitates a man to 'switch off his surface self and change his nature'. From their recent research in West Yorkshire, sociologists Warwick and Littlejohn (1993) note that humour is a significant aspect of a coalmining community's 'cultural capital', and cite that it functions primarily to reinforce boundaries thus accentuating difference between insiders and outsiders.⁴⁸

Investigating aspects of folklore among Welsh coalminers, Davies notes that humour is one of the miners' core expressive attributes, and that, in particular, it comprises an extremely sharp wit and humorous polished narratives concerning, for example, the origins of individual nicknames.⁴⁹ Most of the data that Davies presents is in the form of narrative jokes that gain their dramatic effect from a good deal of direct speech. Other examples of joking relationships among coalminers are scattered throughout autobiographical writing that frequently draws on a robust, local oral tradition. For example

⁴⁶ Green, A.E., "Only Kidding: Joking among coal-miners", in Green, A.E., and Widdowson, J.D.A., eds., *Language, Culture and Tradition*, Leeds/ Sheffield, Institute Of Dialect and Folklife Studies, University of Leeds, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, 1981, p. 51.

⁴⁷ Douglass, Dave, *Pit Talk in County Durham: A Glossary of Miner's talk together with Memories of Wardley Colliery. Pit Songs and Piliking*, Oxford, History Workshop Pamphlets, No. 10, 1973.

⁴⁸ Warwick, Dennis, and Littlejohn, G., "The Cultural capital of Coal Mining Communities", in *Coal, Culture and Community: Proceedings of a Conference at Sheffield Hallam University*, Sheffield, Pavic Publications, 1994, pp. 51-63.

⁴⁹ Davies, Lynn, "Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales", *Journal for the Society of Folklife Studies*, vol. 9 (1971), 79-107.

McFarlane's *Essays from the Yorkshire coalfield*, (1979), Bullock's *Bower's Row* (1965) and, to a lesser, extent Saxton's *The Saxtons in Grimethorpe* (2000).⁵⁰

Joking relationships among Barnsley coalminers

As well as collecting examples of pillocking, this study also sought to gain a local perspective on the practice. Pillocking [ˈpɪləkɪŋ] according to the people of Royston, Grimethorpe, Central Barnsley and Darfield interviewed here, is the general business of mock insults, sharp wit and, not mentioned in Green's article, the activity of telling lies for comic effect. In this context local vernacular 'pillock' can act as a synonym for 'to joke', i.e. joking in a very general sense.

However, confusingly, the verb 'to pillock' has a separate but related meaning, as in the narrower sense of lying for comic effect. This sense pertains to leg pulling or practical joking as in 'taking the Michael', 'taking the piss', or a 'a wind-up'.⁵¹

In an attempt to clarify more precisely what these joking relationships entail the following discussion has been divided into; mock insults or sharp wit; narrative jokes; Gallows humour; pillocking, or telling lies for comic effect. The genre of canned jokes is not generally considered part of pillocking. Some instances of mock insults, verbal wit and white lies have become so legendary that they have been crystallised into highly polished narrative jokes. These jokes are often labelled 'tales' by the informants.

Ritual mock insults and verbal duelling

A core feature of joking relationships among this socio-occupational group appears to be the use of mock insults which sometimes lead to a display of verbal duelling. Although women were not excluded from the practice it was found to exist predominantly among the men. The people interviewed referred to mock insults and verbal duelling as 'banter',

⁵⁰ McFarlane, James, ed., *Essays from the Yorkshire Coalfield*, Sheffield, Division of Adult Continuing Education, University of Sheffield, 1979.

Bullock, Jim., *Bower's Row: Recollections of a Mining Village*, Wakefield, Earnest Press, 1976.

Saxton, Fred, *The Saxtons in Grimethorpe: A Miner's Story*, Grimethorpe; Grimethorpe, Shafton and Brierley Community Partnership, 2000.

⁵¹ 'Kidding' was found to be used by the older members of the speech community, c. 60 years or more.

which they emphasise is an essential part of the valued camaraderie among local men. Crucially, these insults are for comic effect and are not meant to be taken seriously. It is a form of joking that serves to build rapport and, in this respect, the practice differs markedly from sarcasm. Instead of threatening a relationship between speakers, mock insults and verbal duelling promote solidarity. As one former miner told me “you can only be so insulting with your friends”. To a large extent this form of joking relies on well established relationships, and a mutual recognition that the insults and mockery are not to be taken literally and that participants must temporarily suspend normal rules of interpretation.

Insulting someone in a joking way was a common practice at the pit, as the former Royston miner Paul revealed. He admitted that he found it difficult getting up for the day shift and therefore would frequently take a ‘laker’ or two, thereby only working three or four shifts during the week. On the occasions when he made it to work, his colleagues would tease him mercilessly, appearing incredulous that he had at last managed to get out of bed. He explained: “I used to get a load o’ grief on days cos tha wa’ mi shift where I used to fail a lot on days, I couldn’t gerrup.” Examples of the comments he regularly received included, “As thi mam got thi up?” or “Fucking hell are thy here again? That’s three times this week,” or “What’s up, as tha shit bed?”⁵² This sort of interaction is still witnessed in the clubs, but as Sam, a Royston miner, explained, it does not lead to aggression or lasting animosity.

A number of men expressed that they despised sarcasm, especially from a superior. As revealed in the narratives discussed earlier in this chapter, situations between men and the bosses could quickly deteriorate if the wrong tone was adopted. As one man told me he did not object to being asked to do a job but hated being told, and hated sarcasm vehemently.⁵³

However, evidence collected for this study points to the fact that ritual insults and mockery do not always build rapport. If not all parties agree, what can be intended as a joking insult might be construed as a genuine attack. Joy recounts a recent incident that illustrates the point clearly:

⁵² Interview with Paul M., 27/1/99, t 1, s 2, 43.3

⁵³ Interview with Frank C., 17/11/98, t 1, s 2, 28.0

“*Joy C*: I might gu out two or three times a year, if that, up to club, an’ I went in three week since an’ as soon as I got through the door, there’s a bloke sits on door as you gu in - an’ he says “Ooh bloody hell is it Christmas?” An’ I like looked at him. He sez “What’s up is it thi birthday?”

Sandra B: They always say that.

JC: “Is it thi birthday?”, cos I dunt gu out but mi husband does... An’ I hate goin’ in that place, an’ as soon as you gu in they’ve summat to say and it really...

SB: It’s like a lot o’ places i’n’t it? You’ve to run gauntlet to get in to main room, so you get all these criticisms.”⁵⁴

Brenda explains that ‘the pecking order’, as she calls it, “never stops from School to the Derby and Joan”. Clearly Brenda, Joy and Sandra see mock insults and teasing as a form of social control. As Saville-Troike has argued, joking can often be a form of criticism without the usual lasting consequences.⁵⁵

Frequently a verbal attack will result in retaliation and a bout of verbal duelling. Here the idea is to give a quick, witty reply. For example when one miner says to another “Bill haven’t you got little legs,” he says “Well owt ‘ill do for pit won’t it?” In a separate incident, the pit manager says to Sam on first meeting him, “Tha not reight big ‘a’ tha?” He instantly replies “Tha not reight big thisen.” In both instances the retort diffuses a situation, turning it from potentially aggressive into playful.

Such joking relationships involve treading a thin line where one mistake might result in a joking, competitive intonation being misunderstood and a rapport-enhancing intention turning into an unpleasant, aggressive encounter. As Cook points out:

“Joking then is to insulting, as competitive play is to fighting: the use of the same or very similar behaviour for the opposite effect...it is an inversion which seems to have a particular and dangerous attraction for humans. But it also demands ingenuity, since it requires great skill to remain on the borderline, without being perceived as having strayed across into aggression.”⁵⁶

The quick wit capable of turning a potentially serious comment into a playful encounter is an aspect of the coalminer’s expressive culture that is celebrated. There are numerous narrative jokes that recount locally famous verbal duels, in particular duels where a miner out-wits a mining deputy or manager.

⁵⁴ Interview with Sandra and Barry B., and Joy B., 9/3/99, 13.0

⁵⁵ Saville-Troike, Muriel, *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989, p.?

⁵⁶ Cook, Guy, *Language Play, Language Learning*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 73.

Narrative jokes

The narrative joke features verbal conflict via dramatic direct speech. I have termed this genre 'narrative joke' rather than a humorous anecdote as events build up to a closing sequence that consists of a punchline.⁵⁷ This verbal genre, which forms a crucial part of the socio-occupational language variety under discussion, differs from the narratives of verbal conflict in a number of ways. They are generally much shorter in construction, do not necessarily deal with personal experience and are usually more marked off from the surrounding dialogue via the use of formulaic openings or 'keying' strategies.⁵⁸

One of the questions used to try and elicit narratives during the semi-structured interviews was, 'Can you remember any old stories told to you by older miners or members of your family? Are there any stories that stand out?'⁵⁹ Terry a former Union man replied immediately with the following example that his father had told him:

"Oh ah there is one, there is one stands out and it was at Wath Main when the found, I think one of the deputies found a lad asleep, which of course he shouldn't o' been but found him asleep, and he said to him 'You know you shouldn't be asleep'. He said 'Well I wasn't asleep.' He sez 'You were.'" He said "I've seen you,' He sez 'you'd got your eyes shut.' He sez 'I've got mi bloody boots on but I wasn't walking,' (*laughs*)."⁶⁰

Unlike the narratives discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the confrontation with authority in this example is diffused via humour. More important however, is the fact that here miners are not complaining about the attitudes to their superiors but blatantly celebrating their indifference towards work. The 'lad' out-wits the authoritative figure of the deputy with a quick one liner. Being caught sleeping underground in a coalmine can

⁵⁷This is the stance taken by other scholars of conversational humour:

Norrick, N.R., *Conversational Joking: Humour in everyday talk*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 48. See also:

Sacks, Harvey, "An analysis of the course of a joke's telling", in Bauman, Richard, and Sherzer, Joel, eds., *Explorations in the Ethnography of Communication*, 2nd edn., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 337-353.

Sherzer, Joel, "Puns and Jokes," in *Handbook of Discourse Analysis, vol. 3: Discourse and Dialogue*, ed. Van Dijk, T.A., London, Academic Press, 1985, pp. 213-21.

⁵⁸ Goffman, Erving, *Forms of Talk*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1981, p. 83.

⁵⁹ Refer to the 'Topic List' presented in the Methodology chapter.

result in the victim being dismissed and so the social context in which the event takes place is a potentially serious one. Even if it exists, any response from the deputy following the lad's final line is not presented in this polished version. Thus it manages to project a negative stereotype of the deputy as being someone with power in theory but ineffectual in practice. Santino, in his research on occupational narratives, concluded that:

“The dealing with status and authority superordinates by subordinates is a major theme in occupational narrative.” And, more importantly, that “...one of the most pervasive themes in occupational narrative (*is*) hostility toward authority as realized by a prank a subordinate worker plays on a superordinate.”⁶¹

Another major theme recurrent in the narrative jokes collected appears to be the miners' disregard towards work. Some of these have become legendary either to a particular group of colleagues who perhaps worked together, or in some cases, across a larger area.

Two variations of the following narrative joke were collected. This version was told by a miner in his seventies, and the other by a man in his forties, both men had worked at Houghton Main:

“It's another true story, me and Deputy went down this Kent seam and when we get back old Harry's got about three top coats wrapped round him and he's fast asleep, and he say to me, Deputy 'Just look there' reight politely 'just laid like a big black clock him.' And he nudged him and he just opened one eye, he says, 'I don't know how you can do it Harry?'
And he just says 'Years of experience', (*laughs*).”⁶²

In this narrative joke we are reminded that it is based on an actual event witnessed by the narrator, and as he himself states: 'It's another true story'. Another device that the narrator uses to enhance the performance of the narrative is to portray the deputy speaking 'reight politely' rather than in the local vernacular. The short, terse response from the guilty miner shows no remorse and indeed openly suggests that it is regular practice for him to sleep underground. Much of the dramatic effect of this narrative relates to the seriousness of the offence as mentioned before. The theme of verbal duelling between the men and the

⁶⁰ Interview with Terry V., 10/1/96, t 1, s 2, 15.0.

⁶¹ Santino, Jack, “Characteristics of Occupational Narratives”, *Western Folklore*, vol. 37 (1978), 199-212.

bosses is evident again and, as with all the narratives discussed in this chapter so far, it functions to celebrate local miners' disregard for authority.

Undoubtedly, all these narratives are idealisations of events, and their frequent performance during the taperecorded interviews can be viewed as an attempt to foster a sense of insidership. As Goffman states: "A performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs...as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community."⁶³ Crucially, the group under question in these narratives does not include the socio-occupational group as a whole, but specifically the 'workers' as opposed to the 'bosses'. Here is different example where the manager is the one who turns the serious into the comic via a witty one liner:

"*Terry V*: Somebody would make light of something no matter how serious it was. I remember once we'd a meeting wi' t' manager, Tony Griffin, manager at Houghton Main and they were talking about goin' in for a four day week, they were always talkin' about a three or four day week the NUM. And he used to say, he says to us one day 'Well I dunt know about you going in a four day week, I've some that are only doing three and they're quite satisfied'. (*laughter*)."⁶⁴

To appreciate the punchline the audience needs an adequate background knowledge. The union had approached the manager to reveal that they were considering restricting their members to working just four days per week so as to disrupt the production of coal and thereby making a form of industrial protest. But the manager points out that most of the workforce only appear to work three days a week anyway, due to unofficial absenteeism.

This particular 'tale' has classic status throughout the region being performed by men who had worked at Royston Drift mine, Grimethorpe colliery and Houghton Main colliery. Sometimes precise contextual detail is included as in this instance, but in other versions, the protagonists and the venue are unspecified. It is these latter versions that are a testimony to the fact that a narrative joke has achieved legendary status across a number of neighbouring mining communities, forming part of many individuals' narrative repertoire.

⁶² Interview with Bill and Mavis S, 10/12/96, t 1, s 2, 1.5.

⁶³ Goffman, Erving, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London, Penguin, 1969, p. 45. Also Bennett has argued that group sagas among school teachers function as celebrating a shared past: Bennett, Gillian, " 'Rocky the Police Dog' and other tales: Traditional Narrative in an Occupational Corpus", *Lore and Language*, vol. 3, no. 8 (January 1983), 1-19.

⁶⁴ Interview with Terry V., 10/12/96, t 1, s 1, 23.40.

The only other narrative joke found to have achieved such classic status, is the ‘Lake district joke’ as discussed in Chapter 6. The central theme of the ‘lake district joke’ is also a celebration of the local miners’ disregard for authority and an indifferent approach to work as manifested by the suggested frequent absenteeism or love of taking a ‘laker’.

Gallows humour

Another key aspect of the coalminers’ humour identified in the data collected for this study is a type of gallows humour. During the semi-structured interviews informants repeatedly provided examples of this patterned humour without being prompted. The following example was told by a former Royston miner in his late thirties:

“Paul M: That wa’ another one (laughs) another type o’ pillocking, there wa’ a kid called Barry Dickinson working with us then - well they were in headin’s they were headin’ men an’ we wa’ on what they call mats forward, materials forward...- And somebody said, ‘Pete Baildon’s lost his hand, fucking chopped his hand off wi’ a sheet.’ An’ that like.

An’ Barry Dickinson wa’ saying “He’ll be pillocking (meaning - he’s lying).” He says, “Tell him if I find it, say I’m gunna stamp on his fucking fingers after what he said to me other day.” An’ that. An’ - he really wa’ - his arm wa’ dangling an’ that like.

An’ they got him like strapped up an’ on stretcher, an’ that. And Dickie wa’ still up to him an’ sayin,’ ‘Does this mean I dunt get me tenner at weekend,’ An’ that like, what he owed him. An’ he wa’ in his pockets this Barry Dickinson, tekin’ his bacca off him an that like saying you know ‘They’ll not let thee chew it in hospital.’ An’ that. ‘Tha gunna be in theer a while like, I might as well have this.’

An like tekin his snuff, an’ everybody piles onto stretcher then like you know, real fuckin’ mercenary world, wa’n’t it like? (meaning - Offering to help as an excuse to leave work early)

AC: Yeah.

PM: Bad place to gu if you were seeking sympathy...”⁶⁵

When asked whether or not this sort of black humour would occur in his present job in the construction industry, he replied categorically “no”. “If a kid’s arm was hanging off you’d be really serious an’ first aidy abaht it, you know but them boys, first thought wa’ like rob his bacca, his snuff an’ that.”

⁶⁵ Interview with Paul M., 27/1/99, t 1, s 2, 40.5

This kind of joking relationship between coalminers has been commented on by others, such as Bullock, Douglass and Green. However, examples that they provide are always set in the underground environment, whereas in the data collected here this brand of gallows humour, like the verbal duelling, appears just as common among surface workers.

The following example was related by Ian, a former surface worker who had been at the scene of an accident on the stockyard:

“Ian T: Working on the stockyard one day, Doggy puts his hand behind this ‘S hook’ to get this sling off, course props opened up and dragged his hand and his glove through this ‘S hook’ and Jonesy like, being Jonesy like, tha knows I mean, sod it like. So he comes over like the crane driver and Denty’s there screaming his head off like, ‘Arr mi fingers they’re off they’re off me fingers are off’. So Jonesy says, ‘Hang on a minute, Dave will go see if we can get a Hacksaw’. So he went over t’ compound like there’s a couple o’ fitters there like, ‘Lends thi hacksaw mate we got a kid stuck in t’ slings like.’ He come back pulls Denty’s sleeve up puts hacksaw again his wrist so Denty’s screaming ‘No Dick, no, no, no, not mi hand Dick, not mi hand Dick.’ So Jonesy says, ‘Shut up you soft cunt.’ He says, ‘They’re hardened steel these slings we’ll never get through ‘em.’ He says, ‘They’ll put thi hand back on tha’ll be reight’ (laughs) course like then he saws through t’ slings like, but that wa’ crack like, that wa’ t’ big joke.”⁶⁶

Douglass asserts that this kind of black humour, along with joking relationship in general, is grounded in the underground context where there is a different atmosphere borne out of necessity to enhance ingroup solidarity due to the stressful working environment. Henriques et al use a similar argument when they state that miners appear to swear more when they enter the underground environment. Green agrees with Douglass that the underground environment is responsible, in part, for this brand of humour, but points out a paradox in Douglass’s conclusion as the gallows humour is viewed as building solidarity whilst simultaneously validating a competitive element and leading ultimately to the loser of the duel being hurt and humiliated. Perhaps viewing his data more objectively than Douglass (who is not only a former miner, but a former NUM branch delegate), led Green to make the particularly insightful comment that “kidding is thus a dialectic comprehending the solidarity of the group and the individuality of its members”.⁶⁷ However, as Green

⁶⁶ Interview with Ian T., 18/1/99, t 1,s 1, 32.0

⁶⁷ Green, *ibid*, p. 62.

admits his empirical data was collected anecdotally and strengthened by data scattered through autobiographical essays written by coalminers. These two elements led to the examples cited as coming exclusively from underground situations. The sample selected for this study purposefully included a wider representation of the coalmining community, and this has provided evidence that such banter takes place on the surface of the pit as well as underground. There are two obvious explanations for this.

Although the underground environment is unique (in its isolation, darkness, and the fact that it is regularly dusty and plagued by water), and the job awkward and potentially dangerous, surface work, especially on the stockyard, has its share of serious accidents. Also many miners who worked underground initially, if injured are often given a job on the 'pit top', thereby bring the practice of joking relationships onto the surface. Although many surface workers have never worked underground, they consider themselves part of this socio-occupational group, and in the data collected here show their love of the camaraderie of which these joking relationships are a key part.

Ultimately, this allows humour and the joking relationships among miners in general, is context dependent, but these contexts are not limited to the underground working environment. Rather they are inextricably linked to subjective feelings of male, group belongingness. The humour builds solidarity, and at the same time allows people to jockey for position in the local hierarchy. Of course, it is worth remembering that they are also a tremendous source of entertainment for the majority.

Pillocking: Lying for comic effect

Most of the men interviewed in this study use the term 'pillocking' in two discrete but related senses. As stated earlier pillocking can refer to joking in a wide sense including verbal duelling, telling polished narrative jokes, general banter and importantly telling white lies for comic effect. Rather confusingly, locals also use the term to refer to this latter brand of humour in particular and that is how it will be used in this final discussion of joking relationships.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ The practice of pillocking is also very occasionally known as 'slow timing'; as noted in the glossary earlier in the study.

Pillocking, or the telling of lies about something to someone for comic effect, is a critical component of the local expressive verbal culture. When questioned directly about the nature of pillocking, former miner Neil answered:

“...it’s like - I dunt know – it’s like telling lies but not. You know telling fibs like an’ it’s like windin’ people up basically, called pillocking.”⁶⁹

Paul provided a similar perspective and underlined its importance among miners:

PaulM: Pillocking just tekin’ piss. But like its tekin piss, its an art form.

AC: You would say its at pit more than other places (of work)?

PM: I would do yeah.”⁷⁰

Remarkably, Green’s extensive article makes no reference to this sort of humour, although he does refer to practical jokes. Interestingly, although Douglass uses the word pillocking in its wider more general sense, he does not use it in a narrower sense and makes no reference to this practice among miners of deceiving for comic effect. This is particularly surprising as he writes about his experiences in the Doncaster coal mines, which neighbour Barnsley.

Due to the exploratory nature of much of the research conducted in this study, combined with the lack of adequate analytical tools for humour research in general, an attempt was made to record emic terminology along with informants’ own perceptions of the specific practice under scrutiny. The reflexive nature of the ethnographic case study research design used for data collection, meant that interviews could focus more centrally on pillocking as it became evident that it was a vital part of the local talk complex.⁷¹ Importantly, what was revealed during these interviews was the fact that pillocking not only relies on the presence of males from the socio-occupational group, but also a substantial knowledge of one’s peers’ social life.

As previous research has shown, banter, such as verbal duelling and mockery, exists in a number of male, manual occupational settings not just among coalminers. However, pillocking is a distinctive practice that relies on a considerable overlap of individuals’ work life and private life. Many of the individuals interviewed in this study were subject to this particular overlap when working at local pits. Paul from Royston gives an extraordinary

⁶⁹ Neil Scully interviewed 10/12/96, t 1, s 2, 4.0

⁷⁰ Interview with Tony Martin, 27/1/99, t 1, s 1, 34.0

⁷¹ As highlighted in Figure 2:6 of the Methodology Chapter, p. 63.

lucid account of how this situation of overlapping social groups (work and personal life), differs considerably from his current job in construction where people are recruited from all over the country. This point emerges within a general explanation of the practice by a former Royston miner:

*“PaulM: Right, right, like some bloke ‘ill walk past another bloke an’ that an’ he’ll say like ‘Fucking hell are you gunna be all day putting them up like if you don’t fucking get a move on I’ll come an’ lash up miself in mi dinner brek.’ ...but like pillockin’ you dunt have to be puttin’ somebody dahn, you can be tekin’ piss subtle, or a part o’ it could be blaggardin’ (mock insults) or a part o’ it could be definitely tellin’ him lies, that like, you know that somebody’s been givin’ his wife one an’ stuff like that. But them’s the kind o’ levels you mek at the pit like. An’ that’s why pillockin’ on’y fits at pit because they were little communities... With it being (a) community everybody knew everybody’s business an’ that, an’ you could pillock different to what you can like workin’ wi’ someone from, you might be workin’ wi’ like three people from Dublin one from Birmingham in this industry (*meaning* - his current job in construction), it’s not communal like... you could gu workin’ a small village but you wunt have a nucleus of people from a small village, you’d have like paddies an’ like everybody in theer you know. So you can’t pillock abaht –at the level you could at the pit wheer everybody knows like how many people live in your house an’ like everything. They know everything abaht you, so the pillocking could go like a grade or two further, like deeper an’ like that’s when they’re pillocking people.”⁷²*

The reason that the practice of pillocking arose and flourished in these communities then is because their inhabitants knew so much about each other. This information might include detailed knowledge of a persons kinship network, what their reputation as a worker was like, how much money they earned, or for a woman whether she was a good mother or not, or whether her house was a ‘palace’ or a ‘tip’. On top of this is the fact that people have a shared fate due, until recently, to the enduring monopoly employer of the local pits. Specific examples of pillocking were collected from men of all ages and these exemplify more specifically how this overlap is a central concern of the practice. After commenting on the fact that pillocking requires this social overlap Barry provides a good example of the practice:

*“BarryB: Let me gi’ you an example like. This is pit humour ...I had an apprentice with me one day a young lad. I told you abaht him I think? (*looks at his wife whilst speaking*)*

⁷² Interview with Paul M., 27/1/99, t 1, s 1, 34.0

And he wa' just ordinary lad that lived local, and the' put him, - cos a wa' an electrician actually dahn t' pit - and they'd put him we me like you know, 'You look after him for a month' or whatever and 'share this that and t'other.' And we went to this particular place - it wa' his first couple o' days - and this is type o' humour I'm talking abaht.

You know, nobody means any wrong by it, but it's just something you had to accept. And this lad says to him, well this lad he'll be in his fifties. He said 'What's your name then lad?'

He sez 'Jeremy.'

He sez 'J-e-r-e-m-y', he says 'wheer's tha live.'*(humorous tone)*

You know wi' this Jeremy job like - cos it want like a pit name wa' it Jeremy -

He sez, 'Oh I live dahn t' Doles at Royston,' or whatever it wa'.

'What (do) they call thi dad then?'

'So an' so, so and so'.

'And what's thi mam's name?'

'Jane.' Or whatever.

'Oh he says yeah I know 'em.' He says 'That's her. Thi mam's knocking so and so off.'

And this kid, his face, honestly it dropped a foot. And they were just kidding (pillocking) him, but it's part o' pit life ...They would say any mortal thing to get you going and the more you got going the more they liked it. I've seen kids wi' faces as red as fire wi' embarrassment like."⁷³

Many of the examples of pillocking collected here concern men fabricating 'tales' that concern a close family member and in particular a female member of an individual's family, especially a man's mother, his girlfriend or wife. In some cases the deceit can last for a long time, with a number of men pillocking one man on the same issue. Alternatively, the deceit only lasts a few minutes as in the following example told by the same Royston miner:

BarryB: Every pit had probably twenty that wherever you wa', whether you were in a club or pub or dahn t' pit you'd to keep an eye on, you'd to make sure that you were ready for what ever they come up with, you know. We went in a club one night me and Sandra and this bloke come up to me and he says, 'Oh this is mi wife so and so', 'Oh hello' and all that. And went here love a want you' He says 'Will you start sending him with a clean towel t' pit, because am sick o' him using mine our lass' washing mine three or four times a week.' You know he's making to be as though a wa' a scruff like...

SandraB: And that I wasn't doing my job as a woman you see.

BB: It was just out o' blue

AC: So he wa' saying to you?

⁷³ Interview with Sandra B. and Barry B., and Joy B., 9/3/99, t 2, s 1, 31.4

SB: To me, he pulled me 'Can you start sending him we a new towel' Well I mean.. so indignant

BB: She'd no respect for him, but that's part o' job like

SB: He's saying take no notice and I mean everybody around laughing you know I wa' really embarrassed."⁷⁴

This example raises a number of significant issues concerning the practice of pillocking. Many people commented upon the fact that at 'the pit' there were hundreds of jokes and that joking was non-stop. However, here Barry draws attention to the fact that there were specific individuals known for pillocking that one had to be wary of, irrespective of the context. In this sense these people are special cases, similar to the men known for being exceptional storytellers discussed earlier. This variability in individual desire and ability to perform points the heterogenous nature of the socio-occupational group. A different point is the fact that the practice of pillocking is not confined to the context of the pit. It is a practice that relies on the overlap of social and occupational relationships and draws from each for its subject matter. This evidence differs to Pilcher's findings, following his research among longshoremen in Oregon, America. He found that the verbal practices of work, including leg pulling, did not enter into the domestic, or wider community sphere. It also conflicts with Green's evidence based on research among coalminers in West Yorkshire, where he infers that joking relationships are more pronounced in the underground working environment. The example also reveals that women are part of the pillocking process although normally as the victimised, marginal figures.

Summary

One explanation for the practice of joking relationships is that they are forms of play that exist primarily as a means of entertainment and which among miners, help make a dirty, dull and sometimes dangerous job more bearable. A rather separate explanation is that joking, in any subculture, functions to test relationships of existing and new members of the group. It could be argued that in an industry such as coalmining the group cannot afford to allow individual needs to rise above the needs of the group. Therefore verbal duelling and

ritual mock insults by attacking arrogance, help instill feelings of trust, solidarity and, as the men themselves say, 'camaraderie'. Norrick repeatedly argues that joking relationships exist fundamentally to build camaraderie.⁷⁵

As a researcher, by understanding the punchlines of the various narrative jokes and thereby laughing with the informants during the taperecorded interviews, I too showed my allegiance to the group, which contributed to feelings of solidarity between myself and the informants. This understanding of joking relationships functioning as acts of solidarity leads us to the conclusion that joking is a conservative practice. As Mary Douglas pointed out, whilst joking appears to attack received patterns of behaviour it is in fact "only a temporary suspension of the social structure", and actually clarifies and enforces social norms.⁷⁶ Nicknames were shown to operate in a similar conservative fashion in Chapter 6.

If a particular joking incident is memorable it may become crystallised into the form of a polished narrative joke, and this contributes to the notion of a shared past and a sense of 'groupness'. Joking relationships, in a similar fashion to narratives, function primarily to build feelings of mutuality and trust. However the evidence presented in this chapter has been collected via interview and therefore consists of retrospective examples. By examining evidence collected via participant observation it would be possible to analyse the continuation of the practice.

Outside of the taperecorded interviews, in the social centres of local pubs and clubs, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that a feeling of belonging still exists for many people. Being affiliated to an occupational group has shaped some people's identities indelibly, and in certain social contexts, this is manifested via the recounting of narratives and the continued existence of joking relationships. As Royce Turner highlights, for many people although the pit has gone its hold on people still exists:

"Billy's days as a miner were long gone. But he still clung to them. They conveyed a legitimacy. They were a testament to the days when he would make a worthwhile contribution to the economy, to society. And that, really, is all he ever wanted to do. It was a modest aim, but it was an honourable aim. Grimethorpe pit was instantly on his tongue the moment he met you... Proud like so many men (*were*) proud. There

⁷⁴ Interview with Sandra and Barry B., and Joy B., 9/3/99, t 2, s 1, 33.0

⁷⁵ Norrick, p. 153-158.

⁷⁶ Douglas, quoted in: Norrick, N.R., *Conversational Joking: Humour in everyday talk*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 148.

were so many thousands of other men like Billy in the abandoned Yorkshire coalfield.”⁷⁷

During participant observation for this study I visited the Red Rum pub, on the edge of the White City housing estate in Grimethorpe. On one occasion a former miner, Martin, entered the pub and came and sat with us. He began telling us how busy he had been, working as a part-time driver as well as on a number of local community projects. He joked “I dunt know how I found time to work at pit.” He then launched into a story about how he and Billy had helped set up a portacabin which would be used to house a community computing project. The fieldwork diary records the narrative:

“That week Martin and Willy had helped set up a portacabin that was going to be used as an office for one of these projects although I didn't manage to find out what it entailed at the time. It had reminded them of working in the 40 inch coal seams of the Beamshaw seam underground at Grimethorpe. They had to crawl underneath the portacabin to sort out some cables and to ensure that everything was generally ok with it. The word in the village was that Willy's knees were still sore from this crawling around, the implication being that at one time they crawled around everyday at work but now of course that is all over.

Martin said, ‘Mind you I didn't mind the Beamshaw, I didn't mind crawlin’ in fact I preferred it to the four foot ten seams where you're having to bend your neck and when you're rushing, you're knocking your head all the time’.

Standing up straight with loads of space or crawling on your knees was fine, but being bent awkwardly seemed unpopular.”⁷⁸

What this incident emphasised was how locals manage to graft the present onto the past. The fact that the ex-NUM man Willy has sore knees would not have been of any significance in a non-mining village. Yet here in Grimethorpe the incident took on a special significance. It appeared that the whole community were revelling in the irony that one of the key members of the local aristocracy, (a former coalface worker, charge hand, and union representative and grafter) who had spent most of his working life crawling on his knees was now suffering from a few hours crawling under a portacabin. The incident was

⁷⁷ Turner, *ibid*, pp. 24-5.

⁷⁸ Fwd, 14/3/97.

newsworthy among the men at our table and provided a 'floor' for Martin to reminisce about the different heights of Grimethorpe's coal seams.⁷⁹

Earlier in the evening the men sat around our table had given Dave Hunter the community outreach worker at the local Acorn Centre, a scrap of paper with a phone number on saying that someone had rung the pub earlier and left a message and requested that he contacted them. John said that he got the impression it was connected with the living archive project that he was organizing and that it sounded important and urgent. Periodically throughout the evening the men reminded him about the message. Eventually he went to the telephone in the pub and rang. When he returned there was a roar of laughter. The number he had rang was the mobile number of John one of the men at our table and there was a recorded message that said "Hello you have just been pillockd". When the laughter died down Johnny, now a market stall trader on Barnsley market, told of how he had been using it to pillock the other market traders.

Understandably, not all new work environments that the former miners enter are suitable contexts for such joking relationships as Neil a former fitter at Barnsley Main colliery revealed:

"NeilS: ...I had a hell of a job me when I started at college, so if somebody 'ad say summat an' I gi' 'em a quick back like you know, it wa' just natural you know, an' they sort o' look at you they di'n't know how to tek you at all. Really weird aye.

AC: Different environment?

AS: Yeah but even nah, lads in pub 'll say that its totally different everywhere they work you know. They've started it off at foundry nah ,mi brother an't' other pit lads, it's basically telling lies abaht somebody for t' next shift, "As tha heard abaht so and so?" You know..."⁸⁰

One way in which the socio-occupational boundary is maintained is via regular social contact of former miners. The continued existence of the Royston women against Pit closure Group that meets every fortnight in a local pub provides similar social contact. The group exists first and foremost as an active local voice which tackles current issues affecting the local community. However, there is also an element of wanting to sustain the

⁷⁹ During fieldwork the researcher was informed that some men when out socialising have been known to get under the tables and, pretending that they are on the coalface, mime certain tasks such as drawing the chocks in.

⁸⁰ Neil S., Interviewed 10/12/96, t 1, s 2, 4.0

group because of a need to maintain the social contact and a fear of disbanding a group that has achieved so much and has a shared past. Their meetings are semi-formal, well organized and tackle important, sometimes sensitive issues. However, occasionally an anecdote will come from nowhere. At one of the meetings Joan told a short polished narrative joke that she remembered her mother-in-law frequently recounting, “She had once told her husband, as he was setting off for the day shift, that he had put his clogs on the wrong feet and as quick as lightening he replied ‘I know they’re on the wrong feet, they should be on thine’.” Although short, it signalled that for many women belonging to a socio-occupational group was something that continued to form a crucial part of their local identities.

Discussion

The data described above to some extent counteracts the dialogue on ‘loss’ collected during fieldwork and presented and discussed in the introductory chapter. What emerged, both in the semi-structured interviews and during participant observation, was the continued importance for locals of this sense of belonging signalled via the recounting of narrative and the joking relationship. But why should this be so? Cohen’s work on the subjective construction of community offers a viable explanation for the continued salience of this attachment manifested in the socio-occupational language variety:

“So the question, ‘why do communities respond assertively to encroachment upon their boundaries?’, we can now speculate along the following lines. They do so because their members feel themselves to be under so severe a threat from some extrinsic source that if they do not speak out now they may be silenced for ever. Further, they do so because their members recognize their own voices within them, and because they feel the message of this vocal assemblage, though general, to be informed directly by their own experiences and mentalities. And they do so because their members find their identities as individuals through their occupancy of the community’s social space: if outsiders trespass in that space, then its occupants’ own sense of self is felt to be debased and defaced. This sense is always tenuous when the physical and structural boundaries which previously divided the community from the rest of the world are increasingly blurred.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Cohen, *ibid.*, p. 109.

8

Conclusion and further research

Conclusions

The study of the local dialect is a first step towards the study of the history and development of the language.

The grammar of the local dialect is not normally considered as one of the main areas of research in the study of the history of the language.



an important sociological variable if the local dialect is to be described and analyzed accurately. Placing locally important social variables, such as the age, sex, and social class of the speaker, are essential to the study of the local dialect. This is especially the case in localities such as Ruyton and Chirbury where the dialect has been dominant for so long and where generations of people from the same family have had, not only to have, a generally shared local dialect.

Conclusion

The aim of this final chapter is to draw together the key findings of this study and suggest avenues for further research.

The grammar of the local dialect is not formally codified in any written sources, nevertheless people interviewed in this study were able to comment, sometimes with remarkable complexity, on the specific features that distinguished Royston's regional speech variety from that of neighbouring localities. Dialect jokes also functioned in a similar fashion to reinforce the separateness of Royston speech. I have termed these perceptions, jokes and anecdotes 'dialect lore'. One important conclusion of this study then, is that many local people both celebrate and exaggerate the salient features of regional speech in 'dialect lore', which serves to bolster the idea of Royston and Barnsley as separate speech communities. I use the term 'exaggerate' because the regional speech data collected and analysed revealed that in fact the differences between the regional speech of Royston and Barnsley rest on a small number of phonological shibboleths, for example pronouncing the word *home* /ɒm/ rather than /ɔ:m/ or /uəm/. In a similar way many dialect jokes were observed and collected that celebrated the distinctiveness of the local coalmining jargon, serving to promote a sense of insidership and creating a socio-occupational boundary.

Treating the regional speech variety and the sociolect of coalmining as different entities, as this study has done, is somewhat artificial. In reality, they are inseparable components of local speech usage, and it is unlikely that the local speakers themselves consciously isolate the two varieties during interaction. However, paying special attention to the coalmining jargon has underlined its importance in constructions of local identity. Moreover, the sense of belonging to a specific socio-occupational group in such localities must be recognized as an important sociological variable if the local talk complex is to be described and analysed accurately. Placing locally important social variables, such as occupation, alongside the usual variables of age, gender and region allows more valid assumptions to be reached. This is especially the case in localities such as Royston and Grimethorpe where one industry had dominated for so long and where generations of people from the same locality have had, and continue to have, a relatively shared fate and local history.

One motivation for this study arose from the destruction of the local coalmining industry during the 1980s and 1990s. The consequence of this, as other linguists have noted, is that soon it will be impossible to collect empirical linguistic data (Elmer, Wright)¹. However, during fieldwork, it was discovered that a wealth of the coalmining sociolect is embedded within larger units of discourse, referred to here collectively as ‘communicative styles’, and this may well prolong the survival and adaptation of at least some of the sociolect providing the speakers themselves feel motivated to use it.

It was noted that the underground jargon, and particularly the coal face jargon, features most prominently in the routine formulaic speech forms observed in this study. The communicative styles collected and described, for example greetings, leavetakings and sayings, are used in the appropriate social contexts to signal an individual’s affiliation to the local social sub-group. A number of studies have noted that the effective display of communicative competence in a speech community relies on the speaker’s skill in using formulaic utterances in the appropriate social contexts. (Fillmore, Dorian)². The findings in this study lead us to hypothesise that such language forms operate, among former local coalminers and their families in the appropriate context, as a flexible symbolic resource used for the effective display of a particular local social identity. ‘Local’ is a convenient way of avoiding the difficult task of separating ‘regional’ and ‘occupational’ identities which are signalled simultaneously in so much of the monolingual communicative styles observed here. As stated in Chapter 5, presumably different but similar linguistic repertoires exist in other industrial communities. Although these may differ in the regional speech employed and in the technical jargon used, they would probably function in the same way: to maintain working relationships, both during a vibrant working era and subsequently in order to signal to each other the continuing importance of their shared past. As Le Page and Tabouret-Keller postulate:

¹ Elmer, Willy, “A Questionnaire for the Terminology of Coalmining”, *The History and Dialects of English: Festschrift for Eduard Kolb*, ed., Fischer, Andreas, Heidelberg, C. Winter, 1989, pp. 245-253.

Wright, Peter, “Coal-mining Language: a recent investigation”, in ed. Wakelin, M.F., ed., *Patterns in the Folk Speech of the British Isles*, London, Athlone Press, 1972, pp. 32-49.

² Fillmore, Charles, J., “On Fluency”, in Fillmore, C.J., Kemplar, D., and Wang, W.S.Y., *Individual Differences in Language Ability and Language Behaviour*, New York, Academic Press, 1979, pp. 91 – 94.
Dorian, Nancy, C., “Defining the speech community to include its working margins”, in Romaine, Suzanne, *Sociolinguistic Variation in Speech Communities*, London, Arnold, 1982, p.31.

“...the individual creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behaviour so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time he wishes to be identified, or so as to be unlike those from whom he wishes to be distinguished”³

In truth, much of this routine speech usage is unceremonious and unexceptional to the speakers themselves. Nevertheless, this is not to underestimate its use when manipulated by individuals in order to project different social identities or as an emblem of ‘groupness’. These compact acts of identity, such as sayings and leavetakings, help sustain social relationships in a period of intensive change. Fasold, summarising Milroy’s Belfast study (1980), wrote:

“Strong social networks seem to be associated with locally-orientated working communities. These networks have the effect of enforcing norms of behaviour, including how people should talk. Furthermore, if a group with strong networks finds itself in a situation (perhaps due to outside pressure of some kind) in which it feels the need to emphasise its own identity, the group might fix on a variant of its local speech as a symbol of its identity.”⁴

This study has argued that ‘local’ speech signals more than geographical belonging, and includes locally important social categories. The coalminers’ sociolect in Royston is part of the local speech and is used as an index of socio-occupational belonging. However, these emblems of identity that precis a shared past into appropriate and usable forms, for example leavetaking routines such as “al sithee on t’ tailgate,” are ironic statements. They are referring to places that no longer exist. There is something deeply paradoxical in the fact that contemporary circumstances, for example in Royston, mean that a community needs to reassert itself, but it often achieves this via idioms that are actually threatened by those present circumstances.⁵

Undoubtedly, as with all people, the individuals who form the basis of this study are affiliated to a multitude of different, overlapping and sometimes conflicting social sub-groups, which they can enter and leave easily. Unsurprisingly, affiliations to coalmining as a way of life have been shown to feature prominently among the people interviewed and

³ Le Page, Robert. B., and Tabouret-Keller, Andrée, *Acts of Identity: Creole based approaches to ethnicity and language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 181.

⁴ Fasold, Ralph, *Sociolinguistics of Language*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, p. 265.

⁵ Cohen, A.P., *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, London, Routledge, 1985, p. 98-9.

observed in this study. However, such affiliations are part of a dialectical relationship. One of the most prevalent themes emerging throughout the interviews with local men and women in this study was the dialectic of hating the exploitative, dangerous and dirty nature of pit work, whilst simultaneously taking great pride in performing such a job and being part of a collective, unionised workforce, which offered financial security. Pride arises principally from the knowledge that the miner is responsible for extracting coal, a commodity necessary to the general public. Pride also emanates from the physically demanding, isolated and dangerous work that mining entails, as well as the security provided by the union. This ambiguous, conflictual affiliation with the world of coalmining was also felt, to some degree, by the women interviewed.

A similar dialectal relationship exists with regard to the sense of regional belonging experienced by many individuals whereby pride in belonging to a particular village, such as Royston, is counterbalanced by the realisation that massive social changes are taking place locally. These changes are manifested in economic insecurity through loss of work, as well as the associated rising crime and emotional insecurity, low self esteem and a perception of a lack of 'camaraderie' among the men. These local changes, as a consequence of larger global shifts, are frequently interpreted as 'loss' and as 'a way of life gone' by the men and women interviewed in this study. However, it is clear that these circumstances have provided some men and women with new roles via education or alternative types of employment.

After describing the phonological, lexical and grammatical features of the local regional speech variety and the local coalmining sociolect, this study concentrated on larger units of discourse or 'speech styles', for example the formulaic routines described above (sayings and greetings) as well as naming processes, narratives and joking relationships. In doing so it has not sought to restrict the analysis to the structural properties of the utterances, but instead to attempt to understand the social meaning of the utterances, indeed to describe what the speech forms 'mean' to the users themselves. This requires analysing language in its wider social context, which is a demanding exercise and not to be underestimated. As Antaki points out:

“...to move away from the reassuring cradle of formal structure is to stray into territory that demands that one be knowledgeable about the cultural history of one’s respondents (and that might extend widely, and far back) and be able to manage a mass of historical and anthropological data outside of the stricter confines of the talk and its local context. Such demands, though perhaps not unfamiliar to many social scientists, are (and perhaps ought to be) daunting; to meet them is to draw on reserves of cultural capital which not all of us can properly claim to possess, if we are trained in the mono-disciplines of psychology, sociology, linguistics or communication studies.”⁶

Writing specifically about studying stylistic variation, Coupland has also argued the need for inter-disciplinary research if the important question of why such variation in spoken discourse exists is to be addressed.⁷ This particular study purposefully followed an ethnolinguistic research design so as to gain an adequate understanding of local speech forms in their social, economic and cultural contexts. This led to revealing interpretations, for example of local naming processes, joking relationships and oral narratives. Nicknames whilst viewed as creating a sense of group belonging, are also seen to operate as local forms of informal social control. Acceptable male social roles are created and maintained through the use of nicknames, thereby limiting individuality. Local idioms of occupation and kinship in their various guises reveal a wealth of information about how individuals are perceived and fixed in idealized hierarchies. Which pit a man worked at, what job he undertook, where he performed that job, whether he was a boss or not, who his relatives are, his reputation as a worker; this data is recorded and evaluated locally, to a large extent via local idiomatic forms. Such terms as ‘big hitter’ or ‘good worker’ are used as markers of toughness, of one’s ability to perform physically demanding, dirty and sometimes dangerous work. These labels provide an index of one’s social standing in relation to work, placing individuals in a local male hierarchy that extends beyond the workplace into the wider community.

In Royston, the use of nicknames signals loyalty to the peer group, to the subculture of local coalminers. Nicknames such as ‘Cancerous Bastard’, ‘Ram’ or ‘Shirley’ that might be shocking to an outsider, if they knew the origins, do not cause offence here as locals are

⁶ Antaki, Charles, *Explaining and Arguing: The social organization of accounts*, London, Sage, 1994, pp. 106 – 107.

⁷ Coupland, Nikolas, *Dialect In Use: Sociolinguistic variation in Cardiff English*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1988, p.158.

fully aware of the rules of composition and usage of this communicative style. Ultimately, by being humorous, nicknames attack what is deemed inappropriate behaviour, or stigmatize an individual's appearance or origin, but without severing relationships. As such, they operate in a conservative manner.

This study found that joking relationships among miners (pillocking), and especially verbal duelling, operates in a similar conservative way. To engage in the practice of verbal duelling requires adequate communicative competence, for example the ability to know how far to go, including which taboo subjects (such as accusing someone of being a 'bastard' or a 'scab') to avoid. Yet verbal duelling and lying for comic effect aim to build camaraderie among the men by instilling feelings of trust and solidarity. Such interaction, as observed and recorded during fieldwork, quite clearly functions on the very borderline of aggression and support. This insight into the practice of 'pillocking' among Barnsley coalminers contributes to existing sociolinguistic and anthropological research, for example Basso's linguistic semiotic study of joking among the Apache. In that study he claims: "...Apache assert that joking is one means for 'stretching' (*yidziis*) social relationships, a playful device for testing and affirming solidarity by ostensibly denying it."⁸ And although this kind of joking is recognised as being dangerous, "...individuals are able to joke 'dangerously' with an enviable measure of impunity, and they regard it, especially before a large audience, as a way of 'boasting' (*'adilkaayo yalti'*) about the closeness of their ties."⁹ Empirical narrative data collected for this study supports previous research that claimed 'narratives of verbal conflict' exist as an identifiable speech genre.¹⁰ Social identity theory was found to provide an adequate explanation for many narratives where local coalminers and their families are projected as struggling against forces over which they have limited control, for example management decisions or industrial disputes. The analysis of personal experience narratives of conflict concluded that an individual's 'sense of belonging' to the socio-occupational group becomes more pronounced during the recounting of narratives that relate to times of emotional or economic insecurity. This highlighted the fluid, situational and subjective nature of group affiliation for local men and women. Such identities are

⁸ Basso, Keith, H., *Portraits of "The Whiteman": Linguistic play and cultural symbols among the Western Apache*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 69.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 74.

fragile and transitory because they are constructed in the process of narrative performance, which itself rests on events that are chosen and constructed selectively, and which feed on the emotive power of nostalgia. Nevertheless, the continued telling of such narratives is itself testimony to the point that individuals have a desire to feel they belong to a distinctive group and to see themselves in a positive light.

People interviewed in this study often highlighted the amount of joking relationships, use of nicknames and skill at recounting polished anecdotes and narratives or 'tales' among the local coalminers. Participant observation confirmed that these communicative styles are still in existence in Royston and Grimethorpe. However, it was also the case that the extent of such language use is exaggerated by some people who infer that everyone who worked in coalmining was a good storyteller, had a nickname or was always joking. This rhetoric itself is a strategy used to promote insider distinctiveness, thereby reinforcing the idea of a socio-occupational group boundary.

The study has striven to provide a sensitive account of local socio-linguistic practices by describing and then analysing the function of regional and socio-occupational speech varieties, as well as communicative styles. In this sense it contributes to a deeper understanding of 'local' linguistic practice and to a wider more general theory of language use.

Although language has been viewed in its social context, this has not been a mere backdrop for local speech forms. The ethnographic approach to data collection uncovered a number of locally important social issues, including the breakdown of long-established social networks and socio-economic patterns.

Further research

Lack of research of the local speech variety spoken in the Barnsley area means it warrants a serious investigation. Chapter 2 recorded some of the salient local features, but a thorough descriptive study at the phonological, lexical and grammatical levels (in the vein of Shorrocks and Petyt)¹¹ would increase our knowledge about regional non-standard local varieties east of the Pennines.

¹⁰ Shorrocks, Graham, "The Social and Economic Background to the Narrative of Verbal Conflict", *Lore and Language*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1991), 67-76.

¹¹ Shorrocks, Graham, "A Grammar of the Dialect of Farnworth and District, (Greater Manchester County, formerly Lancashire)", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 1980.

Another important avenue for further research concerns the issue of individual variation and style shifting. As noted in Chapter 3, evidence suggests that first-person, personal pronoun usage appears to oscillate between the informal, familiar 'thou' form and formal 'you' form, depending on internal linguistic and external social contextual factors. Treating this grammatical feature as a linguistic variable and measuring its use would form the base of an exciting study. What is required in particular is a large body of data which shows individuals speaking in a number of different social contexts. Successfully collecting such data may well call for more radical methods than have been traditionally employed, for example using recording devices that willing participants wear permanently for up to a week. Such reliable data will involve a lot of effort in the piloting of equipment, defining ethical parameters and transcribing all the data, however, ultimately it will provide a set of data much more valid than that collected via standardised questionnaires, word lists and socio-linguistic interviews.

This study also highlighted that there are a number of formulaic language forms used routinely, as well as naming practices, features not always taken into consideration by those undertaking micro analysis of phonetic features or by those investigating the coherence of much larger units of discourse (discourse analysts). Continuing research adequately explaining precisely when, where and why such language forms occur among other social sub-groups is needed.

In an attempt to provide a social explanation of local linguistic behaviour this study has viewed regional and socio-occupational language variety and communicative style as symbolic markers of identity. This has been achieved via an ethnographic approach, the fundamental principle of which is the aim of discovering local social complexity rather than imposing global social categories¹² and trying to seek clarity out of this complexity. As Geertz notes: "...the road to the general, to the revelatory simplicities of science, lies through a concern with the particular, the circumstantial, the concrete..."¹³ Such an approach to language study is time consuming and demanding because it entails understanding the wider social and cultural background assumptions in which local

Petyt, K.M., *Dialect and Accent in Industrial West Yorkshire*, Amsterdam, Benjamin, 1985.

¹² Eckert, Penelope, *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice: The Linguistic Construction of Identity in Belten High*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000, p. xiv.

¹³ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, London, Fontana, 1993, p.53.

meaning emerges. However, it ensures that any general theory generated is wholly grounded in local social practice.

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Appendices

(A)

Later more focussed Topic list 2

8/10/99, Ian T. interview

Format

- 1-Main topic list,
- 2- Specific questioning on the genres and themes that have emerged in the fieldwork so far.
- 3- General questions

2- Specific questions

In what way do miners acknowledge their membership to being part of the mining group during interaction, even today?

Questioning on the local communicative styles

Tell me more about

- Sayings/words [Prompts if required-‘Let me get me breath’, ‘Weight on’, ‘More shears cut...’]
- Leave takings
- Story telling
- Pillocking
- Scabs – silence

Specific questioning on the themes

Tell me more about

- Humour
- Conflict, independence
- Absenteeism
- Pride vs hate the pit
- Hierarchy, surface/ underground, inbye/ outbye
- Nepotism
- New work environment, how different?

3 - General questions bearing in mind his background.

He didn't work underground, why?

His dad and his relationship with his work colleagues today?

Looking back in on it all, his relative distance is useful for language discovery, take advantage of this

What are the effects of the demise of the union?

Have you any Contacts? Especially Women, well known characters as well as younger ex-miners?

Topic list 3, for Women, 7th and 8th of March 1999

(ii) Are you from this area?

Are you all from mining backgrounds?

If not, did you notice any difference about the community?

(ii) Can you remember any old stories told to you by older members of your family, your mothers or fathers, or grandparents? Are there any stories that stand out? What about your personal experience memories?

(iii) As a miner's wife is it different to say being a railwayman's wife? Would it be different being married to a deputy or a manager?

Did any of your sons work at the pit? What did you think about them working underground?

Some people have said that children play at being miners, have you ever come across that?

Do men like to talk about the pit?

Do they do this at home? Or in the Clubs?

The strike

Do you think the experience of the strike, (1984-85), changed your views on things?

Do you think being part of the RWAPCG changed you at all?

What was the reaction of your partner to you being involved in the group?

How did you relate to women whose partners had worked during the strike?

What are the main changes you have seen in the community?

Do folk in Royston speak differently to those from other parts of Barnsley?

Main topic list (refer to Chapter 3)

(B)

List of Archived Audio Tapes: *The Andrew Cave Royston coalmining lore and language collection.*

Tape no.	Date of interview	Name(s)	Place
1,2	7/12/96	Steve	Newcastle
3	10/12/96	Terry	Darfield
4,5	10/12/96	Bill and Mavis	Darfield
6	10/12/96	Neil	Oakwell
7,8	10/12/98	Dave and John	Royston
9,10	12/12/96	Joe	Wombwell
11	12/12/96	various-Pub	Grimethorpe
12,13	10/7/97	Ted	Grimethorpe
14	23/9/98	Pete	Royston
15	24/9/98	Colin	Royston
16,17	24/9/98	Sam and Maggie	Royston
18	22/10/98	Clarry and Mary	Royston
19,20	24/10/98	Harold	Royston
21,22	29/10/98	Ray and Cathy	Royston
23	5/11/98	Harry	Royston
24	17/11/98	Frank	Royston
25, 26	18/1/99	Ian	Shafton
27	4/2/99	Paul	Royston
28,29	7/2/99	Anne, Shiela, Pat, Joan,	Royston
30,31	8/2/99	Joy, Sandra, Barry	Havercroft
32	8/1/2001	Ray	Royston

(C) Archive of written documents collected during fieldwork

- (i) Letters to workers of Royston Drift mine during the 1984-85 strike**
- (ii) Unpublished autobiography, fiction and poetry.**

YOU AND WHO ELSE?

Men have started to go back to work at pits in every Area of the Yorkshire Coalfield - including Barnsley.

We know that more would like to join them but, understandably, don't want to face the "aggro" and the intimidation of being in a minority.

At almost every pit in the Area our managers are hearing the same thing, "We're not coming back in one's and two's. It would be different if there were a crowd of us".

Well here's the chance to come back on those terms.

This leaflet includes a Back to Work form and a reply paid envelope. If you genuinely feel that it's time to get back to work and would be willing to come back in a group all you have to do is fill in the form and post it in the envelope provided.

At any pit where there are enough men to form a sizeable group we will get in touch with you and lay on all the necessary arrangements.

ALL REPLIES WILL BE TREATED IN STRICT CONFIDENCE AND NO APPROACHES WILL BE MADE UNTIL WE HAVE ENOUGH NAMES TO MAKE UP A GROUP.

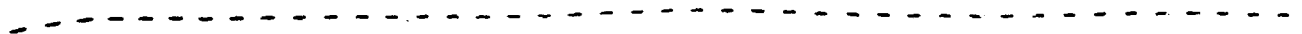
If you start work in the next couple of weeks your pay between now and Christmas (with holiday pay and other entitlements) will add up to more than £1000 for face men and about £800 for surface workers.

- If **YOU** think the strike has gone on long enough
- If **YOU** are fed up with waiting for a national settlement
- If **YOU** are facing mounting debts and dreading the final demands
- If **YOU** want to protect your job, your pit and your family's future,

THEN STAND UP FOR YOUR RIGHT TO WORK

Join the 50,000 British Miners who vote with their feet at the pit gates every day and

COME BACK TO WORK



To: The Manager (insert name of Colliery or Unit)

I am interested in returning to work as part of an organized group.

Name: Check No.

Address:

..... Tel No (if any)

Signature: Date

NATIONAL COAL BOARD

BARNSELEY AREA

If you are interested in returning to work as part of a group but would prefer to telephone your Manager, the numbers of the Barnsley Area Collieries and other units are as follows:-

Barrow	-	Barnsley 205751
Bullcliffe Wood	-	Bretton 481
Caphouse	-	Wakefield 848806
Darfield Main	-	Barnsley 754647
Dearne Valley	-	Barnsley 754848
Denby Grange	-	Bretton 491
Dodworth	-	Barnsley 205201
Emley Moor	-	Wakefield 848801
Ferry Moor Riddings	-	Hemsworth 610219
Grimethorpe	-	Barnsley 711171
Houghton Main	-	Barnsley 754949
Kinsley Drift	-	Hemsworth 615555
Newmillerdam	-	Wakefield 257711
North Gawber	-	Barnsley 383333
Park Mill	-	Huddersfield 862233
Royston Drift	-	Barnsley 723438
South Kirkby	-	Hemsworth 612099
Woolley	-	Barnsley 382651
East Side Coal Preparation Plant	-	Hemsworth 615541
West Side Coal Preparation Plant	-	Barnsley 387301
South Side Coal Preparation Plant	-	Barnsley 716464
Barnsley Main Road Transport	-	Barnsley 287671
External Services	-	Barnsley 711528
Birdwell Property Yard	-	Barnsley 742921
Hemsworth Property Yard	-	Hemsworth 610847

National Coal Board
Barnsley Area
Royston, Nr. Barnsley
West Yorkshire S71 4BD
Telephone: Royston 3438 STD Code 022670



Royston Drift Mine

Colliery Manager
N. Kemp

Our ref
Your ref

December, 1984

Dear Colleague,

I am very concerned about this extremely damaging dispute. The Pit is now certainly suffering as a result of this. I know you and your families are fed up with this seemingly hopeless situation.

I ask you to think very seriously about all our futures and our Pit's future as this hinges desperately on a quick return to normal working.

We have managed to keep work places in a reasonable condition, up to now, but as you know our faces and face roads normally only exist for 8 to 20 weeks. They have now been stood - deteriorating - for more than 40 weeks.

Royston is a good Pit. Prospects have never been better. Relationships are good,

WHY ARE WE JEOPARDISING OUR FUTURE AND OUR PIT?

Let us get back to normal working and look after our own Pit and futures. Enough is enough - DON'T LET OTHERS DECIDE OUR DESTINY - LET US DECIDE IT OURSELVES.

COME BACK TO WORK.

Please phone me at the Pit. I can be contacted anytime on Barnsley 723438 or Barnsley 767693 or fill in and return the attached slip.

N Kemp
N. Kemp
Colliery Manager

Name Check No.
Phone No. Job.
Address
.....
.....

National Coal Board
Hobart House, Grosvenor Place, London SW1X 7AE

CHAIRMAN
Ian MacGregor

March 1985

Dear Colleague,

This long strike is over. It has been severely damaging to the relationships between all of us who work in the industry. Workers have not just been in dispute with management; miners have been set against fellow miners, causing terrible strain to individuals, families and communities.

The strike has cost individual workers thousands of pounds in lost wages and the Board many millions of pounds in lost and damaged equipment. We have lost many coalfaces.

This strike was not of management's choosing nor of our making. Now that it is over, every effort must be made to restore harmony within the industry so that we can all resume our respective responsibilities to ourselves, our families, our communities and the industry that sustains us.

When normal working has been restored, management will discuss and settle important issues with your representatives, including your pay now and for the future.

Your colliery manager's first priority is the restoration of safe working. I am asking you for your personal co-operation in ensuring the safety of your fellow workers.

Sincerely,



December 1986

Dear Colleague,

We are approaching the end of a momentous year for the British coal industry.

On one hand, we have seen a remarkable recovery since the strike. Productivity is the highest in the industry's history; collieries are regularly breaking records and costs are being reduced.

On the other hand, we have been faced with the most formidable of all challenges - the collapse of international oil prices, the consequent pressures on our own prices, and the ever-present threat of cheap imported coal.

In the few months I have been Chairman, I have been enormously impressed by the positive response from everyone to each problem as it has arisen. At times, some of the difficulties must have seemed unsurmountable. Lesser people might have thrown up their hands in despair.

But I know that is not the stuff coal industry people are made of. The way the challenges arising from a £400 million reduction in revenue have been tackled is admirable.

We are about to enter a New Year in which I hope we sail into calmer waters. The industry's major dramatic restructuring is nearing completion, but of course, healthy restructuring will always be with us. We are sustaining investment at some £650 million a year. I hope we are set for a period of stability in which we can all get on with the basic task of creating an efficient energy industry with a bright future for coming generations. I have no doubt we will succeed.

This is my first Christmas as Chairman. Let me thank you for your contribution during the year, and take this opportunity of wishing you and your loved ones a Merry Christmas and a happy, prosperous and successful New Year.

Warmest Regards

Bob Haslam

Robert Haslam

Chairman, British Coal

(ii)

They marched like soldier ants from the pub at Darfield Main
The day was March 5th, and they were as one once again,
Old men, young men, wives and children small
Not a bent head amongst, these were all held tall.

Some brought their dogs, Spot, Patch & Nipper,
And on their collards, they placed the N.U.M. sticker,
This was their day to show they weren't ~~xxx~~ defeated,
Despite the fact of the way they had been treated.

At the front walked Johnny Darwin carrying the big drum
Carefully placed on his now extending tum,
We backed the Union, we we n't a Scab ~~xxx~~ they chanted together,
They'll never make us bend, never, never, never.

Soon they came towards the Local called The Rising Sun,
And everyone began chanting Scum, Scum, Scum,
For here lived a man who crossed the picket line,
And to the Meneof-Joal, there is no greater crime
For with his 'wired windows' he was labelled as a Scab
He would keep his 'Judas Mark' forever, and pick up the tab

Up the hill they went onwards towards the mine
And on the pavement an Old Age Pension shouted
'Keep it up lads, your doing fine
I've seen it all before during the years 1926 to 29
Don't let them do to you as they did to me and mine'

On Inkerman went the procession towards the ~~xxxx~~ local schools,
Where teachers and pupils clapped and broke their usual rules
Mark well ~~xxxx~~ children these people of coal
They fought well for their principles - to keep off the dole

Forward on to Middlecliffe, their banner held high,
And not unashamedly many tears glistened in the eye
These were of pride and certainly not defeat,
Thaterism and her Government has made them retreat,

Soon they were numbered 2000 and came to the 'Pit Lane'
This street led into the Yard of the Colliery - Houghton Main,
They greeted each other, Dick, Harry and Jack,
And in soft tones with sadness, said were glad to go back

The drum was still loudly booming as they marched with pride
Into the pit yard, all 2000 and some still left behind
No banner flew, no cheers were heard, it was not expected,
Until the sores had had time to heal, and everyone corrected.

And then the Manager came out of his little den,
And looking round the multitude said this to the men,
'I'me still the Manager and what I say still goes
But we should get together as friends and not foes.

So come on lads our jobs are here, and we should mine the coal
Theres lots to do for me and you and the strike has had its toll
Lets settle down, check your clothes, and get to know your shift
And when you know what shift your on, start down on Silkestone drift

So this was their day and it was soon they all departed
Heads held high, chests full of pride, and not downhearted
And when the morning was over and no one left behind,
They all knew this day of Victory would stay on in the mind,
For they had lost the battle but yet the'd won the war
And this day of Solidarity would live forevermore.

THE ONE IN RED.

"Are you ready, lads? All in line?
My, how your plastic shields do shine!
Ready for the signal?
Get as many as you can,
We've got to go home with a full van!
The weather's lovely, it's brought them out today,
Truncheons at the ready to keep Artnur's thugs at bay."
So the day at Orgreave started, everyone alert,
But they didn't bargain for the one in the red shirt.
Stuck out like a sore thumb, he did,
They jumped on him, he flinched,
Down he went, still fighting,
They crucked him in the van with the others,
Now they'd got their full load,
And they dropped him off at the hospital down the road.
They sent for his wife, like they do,
She came, she looked worried,
She couldn't see him anywhere.
"Look beside you," the nurse said, 'he's there."
Standing in the ward surrounded by beds,
The nurse pointed to one,
His body in shreds,
His wife gasped and screamed,
She couldn't believe her eyes,
"How could they do it? It's lies, all lies,
You're not alright, they said you were."

His face was bloated like a balloon,
His arms in plaster, his face black and blue,
He could n't speak and she'd nothing to say,
The shock was too hurtful, she could only pray,
She went every day, his swellings decreased,
At last he came home to every-one's delight,
He was willing to go on but he could n't fight,
He could only shuffle about,
No more picket lines for him,
He could only watch and wait,
What could he do? what was his fate?
His mates came to see him
And kept him up to date
Of the fighting and the riots.
Then it was over, every-one back to work,
But not he, he could n't think straight,
His leg wouldn't heal and his back still hurt,
And all because he wore a red shirt.

THE BEST OF TIMES, THE WORST OF TIMES.

The bright summer sun of those days belied a lot of truths. We didn't see how dark the shadows were that snook around us or the pools of misery that lay behind the facade of browning skins, sloganeering, tidy gardens, branch meetings, crack of the dawn yawning marches and back slapping promises of loyalty that we thought would only be tested for a couple more weeks and then we could face the debris of our crumbling lives.

We were less than constructive with the time on our hands than we could have been. Compromised as we were by a severe shortage of funds it may have been wise to have sought some form of gainful employment, albeit temporary, elsewhere, or maybe improved our often impoverished education by further study (this being the case for most they were, naturally, further compromised). I took up the option of the latter later in the strike and did an 'O' level in sociology at my old school via an evening class. There was no reduction in the cost for striking miners but I scraped through it to gain a decent pass which has been as much use to a second rate electrician as an electronics degree would be to a politician. Some few took the former option and either resigned from the Coal Board to seek or start work elsewhere or to languish for years in the twilight world of unemployment. For Gran, Chris and I, we settled for walks down the half remembered dusty footpaths we knew as kids and had scared the fields with as we dragged our feet through our formative years. There wasn't much point in getting too involved in anything though as we were sure the next edition of the Six O'clock News, or at least the next rumour, would tell us it was all over. And so each day was taken as it came.

Generally, our picketing days were kept to approximately the same hours; up at 4:30a.m., back home for the start of Good Morning Britain at 6:15 and then another couple of hours in bed, back to the pit gates for dinner time to give the mini-bus or meshed van another barracking, then down to the bowling green hut to pick up our three quid daily wage. The remainder of the day and all the weekends we had to ourselves.

The five-or-so-a-side that we played three or four times in the week kept us fairly fit while the twenty or so cigarettes that we smoked every day left us gasping for more. Between them they took care of a days picket wage each time. What small change we accrued was carefully saved for the weekend when we would descend on the village and join the other shades of normality and look for a spark of colour in the bottoms of our few glasses or maybe a hope to latch onto in the latest rumour. This would have been near on impossible had not my Mother helped in a number of ways including

giving us a fiver once a week from her widows pension and three quid at the weekends to 'Go and have a drink with'. Others also helped in similar ways from time to time, and in differing ways too. My brothers bought us food, as did a friend who stayed over on a few occasions, and we also had a break in Blackpool with spending money thrown in by my brother Tez and his wife. (I felt a little guilty in the years since he gave me that money on that break as we barely spent any of it while we were there and brought most of it home again. After living for months on next to nothing suddenly having thirty pounds in your hands was rather like coming into a windfall).

It was also surprising where help didn't come from too. You learn a lot about people, their friendship, loyalties and politics when they fear they may have to put their hands in their own pockets. Lip-service is far cheaper than loyalty.

Gran and I covered a good few miles on our walks down memory lanes and over once foreign fields. We occasionally bumped into others too on our travels who, it appeared had the same itchy feet as ourselves. We would swap the latest rumours and then our own theories on what we thought or hoped would happen next and then go our separate ways only to hear later from someone else our theories being postulated as the newest rumour and so the we inadvertently fed the fires of disappointment that would flare to consume us when the latest round of talks failed again. The pitiful cycle of rumour begets theory begets rumour would raise its ugly head again years later when the pit closure program gathered pace and we would spend half a shift a day trying to make sense of what was happening only to find that the truth was exactly what we had secretly feared all along. It has taken a long time to learn that rumour is the refuge of the damned and the mother of disappointment.

Workmates weren't the only people we happened upon in the middle of nowhere; Chris, his brother and my friend Neil, and myself were stopped twice while on a long walk through Sherwood Forest by the police, one set of whom were mounted. On both occasions they were disappointed to discover we were actually only out for a hike and not on some seditious mission, especially the second lot in the jam sandwich who were more than irked when we asked them to point out on our map where they thought the nearest public footpath was.

These times also gave us opportunity for reflection. Young as we were, we still found plenty to reflect upon, not least the commonly aired refrain of 'Why did I take the job in the first place?'. Chris, like myself, had come to the mine straight out of school, where as Gran had come to the Coal board from a job as a car mechanic in the hope of a secure future and better pay. We were

scabby, scabby Bastard. Bastard, Bastard, scabby, scabby Bastard.' Then would begin the physical attacks as fists swung like maces over the crisp epaulette and into the head of the fool waving his payslip in the face of his opprobrium. The blows were random and the police were grim faced in their indifference as we trailed the condemned man back to his terraced fortress in the centre of his oppressors street.

On any other day the harangue would have spent itself there against his deaf walls but today we were met by a much larger than normal gathering of police. The camera crew who had been filming todays events seemed unnerved by the sudden actions that followed. We had already watched them warily but had received assurances from them that they were filming for Canadian television and so had uncomfortably left them to their job.

Being there as it happens must be what all reporters wish for and so this crew must have felt themselves fortunate indeed to be there to film the blonde police officers demand that we leave the area immediately. A few voiced a minor protest but we began to disband as asked when the same officer turned to Spike and told him he could not walk 'That way out of the street.' As Spike lived further up the street he pointed this out to the now reddening copper; 'I'm only goin' 'ome'.

'Either leave the area as I have directed or I shall have to arrest you for obstruction'. He reiterated. A slight pause intervned and the camera quietly whirred. Everyone had stopped and focus on the tension between Spike and the police officer as they locked eyes. A baffled laugh escaped Spikes lips as he tried once more to explain, 'I live up here. I'm only going home.'

"They're dead. They're all dead!"

The shearer crawled inexorably on, ripping the coal and the dead from the face and swallowing them into it's ever open mouth. The panzer chain moved, in the opposite direction, beneath this steel beetle feeding in the crushed, torn and dismembered almost nonchalantly. My stomach lurched and I pushed myself away from the cable trough and back into the gap between the two chocks behind me.

The world swam before me as a billion crystals of dust swirled in my lamp and then rushed away as the air, channelled by the bulk of the advancing machine, gained pace. A few larger pieces of coal and sticky lumps flesh, bone and viscera started to pepper me, and I winced as a spray flecked my frozen features. I sat for a moment longer, feeling a dew form over my skin, then turned to swing my lamp into the face of the driver. There was no face just a suggestion of shape around a gapping tear of a mouth from which there seemed to be emitting a howl, or more exactly a forlorn groan that seemed to undulate as it drifted around me. I scrambled to my knees and began to scurry feverishly away, pushing the endless dark before me with the edge of my lamp.

My knees and hands were being ripped open by the sharp shale and metal edges of the chock bases, but I gave them no more thought than the soiled shirt and jeans that I was wearing. I kept my head down as I ploughed forward hoping to reach the face entry before the driver and the shearer reached me.

The entry appeared suddenly before me as no more than a subtle greying of the darkness and I half leaped, half fell through it before I properly realised where I was. The noise of the drum shearing clear of the lip behind me rose briefly and I cringed half expecting to be torn on it's picks like the corpses I had just witness but the whirr of the drum and the slashing of the venturer jets receded into the monotonous grind of earlier. I turned slowly to find the machine leaving, the driver facing away from me and the darkness now on the offensive chasing him down the bank. All that now remained with me was the incessant howl which stopped when I closed my mouth.

The clear dark sky was a glittering sheet of mica above me and the silhouette of a copse in the foreground shaded the voice of a dog-fox. The peace and chill of the air closed around me in a velvet and I turned to walk into the east forever.



DANCE THE OLD.

Dance the old, it's all we got,
 Use the time, don't waste a drop.
 Feed your mind, don't starve your memory,
 Eat the world, ignorance is the enemy.

Accept the past, create the future,
 Destiny is fiction, ambition your lover.
 Butterfly wings, pebbles in a stream,
 Chaos in theory, ripples destroy dreams.

Penance means control, bible black censorship,
 Breath the air, putrefied designs of leadership.
 Passion will cripple, undermine rational sanity,
 Curse the day you started, reason is longevity.

Find your solace, explore the eclectic,
 Divine your youth, stagnant is septic.

Dance the old,
 Shake the cold,
 Forget your age,
 Forever conscious, forever bold.

Devour the past,
 Design the future,
 Search for answers,
 complexity in questions, simplicity in solutions.

Be pedantic, grey is the bigot,
 Cross the Rubicon, take Caesars gambit.
 Blast the staid, sift the rubble,
 Use the debris, make one palace from a thousand hovels.

(September 1993)

Having all been brought up in a mining village we should have been inured to the shock of life in the mine, but we were wrong. I had paid a couple of visits to a mine while at school but as with all day trippers to a colliery we had only seen the good bits and had wondered through the visit like a fly on the wall of an abstract dream. My memories of my life at the mine are legion, they swarm into my minds eye like snow flakes into a headlight and are as soon lost if I don't freeze one in it's errant flight and study it's form. Each one has more points and edges than I ever saw as they were originally experienced and, as life itself in the mine was, all human life is there in both blissful reality and painful caricature.

Judd was the electrician I was put with to do my Close Personal Supervision, or C.P.S. for short, during my first twenty days underground. As a veteran of both nationalised and pre-nationalised days he knew life at the pit inside out and seemed as much a part of the place as the rings themselves. He was never fazed by anything, in fact he seemed to thrive on it. I have the feeling he loved the place and would have spent more than his usual seven days a week there if it had been possible. So, to have me, a shuffling ignorant in his wake, probably was of little or no consequence to him. He had long since ignored the premise that on my C.P.S. I should never be more than an arms length away from him and used me as a if I were another tool on his belt; he would check, almost absent-mindedly on occasion, to see if I was still part of his kit and then satisfied at my presence would continue with the task at hand until I was required to hold this, fetch that or tighten the other and then lay me aside until later. He had a way of teaching you without actually showing you anything. His straight forward approach to everything said more than a year in the class room ever could. His hands told the story of his experience from the way he would effortlessly move the heaviest switchgear around to holding his cheese sandwich by one never eaten corner in his grimed fingers to his ability to find just the right size spanner for the job by touch alone. Behind all this he had a strange sense of humour that I never appreciated until years later when I found it had rubbed off onto me. On one occasion he took me to a seemingly remote part of the mine I now know to have been in the outback of the Main Hard seam and sat me next to a bloke who looked from his age and appearance to have crawled out of the strata. If it hadn't been for the fact that he didn't have large glowing eyes, I'd have thought I'd found Gollum. He certainly had a number of the other characteristics though; his skin was filthy and grey, his hands were long with boney fingers that picked and inspected as if searching with an independent mind, his scalp, which he exposed occasionally to scrape with his tooth blunted

nails was covered only randomly with lank white hair and his body creaked skeletally in his oversized clothes that only appeared to be held together by the leather belt thrown around his waist. His lamp, battery and self-rescuer lay abandoned on his make-shift seat next to him. He was constantly mumbling but was only coherent on the times that he actually addressed either Judd or myself, remaining for the rest of the time in some urgent babble with himself or the ghosts that haunted both his memory and maybe this part of the mine.

I sat uncomfortably staring at this creature while Judd busied himself with apparently nothing around the nearby bank of switchgear. Then this creature turned his baleful eyes upon me and began to rant. At first I couldn't catch his words as they were spat towards me, each one making me wince as it struck. I cowered further into the rusted tin behind me pulling down the peak of my helmet in an attempt to shield my eyes. As I latched onto his riot of words I realised that what was hitting me were not the words themselves but thick tobacco stained spittle that flicked from his flapping lips as he jabbered at me. I watched his jaw working mechanically with some fascination for a few moments before it dawned on me that the intermittent clicking I could hear amongst his words was not that of a loose belt roller in the background but his top set of false teeth as they came free of his gums and clacked against his bottom set every time he opened his mouth wide enough to bellow the next high point of his colloquial disquisition. He would pause rarely to eject a random jet of tobacco juice and then continue his breathless pace.

'Bastard's. All on 'em. Bastard's. Not one of 'ems any use they'd all take yer last breath if y'd let 'em. Never trust any on 'em' me fuckin' dad told me that before I even knew what 'e were on abaht, but 'e were rate, the old twat. The' were bastards then an' the' bastards nah. If she thinks that just 'cos she's in power nah she's gonna do what she want's then she's gonna be in fo' a fuckin' shock. The' 'avn't forgot y' know, what we did to 'em in seventy two and seventy four, made the cunts look twats we did every man-jack on 'em. Took 'em on an' fuckin' won. The' dint know what 'it 'em but they ant forgot neither. Them were day's the' were when we 'ad some power, like back in twenty six when we were all aht. I were only a lad then but I remember bein' stood at ar front door dahn on Swanick theer when the fuckin' soldiers came dahn. The' were escortin' this scab 'ome from wock the' were an' as the' saw me an' me dad stood in t'door this bozz-eyed twat in 'is poxy uniform told us t'gerrin the 'ouse. 'Y' can fuck yer sen.' me dad sez. Well this other bastard who woz wi' 'em sez, rate loud like; 'WHAT DID YOU SAY?'. Well I woz only a lad an' I wasn't gonna let this southern twat talk to my dad like that so I sez as loud as I

could, 'Yo' 'eard 'im 'e said y' can goo and fuck yer sen'. Well all the street were aht an' the' dint half piss their sens but me dad dint half fuckin' clout me round the tab. 'Yer mam's in the house, watch yer fuckin' language', 'e sez'. Well I didn't half feel a twat but I didn't look half as big a twat as them soldiers an' that scabby bastard did. Y' only need to say the right thing at the right time an' y' stop any fucker. And make 'em listen. Are you listening?". He glared at me again but I just sat there open mouthed as he hawked another stream of juice onto the rail and over my toe-cap. I'm sure he always spat from the same part of his mouth and at the same angle but he simply never bothered to move his head when he did it. Not waiting for a reply he blundered on. "Now Gormley knows what t'do; get the bastards rahnd the table and negotiate. Negotiate. Nefuckingotiate. Talk to the bastards. Y' can do owt when y'talk abaht it but y'll never get any weer if y' fuckin' don't. But these bastards don't want t' fuckin' listen. 'Am tellin' yer they ant forgiven us yet fo' winnin'. They ant got no Spencer bastards nah. We a solid union agen an the'll 'ave to talk to us or the's gonna be trouble agen. She's not fuckin' stupid y' know. She might be some woman but she's not fuckin' dumb, yo' watch that she int. Mind, it meks y' wonder sometimes though just 'ho is on y' side though, 'cos 'e was a useless twat that fuckin' Callahan. Sold us dahn the fuckin' river 'e did. Y' can't trust any o' the bastards, I mean look at Benn, 'e shut no end of pit's and 'e was all fo' nuclear power an'.."

"They were all piss-pot little pit's though." pipped up Judd from behind the switches.

"..nah y'd think 'e'd never fuckin' done owt. Wunt yer? Well wunt yer?. Skinner 'es the man, at least 'e knows what a pit looks like. 'E did the right thing got a better job elsewhere an' got aht o'this fuckin' stinkin' 'ole."

"Like Jimmy Saville." Came Judds voice from out of the darkness. By now he had stopped pretending to examine the switchgear and had angled a nog against the rings and had reclined against it with his lamp on it's courtesy light and his eyes resting.

"CUNT." bellowed my captor, and shot another wayward jet of brown gunge out and onto his already encrusted trousers. For a few brief seconds he fell silent and I felt for a moment that the rest of the world was breathing out in relief as a strange hush quickly descended on the place. Then the spell was broken as he abruptly jerked to his feet and after pressing the call button on the hailer an irritating number of times he announced into the diaphragm; "Snap time. Snap time. Get your bread. Get your fuckin' bread!" Then he turned into the roadway and as if by slight of hand produced from his trousers a jet of urine whose dying spurts he underlined by breaking wind. As he performed his routine I realised

that the conveyors had stopped and so this accounted for the sudden blanket of quiet that had descended upon us. Judd was quietly chuckling to himself as he watched the spectacle before him. "Have you brought your snap with you?" he asked. I was about to say I'd left it back at the paddy house but I was pulled away from normality by the bump beside me as the entertainer returned to his stage. "Snap time. YES!" he announced and tipping his head forward he let his clumsy top set fall into his palm. I stared in horror at the dental plate in his hand as the teeth were only a white serration amidst a thick crust of tobacco and the palate was covered with a brown mucus. The slug he had been chewing he removed from his mouth and placed on the side of the bench. As he performed this, he grinned broadly at me to reveal a similar, ignored bottom set and an empty black maw that breathed a freshly released stench over me. He produced a half filled water bottle from behind him and quickly rinsed the top set which he then seemingly threw back into his mouth. A bread bag appeared on his lap, from which he produced a seemingly damp handkerchief and then proceeded to tear lumps out it with his restless teeth. The lumps were swallowed unchewed in much the same manner as a crocodile would but without any of the finesse. He was well into his second before I smelled the jam that barely coloured the insides of his bread.