

**The Industrial Past in the Deindustrialised
Present: A Cross-Generational Oral History of
County Durham Mining Towns**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores cross-generational experiences of deindustrialisation in County Durham, with a focus on three former coal mining villages: Bearpark, Brandon, and Langley Park. By analysing oral history life narratives from individuals connected to these communities, it investigates the ever-evolving relationship between collective memory, individual experiences, and the dominant narrative of deindustrialisation. Memory is a central theme, not only in comprehending how people conceptualise deindustrialisation but also in understanding industry's place within collective memory.

Adopting a *longue durée* approach, deindustrialisation is understood here as an ongoing process, that continues to shape individuals and communities, both in its emotional legacies and physical remnants. The thesis assesses how past industrial communities are reconstructed in the present and their contemporary relevance. In doing so, it seeks to interrogate how memories of the past are used to inform understandings of belonging, identity, commemoration, and politics.

Moreover, while the conventional narrative of coal industry decline in the UK centres on the 1984-85 miners' strike and subsequent closures, deindustrialisation had been occurring in earnest in County Durham since the 1960s. This research therefore seeks to explore this longer timeline and understand its place within the prevailing strike-centric narrative. It also aims to critically interrogate the construction of 'imagined mining communities' in memory, by unpacking the more complex and nuanced responses to deindustrialisation within life narratives.

Throughout, a spatial perspective is adopted, examining how industry shaped the social dynamics of villages within space. Rather

than offering an exhaustive history of coal mining in County Durham, this thesis focuses upon how these villages were socially and spatially constructed around industry, as well as how this has been remembered, and how interviewees make sense of the transformations in space following deindustrialisation.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores cross-generational experiences of deindustrialisation in County Durham, focusing on three former coal mining villages west of Durham city—Bearpark, Brandon, and Langley Park. These villages, and West Durham more generally, provide a valuable case study of the spatial, temporal and emotional dimensions of deindustrialisation in the United Kingdom, and is an area which has been thus far overlooked within existing literature. By the time of the 1984-85 strike, only one colliery remained in operation in the west, Bearpark, and this closed three weeks into the commencement of strike action in 1984. The other two collieries discussed in this thesis, Brandon Pit House and Langley Park, closed in 1968 and 1975 respectively.

Although the 1984-85 miners' strike holds a significant position within popular understandings of the decline of coal mining in the United Kingdom, an undue focus upon the strike serves to disregard a much longer history of deindustrialisation as a process that had been occurring in many areas of the country throughout the postwar period. On 1st January 1947—vesting day, in which all collieries passed into public ownership—there were 201 coal mines employing 148,000 men in the North East of England, yet by 1980, only 28 collieries employing 33,500 men remained.¹

¹ Nerys Anwen Jones, 'Coal Was Our Life' (PhD Thesis, The Open University, 1997), <http://oro.open.ac.uk/54426/>.

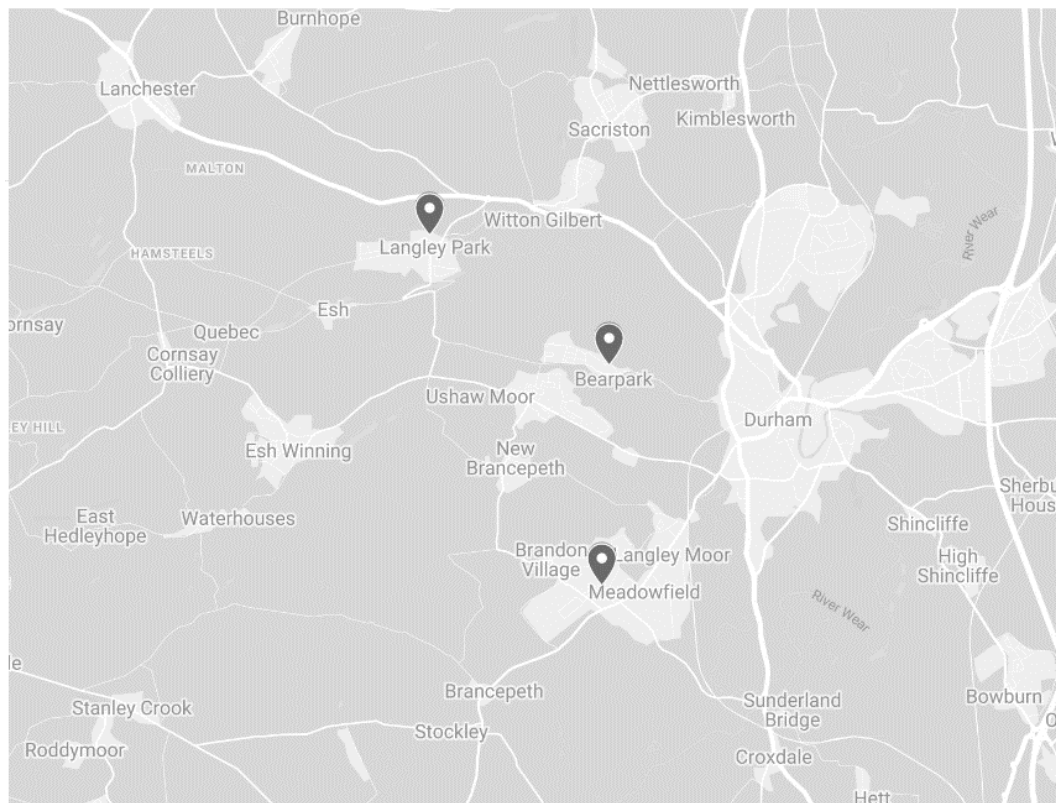


Fig. 1 Map showing Bearpark, Brandon, and Langley Park in relation to the city of Durham.²

This research aims to explore the deindustrialisation of County Durham over the *longue durée*, viewing it as a process rather than a single event. This has been done effectively in relation to other coalfields, and yet there is a relative scarcity of discussion of earlier. In particular, little work has yet been done that examines how people and their communities within the region experienced this longer timeline of coal mining's decline, and how deindustrialisation as a process, rather than an event, is understood within individual and collective memory.

² Google, Map of Bearpark, Langley Park, Brandon, available at at <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1h-RcYX6Rr3bbAEYxPieCeS5dmdxNBUI&usp=sharing> (accessed September 2023)

By drawing upon detailed life narratives within the original oral histories from current and former residents of these villages, this research investigates the emotional and spatial landscapes of industrial closure. Critically, this is just as much a work about memory, place attachment, and emotion within the context of deindustrialisation, as it is about coal mine closures themselves. It is a history of both individuals and communities within a challenging and changing socio-economic context, and one which recognises the validity of memory as a legitimate historical source capable of revealing the complex interplay between past and present within individual narrative and collective memory. This is particularly pertinent when we understand deindustrialisation as an evolving, on-going process; in turning to oral history testimony, we are able to see how memory interacts with and adapts to the process of deindustrialisation over time.

A key aim of this research was to produce an oral history which respects the principle of shared authority in the interview process, and one which gave voice to the personal and collective experiences of industrial decline, no matter how close or far they stood to dominant narratives of coal's decline. Although perhaps an unwise step away from time-efficient, well-regimented research plans, for the most part, I gave interviewees the floor to speak about their experiences with as little intervention from myself as they were comfortable with. The result was a small number of extensive testimonies that were emotionally rich, and which illuminated memory's central place within ideas of community, politics, and place across generations.

This thesis analyses such memory critically, whilst seeking to remain as sensitive as possible to the intentions and meanings put forward by interviewees. In doing so, it assesses the way in which industrial communities of the past are imagined in the present, and the purpose these constructions serve today. Yet in order to comprehend how people conceive deindustrialisation and its impact upon communities, it is also essential to understand how industry itself is positioned within memory. This demands,

firstly, an interrogation of how industry developed within County Durham, and more specifically, how industry shaped the social relations within villages.

A spatial approach is valuable in this exploration. This thesis understands space as being socially produced through continuous contestations and conciliations over power and meaning.³ It does not purport to offer an extensive analysis of the history of coal mining in County Durham. This has been done comprehensively elsewhere, as will be discussed below. Instead, it seeks to explore how the villages in question have been both produced and remembered spatially, to further understand the spatial and social implications of deindustrialisation in the present day. At the same time, it interrogates the understanding of Durham mining villages as homogenously and statically experienced spaces, by exploring testimony that discusses experiences of division and exclusion based upon ethnicity, class, gender, and disability.

With this attention to memory across the *longue durée* of deindustrialisation in County Durham, another central aim of this thesis is to investigate how the process of deindustrialisation is engaged with by interviewees of different generations, considering both the tensions and transmissions that exist within cross-generational relationships to place. Throughout, it remains attentive to the ways in which the dominant narrative of industrial closure and constructions of communities of the past figure within these generational understandings. As with the approach to

³ Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2005); Doreen B. Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production*, Critical Human Geography (London: Macmillan, 1984); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); David Harvey, 'Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 3 (1990): 418–34; David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2006); R. E. Pahl, *Divisions of Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

understanding industrial communities, it again seeks to uncover the complexities within responses to deindustrialisation, problematising the notion that it was a homogenously experienced process.

Within the testimony collected for this thesis, three generational cohorts are apparent. Firstly, there is a generation with a distinct living memory of industry, these people were either employed within coal mining themselves, or had friends or relatives that were. Then, there is a generation whose memory of industry is characterised by its closure. These are individuals who were children or young adults at the point of colliery closure, who may have a degree of lived memory of industry in operation but whose experiences are dominated by an industry in decline. Finally, there is a younger generation with no lived experience of industry, but for whom deindustrialisation holds significant weight in their emotional relationships to place.

Furthermore, it questions how the industrial past remains present for individuals and communities that have experienced deindustrialisation, both in relation to the emotional legacies of closure and the physical remnants of industry. In doing this, it retains a spatial approach, to consider how memory and emotion shape engagement with deindustrialised spaces through practices of commemoration, both tangible and intangible. Again, it seeks to introduce nuance, investigating the tensions inherent within representations of the past, as individuals look to find personal meaning and identity within a collective memory of the industrial past.

Indeed, the final key question this thesis poses is how the industrial past figures within individuals' conceptualisation of place in the present, and their hopes for the future. To do so, it considers interviewees' discussions of both social and economic regeneration, in relation to both economic opportunities like green industry, and social practices like community engagement with the Durham Miners' Gala. Whilst this thesis remains attentive to the physical and affective sense of loss that continues to

pervade the villages of County Durham as deindustrialised spaces, it seeks to challenge the perception that these are places in all out decline by simultaneously investigating ideas of political, social, and economic renewal.

Literature Review

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF DEINDUSTRIALISATION

This thesis is concerned with three mining villages of County Durham, but in researching deindustrialisation, it is located within a transnational field of study that provides a broad range of transferable perspectives and knowledge to be considered within the former coalfield communities of North-East England. The field of deindustrialisation studies is itself relatively new, emerging first in the 1970s with its focus predominantly on the immediate economic consequences of industrial closures in the United States.⁴ In particular, Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison's *The*

⁴ John E. Ullmann, *The Anatomy of Industrial Decline: Productivity, Investment, and Location in U.S. Manufacturing* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1988); Dale A. Hathaway, *Can Workers Have a Voice?: The Politics of Deindustrialization in Pittsburgh* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Felician Foltman, *White- and Blue-Collars in a Mill Shutdown: A Case Study in Relative Redundancy* (New York: New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1968); John C. Raines, Lenora E. Berson, and David McI Gracie, *Community and Capital in Conflict: Plant Closings and Job Loss* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Jane Jenson and Rianne Mahon, *The Challenge of Restructuring: North American Labor Movements Respond*, Labor and Social Change (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Steven P. Dandaneau, *A Town Abandoned: Flint, Michigan, Confronts Deindustrialization*, SUNY Series in Popular Culture and Political Change (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Staughton Lynd, *The Fight against Shutdowns: Youngstown's Steel Mill Closings* (San Pedro: Singlejack Books, 1982); Bruce Nissen, *Fighting for Jobs: Case Studies of Labor-Community Coalitions Confronting Plant Closings*,

Deindustrialization of America is a significant touchstone in this early period of work, and established a definition of deindustrialisation as ‘a widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation’s basic productive capacity’ that has since been taken forward in a myriad of ways.⁵

Around the turn of the millennium, the focus of the field shifted away from discussions of the immediate economic restructuring related to industrial closures, moving beyond the ‘body count’ towards examinations of the longer-term impacts of deindustrialisation.⁶ Some of this work, such as Cowie and Heathcott’s *Beyond the Ruins*, and Steven High’s *Corporate Wasteland* seeks to situate the deindustrialisation of North America within historical perspective.⁷ Rather than limiting their scope to the sudden shock of an industrial closure in a specific location, such scholarship instead positions deindustrialisation as a process intrinsically linked to the historical trends of industrial capitalism.

With increasing distance from the event of closure itself, there is now also increased attention paid to its social, ecological, and cultural legacies that addresses the ongoing effects of deindustrialisation in individual communities or specific geographical areas, examining at the micro-level

SUNY Series in the Sociology of Work (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

⁵ Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 6.

⁶ Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A : Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Kathryn Marie Dudley, *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Bill Bamberger, *Closing: The Life and Death of an American Factory*, The Lyndhurst Series on the South (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); Steven High, ‘Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization’, *International Labor and Working Class History* 84, no. Fall (2013): 140–53.

⁷ Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2003); Steven C. High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization* (London: ILR, 2007).

the spatially bounded affective responses and local concerns.⁸ Perhaps one of the most influential concepts devised to explore these legacies is the ‘half-life of deindustrialisation’, employed by historian Sherry Lee Linkon in her study of the United States’ communities that sit within what is now characterised as the ‘rust belt’.

For these communities, Linkon suggests, ‘deindustrialisation is not an event of the past. It remains an active and significant part of the present. Like toxic waste, the persistent and dangerous residue from the production of nuclear power and weapons, deindustrialisation has a half-life. Its influence may be waning, slowly, over time, but it remains potent, and it cannot simply be forgotten or ignored.’⁹ Whilst the half-life metaphor provides a rather grim assessment of deindustrialisation as a process, elsewhere Linkon, examining literary and artistic representatives of deindustrialised Youngstown and Detroit, explores how the ‘contested and productive relationships between the past and the present’ can provide ‘physical and social resources...for renewal’.¹⁰

At the same time, in interrogating experiences of ‘working-class erasure’ as part of the deindustrialisation process, other scholarship outlines the difficulties involved in obtaining such renewal with the increasing retrenchment of representative space.¹¹ For instance, Jackie Clarke focuses

⁸ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown*; Lachlan MacKinnon, *Closing Sysco: Industrial Decline in Atlantic Canada’s Steel City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).

⁹ Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation: Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018); Steven High, ‘The Emotional Fallout of Deindustrialization in Detroit’, *Labor* 16, no. 1 (1 March 2019): 127–49. 07/11/2024 07:31:00

¹⁰ Sherry Lee Linkon, ‘Narrating Past and Future: Deindustrialised Landscapes as Resources’, *International Labor and Working Class History* 84, no. Fall (2013): 44.

¹¹ Lachlan MacKinnon, ‘Coal and Steel, Goodbye to All That: Symbolic Violence and Working-Class Erasure in Postindustrial Landscapes’, *Labor (Durham, N.C.)* 16, no. 1 (2019): 107–25; Lachlan MacKinnon, ‘Post-Industrial Memoryscapes: Combatting Working-Class Erasure in North America and Europe’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Memory and Place*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2020), 175–84,

upon the closure of the Molineux factory, arguing that to dismantle of the industrial workplace also served to remove the representational space that had allowed for the cultural and political discourses of its workers, rendering them invisible within a post-industrial landscape.¹²

In the United Kingdom, a significant amount of attention has been paid to the decline of the coal industry in particular.¹³ A great deal of scholarship on the miners' strike of 1984-85 emerged, positioning it as a watershed moment in the industry's history and for industrial communities.¹⁴ Historians like Jim Phillips have recognised the strike as a pivotal moment, often interpreting it through the lens of E.P. Thompson's concept of the 'moral economy,' which emphasises the breach of a longstanding social contract between workers and the state.¹⁵ Phillips, in particular, has used

doi:10.4324/9780815354260-21; High, 'Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization', 2013; Loïc Wacquant, 'Relocating Gentrification: The Working Class, Science and the State in Recent Urban Research', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 1 (1 March 2008): 198–205.

¹² Jackie Clarke, "Closing Moulinex: Thoughts on the Visibility and Invisibility of Industrial Labour in Contemporary France," *Modern & Contemporary France* 19, no. 4 (2011).

¹³ Tim Strangleman, "'Mining a Productive Seam? The Coal Industry, Community and Sociology'", *Contemporary British History* 32, no. 1 (2018): 18–38, doi:10.1080/13619462.2017.1408532.

¹⁴ Huw Beynon, ed., *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike* (London: Verso, 1985); Raphael Samuel, Barbara Bloomfield, and Guy Boanas, eds., *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); Ken Smith, *A Civil War without Guns: 20 Years On, the Lessons of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike* (London: Socialist Publications, 2004); David John Douglass, *Ghost Dancers: The Miners Last Generation*, Stardust and Coaldust 3 (Hastings: Christie Books, 2010).

¹⁵ Jim Phillips, 'Material and Moral Resources: The 1984–5 Miners' Strike in Scotland', *The Economic History Review* 65, no. 1 (February 2012): 256–76; Jim Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984–85* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); Andrew Perchard, "'Broken Men" and "Thatcher's Children": Memory and Legacy in Scotland's Coalfields', *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84 (2013): 78–98; Ewan Gibbs, 'The Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields: Managing Deindustrialization under Nationalization c. 1947–1983', *Enterprise & Society* 19, no. 1 (2018): 124–52; Andrew Perchard and Jim Phillips, 'Transgressing the Moral Economy: Wheelerism and Management of the Nationalised Coal Industry in Scotland', *Contemporary British History* 25, no. 3 (September 2011): 387–405.

this framework to highlight how the strike symbolised a breakdown in this moral economy, reflecting the deep-seated tensions between the working class and the Thatcher government.¹⁶

However, while acknowledging the significance of the strike, Phillips and others have also sought to establish a more long-term approach to understanding coal's decline throughout the 20th century. This perspective moves beyond the dramatic flashpoint of 1984-85 to consider the broader, more gradual processes of economic restructuring and community disintegration that predated and followed the strike.¹⁷ By tracing the roots of deindustrialisation to earlier decades, such work argues that the decline of coal was not simply an event but a prolonged process that had been unfolding over many years, shaped by changes in global energy markets, technological advancements, and shifting government policies.

This long-term approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the decline that considers how coalfield communities had been dealing with economic uncertainty, unemployment, and social change well before the strike, and continue to do so long after its end. It also opens up space for exploring the diverse ways in which these communities experienced and responded to deindustrialisation, moving beyond the strike-centric narratives to include the everyday realities of life in declining coal regions.

¹⁶ Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984-85*; Jim Phillips, 'Deindustrialization and the Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields, 1947 to 1991', *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84 (2013): 99-115.

¹⁷ Andrew Perchard, *The Mine Management Professions in the Twentieth-Century Scottish Coal Mining Industry* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 2007); Stephen Catterall, 'The Lancashire Coalfield 1945-1972: NUM-Labour Party Hegemony and Industrial Change', *Manchester Region History Review* 14 (2000): 102-16; Keith Gildart, *North Wales Miners: A Fragile Unity, 1945-1996* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001); Jörg Arnold, "'Like Being on Death Row': Britain and the End of Coal, c. 1970 to the Present', *Contemporary British History* 32, no. 1 (2 January 2018): 1-17; Jim Phillips, *The Industrial Politics of Devolution: Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

Earlier scholarship, particularly Royden Harrison's seminal edited collection *Independent Collier* (1978), laid important groundwork for this nuanced understanding. Harrison challenged the homogenised trope of the miner as the "archetypal proletarian" by illustrating the significant variations between individual coalfields across the UK.¹⁸ His work disrupted simplistic historical and sociological narratives that portrayed miners as a uniform group, instead revealing a complex range of economic identities and experiences that differed vastly between regions.¹⁹ Harrison's effort to complicate these stereotypes has since been advanced by others, like David Howell, who, in his review of the literature emerging from the 1984-85 strike, emphasises the difficulty of accessing the 'truth' of the strike due to the deeply embedded ideological understandings of the mining industry.²⁰ Howell points out that much of the historiography surrounding the strike was marred by crude stereotypes and biased narratives, which often simplified the complexities of miners' identities and struggles. He called for a more rigorous, critical, and creative historiography that could move beyond these reductive portrayals.

Progressing with attempts to problematise earlier generalised accounts of deindustrialisation in the United Kingdom, subsequent work unpacks the emotional landscapes of deindustrialisation, shifting the focus from merely economic and political aspects to the cultural and psychological impacts on former coal communities. This shift has allowed for an exploration of the cross-generational legacies of industrial decline, where scholars have frequently drawn upon Linkon's "half-life" to describe the lingering effects

¹⁸ Royden John Harrison, *Independent Collier: The Coal Miner as Archetypal Proletarian Reconsidered* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ David Howell, 'Goodbye to All That?: A Review of Literature on the 1984/5 Miners' Strike', *Work, Employment and Society* 1, no. 3 (1 September 1987): 388–404.

of deindustrialisation.²¹ Works like Andy Clark's study of Scottish communities, and Tim Strangleman's exploration of industrial change, highlight how memory, identity, and emotional experiences continue to shape these communities long after the physical structures of the industry have disappeared.²²

This evolving scholarship has also focused on now increasingly redundant aspects of coal communities, such as leisure pursuits and recreational spaces, offering a richer, more comprehensive understanding of how these communities have navigated the long-term consequences of deindustrialisation and underscoring the importance of these cultural dimensions in understanding the full impact of industrial decline.²³ This focus on memory and emotional landscapes has become a crucial element in the broader narrative of deindustrialisation, connecting the past with the present and highlighting the enduring legacy of coal in the collective consciousness of former mining communities.

²¹ Andy Clark, "“People Just Dae Wit They Can Tae Get by”": Exploring the Half-Life of Deindustrialisation in a Scottish Community', *The Sociological Review* 71, no. 2 (1 March 2023): 332–50; Tim Strangleman, 'Deindustrialisation and the Historical Sociological Imagination: Making Sense of Work and Industrial Change', *Sociology* 51, no. 2 (April 2017): 466–82; Jay Emery, 'Geographies of Deindustrialization and the Working-Class: Industrial Ruination, Legacies, and Affect', *Geography Compass* 13, no. 2 (2019): e12417; Jim Phillips, Valerie Wright, and Jim Tomlinson, 'Being a “Clydesider” in the Age of Deindustrialisation: Skilled Male Identity and Economic Restructuring in the West of Scotland since the 1960s', *Labor History* 61, no. 2 (3 March 2020): 151–69.

²² Clark, "“People Just Dae Wit They Can Tae Get by”": Exploring the Half-Life of Deindustrialisation in a Scottish Community'; Tim Strangleman, 'Networks, Place and Identities in Post-Industrial Mining Communities', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25, no. 2 (2001): 253–67.

²³ Ruth Cherrington, *Not Just Beer and Bingo! A Social History of Working Men's Clubs* (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2012); Martin Johnes, 'Pigeon Racing And Working-Class Culture in Britain, C. 1870–1950', *Cultural and Social History* 4, no. 3 (1 September 2007): 361–83; John C. O'donnell, 'Industrial Songs as Part of a Culture', *International Journal of Music Education* os-6, no. 1 (1 November 1985): 7–11; Mike Huggins and Keith Gregson, 'Northern Songs, Sporting Heroes and Regional Consciousness, c. 1800—c. 1880: “Wor Stars That Shine”', *Northern History* 44, no. 2 (2007): 141–58.

However, as historian Arthur McIvor contends ‘overly sentimentalised and nostalgic representations of deindustrialised workplaces have perhaps contributed to a neglect of the multifaceted impacts industrial work and its loss had upon workers’ bodies’.²⁴ Indeed, McIvor and other historians of industrial disability offer comprehensive assessments of the long-lasting consequences of both industry and its decline on both individual bodies, and conceptualisations of ill-health and disability within communities more broadly.²⁵ Significantly, such scholarship facilitates a greater understanding of the complexities and contradictions within responses to deindustrialisation, as individuals simultaneously celebrate and mourn the decline of the coal industry.

Likewise, these explorations frequently highlight the relationship between mining and constructions of masculinity, outlining the highly gendered division of space and labour within coalfield communities. In turn, the effect of deindustrialisation upon male identity and conceptualisations of masculinity are now significant areas of research in their own right.²⁶

²⁴ Arthur McIvor, ‘Deindustrialization Embodied: Work, Health, and Disability in the United Kingdom since the Mid-Twentieth Century’, in *The Deindustrialised World*, ed. Steven High, Lachlan Mackinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 26.

²⁵ McIvor, ‘Deindustrialization Embodied: Work, Health, and Disability in the United Kingdom since the Mid-Twentieth Century’; Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston, *Miners’ Lung: A History of Dust Disease in British Coal Mining* (London: Routledge, 2016); Arthur McIvor and R Johnston, ‘Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries’, *Labour History Review* 69, no. 2 (2004): 135–52; Ben Curtis and Steven Thompson, “‘This Is the Country of Premature Old Men’ Ageing and Aged Miners in the South Wales Coalfield, c.1880–1947’, *Cultural and Social History* 12, no. 4 (2 October 2015): 587–606; Vicky Long and Victoria Brown, ‘Conceptualizing Work-Related Mental Distress in the British Coalfields (c.1900–1950)’, *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 1 (6 November 2018): 133.

²⁶ Anoop Nayak, ‘Displaced Masculinities: Chavs, Youth and Class in the Post-Industrial City’, *Sociology* 40, no. 5 (2006): 813–31; Anoop Nayak, ‘Last of the “Real Geordies”? White Masculinities and the Subcultural Response to Deindustrialisation’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21, no. 1 (2003): 7–25; James Patrick Ferns, ‘Workers’ Identities in Transition: Deindustrialisation and Scottish Steelworkers’, *Journal of Working-Class Studies* 4, no. 2 (2019): 55–78; George Karl Ackers, ‘Rethinking Deindustrialisation and Male

Walkerdine and Jimenez explore this through use of ethnographic psychosocial interviews in a deindustrialised town in South Wales, named ‘Steeltown’ for the purpose of their study. They note that industrial closure ruptured ‘the strong gendered aspects of the community matrix’, primarily the idea of the industrious male breadwinner and the domestically orientated female, and ‘the loss of these gender relations is traumatic’.²⁷

Yet Anna Reading identifies the ongoing ‘unequal gendered legacy’ of industrial history that allows little room for women to express their experiences of deindustrialisation and articulate conceptualisations of feminine identity within a dominant discourse of industrial masculinity.²⁸ There is an increasing amount of research into the experiences of women workers affected by industrial closures, but there remains a paucity of attention granted to female experiences within former coalfield communities, beyond research into female participation in the miners’ strike of 1984-85. Whilst there is a recognition within the literature that deindustrialisation significantly alters gendered roles and behaviour, the voices of women themselves are largely absent.²⁹

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Career Crisis’, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling* 42, no. 5 (2014): 500–510.

²⁷ Valerie Walkerdine and Luis Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community after De-Industrialisation: A Psychosocial Approach to Affect* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²⁸ Anna Reading, "Making feminist heritage work: Gender and heritage," in *The Palgrave handbook of contemporary heritage research*, ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.11-12.

²⁹ An exception to this is Bella Dicks, ‘Coping with Pit Closure in the 1990s: Women’s Perspectives’, in *Gender and Qualitative Research (1996)* (Routledge, 1996); Bella Dicks, David Waddington, and Chas Critcher, ‘Redundant Men and Overburdened Women: Local Service Providers and the Construction of Gender in Ex-Mining Communities’, in *Men, Gender Divisions and Welfare*, ed. Jeanette Edwards, Jeff Hearn, and Jennie Popay (London: Routledge, 1998), 287–311.

The history of the Durham coalfield has been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis, with a rich body of literature exploring its economic, social, and political dimensions.³⁰ W.R. Garside's *The Durham Miners, 1919-1960*, provides a detailed examination of the coalfield's economic and industrial history, particularly during the tumultuous interwar and post-war periods.³¹ Garside's analysis highlights the complex interplay between the coal industry, labour relations, and government policy, documenting how the Durham coalfield navigated fluctuating demand, technological changes, and recurrent labour disputes.

In contrast, Martin Bulmer's *Mining and Social Change*, takes a broader sociological approach, exploring the impact of the coal industry on the social fabric of the Durham coalfield throughout the twentieth century.³² Bulmer's work is invaluable for its exploration of how mining shaped social relations, identity, and class consciousness in the region. His analysis provides a nuanced understanding of the coalfield not merely as an economic unit but as a deeply embedded social structure that influenced every aspect of community life. This sociological perspective is crucial for grasping the full scope of the coalfield's influence on the lives of those who lived and worked there.

Likewise, the historical politics of the Durham coalfield is explored by Robert Moore in *Pitmen, Preachers, and Politics: The Effects of Methodism*

³⁰ M. Sill, 'Landownership and Industry: The East Durham Coalfield in the Nineteenth Century', *Northern History* 20, no. 1 (1984): 146–66; Amanda Donald, 'Miners' Health and Welfare: Care and Compensation in the Durham Coalfield, 1870 to 1920', Student Dissertation, (2019), <https://oro.open.ac.uk/60281/>; Norman Emery, *The Coalminers of Durham* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1992); W. R. Garside, *The Durham Miners, 1919-1960* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971); Hannah Elizabeth Martin, 'Local Spaces of Labour Control or Platforms for Agency? The North East Durham Coalfield, 1820–1890', *Geoforum* 119 (1 February 2021): 72–82; David Spring, 'The Earls of Durham and the Great Northern Coal Field, 1830–1880', *The Canadian Historical Review* 33, no. 3 (1952): 237–53.

³¹ Garside, *The Durham Miners, 1919-1960*.

³² Martin Bulmer, *Mining and Social Change: Durham County in the Twentieth Century*, Routledge Revivals (London: Routledge, 2015).

in *a Durham Mining Community*, which examines the intersection of religion and politics, particularly the influence of Methodism on the political culture of the Durham miners. His analysis offers a unique perspective on how religious and moral values intertwined with labour activism to shape the identities and political behaviours of miners.³³ Later work by Lewis Mates on the political landscape within the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) reveals significant internal divisions and a dynamic rank-and-file activism that frequently diverged from the official leadership. Mates demonstrates that the political experiences within the Durham coalfield were far from uniform, with localised activism shaping the broader labour movement in ways that often conflicted with both national union strategies and state policies.³⁴

Scholarship on the Durham coalfield has also problematised the notion of a homogenously experienced coalfield by revealing variations in both work practices and political dynamics. Joel Krieger's *Undermining Capitalism* examines the complexities introduced by state ownership after the nationalisation of the coal industry, showing how the government's efforts to standardise and control the industry often clashed with local practices and the established ways of working within different coalfields.³⁵ Krieger highlights how these top-down policies were met with varied responses at the local level, reflecting the diverse work cultures and practices across the coalfields, including Durham.

³³ Robert Moore, *Pitmen Preachers and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

³⁴ Lewis H. Mates, *The Great Labour Unrest: Rank-and-File Movements and Political Change in the Durham Coalfield* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Lewis Mates, "'We Want Real Live Wires, Not Gas Pipes': Communism in the Inter-War Durham Coalfield", *Twentieth Century Communism* 23, no. 23 (2022): 51–95; Lewis Mates, 'The Limits and Potential of Syndicalist Influence in the Durham Coalfield before the Great War', *Labor History* 54, no. 1 (February 2013): 42–63.

³⁵ Joel Krieger, *Undermining Capitalism: State Ownership and the Dialectic of Control in the British Coal Industry.*, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

Despite this rich academic tradition that thoroughly documents the economic, social, and political history of the Durham coalfield, the reality of its decline in the post-industrial era is starkly illustrated by Ray Hudson's observations in 2009, described the Durham coalfield as a 'marginalised and near-bust periphery...blighted by widespread poverty and inequality.'³⁶ Here, Hudson drew on the past thirty years of his own research, which has consistently demonstrated the socio-economic problems experienced by the region as a result of industrial closure. His conclusions are attested to by statistical studies, such as that of Beatty and Fothergill, that illustrate continued high levels of unemployment, economic stagnation, and poor population health in former coalfield areas.³⁷

More recently, with Huw Beynon, Hudson turns to explore the forces that drove the decision to exit the European Union, attesting once more to feelings of continued marginalisation and political alienation that they argue resulted in large 'leave' majorities in former coalfield communities.³⁸ These areas have also been subject to renewed scrutiny following recent political changes, notably the 'fall of the Red wall' and the Brexit decision.³⁹ Much of this attention relies heavily upon the conceptualisation of deindustrialised areas as 'left behind', predominantly composed of a

³⁶ Ray Hudson, "Rethinking Change in Old Industrial Regions: Reflecting on the Experiences of North East England," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 37, no. 4 (2005), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1068/a36274>.

³⁷ Christina Beatty and Stephen Fothergill, 'Labour Market Adjustment in Areas of Chronic Industrial Decline: The Case of the UK Coalfields', *Regional Studies* 30, no. 7 (November 1996): 627–40; Christina Beatty, Stephen Fothergill, and Ryan Powell, 'Twenty Years on: Has the Economy of the UK Coalfields Recovered?', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 39, no. 7 (July 2007): 1654–75.

³⁸ Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson, "The road to Brexit on the British coalfields," in *Doreen Massey Critical Dialogues*, ed. Marion Werner et al. (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2018).

³⁹ Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson, 'The Road to Brexit on the British Coalfields', in *Doreen Massey Critical Dialogues*, ed. Marion Werner et al. (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2018); Gillian Evans, 'Brexit Britain: Why We Are All Postindustrial Now', *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 2 (2017): 215–19; Luke Telford and Jonathan Wistow, 'Brexit and the Working Class on Teesside: Moving beyond Reductionism', *Capital & Class* 44, no. 4 (1 December 2020): 553–72.

white working class that lack the qualifications and skills needed in a post-industrial economy.⁴⁰ In turn, Lisa McKenzie suggests that such arguments severely ‘underestimate the depth and intensity of the devastation experienced by working class people and their communities’ and serve to reinforce narratives of a ‘feckless poor’ who remain old-fashioned and backwards looking.⁴¹ In response, McKenzie relies upon ethnographic research in London and Nottingham to outline more clearly the ongoing emotional relationships with deindustrialisation and the way these influence political decisions.⁴² There is scope to explore this more complex development of political change in County Durham, too.

The dissonance between the historical vibrancy of the Durham coalfield, as captured by earlier scholars, and its contemporary challenges, underscores the importance of examining both the rich legacy of the coalfield and the deep scars left by its decline. In this sense, the enduring relevance of the Durham coalfield’s history, coupled with the pressing socio-economic issues identified in Hudson’s more recent work, justifies a renewed focus on this region. Such research can deepen our understanding of how the coalfield’s rich past and challenging present are intricately linked, providing important insights into the broader narrative of deindustrialisation and its long-term effects on communities.

⁴⁰ Matthew J. Goodwin and Oliver Heath, ‘The 2016 Referendum, Brexit and the Left Behind: An Aggregate-Level Analysis of the Result’, *The Political Quarterly* (London, 1930) 87, no. 3 (2016): 323–32; Stephen Drinkwater, ‘Brexit and the “Left behind”: Job Polarization and the Rise in Support for Leaving the European Union’, *Industrial Relations Journal* 52, no. 6 (2021): 569–88; Matthew Watson, ‘Brexit, the Left behind and the Let down: The Political Abstraction of “the Economy” and the UK’s EU Referendum’, *British Politics* 13, no. 1 (2018): 17–30; Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin, ‘Understanding UKIP: Identity, Social Change and the Left Behind’, *Political Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2014): 277–84.

⁴¹ Lisa McKenzie, ‘The Class Politics of Prejudice: Brexit and the Land of No-hope and Glory’, *British Journal of Sociology* 68, no. S1 (2017): S265–80.

⁴² Ibid.; Lisa McKenzie, “‘It’s Not Ideal’: Reconsidering “Anger” and “Apathy” in the Brexit Vote among an Invisible Working Class’, *Competition & Change* 21, no. 3 (1 June 2017): 199–210. See also James Rhodes, Stephen Ashe, and Sivamohan Valluvan, ‘Reframing the “Left behind”: Race and Class in Post-Brexit Oldham’, *Manchester Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (CODE)*, 2019.

For despite this renewed attention given to the region in the present day, and the centrality of coal mining to the area's industrial past, there is little existing scholarship that fully considers the social and emotional impact of deindustrialisation there. As discussed above, the field of deindustrialisation studies is now rich with research that examines the socio-spatial legacies of industrial closure across generations, with much research reliant upon oral history narratives that capture the dynamics of memory, generational relationships, and attachments to place. For the most part, however, County Durham has been excluded from these discussions.

The two primary areas that have received attention in County Durham are the 1984-85 miners' strike and the Durham Miners' Gala. There is a substantial amount of work that explores the 1984-85 miners' strike with reference to the area, in which a great deal of attention is paid to the mobilisation of women in this action.⁴³ As collieries in the east of Durham were still in operation at this time, the focus of this work is on experiences there. The strike literature undoubtedly raises key themes for further exploration, like the conceptualisations of community, gender, and identity that emerge in strike narratives, but as Waddington, Critcher and Wykes

⁴³ David Peace, *No Redemption: The 1984-85 Miners' Strike in the Durham Coalfield* (Newcastle: Flambard, 2010); Beynon, *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike*; Samuel, Bloomfield, and Boanas, *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5*; Jean Spence and Carol Stephenson, "'Side by Side With Our Men?'" Women's Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners' Strike', *International Labor and Working-Class History* 75, no. 1 (2009): 68-84; Meg Allen, 'Women, "Community" and the British Miners' Strike of 1984-85', in *Women Resist Globalization: Mobilizing for Livelihood and Rights*, ed. Sheila Rowbotham and Stephenie Linkogle (London: Zed Books, 2001), 46-70; Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, 'National Women Against Pit Closures: Gender, Trade Unionism and Community Activism in the Miners' Strike, 1984-5', *Contemporary British History* 32, no. 1 (2018): 1-23.

remind us, the strike was simply a moment within a much longer process of deindustrialisation in the area.⁴⁴

The multi-generational oral history testimonies collected for this thesis from current and former residents of west Durham, which had been subject to industrial closures throughout the post-war period, also make a strong case for a greater exploration of the longer timeline of industrial decline. As is demonstrated in the Scottish, Welsh, and Lancashire context, the policies adopted by the state-managed National Coal Board (NCB), often with cooperation from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), that saw the contraction of peripheral coalfields and the concentration of labour into ‘super pits’ had long-lasting effects upon communities and individuals that have thus far been unexplored in County Durham.⁴⁵

Other work that has focused on County Durham, such as that of Carol Stephenson and David Wray, has largely concentrated on the Durham Miners’ Gala and its associated banner making practices, arguing for the symbolic significance of the Gala in relation to broader themes such as community, identity, and class.⁴⁶ Stephenson and Wray explore the resurgence of gala attendance in the 2000s, following a lull in attendance in

⁴⁴ David Waddington, Maggie Wykes, and Chas Critcher, *Split at the Seams?: Community, Continuity and Change After the 1984 Coal Dispute* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1990).

⁴⁵ Catterall, ‘The Lancashire Coalfield 1945-1972’; Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners’ Strike in Scotland, 1984-85*; Gildart, *North Wales Miners*; David Howell, *The Politics of the N.U.M.: A Lancashire View*, First Edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Andrew Perchard et al., ‘Fighting for the Soul of Coal: Colliery Closures and the Moral Economy of Nationalization in Britain, 1947-1994’, *Enterprise & Society*, 2024, 1-34.

⁴⁶ Carol Stephenson and David Wray, ‘Emotional Regeneration through Community Action in Post-Industrial Mining Communities: The New Herrington Miners’ Banner Partnership’, ed. Carol Stephenson, *Capital & Class*, no. 87 (2005): 175-99; David Wray, ‘The Place of Imagery in the Transmission of Culture: The Banners of the Durham Coalfield’, *International Labor and Working-Class History* 76, no. 1 (2009): 147-63; Mary Mellor and Carol Stephenson, ‘The Durham Miners’ Gala and the Spirit of Community’, ed. Mary Mellor, *Community Development Journal* 40, no. 3 (2005): 343-51..

the 1990s. Through use of interviews, they demonstrate that banner restoration and participation in the Gala act as a significant protest against the invisibility and marginalisation imposed by deindustrialisation, by allowing for individuals to assert their own interpretation of place and granting the opportunity to occupy space in a physical, visible way.⁴⁷

Likewise, Chris Scott, writing in 2009 whilst a curator of industry at Beamish Museum, notes the recent increase in requests to the museum for the right to restore old colliery banners, as well as the creation of new ones. These efforts, he observes, typically begin as grass-roots movements from residents of mining towns as an expression of pride in place and community; instead of focusing upon the physical structures, which are often left to regenerate, therefore, the turn to the past often seeks to renew a perceived sense of former solidarity within these communities.⁴⁸ This existing work on the Gala demonstrates the significance of place within County Durham, and highlights the entanglement of emotion, identity, and memory within the region as a deindustrialised space. Whilst this thesis does consider the Durham Miners' Gala, both historically and in the present day, it also seeks to look beyond the Gala to explore how these themes play out in the more everyday spaces of the former industrial villages in order to undertake a renewed analysis of the area to understand how meanings of deindustrialisation have continued to change over time in County Durham.

In her 1991 article, *A Global Sense of Place*, Doreen Massey notes that places must be understood as processes instead of static features, and therefore it is important to explore how understandings and interactions with place and community within County Durham have been augmented, altered

⁴⁷ Stephenson and Wray, 'Emotional Regeneration through Community Action', 2005.

⁴⁸ Chris Scott, "Contemporary Expressions of Coal Mining Heritage in the Durham Coalfield: The Creation of New Identities," *Folk Life* 47, no. 1 (2009).

and transmitted cross-generationally to fit the needs of the present.⁴⁹ As discussed already, the socio-spatial inequalities entrenched within the North-East region as a result of deindustrialisation have been clearly demonstrated.⁵⁰ Yet such work historicises deindustrialisation and sheds little light upon how these inequalities are experienced by individuals, or how they may be studied.

There is, therefore, a pressing need to place the current experiences of the region within a historical framework that considers the central role of industry in shaping place and identity. Understanding the ongoing negotiations with deindustrialisation requires not only a temporal perspective but also a spatial one. Other work by Doreen Massey, as well as that of David Harvey, extensively examines how the spatial reorganisation of capital and industry influences social relations and economic landscapes. They lay down a crucial framework for understanding the political nature of space, demonstrating how the reorganisation of capital leaves behind communities that are economically and socially devastated—a process that has been starkly visible in the decline of the Durham coalfield.

Building on this framework, Steven High's work on deindustrialisation from a spatial perspective is particularly relevant. High applies these spatial theories to explore how deindustrialisation transforms physical landscapes into 'industrial ruins' or 'wastelands', which continue to affect the memory and identity of the communities left behind.⁵¹ Although High is writing about the North American context, his ideas are relevant to County Durham;

⁴⁹ Doreen B. Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," *Marxism Today*, 1991.

⁵⁰ Raymond Hudson, *Wrecking a region : state policies, party politics, and regional change in North East England* (London: London : Pion Limited, 1989).; David Byrne, "Industrial Culture in a Post-Industrial World: The Case of the North East of England," *City* 6 (11/01 2002).

⁵¹ High and Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*; High, 'Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization', 2013.

the abandoned sites of former coalfields are not just empty spaces. They are instead active sites of memory that shape how these communities remember their past and navigate their present, underscoring the emotional legacies of spatial change. Indeed, various studies on deindustrialisation in other regions have adopted a spatial approach, such as those by Tim Edensor in the North West of England and Alice Mah, in the context of the former shipbuilding sites of Newcastle.⁵²

While such work examines the cultural and social implications of industrial ruins and urban decline, the development and decline of industry in County Durham have received limited attention from this spatial perspective. With that said, Huw Beynon and Terry Austrin's *Masters and Servants* lays an important foundation for understanding how space was structured and contested in the Durham coalfield, although stopping short of adopting an explicitly spatial approach or examining industrial decline itself.⁵³ Their work offers a comprehensive account of the development of mining villages in the region, highlighting the paternalist origins of these villages and the rise of the Durham Miners' Association as a political force challenging the dominance of coal owners, yet leaves unexplored the specific spatial implications of deindustrialisation and this is a gap that this thesis seeks to address.⁵⁴

⁵² Alice Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics, and Materiality* (New York: Berg, 2005).

⁵³ For other discussions of politics and unionism in relation to the Durham coalfield, see Mates, *The Great Labour Unrest*; Hester Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout: Meanings of Community in the Durham Coalfield*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Moore, *Pitmen Preachers and Politics*; Martin Bulmer, 'The Character of Local Politics', in *Mining and Social Change: Durham County in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Martin Bulmer (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 128–42.

⁵⁴ For other discussions of politics and unionism in relation to the Durham coalfield, see Mates, *The Great Labour Unrest*; Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*; Moore, *Pitmen Preachers and Politics*; Bulmer, 'The Character of Local Politics'.

To do this, the work of Henri Lefebvre is useful, particularly his 1974 *The Production of Space* which suggests that:

“Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics. It has always been political and strategic. There is an ideology of space. Because space, which seems homogeneous, which appears as a whole in its objectivity, in its pure form, such as we determine it, is a social product.”⁵⁵

In adopting this approach, this thesis interrogates the production of space in the coal mining villages in the west of County Durham, from their development as representations of industrial capitalism, to the emergence of representational space, and ultimately, how space is now occupied and practiced following deindustrialisation. To return to Massey’s argument, if places are processes, oral history can be used to reveal how individuals have changed, or been changed by, the altering dynamics of where they live. Such an approach requires the interrogation of identity formation, from the individual to the collective level, and an exploration of changing interactions with place, memory, class, and politics over time.

COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

Of course, the study of the social impact of deindustrialisation is underpinned by the study of industry’s place within communities in the first

⁵⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); To understand this, Lefebvre proposed a conceptual triad: **spatial practice**, perceived space that is physically used, **representations of space**, those conceived by the dominant actors such as city planners and social engineers, and **representational space**, the lived spaces that are modified over time by the lived experience of inhabitants and may be imbued with symbolism or counterculture. see also, in relation to the 'spatial turn', Doreen Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 39 (1995): 182–92; Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2005); David Harvey, 'Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination¹', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 3 (1990): 418–34; Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27.

instance. Dennis, Rodriguez, and Slaughter's seminal *Coal is our Life* offers the first comprehensive sociological account of mining communities, using the fictional 'Ashton' as a model to explore the social structures of coal settlements in the United Kingdom.⁵⁶ To a significant extent, such work positioned coalfield communities as homogenous, somewhat idealised, examples of working-class life.

Later work counters this oversimplified conceptualisation, arguing for a more critical approach in the investigation of coal communities in order to understand the nuances of experiences both within and between places. Indeed, following on from the arguments of Harrison's *Independent Collier*, Peter Ackers criticises '...the constitution of a stereotypical coalminer, an ideal-type figure who, in reality, existed barely anywhere', arguing that such 'romantic historicism' overlooks the diversity of true historical experience.⁵⁷

The very concept of 'community' has been the subject to much debate over its utility as an analytical device.⁵⁸ Indeed, it is a nebulous construct that can be employed in a multitude of different ways with different meanings. In relation to coal communities, however, Jim Phillips offers a useful categorisation of three broad ways in which community can be understood in this context:

- An economic locality, geographically bounded, where coal was a major source of male employment.

⁵⁶ Norman Dennis, *Coal Is Our Life : An Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956).

⁵⁷ Peter Ackers, 'Life After Death: Mining History without a Coal Industry', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* 1 (1996): 159–70.

⁵⁸ Ted K. Bradshaw, 'The Post-Place Community: Contributions to the Debate about the Definition of Community', *Community Development* 39, no. 1 (January 2008): 5–16; Stefan Berger, Bella Dicks, and Marion Fontaine, "'Community': A Useful Concept in Heritage Studies?", *International Journal of Heritage Studies : IJHS* 26, no. 4 (2020): 325–51.

- An ideological communality, also geographically bounded, with shared cultural, political, and social norms, and emphasis on solidarity and mutuality.
- An occupational group, imagined to some extent, although channelled through trade union organisation, and operating across local, regional and—within the United Kingdom—national boundaries.⁵⁹

Similarly, Gilbert extends Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' to interrogate the nostalgic construction of mining communities as archetypal symbols of a lost moral and political order.⁶⁰ In particular, Gilbert is concerned with how this mythologised idea of a mining community was deployed as political rhetoric during the 1984-85 strike and in assessments of the impacts of industrial closure. He argues that as 'actual mining settlements are disappearing from the actual landscape of Britain...their place in the political and cultural landscape is becoming fixed' in a way that marginalises alternative voices and experiences.⁶¹

Again, we are reminded of the importance of looking beyond the 1984-85 strike, because for all its significance in the history of British coal mining in the twentieth century, an undue focus serves to obscure a much longer, complex history and further marginalises the voices of those whose experiences were spatially and temporally different to the mythologised portrayals of the miner's strike. The oral histories collected here certainly demonstrate the strength and complexities of emotion associated with this broader timeline. As oral histories conducted in other coalfield contexts have, interviewees touch on the highly emotional memories of migration,

⁵⁹ Jim Phillips, 'The Meanings of Coal Community in Britain since 1947', *Contemporary British History* 32, no. 1 (2 January 2018): 39–59.

⁶⁰ David Gilbert, 'Imagined Communities and Mining Communities', *Labour History Review* 60, no. 2 (1995): 47–110.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

dislocation, and changes in community structure as a result of coalfield restructuring in west Durham, too.

In discussing these themes, the oral histories included here demonstrate the ways in which memory is used to construct mining communities of the past in imagination, as a way of understanding deindustrialisation and one's individual role within in. In doing so, it is attentive to industry's principal place within the social relations of space. As Tim Strangleman contends, 'the singular character of the coal industry meant that it shaped many aspects of individual and communal life'.⁶² Yet as will be explored in the proceeding chapters, there is nuance in the way that people experienced this centrality of industry to community, and thus complexities in their interactions with deindustrialisation in turn.

In order to understand how individuals position themselves within the broader network of a community, both in the present day, and through memory, in the past, Raymond Williams's concept of structures of feeling is useful. Structures of feeling, as outlined by Williams, can be understood to be 'affective elements of consciousness and relationships' that emerge in a specific temporal and spatial context, or 'meanings and values as they are lived and felt', being either dominant, residual, or emergent.⁶³ David Byrne explores the notion of 'industrial structures of feeling', arguing for industry's central role in shaping a dominant framework for social relations.⁶⁴

⁶² Tim Strangleman, "'Mining a Productive Seam? The Coal Industry, Community and Sociology'", *Contemporary British History* 32, no. 1 (2018): 18–38.

⁶³ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Toronto: Oxford University Press; 1977), p.132.

⁶⁴ David Byrne, 'Industrial Culture in a Post-Industrial World: The Case of the North East of England', *City* 6 (1 November 2002): 279–89.

In turn, Tim Strangleman suggests that lived experience of deindustrialisation can be understood in the context of Williams's residual structures of feeling, defined as:

‘certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation.’⁶⁵

As such, this thesis seeks to explore how these residual structures of feeling shape life narratives of individuals dealing with deindustrialisation. It also examines how ideas of belonging and authenticity are generated within these residues, and the manner in which memory is drawn upon to do this. Already, Valerie Walkerdine and Luis Jimenez, in a former steelmaking town in Wales, explore how this construction of an imagined community of the past functions in the present, generating narratives of belonging and exclusion in now deindustrialised spaces.⁶⁶ They describe community as a ‘protective envelope’ or a second skin, used to provide ontological security in times of uncertainty such as the closure of industry.⁶⁷ They note, moreover, how this claim to space and placed-based belonging, is often coupled with a distrust or fear of outsiders, and a limitation of which identities are acceptable within the community boundaries; as such, belonging typically becomes bound to having access to the collective memory of place and exhibiting the ‘correct’ forms of identity that align with this historical conceptualisation of community.

⁶⁵ Tim Strangleman, ‘Deindustrialisation and the Historical Sociological Imagination: Making Sense of Work and Industrial Change’, *Sociology* 51, no. 2 (2017): 466–82.

⁶⁶ Walkerdine and Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community after De-Industrialisation: A Psychosocial Approach to Affect*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

This thesis explores claims such as this in relation to County Durham, interrogating the notion of ‘imagined mining communities’ as it appears within oral history testimony as a feature of memory. In doing so, it seeks to understand the purpose such constructions of the past serve for participants in the present day. Likewise, it attempts to explore the perspectives and experiences that fall beyond this mythologised idea of community, in order to better understand the nuanced responses to deindustrialisation.

GENERATIONS

In order to understand how such structures of feeling are perpetuated or contested across space and time, and indeed, how a collective memory is maintained within these, it is also useful to consider Mannheim’s theory of generations. A generation, Mannheim suggests, is based upon ‘a common location in the social and historical process’ in which a person is limited to ‘a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience’.⁶⁸ For Mannheim, a new generation is created through a sharp social rupture; collective memory is transmitted across generations, but it is also in parts rejected, transformed, and augmented by the subsequent generation in response to their social context.⁶⁹

Therefore, the pertinence of memory to this thesis is not solely due to its oral history methodology, but also because of its cross-generational

⁶⁸ Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge: Collected Works*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York: Routledge, 1952).

⁶⁹ Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge: Collected Works*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York: Routledge, 1952).

approach. Edward Shils, in his study of tradition, emphasised the centrality of inter-generational relationships in establishing a sense of order in self-identity and societal structure. Humans, Shils states, 'need the help of their ancestors' to provide a guiding chart of rules and categories by which to order life and society.⁷⁰ As such, the cross-generational exchange of memory is understood to underpin much broader structures than simply the relationships between people of different ages.

To turn to the arguments of historians like Jan Assmann and Alessandro Portelli, to examine how memory is transferred and transformed across generations is a useful indicator of how what is felt to be relevant or useful in the present.⁷¹ These changing interpretations and uses of memory may also provide telling insight into the relationships between different generations by highlighting areas of consensus or possible tensions. To explore this in the context of County Durham is to contest the argument of Pat Thane, who argues that 'the concept of generation has little resonance in the politics of modern Britain' because it has not experienced sharp historical breaks such as hostile invasions or revolutions.⁷² Indeed, High compares the process of deindustrialisation as 'not altogether different from what happens in wartime'.⁷³

In mid-twentieth century Western employment patterns, Riley, Johnson, and Foner argue that there existed an 'age-agreed sequence of

⁷⁰ Edward Shils, "Tradition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 2 (1971): p.326.

⁷¹ Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

⁷² Pat Thane, "Generations and Intergenerational Relationships, Public and Private, in Twentieth Century Britain," in *Generations in Twentieth Century Europe*, ed. Stephen Lovell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.190.

⁷³ Steven High, "Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization," *International Labor and Working Class History* 84, no. Fall (2013): 141-42.; Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations."

roles' through which generational cohorts progressed over time.⁷⁴ This sequence, particularly within the coal industry, was predominantly masculinised, with successful adulthood closely tied to male participation in the workforce and the associated gender socialisation.⁷⁵ As Gildart argues, this process of socialisation was not merely about acquiring technical skills but about internalising a distinct working-class identity rooted in solidarity, resilience, and a collective sense of pride.⁷⁶ In relation to the North Wales coalfield, Gildart emphasises that this identity was transmitted across generations, often within the same families, reinforcing a powerful sense of continuity and duty within mining communities.

However, this established pathway was significantly impacted by the broader economic shifts of the 1970s. In 1974, the Plan for Coal was introduced aiming to secure the future of British coal through substantial investment and expansion. This plan, coupled with renewed recruitment campaigns and significant wage increases for miners following the settlements after the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes, temporarily rekindled optimism within mining communities.⁷⁷ This period saw a resurgence in the belief that mining could continue to offer stable, well-paid employment, and thus sustain the traditional masculine identities that had long been associated with coal mining.⁷⁸ Phillips, in particular, discusses in how these

⁷⁴ M. W. Riley, M. Johnson, and A. Foner, *Aging and Society: A Sociology of Age Stratification* (New York: Russell Sage, 1972), 524.

⁷⁵ Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs* (London: Saxon House, 1977); Ian G. Roberts, *Craft, Class and Control: The Sociology of a Shipbuilding Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press for the University of Durham, 1993).

⁷⁶ Gildart, *North Wales Miners*; Keith Gildart, 'Mining Memories: Reading Coalfield Autobiographies', *Labor History* 50, no. 2 (1 May 2009): 139–61.

⁷⁷ Perchard et al., 'Fighting for the Soul of Coal'.

⁷⁸ Keith Gildart, 'Dust, Diesel, and Disability in the British Coal Industry: A View from the Coal Face, 1985-1992', *Journal of the Social History of Medicine and Health*, 31 December 2019, 1–17.

identities were central to the resistance against industrial decline, as miners saw themselves not just as workers but as defenders of a way of life.⁷⁹

Yet, despite this optimism, the anticipated continuity proved short-lived. Writing in 1975, Waring observed that 'new cohorts, through aging, are being readied for allocation to roles which have disappeared.'⁸⁰ This statement captures the growing dissonance between the optimism fostered by the Plan for Coal and the reality of ongoing industrial decline. The roles that had once been secure and integral to the masculine identity within these communities were beginning to vanish, leaving younger generations without the clear occupational pathways that had defined their predecessors' lives

As has already been outlined in this literature review, much of the recent scholarship of deindustrialisation sets out to explore these cross-generational legacies of closure, although County Durham is notably absent. By its very nature, Linkon's 'half-life' metaphor demands a cross-generational understanding of deindustrialisation, that is apparent in her own work and of those who have adopted her framework subsequently. Similarly, Geoff Bright devotes attention to cross-generational memory and its uses in the Yorkshire coalfield. However, Bright draws heavily on the work of Avery Gordon, who developed the notion of 'social haunting' to explain a 'social violence done in the past' that continues to demand change and acknowledgement in the present.⁸¹ By examining the continued presence of the coal-mining past in deindustrialised communities, Bright

⁷⁹ Phillips, 'The Meanings of Coal Community in Britain since 1947'.

⁸⁰ Joan M. Waring, 'Social Replenishment and Social Change: The Problem of Disordered Cohort Flow', in *Age in Society*, ed. Anne Foner (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975), 111.

⁸¹ N. Geoffrey Bright, "'The Lady Is Not Returning!': Educational Precarity and a Social Haunting in the UK Coalfields', *Ethnography and Education* 11, no. 2 (2016): 142–57.

suggests that the engagement of later generations is a response to feelings of continued marginalisation and injustice within these communities.⁸²

Relatedly, Miriam Hirsch and Eva Hoffman explore the difficulty of negotiating traumatic memories of which an individual does not have direct experience of and questioning how individuals can heal trauma which they themselves do not have the matching experience from which to make it comprehensible.⁸³ Hirsch describes this phenomenon using the term ‘post-memory’, arguing that the inheritance of traumatic memories means younger generations risk having their own memories ‘displaced or even evacuated’. Yet Hoffman, building on this concept of post-memory, suggests that this inherited trauma can be used by future generations to create something useful and relevant to the present.⁸⁴ As such, whilst much of the attention paid to generation in deindustrialised areas provides a negative conceptualisation of the past being apparent in the present, there is also potential for this past to be used in a way that is progressive and useful for future generations.

In their study of two generations of Jewish-Israeli soldiers, Ben Ze’Ev and Lomsky-Feder have identified the emergence of what they term ‘canonical generations,’ who have become historically bonded within national memory to a significant event because of their lived experience of it.⁸⁵ David Nettleingham draws upon these ideas in relation to the coal industry, exploring the canonisation of the ‘last generation of miners’ and arguing that they have become a symbolic asset for collective memory and a

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Eva Hoffman, ‘The Long Afterlife of Loss’, in *Memory*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, Histories, Theories, Debates (Fordham University, 2010), 406–15.

⁸⁴ Hoffman, ‘The Long Afterlife of Loss’.

⁸⁵ Efrat Ben-Ze’Ev and Edna Lomsky-Feder, ‘The Canonical Generation: Trapped between Personal and National Memories’, *Sociology* 43, no. 6 (2009): 1060.

tool for successive cohorts to derive social and political identity from.⁸⁶ In interviewing younger generations from coalfield communities, Nettleingham reveals, for instance, how individuals feel an increased political consciousness and participation is inspired directly by inherited memories of the miners' strike; as such, the past is constructed as a repository for the present.⁸⁷

Likewise, James Rhodes uses oral testimony to establish the different generational responses to the Youngstown born boxer, Kelly Pavlik. He notes that older generations are drawn to the figure of Pavlik due to his invocation of a 'power, co-ordination and domination' that felt akin to the traits that had formed their identity through industrial work, whilst younger generations, raised in a post-industrial landscape, identified Pavlik as a symbol of hope, an embodiment of the opportunity for a new, progressive community from which they could draw their own novel and distinct identity.⁸⁸ Importantly, Rhodes's work highlights the tensions also inherent in the cross-generational engagement with deindustrialisation, not simply the transmissions, picking up on different generational understandings of gender, identity, and work. This is key to Mannheim's conceptualisation, in that generations are formed through inheritance and contestation of ideas.

In exploring these cross-generational accounts from a cultural perspective, Rhodes demonstrates the evolving generational meanings of industrial identity beyond the workplace itself. There remain questions to be asked about whether this is true of the former mining towns of County

⁸⁶ David Nettleingham, "Canonical Generations and the British Left: The Narrative Construction of the Miners' Strike 1984–85," *Sociology* 51, no. 4 (2017).

⁸⁷ Nettleingham, "Canonical Generations and the British Left: The Narrative Construction of the Miners' Strike 1984–85."

⁸⁸ Edward Slavishak, *Bodies of Work: Civic Display and Labor in Industrial Pittsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). quoted in James Rhodes, "Youngstown's 'Ghost'? Memory, Identity, and Deindustrialization," *International Labor and Working Class History* 84, no. Fall: 62.

Durham. By participating in collective remembering or commemoration of industry, do residents feel haunted by the memories of past generations, or does this inherited memory have more future-orientated uses in the present?

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

Much of the existing literature on deindustrialisation discussed above also touches upon the debates surrounding the preservation of the industrial past for the purposes of commemoration and heritage, or alternatively, the ruination of post-industrial landscapes.⁸⁹ Where heritage is discussed in this thesis, it is understood, as Harvey succinctly outlines it, as ‘the process by which people use the past’.⁹⁰ Adopting this broad-spectrum definition of heritage allows us to examine both ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ approaches to heritage, encompassing the cross-generational relationships to place and community already discussed in this introduction.

In 2006, Laurajane Smith brought to the table the now widely used term ‘authorised heritage discourse’. The concept denotes the emergence of a hegemonic approach to the management of heritage that:

‘focuses attention on aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes that current generations ‘must’ care for, protect and

⁸⁹ Alice Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline* (University of Toronto Press, 2012); Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics, and Materiality*; Tim Strangleman, ““Smokestack Nostalgia,” “Ruin Porn” or Working- Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation”, *International Labor and Working Class History* 84, no. Fall (2013): 23–37; Karolina Kolenda, ‘Aestheticising the Post-Industrial Debris: Industrial Ruins in Contemporary British Landscape Photography’, *Literature, History of Ideas, Images and Societies of the English-Speaking World*, no. vol. XVII-n°1 (8 November 2019).

⁹⁰ David Harvey, ‘The History of Heritage’, in *Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, ed. Peter Howard and Brian Graham (London: Ashgate, 2008), 29.

revere so that they may be passed to nebulous future generation for their ‘education’⁹¹

Indeed, within the authorised heritage discourse, there is an overwhelming compulsion to preserve; heritage, therefore, becomes an exercise in uncritical, conservative nostalgia, and notably, this is how it was assessed in early academic scholarship.⁹² David Lowenthal, for instance, suggests that this drive to preserve the past as heritage is based on the assumptions that ‘the past was unlike the present; that its relics are necessary to our identity and desirable in themselves; and that tangible remains are a finite and dwindling commodity’.⁹³ In contrast, however, Lachlan MacKinnon engages directly with these assumptions, arguing that ‘While this is true, in deindustrializing and post-industrial spaces, we might also view working-class attempts at preservation as an exercise or test of power’ within the context of increased social and economic marginalisation.⁹⁴ Framed this way, MacKinnon suggests, preserving and displaying the industrial past offers a source of renewal for working-class communities.

This tension between preservation and power is particularly evident in the heritage projects of former coal-mining communities, as explored by Gildart, Perchard, Curtis, and Miller. in their study of the politics of

⁹¹ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁹² David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen London, 1987); David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511523809>.

⁹³ Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, 389 quoted in ; MacKinnon, ‘Coal and Steel, Goodbye to All That’.

⁹⁴ MacKinnon, ‘Coal and Steel, Goodbye to All That’; See also Bella Dicks, ‘Performing the Hidden Injuries of Class in Coal-Mining Heritage’, *Sociology* 42, no. 3 (1 June 2008): 436–52; Strangleman, “‘Smokestack Nostalgia,’ ‘Ruin Porn’ or Working- Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation’.

memory and heritage within representations of the British coal industry.⁹⁵ The article highlights the political and social fractures that arise when different groups within these communities attempt to control the narrative of their shared past, examining how ‘heritage projects... have become battlegrounds for what kind of history should be presented to the public, where memorials should be located, and which memories and experiences should be preserved’.⁹⁶ For example, in both Lancashire and North Wales, the 1984/85 miners’ strike remains a deeply divisive issue. Former miners who supported the strike often feel that their experiences are being marginalized in heritage projects, which they argue present a sanitized version of history that fails to adequately represent the struggles they endured during the dispute.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, for County Durham, there remains questions of how this is done in practice. In particular, discussions of industrial heritage in County Durham frequently turn to assess the place of Beamish Open Air Museum.⁹⁸ To Robert Hewison, Beamish is ‘the height of historic invention’ and is representative of the fact that deindustrialisation in the United Kingdom has led to the replacement of traditional heavy industries with the ‘heritage industry.’⁹⁹

This argument should not be dismissed outright, as it does raise important questions regarding the commodification of working-class culture. Bella Dicks explores this too in *Culture on Display*, questioning

⁹⁵ Keith Gildart et al., ‘Revisiting the History of the British Coal Industry: The Politics of Legacy, Memory and Heritage’, *Waseda Rilas Journal*, no. 8 (2020): 407–11.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Natasha Vall, ‘Coal Is Our Strife: Representing Mining Heritage in North East England’, *Contemporary British History* 32, no. 1 (2017): 101–20; Kevin Hannam and Stuart Howard England, ‘The Making of Two Mining Museums: Bowes and Beamish, North East England’, in *Mining Heritage and Tourism*, ed. Michael Conlin and Lee Jolliffe (London: Routledge, 2010); Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

⁹⁹ Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*.

‘Who has the power to display whose culture, in whose name, and in whose interest?’.¹⁰⁰ Addressing questions of cultural representation more broadly, Beverly Skeggs discusses the positioning of working-class culture as at times ‘merely an absence’, but at others, a commodity to be borrowed from and fetishised.¹⁰¹ Indeed, this is an argument central to many criticisms of heritage projects that purport to represent working-class culture.

Steven High’s *The Wounds of Class* emphasises the deep social and cultural impacts that industrial decline has on communities. High argues that the ‘wounds of class’ cut deeper than just economic loss, extending into the very fabric of community identity and memory.¹⁰² He notes that as industries close, the associated working-class culture often becomes marginalised or erased, replaced by middle-class narratives that aestheticize industrial ruins rather than engage with the harsh realities of deindustrialisation. This critique is particularly relevant when considering the preservation efforts in former coal-mining areas, where the legacy of industrial labour is at risk of being overshadowed by more palatable, nostalgic representations that do not fully capture the complexities of the working-class experience.

However, elsewhere, in her work on the Rhondda Heritage Park, Dicks demonstrates the complexities of engagement with such sites of ‘living history’. Indeed, by engaging with former miners working as site guides and visitors to the park, Dicks highlights how industrial heritage sites are often spaces of contestation over meaning and visibility; within these

¹⁰⁰ Bella Dicks, *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visibility* (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2004).

¹⁰¹ Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of class and gender : becoming respectable*, *Formations of class & gender*, (London: SAGE, 1997), p.95.

¹⁰² Steven High, “‘The Wounds of Class’: A Historiographical Reflection on the Study of Deindustrialization, 1973–2013’, *History Compass* 11, no. 11 (2013): 994–1007.

contestations, there are opportunities for working-class people to find representation and meaning.¹⁰³

Furthermore, if we expand the understanding of heritage beyond formal sites such as museums, towards the broader definition outlined by Harvey, we see that ‘heritage’ is taking place on smaller, everyday scales too. Like Lowenthal, French historian Pierre Nora suggests that the acceleration of history now sees society increasingly concerned that memory and tradition are slipping away. Nora suggests that, in response, *lieux de memoire* are created, being ‘any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature’ around which ‘memory crystallises and secretes itself’.¹⁰⁴ Nora is primarily concerned with how *lieux de memoire* function as operatives of the nation-state, exploring how the imbued symbolism of certain sites and practices contribute to the collective understanding of French nationalism.

However, in following Lefebvre and underscoring the social production of the spaces of memory, Nora’s concept also allows for an understanding of more local sites of commemoration and the multiple ways they are imbued with symbolism through collective memory. For instance, Jay Winter explores engagement with sites of memory, arguing that ‘the group that goes to such sites inherits earlier meanings attached to the event, as well as adding new meanings’.¹⁰⁵ Heritage, therefore, becomes as much about the emotional responses to memory as it does about the sites of memorialisation themselves.

¹⁰³ Bella Dicks, *Heritage, Place, and Community* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000); Dicks, ‘Performing the Hidden Injuries of Class in Coal-Mining Heritage’.

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations* (Berkeley, Calif.) 26, no. 26 (1989): 7–24; Pierre Nora, ‘Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory’, *Eurozine*, 18 April 2002, <https://www.eurozine.com/reasons-for-the-current-upsurge-in-memory/>; Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

¹⁰⁵ Jay Winter, ‘Sites of Memory’, in *Memory*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, *Histories, Theories, Debates* (Fordham University, 2010), 312–24.

Indeed, increasing attention is now paid to intangible aspects of heritage, defined by UNESCO as ‘practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and sometimes individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage’. In this sense, intangible cultural heritage is understood to be an inherently cross-generational phenomenon, and one rooted in the collective memory of communities. The UNESCO definition also states that ‘intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognised as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it – without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage.’¹⁰⁶

Yet this definition presents a rather static idea of intangible heritage, despite its attempts to move beyond the rigid definition of heritage itself. There is no singular way in which a community interacts with the intangible heritage of the past, and contestations over meaning and memory are an inherent part of the process.¹⁰⁷ Marion Fontaine captures this well within her article on the uses of mining identity within political debates in the North of France, demonstrating the ambiguous ways in which the past is drawn upon for present purposes.¹⁰⁸ As such, even its in abstract, intangible forms, heritage can be a difficult, contested site.

This thesis therefore seeks to engage with these ongoing discussions that surround both tangible and intangible heritage, asking how both figure within individual’s experiences of the emotional and physical landscapes of deindustrialisation. To do so, it will discuss both physical representations of the past, like Beamish Museum, but also immaterial sites

¹⁰⁶ ‘UNESCO - What Is Intangible Cultural Heritage?’, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>.

¹⁰⁷ Stefan Berger, ‘Industrial Heritage and the Ambiguities of Nostalgia for an Industrial Past in the Ruhr Valley, Germany’, *Labor* 16, no. 1 (1 March 2019): 37–64.

¹⁰⁸ Marion Fontaine, ‘From Myth to Stigma? The Political Uses of Mining Identity in the North of France’, *Labor (Durham, N.C.)* 16, no. 1 (2019): 65–80.

of remembrance like the Durham Miners' Gala, to unpack the contested meanings of the industrial past within the present.

Chapter Structure

This thesis is divided into six chapters, adopting a chronological approach that traces the development of the villages as industrial communities, through to the onset of deindustrialisation, and up to the present day. This structure lends itself to the investigation of cross-generational understandings of deindustrialisation, by allowing for an interrogation of the continuities and transformations within place and how these are assessed across generations. This is underpinned by the research's oral history methodology, and as such, Chapter 1 of this thesis outlines this methodological approach.

Firstly, therefore, it explores the development of oral history as method, and in doing so, examines the key debates concerning memory, nostalgia, and emotion in relation to the practice. Here, it also considers the unique orality and subjectivity of the source and discusses how this is approached in this thesis in relation to transcription and its inclusion in this writing. Secondly, the chapter discusses oral history in practice, reflecting on how the testimony used in this thesis was collected. In particular, it considers the context in which this research was conducted, namely the Covid-19 pandemic, and seeks to demonstrate findings from interviewing in this context that may be useful for other oral historians researching deindustrialisation.

Next, the chapter reflects on researcher positionality. It considers the discussion of the researcher as an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ to the community being studied, by examining my own dual position during this research. Here, too, it considers ideas of power and intersubjectivity in the oral history process and reflects on the implications for this thesis.

Chapter 2 interrogates the development of the Durham coalfield through a spatial lens, examining how industrial capitalism's broad-scale processes shaped the everyday experiences of industrial communities. It begins by discussing the production of paternalistic space, exploring how space reinforced existing class relations in service of industrial capitalism. As well as this, it examines the coal mine, or ‘the pit’ as a space of work. In doing so, it investigates the unique social dynamics that emerged within the underground workspace, where industrial capitalism and the natural environment converged, affecting workers' lives and their sense of solidarity. It also explores how spaces of autonomy and independence emerged within the mine and in outdoor areas of colliery villages.

Finally, this chapter examines how these conditions and social relations gave rise to labour organization, particularly the Durham Miners’ Association, and subsequently, representation in parliamentary politics. Here, it also discusses nationalisation, focusing on the role of the National Coal Board (NCB) as a form of state paternalism that continued to intertwine village spaces with industry. While not providing an exhaustive examination of these movements, the chapter draws from existing historiography to investigate how they influenced the social relations within the coalfield and whether they altered the power dynamics associated with paternalistic control of space. In summary, this chapter uses spatial theory to explore the formation and transformation of colliery villages, emphasising the constant negotiations and conflicts over space that have shaped these communities, underscoring the enduring centrality of industry, and thus establishing the significance of deindustrialisation within the broader context of the thesis.

Chapter 3 builds upon this spatial approach, but here turns to oral history testimony to explore how these spaces are constructed in memory. Drawing upon the lived experience of interviewees, it discusses the creation of industrial communities. Throughout, it is attentive to Gilbert's notion of 'imagined mining communities' and as such, simultaneously explores the threads of nostalgia and idealism that are weaved through conceptualisations of communities of the past. This chapter also examines the villages as gendered spaces. It considers the intrinsic position of industry in the construction of masculinity, and the socialisation of young men for industrial work. At the same time, it discusses notions of femininity in coalfield communities, highlighting women's labour as an integral part of everyday life. This encompasses an assessment of domestic labour, but importantly, also of emotional labour and women's role in constructing the social networks of support within mining villages. Finally, it considers understandings of belonging in relation to interviewees' constructions of a homogenous, idealised community of the past, using other testimony in turn to unpack alternative memories from those who were excluded. In doing so, it seeks to explore the complexities and nuances of the mining villages before deindustrialisation.

Having provided, in the first two chapters, a substantial historical context of industry in County Durham, and established the socio-spatial relations of the villages as understood in memory, Chapter 4 turns to an examination of deindustrialisation in its own right. It begins by outlining the contraction of the coalfield in the county, with particular attention to the timeline of closures. In highlighting that the highest number of colliery closures occurred in the 1960s, with sporadic closures in the proceeding decades, this chapter first seeks to understand experiences of these earlier closures, but also how these narratives are subsumed beneath a dominant narrative that centres around the 1984-85 strike. It does also give significant discussion to the experiences and emotions surrounding the strike itself.

Here, it explores testimony from two distinct generations- those with direct experience of industry, either through their own employment in coal mining or their wider participation in the industrial community as adults, and a second, who were children or teenagers at the time of closure, whose direct experience is dominated by deindustrialisation. This chapter explores the experiences of both generations, with attention to their emotional responses in memory. Finally, the chapter also outlines the context of alternative employment in the region, with reference to the Miners' Redundancy Scheme. It draws on testimony to understand the emotional and social responses to unemployment, and here begins to consider the first cross-generational legacies of deindustrialisation as they were emerging.

Next, Chapter 5 turns to an examination of the colliery villages as they exist now, as deindustrialised spaces. Here, it introduces the third generation outlined in this thesis- those with no direct experience of industry or industrial closure. First, the chapter interrogates the physical landscapes of deindustrialisation. Again, it challenges the notion of deindustrialisation as a uniform process aligned with the dominant cultural narrative, exploring how earlier closures such as Brandon Pit House in 1968, distinct from the later wave of deindustrialisation, shaped the remembrance of the industrial past, both in physical landscapes and emotional legacies. This investigation seeks to further understand cross-generational consistencies and differences in perceptions of place, belonging, and community.

It examines the interplay of memory, community, and belonging, considering how migration patterns and perceptions of newcomers have influenced individual relationships with collective memory. Commemorative practices in Bearpark are also explored, interrogating the use of the past in contemporary contexts. This section further investigates how memories of a past 'imagined mining community' are employed to assert individual identity today. Lastly, the chapter turns to examine cross-generational relationships with these deindustrialised places. It explores how younger residents understand and negotiate with these environments

and how tensions can arise, both within and between generations, due to differing perspectives on place. Additionally, it revisits the theme of memory, analysing how younger generations utilise the industrial past in new ways, despite lacking direct lived experience of industry.

Finally, Chapter 6 investigates how politics in County Durham has become intertwined with nostalgia and appeals to the past, both from political parties and voters. It begins by examining how the past contributes to regional identity and imaginings of the region, acknowledging both experiences of decline and evidence of the industrial past being used in progressive ways for the region's renewal, particularly in regard to technological and renewable industries. Next, the chapter explores the connection between regional politics and national politics, using individual testimony to contextualise the decline of the Labour Party, the Conservative government's 'levelling up' agenda, and the Brexit vote within the historical context of deindustrialisation.

Lastly, the chapter examines how these large-scale political changes manifest at the local level, particularly in relation to the erosion of representative, democratic spaces within villages previously shaped by strong trade unionism. It considers how deindustrialisation has impacted these spaces and, consequently, how cross-generational relationships to politics have evolved. The Durham Miners' Gala serves as a focal point for examining these changes and their implications for the region's political landscape.

CHAPTER 1 METHODOLOGY

“Katherine Waugh: And what was it that made you take the videos and collect the items?”

Ian Cummings: The same as before I think. Perhaps to-- in celebration of what I could see was starting to go, which is one of the reasons to volunteer to do this with you, because it is disappearing.”¹⁰⁹

This chapter examines the oral history methodology of this thesis, both in relation to the theoretical debates regarding oral history as method, and the practicalities of conducting and interpreting oral history interviews. In doing so, it reflects on the research process behind this thesis, unpacking some of the successes and challenges in how the method was used within this research. The thesis relies upon twenty-one original oral history interviews. Participants ranged in age from twenty-one to eighty-eight. Whilst the majority of interviewees still lived within or near to the villages in question, others had moved away.

All interviewees were provided with a participant information sheet that outlined the project before the interview took place and given the opportunity to ask any further questions.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with [Robert] Ian Cummings (Zoom: August 2020)

What is the purpose of the research?

The research is an updated exploration of County Durham mining villages, that have largely been overlooked in existing studies and reports into industrial closure. It aims to examine how ideas of community, identity and heritage have changed in the decades following the closure of the pits, and how the social, economic and political feelings of the villages have been affected. For this reason, the research is cross-generational, to understand how different generations understand their relationship with the village and its industrial past.

Oral history allows people to contribute their own experiences and opinions about the history of their communities and your participation is incredibly valuable in this research.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been asked to take part because of your connection to a former mining village. You do not need to have any special knowledge of the village's history or have any direct relationship to mining yourself.

What does taking part involve?

Participants will be taking part in an oral history interview, which is an opportunity for you to share your experiences of life in a former mining village. You are free to share as much or as little as you wish about yourself and your life within the interview, and there is no right or wrong response to any of the questions.

Fig. 2: Extract from Participant Information Sheet provided to all interviewees. ¹¹⁰

Before recording began, each interviewee was also provided with a consent form to review and sign, that indicated that they were happy for the interview to be recorded. Afterwards, interviewees were provided with the audio recording and a transcript of their interview, before being asked to review and sign a copyright agreement.

The interviews were deliberately loosely structured to foster a sense of 'shared authority,' a principle that underpins oral history's democratic ethos. ¹¹¹ This approach sought to empower participants to take control of

¹¹⁰ See Appendix A for full document.

¹¹¹ Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Kathryn

their narratives, allowing them to highlight the aspects of their experiences and memories that they found most significant. This approach not only seeks to give voice to those who might be excluded from official records but also ensure that their stories are told in their own words, reflecting the complexities and nuances that archival sources typically overlook. By doing so, the research not only captures their voices but also respects and prioritises their agency in the telling of their own histories.

There were no prepared questions, but instead, a few central themes that were raised in questions at appropriate times or introduced by interviewees themselves. In this way, each interview discussed the topics of community, work, childhood, family, politics, and place. As Errante observes, despite the fact that this loose structure sometimes led to sections of interviews being devoted to subjects that did not feel particularly relevant to the topic under investigation, it does, at times, allow for a ‘flow’ to develop in which narrators follow more naturally the threads of memory, illuminating what is significant to them in the process.¹¹²

Oral History and Memory

Like the field of deindustrialisation studies, the development of oral history as a research method is relatively new. Although the first organised oral history project was undertaken in 1948, by Allan Nevins at Columbia University, its concern with interviewing elite white men did little to expand the historical narrative beyond its traditional actors.¹¹³ Instead, it was in the

Anderson and Dana C. Jack, ‘Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses’, in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2016), 199–212.

¹¹² Antoinette Errante, ‘But Sometimes You’re Not Part of the Story: Oral Histories and Ways of Remembering and Telling’, *Educational Researcher*, 1 March 2000.

¹¹³ Allan Nevins, *Oral History: How and Why It Was Born* (New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1966); Rebecca Sharpless, ‘The History of Oral History’, in

1960s and 1970s that oral history fully emerged as a method significantly different to what had come before. Under the direction of those such as British historian Paul Thompson, the potential for oral history to grant historical agency to otherwise excluded and marginalised people came to the fore.¹¹⁴ Oral history was positioned as a method to uncover ‘history from below’ and uncover history ‘as it really was’.¹¹⁵

Oral history, therefore, emerged in part as a critical response to the limitations of archival sources, which often exclude the perspectives of marginalised communities and fail to capture the full complexity of social and cultural histories. In the context of County Durham's mining villages, where the lived experiences of residents are central to understanding the impact of industrial decline, oral history offers a richer, more inclusive narrative that archival records alone cannot provide.

However, it is a method that has been challenged by criticisms of memory as an unreliable and unprofessional method of history. Eric Hobsbawm, for instance, writes that. ‘most oral history today is personal memory which is a remarkably slippery medium for preserving facts’.¹¹⁶ Memory, it was argued, is too prone to romanticised nostalgia and a selective choosing of the past to fit one’s own purpose.¹¹⁷ In response, oral historians highlight the potentials of this malleability of memory, arguing

Thinking about Oral History: Theories and Applications, ed. Thomas L Charlton, Lois A Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2008), 7–32.

¹¹⁴ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 2nd ed.. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹¹⁵ Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., ‘Introduction’, in *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1–9.

¹¹⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997).

¹¹⁷ William W. Cutler, ‘Accuracy in Oral History Interviewing’, *Historical Methods Newsletter* 3, no. 3 (June 1970): 1–7; David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 1st Midland book ed.. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Charles Fernyhough, *Pieces of Light: The New Science of Memory* (London: Profile, 2012).

that it is this very aspect of the method that helps further understanding of how the past is engaged with and used in the present.¹¹⁸

Progressing from the presentation of oral history as having the potential to uncover the ‘real’ truth of history, focus shifted to its potential to explore the process of how people construct historical narratives through memory and meaning.¹¹⁹ Oral history’s true strength emerged in its capacity to reveal how individuals construct historical narratives through the lenses of memory and meaning. By embracing the subjective nature of memory, this explores how the people of County Durham’s former mining communities engage with their past, not just as a series of events, but as a dynamic process that shapes their current identities and sense of community.

While memory has been critiqued as an unreliable medium, prone to romanticized nostalgia and selective recall, it is precisely this fluidity that makes oral history invaluable. Memory’s malleability reveals how individuals and communities construct their identities and histories, particularly in response to significant social changes like deindustrialisation. Rather than being a flaw, the subjective nature of memory allows us to explore the deeper meanings and emotional truths that underpin how former mining communities in County Durham perceive their past and present

As Alessandro Portelli writes, “Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing,

¹¹⁸ Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian : the memory of Egypt in western monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹¹⁹ See, for instance: Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, Studies in Modern Capitalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*; Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memories*, Critical Perspectives on the Past (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); Linda Shopes, ‘Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities’, *The Journal of American History* (Bloomington, Ind.) 89, no. 2 (2002): 588–98.

and what they now think they did”.¹²⁰ Indeed, the way in which people model, invent and reconstruct the past reflects the experiences of the present, and is telling echo of the morals, behaviours and practices that individuals or groups deem important.¹²¹

Likewise, the dismissal of nostalgia as an inherently flawed feature of memory has also been refuted. For instance, both Svetlana Boym and Fred Davis argue convincingly that the prevalence of nostalgic sentiment is a phenomenon worth exploring in itself.¹²² Crucially, Boym differentiates between ‘restorative nostalgia’ that ‘manifests itself in total reconstructions of the past’ and ‘reflective nostalgia’ which is ‘not the recovered of what is perceived to be absolute truth, but the mediation on history and the passage of time’.¹²³ Nostalgia, Boym contends, is a ‘defence mechanism against the accelerated rhythms’ of the contemporary period. As such, this thesis embraces memory, and any nostalgia contained therewithin, as part of the fundamental value of oral history as method; not as a distortion of history, but as a vital element of oral history that reveals how individuals and communities emotionally navigate their pasts.

By exploring nostalgia within memories, this research offers insights into how former mining communities maintain a sense of identity and continuity amidst the significant social and economic changes they have experienced. It is not concerned with producing a comprehensive history of the development and decline of coal mining in County Durham, but rather, it is interested in *how* the residents of former mining villages construct this history through memory, and how that is transmitted and transformed in the context of the present.

¹²⁰ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

¹²¹ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

¹²² Svetlana Boym, *The future of nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

¹²³ Boym, *The future of nostalgia*.

This research deliberately moves away from producing a conventional, archival-based history of County Durham's coal mining industry. Instead, it focuses on how residents of former mining villages construct their history through personal and collective memory, highlighting the ways these memories are transmitted, transformed, and reinterpreted in the present day. This is important, for as Gyanendra Pandey writes of archives,

“...the very process of archiving is accompanied by a process of ‘un-archiving’: rendering many aspects of social, cultural, political relations in the past and the present as incidental, chaotic, trivial, inconsequential and, therefore, unhistorical. In a word, the archive as a site of remembrance and doing the work of remembering is also at the same time a project of forgetting”.¹²⁴

By foregrounding oral history, therefore, the thesis prioritises lived experience over institutional records, arguing that this approach provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of the community's heritage and identity.

Central to this is Halbwachs's theory of collective memory, from which a wealth of subsequent scholarship has drawn its base.¹²⁵ Drawing himself on Durkheim's ideas of social memory and its continuation through commemoration and ritual in early societies, Halbwachs proposed the idea of common domains of memory from which individuals both draw from and augment.¹²⁶ Different groups, for instance, families, or those based upon social class, gender, or religion, have their own distinct collective memory,

¹²⁴ Gyanendra Pandey, ‘Un-Archived Histories: The “Mad” and the “Trifling”’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 1 (2012): 37–41.

¹²⁵ Maurice Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹²⁶ Halbwachs, *On collective memory*.

that may conflict with that of other groups. For Halbwachs, individual memory cannot exist beyond the social influences and circles which we interact with, and there remains a current of continuous thought that is transmitted across generations and between individuals from which our conceptualisation of our self and our past is created. Nevertheless, the way in which individuals draw from this collective memory, or augment it with their own experiences, is also a significant part of the oral history process.¹²⁷

In part, the construction of ‘imagined mining communities’ within narratives of this past speaks to the selective drawing upon collective memory by individuals. As Penny Summerfield argues, individuals often seek composure within their own life stories by drawing upon the wider ‘cultural circuit’ or dominant public narrative of the past.¹²⁸ ‘The challenge for the historian,’ Summerfield contends, ‘is to understand the cultural ingredients that go into accounts of a remembered and interpreted past’.¹²⁹ Alistair Thomson, too, examines the interplay between individual and collective memory, in relation to interviews with Australian veterans and popular conceptualisations of Anzac day in the nation. Thomson contends that ‘oral history can help us to understand how and why national mythologies work (and don’t work) for individuals and in our society. It can also reveal the possibilities and difficulties, of developing and sustaining oppositional memories’.¹³⁰

Already, there is significant attention afforded to a turn to memory in periods of instability or uncertainty, as a tool for the assertion of identity

¹²⁷ Anna Green, ‘Individual Remembering and “Collective Memory”: Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates’, *Oral History* 32, no. 2 (2004): 35–44.

¹²⁸ Penny Summerfield, ‘Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice’, *Miranda*, no. 12 (24 February 2016); Penny Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews’, *Cultural and Social History* 1, no. 1 (1 January 2004): 65–93.

¹²⁹ Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure’, 67.

¹³⁰ Alistair Thomson, ‘Anzac Memories Revisited: Trauma, Memory and Oral History’, *The Oral History Review* 42, no. 1 (1 April 2015): 1–29.

and creating social cohesion. Drawing on a collective memory, Assman argues, is a way of asserting ‘We are this’ but also ‘We are not them’.¹³¹ In times of social change or uncertainty, therefore, the collective memory of a group becomes a tool for social cohesion by establishing identity and belonging, but to do so is also to exclude, to differentiate and to contest which identities are acceptable.¹³² As such, the construction of a life narrative during an oral history interview may be seen, at times, as part of this broader process of establishing authenticity and belonging.

After a number of interviews, I was contacted by participants with further elaborations. In some instances, this allowed for a better understanding of some of the testimony shared with me already, allowing me to interpret it more sensitively. In other cases, it was clear that the interview itself had elicited further reminiscence and probed autobiographical memory; people continued the process of trying to compose a linear narrative of their past and make sense of it after the recorder was switched off and I had left. As such, these conversations provided an extension to the interview, and are useful in exploring memory and its purposes in their own right.

For instance, in Chapter 2 of this thesis, I use one of these post-interview correspondences, with Robin Chapman, alongside his testimony itself. Around ten days after our interview, Robin emailed me, saying:

“After your visit I got to thinking more about mining communities and Bearpark in particular. I have put my thoughts into words which are attached. Please use these thoughts in any way you wish.”¹³³

¹³¹ Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*; see also Allan Megill, ‘History, Memory, Identity’, *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 3 (1 August 1998): 37–62.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Robin Chapman, Interview with the author (Durham, 2022).

The attached document was a combination of his own memories of Bearpark, and his knowledge of its historical development; these were blended to form an articulate summary that combined lived experience with collective memory, and provided an insight into how individuals actively create a 'history' through memory. Indeed, whilst there is a focus upon how to elicit memory within the oral history interview, these post-interview conversations suggest that the interview itself can act as an elicitation device, and the process of constructing a life narrative oral history does not necessarily end with the finished recording.

At the same time, oral history can also help us to uncover the emotionality of memories, both through the words being spoken and within the embodied performance of telling one's story. William Reddy's work on emotion is particularly instructive here. In contesting the work of pioneering US sociologist William James, that positions emotion as a mere biological reaction, Reddy argues that an emotion is a 'translation' of both biological responses and complex thoughts.¹³⁴ Moreover, Reddy also stresses the power of linguistic expressions of emotion. Coining the term 'emotive', he suggests that the voicing of an emotion is not simply a description of a feeling. Rather, it is an integral part of processing that feeling, and in expressing it in words, our feeling is either confirmed or transformed in turn. As such, the expression of emotion within oral history testimony can be seen as an important element of sense-making in relation to memory, and further emphasises the fluidity of memory as it is altered by different emotional states.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); William James, 'The Physical Bases of Emotion', *Psychol Rev* 101, no. 2 (April 1894): 205–10.

¹³⁵ Katie Holmes, 'Does It Matter If She Cried? Recording Emotion and the Australian Generations Oral History Project', *The Oral History Review* 44, no. 1 (1 April 2017): 56–76.

As Katie Holmes contends, however, emotions are rarely expressed in words alone.¹³⁶ Instead, we convey them to others in our body language, our facial expressions, our gestures, and our behaviours, and therefore, the embodied, intersubjective encounter of the oral history interview is about more than what an interviewee says. Silence, too, is often a constitutive part of the oral history process.¹³⁷ Yet as Raphael Samuel observes in the essay *Perils of the Transcript*, ‘the spoken word can very easily be mutilated when it is taken down in writing and transferred to the printed page’.¹³⁸ A transcript does not capture tone of voice, facial expressions, or body language. Often, silences are erased in transcribing, punctuation is added, repeated words are deleted, and stumbles in speech corrected; in doing so, the very orality of the source is flattened.¹³⁹

Some guidance for transcribing oral histories suggests further editing, ‘correcting’ colloquialisms, and words or phrases in local dialect to formal English.¹⁴⁰ In contrast, Alessandro Portelli opts to transcribe all colloquialisms and dialect, in order to preserve the orality of the source as far as possible. This approach, Portelli argues, helps to remind the reader that the words ‘originated in a dialogic oral performance, not a monologic

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Alexander Freund, ‘Towards an Ethics of Silence? Negotiating Off-the-Record Events and Identity in Oral History’, in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2016), 273–86; Robyn Fivush, ‘Speaking Silence: The Social Construction of Silence in Autobiographical and Cultural Narratives’, *Memory* 18, no. 2 (February 2010): 88–98.

¹³⁸ Raphael Samuel, ‘Perils of the Transcript’, in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 403–6.

¹³⁹ Anne Karpf, ‘The Human Voice and the Texture of Experience’, *Oral History* 42, no. 2 (2014): 50–55; Kate Moore, ‘Perversion of the Word: The Role of the Transcript in Oral History’, *Words and Silences: Journal of the International Oral History Association* 1 (1997); Willa K. Baum, *Transcribing and Editing Oral History* (Rowman Altamira, 1977).

¹⁴⁰ See, for instance: Minnesota Historical Society, ‘Editing an Oral History Transcript’, Unknown, https://www.mnhs.org/sites/default/files/library/research/oral-history/editing_oral_history_transcript.pdf.

text.’¹⁴¹ With this in mind, I transcribed all interviews in full, leaving in any colloquialisms or dialect as it was spoken. Punctuation has been added, however, representing as far as possible sentences as they were spoken. Nevertheless, some aspects of the orality will always be lost in the process.

To try to mitigate this further, I worked from the recordings themselves when analysing the testimony and writing about it. Doing this allowed me to better reflect on how words were spoken, at times picking up on overt emotion within them. As these things are difficult, often impossible, to convey in the transcription of words, I have in certain instances elaborated on the way things were spoken. This in itself is an act of mediation upon the original source, despite my best efforts to be as sensitive as possible to these ‘off-the-transcript’ displays of emotion when sharing interviewees testimony.¹⁴²

Oral History in Practice

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

The original methodological plan for this project was the identification of twelve initial interviewees, found using existing contacts and community groups, and then the utilisation of a snowballing technique. In part, this approach relied upon my ability to be present within the communities I was researching, with the aim of identifying participants by engaging with local

¹⁴¹ Alessandro Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁴² Lynn Abrams, ‘Revisiting Akenfield: Forty Years of an Iconic Text’, *Oral History* 37, no. 1 (2009): 33–42; Carl Wilmsen, ‘For the Record: Editing and the Production of Meaning in Oral History’, *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (2001): 65–85.

community groups, events, and services. The intention was to then conduct interviews in-person, in a setting of the participant's choosing. My first interview, six months into this project, was with an existing contact, Liam Adamson. This took place socially distanced at my home in March 2020, in the midst of the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic, occurring just before lockdown restrictions were imposed.

However, the subsequent lockdowns that followed in the proceeding eighteen months, forced a significant reconsideration of this method. As such, interviews with ten participants took place using either Zoom or Microsoft teams, four were socially distanced, and seven were face-to-face. Seven initial interviewees approached me in response to a call for participants posted on various community groups on social media platforms, with one interviewee, Ian Cummings, then introducing me to his daughter Chloe to interview remotely too.

Once lockdown restrictions were lifted, I was able to interview a number of existing contacts and then successfully gather more interviewees using a snowballing technique as initially intended. Even following the easing of restrictions regarding social interaction, however, I carried out two remote interviews; one with Hannah Ashton, who lives in Australia, and one with Oonagh Claber, because time restraints made it more convenient for her.

Below are short biographies of each interviewee whose testimony is quoted in this thesis. Of course, these biographies are by no means comprehensive, but they aim to provide key biographical details and information that is relevant to the testimony shared throughout, as well as brief details about how I encountered each interviewee and the interview format. They are listed in the order they were conducted.

Liam Adamson was born in 1995 and raised in Meadowfield. He currently lives in Gateshead. His maternal grandfather worked at Bearpark Colliery, and his grandmother still lives in the Aged Miners Bungalows there now.

His mother and father moved to Meadowfield before he was born. Our interview took place socially distanced at my home in March 2020. I already knew Liam before the interview, as he is a friend of my partner.

Marion Wilson was raised in Bearpark in the 1950s, and lives there now. She is a Labour Party county councillor within Durham County Council, and a parish councillor for Bearpark Parish Council. Our interview took place remotely on Zoom in August 2020, after Marion responded to a call for participants I posted on a Facebook community group for Bearpark. Our interview lasted around an hour. Marion is well-known in Bearpark due to her political appointments and was kind enough to share my call for participants widely.

Robert ‘Ian’ Cummings is Marion’s cousin, raised in Ushaw Moor in the 1950s, but frequently visiting his grandparents in Bearpark. All his male relatives worked at Bearpark Colliery. He lives in Bearpark now. He worked as a product designer, then production and design manager for various companies, but now works at Beamish Museum. Our interviews took place on Microsoft Teams in August 2020, after Ian responded to my call for participants. Our first interview lasted just over an hour, with a follow-up interview of a similar length occurring a few weeks later.

Chloe Cummings is Ian’s daughter, who he suggested I approach to interview. Born in 1998, she has spent most of her life in Bearpark. Chloe studied Architecture and Urban Planning and was about to begin a master’s degree in building Conservation at the time of our interview. It took place on Microsoft Teams, in August 2020.

Dave Shotten was born in 1947 and raised in Langley Park. He currently runs a historic tour company called Durham Ghost Walks, but was previously a teacher, and before that, a research chemist. During his teaching career, he was a trade union representative, and became active within the Labour Party. Our interview took place on Zoom, in August

2020, after Dave responded to a call for participants I posted on a Facebook heritage group.

Maureen Smith was born in Meadowfield, and spent her childhood and adult life between there, Langley Moor and Brandon. She currently lives in Langley Moor, where she previously served as a Parish Councillor. She also previously served as a County Councillor for the Liberal Democrats. Raised during the Second World War, Maureen's mother worked as an Aycliffe Angel, a worker in a Newton Aycliffe factory manufacturing bombs. Maureen herself worked as a bus conductress, whilst her husband worked at Brandon Pit House colliery until its closure. Our interview took place on Zoom, in August 2020, after Maureen's daughter saw my call for participants on a Facebook group called 'Memories of Brandon, Co. Durham' and put me in touch.

Jacqueline Evans was born in 1969 and raised in Langley Park. She attended university in Preston, studying Applied Social Science, and has stayed in Lancashire since. Her parents still live in Langley Park. Jacqueline responded to my call for participants on a Langley Park community Facebook group, and our interview took place on Zoom in August 2020.

Ben Mummery was born in 1985 and raised in Seaham. He now lives in Langley Park and works as a project manager in the IT industry. Ben responded to a call for participants I posted on a Langley Park community Facebook group, and our interview on Zoom, in September 2020, lasted just over an hour.

Eric Wood was born in 1948. He grew up in Langley Moor and Brandon. His father worked at Bowburn Colliery, before accepting a transfer to the Nottinghamshire coalfield when Eric was 14, and then finally to Silverdale colliery in Staffordshire. Eric started his career as a teacher in Manchester. After working in the education department of Stockport Council, he eventually became County Education Officer for Warwickshire. His final job, from which he retired, was as the deputy Police and Crime

Commissioner for an independent commission. He still lives in Warwickshire, visiting his former home city of Durham whenever he can. He is a member of the Facebook group ‘Memories of Brandon, Co. Durham’ and responded to a call for participants I posted there. Our interview took place on Zoom, lasting just over an hour, in December 2020.

Jonathan Elmer was born in 1971 in London but grew up in Lincolnshire. He studied Environmental Biology at Aberystwyth and moved to County Durham after accepting a role at Durham County Council. He is now a Green Party county councillor for the Brandon division, the first of his party to be elected to this council, and lives in Langley Moor. Our interview took place on Zoom, in June 2021, lasting just over an hour. Having seen news of his recent election, which was a particularly significant change for the division, I reached out to him via e-mail to ask if he would be interested in being interviewed.

Anne Carter was born in 1956 and raised in Bearpark. Her father worked as a surveyor for Durham County Council, and her mother was the doctor’s receptionist in Bearpark. Anne herself studied theology at Durham University, going on to be a Religious Education teacher. Anne’s maternal grandfather is Billy Kingston, a checkweighman at Bearpark colliery and lodge secretary. Her paternal grandfather is Bob Shotton, who was also a checkweighman and the lodge delegate. Shotton was also president of the Bearpark co-operative society and secretary of the Durham Parliamentary Division Labour Party. Both men were parish councillors and county aldermen. Our interview took place in-person, in a local café, in July 2021.

Alison Hiles was born in Hammersmith and raised in North Yorkshire. She moved to Esh, Durham, when married, and has remained there ever since. She is a former Esh Parish Councillor, and District Councillor for what was formerly the Esh Ward. Our interview lasted over two hours and was carried out socially distanced in Alison’s garden in July 2021.

Oonagh Claber was born in 1962 and raised in Bearpark from around the age of three. She was the daughter of the village doctor. She left the village in 1980 to attend university, going on to live in Manchester and London. She returned to County Durham in 1989, and now lives in Langley Park, working as a Lead Genetic Counsellor in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Our interview took place over Zoom in August 2021 and was around an hour long.

Hannah Ashton was born in 1960 and raised in Bearpark. She now lives in Australia. The name used here is a pseudonym. Our interview took place over Zoom, in October 2021.

Redvers Crooks was born in 1962, raised in Bearpark, and lives there now. His father worked at Bearpark Colliery, until a serious accident at work in 1963. Redvers previously served as a County Councillor for the Liberal Democrats, and later the Labour Party. Redvers is an old friend of my father's, and our interview took place at his home in October 2021.

Gary Crooks is Redvers's nephew, introduced to me by Redvers. He was born in 1973 and raised in Bearpark. He left school with no qualifications, and during his twenties, was a drug dealer. He has served a number of prison sentences for drug dealing and armed robbery. He is currently the CEO of the community interest company, Positive Directions North East, and was a key figure in the establishment of Bearpark Community Boxing Club. Our interview took place in a meeting room at Positive Directions NE, in October 2021, lasting just over an hour.

Norman Anderson was also introduced to me by Redvers. He was born in 1964, raised in Bearpark and lives there now. He runs a local roofing business with his son. He is currently chairman of Bearpark Working Men's Club and sits on Bearpark Parish Council. Our interview took place at the Working Men's Club, lasting just under an hour and a half, in October 2021.

Stefan Gemski was born in 1954 and was raised in Bearpark, one of nine children. His father was in the Polish army and met his mother in England during the Second World War. After my interview with Norman Anderson, Norman was showing me a number of photographs of old sports teams that adorned the walls of his office in the working men's club; Stefan's brother was pictured, and I questioned Norman on who it was, noting the surname to be quite unusual for Bearpark. I found Stefan through his involvement with the Waterhouses Community Association and approached him to see if he was interested in being interviewed. The interview took place at his home in Waterhouses in November 2021.

Barrie Carse was introduced to me by a family friend. He was born in 1935 and raised in Ushaw Moor. He left school at sixteen and took up employment at Bearpark Colliery. Following an injury at work, he was transferred to the National Coal Board Planning Department, and later went on to be a cover manager, covering manager's holidays across the county. He retired in 1997 and remained living in Ushaw Moor. Our interview lasted just under two hours and was recorded at Barrie's home in January 2022. Barrie passed away in June 2023.

Robert 'Robin' Chapman was born in 1939 in Bearpark. His father was also born in Bearpark and met Robin's mother whilst working as a tree planter in Dalby forest during the 1926 miners' lockout. His father passed away when Robin was fourteen, at which point Robin left school and took up employment at Bearpark Coke works as an apprentice electrician. He was then employed by Durham County Waterboard, before going on to operate his own business. Robin was interviewed in his home, with his wife Margaret present with us in February 2022. Our interview lasted for 3 hours and 40 minutes.

Harry Nixon was born in Bearpark, grew up there during the 1940s and lives there now. He was the fourth generation of men in his family to go underground at Bearpark colliery, starting when he was sixteen. He became

the NUM lodge chairman for Bearpark for a brief period before it closed. He accepted a transfer to Wearmouth Colliery, but this was halted by his participation in the miners' strike of 1984-85. He was highly active during the strike, travelling across the country as part of flying pickets. Our interview took place in Harry's home and lasted around an hour. He was introduced to me by Redvers, who was there during parts of the interview. Our interview took place in July 2023.

REMOTE AND IN-PERSON ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Indeed, although initially hesitant about interviewing remotely, reflection during and after the process has allowed me to explore the potential insights it holds for oral history methodology, as well as better understand some of its inherent challenges. At the same time, both the advantages and challenges of this alternative method of interviewing have also shaped the research process and what is written in this thesis to an extent worth exploring here.

A recurring discussion in the following chapters centres around migration away from deindustrialised areas. Population movement following industrial closure is a well-explored topic within the field of deindustrialisation studies.¹⁴³ Yet whether due to deliberate limitations in participant recruitment to the specific geographical area under investigation, or due to financial barriers and time restraints within research projects, often interviewees are those who have remained relatively local. Indeed, the original methodological plan for this research was geographically specific and focused upon interviewing people living within or near to the communities themselves.

¹⁴³ High, “The Wounds of Class”.

Yet interviewing remotely opened up the possibility of interviewing people anywhere, significantly widening the scope of conversation about experiences of industrial closure. Interviewees Eric and Jacqueline both lived a substantial 2-to-3-hour car journey away from me in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, whilst Hannah was interviewed from her home in Perth, Australia. As such, these interviews introduced alternative perspectives on emotional attachments to place and functions of memory, as well as perceptions of politics and social change within County Durham from those at a geographical distance.

Beyond this, the conversations regarding remote interviewing during the pandemic have raised important questions about the accessibility of in-person interviewing practices from a disability justice perspective.¹⁴⁴ For all oral history as a method has been championed a way to give voice to those formerly ‘hidden from history’, less consideration has been given as to how standard interviewing practices may actually enforce marginalisation.¹⁴⁵ Instead, assessments of the method are rather rose-tinted. Sharpless, for instance, states that, ‘Oral History, easily accessible and useful for talking with almost any type of person, became a primary tool for documenting the lives of ordinary people.’¹⁴⁶

Likewise, for a field so conscious of chronic ill-health and disability in relation to industrial work as that of deindustrialisation studies, it is quite remarkable that there is a silence surrounding how these intersect with the qualitative research process. As Sarah Dziedzic rightly questions, ‘who have our practices excluded, who have our practices put at risk, and who have our

¹⁴⁴ Sarah Dziedzic, ‘Immunodeficiency and Oral History’, *Medium*, 7 April 2020, <https://medium.com/@sarahdziedzic/immunodeficiency-and-oral-history-85695925dd43>.

¹⁴⁵ Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women’s Oppression and the Fight against It*, 3rd. ed.. (London: Pluto Press, 1977); Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

¹⁴⁶ Sharpless, ‘The History of Oral History’, 7.

practices protected?'.¹⁴⁷ The same questions should be asked of remote practices too, of course. With the shift to online learning and working for many during the pandemic, the digital divide received significant attention during this period, but more specifically, this attention highlighted clear generational differences in internet access and technological capabilities, with older people often excluded from online interactions.¹⁴⁸

This is not to generalise; three of the people I interviewed remotely were over the age of seventy. Rather, it is to encourage a consideration of shared authority over project design, as well as the interview itself, in order that our practices are as accessible as possible to all potential interviewees. Indeed, my research relied on interviewing people of different ages, in order to fully capture the cross-generational responses to deindustrialisation apparent within County Durham. Yet despite this focus, before the pandemic I had not once considered how age may interact with the research process, both technologically and methodologically.

In some respects, too, interviewing remotely has also allowed for a greater attention to the interview process as an intersubjective, embodied encounter between two people, by demanding my consideration of how to reproduce this remotely. In turn, this increased awareness through remote practices has encouraged reflexivity within my in-person practices, too. This has been particularly important when considering emotions as they appear within interviewee testimony, and how they have then been interpreted within this thesis.

¹⁴⁷ Dziedzic, 'Immunodeficiency and Oral History'.

¹⁴⁸ Geoff Watts, 'COVID-19 and the Digital Divide in the UK', *The Lancet Digital Health* 2, no. 8 (2020): 395-e396; Viknesh Sounderajah et al., 'Bridging the Digital Divide: A National Survey Assessing Public Readiness for Digital Health Strategies Against COVID-19 within the United Kingdom', 2020; Centre for Ageing Better, 'How Has Covid-19 Changed the Landscape of Digital Inclusion?', 11 August 2020.

Most notably, the absence of physical presence and non-verbal cues can be a significant obstacle when discussing emotional topics remotely. As already discussed, emotional subjects often require a nuanced understanding of the interviewee's feelings; body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice play a vital role in conveying and comprehending emotions.¹⁴⁹ However, in some of my interviews conducted remotely, these valuable non-verbal cues were either limited or entirely absent from the small virtual rectangle of the video call, making it difficult to fully grasp the depth of emotions being shared. In these situations, I had to rely heavily on verbal communication and the interviewee's ability to articulate their emotions explicitly. This can place an added burden on the interviewee, who may struggle to convey their feelings adequately without the full range of non-verbal cues they would have in an in-person setting.

This also further complicates interpretation of testimony, as emotional subtleties may go unnoticed or be misinterpreted over a video call. However, in an attempt to mitigate this, I turned to existing reflexive scholarship, such as Anderson and Jack's *Learning to Listen*, and attempted to deploy their suggestions for active listening in practice.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, I also simply asked direct questions, like 'Can you remember how you felt?', in order to explicitly probe emotional memories when it felt appropriate and sensitive to do so. I continued to do this during in-person interviews afterwards, despite the additional cues of embodied emotion present there.

¹⁴⁹ Holmes, 'Does It Matter If She Cried?'

¹⁵⁰ Anderson and Jack, 'Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses'; Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, 'Slowing Down to Listen in the Digital Age: How New Technology Is Changing Oral History Practice', *The Oral History Review* 44, no. 1 (1 April 2017): 94–112; Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson, 'Ways of Listening', in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 128–39; Martha Norkunas, 'The Vulnerable Listener', in *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice*, ed. Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 81–96.

Yet many memories are intrinsically linked to specific material items, such as photographs, and this thesis in particular is interested in how people choose to remember the past and how they curate their own personal heritage.¹⁵¹ Remote interviewing introduced a set of notable challenges in this respect due to limited access to material objects or difficulty sharing them through a digital medium. Some items may be difficult to show to the camera, and trying to do so might actually serve as quite an interruption to the natural flow of testimony. Ian Cummings, for example, told me he had a large collection of photographs and videos that he would be happy for me to look through, but there was no practical way to show me them unless I viewed them in person.

It did, however, mean that during in-person interviews I was very aware of our material surroundings, because of their absence in previous remote interviews. With these tangible objects physically present, interviewees employed them as prompts to stimulate memory recall or discussions of their significance. For instance, during my interview with Harry Nixon, he left the room during a discussion of the Durham Miners' Gala, and came back with a number of ties, all related in some way to coalmining or his union activity, telling me he was not sure which one he would wear this year. In doing so, he proceeded to share with me his memories of obtaining the ties, and things that had happened when wearing each.

While interactions with material objects during interviews might initially seem like digressions, they actually provide vital prompts for memory recall and the communication of meaning. These tangible

¹⁵¹ Janis Wilton, 'Telling Objects: Material Culture and Memory in Oral History Interviews', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal, The*, no. 30 (2008): 41–49; Anat Hecht, 'Home Sweet Home: Tangible Memories of an Uprooted Childhood', in *Home Possessions: Material Culture behind Closed Doors*, ed. Daniel Miller (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 123–49.

connections to the past—whether photographs, artefacts, or personal belongings—enhance the richness of the oral testimonies by grounding abstract memories in the physical and sensory world. This interplay between materiality and memory is a key strength of oral history, offering a more textured and multidimensional understanding of the past

There are ways to mitigate the challenges of addressing sensory and material cues remotely, such as asking participants to scan and share photographs, or simply to show or describe significant objects, that I did not employ in this process that could have potentially enriched the testimony shared. However, I was acutely aware that interviewees were providing me with a great deal of their own time, and sharing a life narrative can be a difficult task in and of itself; adding extra layers of expectations to this should be approached with careful consideration.

However, it was only when I did move to in-person interviews that I realised there were other opportunities I had missed in my remote practices that were perhaps less burdensome for interviewees. In particular, I had relied on a rather throwaway off-the-record question in finding other participants, asking interviewees if they knew of anyone else who may be interested in being interviewed. Yet in person, with photographs in front of me, I was able to ask about specific people in the pictures, prompting interviewees' memories about individuals who they otherwise would not have thought to introduce.

For instance, it was only due to the fact that I conducted one interview, with Norman Anderson, in-person at Bearpark Working Men's Club, that I came across a later interviewee, Stefan Gemski. As Norman was showing me photographs of former Bearpark sports teams, that were hung on the walls of the club, I enquired about the Gemski surname and was told of their Polish origins. Locating Stefan took some investigation on my part, and his name did not come up as part of the interview but rather due to my deliberate questioning. Norman, for his part, could only vaguely remember

the Gemski family, but provided me with a couple of pieces of information to follow up on. Whilst I remain hesitant about asking too much of interviewees in remote interviews, there is a balance to be struck, and had I asked to see even one or two photographs or material objects remotely, I may have found similar unexpected ways to prompt memory or locate other interviewees, as occurred here.

In short, the evolution of this research project has underscored the flexibility, reflexivity, and adaptability essential to the practice of oral history, enriching my comprehension of how we approach memory, emotion, and materiality within interview practice. Although driven by the unexpected challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the need to alter the format of interviewing has led to significant, unexpected insights that are useful to my practice as an oral historian. While the initial methodology anticipated in-person interviews within specific communities, the pandemic necessitated a shift to remote interviewing, uncovering unforeseen benefits such as the inclusion of distant voices and raising critical issues of accessibility. This transition also deepened my understanding of the interview process as an embodied, intersubjective encounter, particularly when discussing emotional subjects or material items.

Researcher Positionality

My interest in the topic of deindustrialisation in County Durham stems from a personal connection to the area, something which a number of other scholars in the field of deindustrialisation studies note as their driving motivation for research.¹⁵² My father worked as an electrician at the colliery

¹⁵² For instance, see the contributor discussions in the introduction to Steven C. High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard, eds., *The Deindustrialised World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).

in Bearpark, although he had left the industry by the time it closed and so as a family we were not personally impacted by its closure. His parents, my Grandparents, lived in Langley Moor and Brandon until their deaths. I grew up in the area during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Like for many people of my generation, industry was there in residues even when it was no longer actually there, often in ways I only realised to be significant afterwards, like school trips to Beamish Museum, and the old pit lamp on my Dad's hearth.

I mention all of this because it has significant implications for the research process. The oral history interview is an intersubjective encounter between interviewer and interviewee, and positionality can influence what is shared.¹⁵³ As Naples argues, however, there is no binary 'insider/outsider' status; instead, these positions are 'ever shifting and permeable social locations that are differentially experienced and expressed'.¹⁵⁴ Here, I want to discuss my position as a researcher in both locations, to explore how it influenced the oral history process, and thus what is contained in this thesis.

One of the most obvious benefits of existing links to the community being researched is easier participant recruitment and existing rapport. Building rapport and trust is essential for the oral history interview and requires us to understand the process beyond an effort to 'extract' data from people.¹⁵⁵ Whilst the interview is about the interviewee's experiences, its success is ultimately built upon the relationship between interviewee and

¹⁵³ Valerie Yow, "'Do I Like Them Too Much?': Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa", *The Oral History Review* 24, no. 1 (1997): 55–79; Mahua Sarkar, 'Between Craft and Method: Meaning and Inter-Subjectivity in Oral History Analysis', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 25, no. 4 (2012): 578–600; Amy Tooth Murphy, 'Listening in, Listening Out', *Oral History* 48, no. 1 (2020): 35–44.

¹⁵⁴ Nancy Naples, 'The Outsider Phenomenon', in *In the Field: Readings on the Field Research Experience*, ed. Carolyn D Smith and William Kornblum, 2nd ed. (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 139–49.

¹⁵⁵ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

interviewer. Thus, elements of self-disclosure and informality on the part of the interviewer before the interview are often important in allaying nerves and lessening power inequalities.¹⁵⁶

Although having to interview remotely disrupted this somewhat, as people I already knew wanted to wait and be interviewed in person, it was an advantage to have even a small number of pre-existing contacts. There was already a degree of trust there, and as such, people were incredibly generous with their time, as well as freely sharing their personal photographs and belongings in relation to their testimony. At the same time, this familiarity can cause us to be blind to the ordinary, or to be distracted from the research process by unintended self-reflection.¹⁵⁷ As such, where items or testimony either resonated with my own emotional experiences, or simply confirmed something I accepted as mundane reality, I had to take care to return to these critically and analyse objectively.

Moreover, knowing interviewees has further complications. Despite going through the same participant information, consent, and copyright forms with all interviewees, there is likely an awareness that I, as an interviewer, could share all the personal testimony recorded with me with mutual connections even if they asked for redactions or anonymity. Of course, this would have been highly unethical and a significant breach of trust, but it was only upon reflection did I consider that interviewees may have self-censored their narratives because of who was interviewing them. Alternatively, the degree of informality introduced by pre-existing

¹⁵⁶ Susan Armitage and Sherna Berger Gluck, 'Reflections on Women's Oral History: An Exchange', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 19, no. 3 (1998): 1–11.

¹⁵⁷ Christina Chavez, 'Conceptualizing from the Inside: Advantages, Complications, and Demands on Insider Positionality', *Qualitative Report* 13, no. 3 (2008): 474–94; Valli Kalei Kanuha, "'Being' Native versus 'Going Native': Conducting Social Work Research as an Insider", *Social Work* 45, no. 5 (2000): 439–47; Murphy, 'Listening in, Listening Out'.

relationships may lead interviewees to overshare information they do not necessarily want on the historical record. During one interview, I had to remind the interviewee we were recording because I suspected it was highly confidential, and as expected, they hurriedly asked me to switch the recorder off.

The other issue I encountered was how easily interviews with people I already knew seemed to slip into less formal conversation. For instance, in my interview with Redvers Crooks, who had known my Dad since childhood, when discussing leisure time in the village, he remarks, “I hope your Dad comes out though for the Cheltenham Festival. I bet Jimmy is there.”¹⁵⁸ On some occasions, like this, it was easy to gently nudge the direction of the interview back on course, but other times it felt more difficult and the subject matter more uncomfortable.

Talking about his political opinions, Redvers also asked me ‘What does your Dad think?’. In the recording, my own hesitation and discomfort makes for equally uncomfortable listening, as I weigh up my position as a researcher but also, as the daughter of Redvers’ friend. I eventually concede-truthfully- that I do not really know, and Redvers adds ‘He’s a socialist I think...cause when I mentioned, he agreed’. After a few minutes, the interview is back ‘on track’, but not before my positionality had contributed to a sense of discomposure and unease in the interview.

Indeed, although this was not the case here, research that blurs the line between the professional and personal risks complicating relationships, either with interviewees themselves, or with other people mentioned during the course of the interview. As DeLyser warns, ‘Those of us whose place of research may also be a personal space to refuge, would be well advised,

¹⁵⁸ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author (Bearpark, October 2021)

before undertaking insider research, to attempt to tease out and contemplate the potential repercussions that professionalizing the personal may have'.¹⁵⁹

Katherine Borland found, in conducting an oral history interview with her own grandmother, conflict in interpreting meaning within what is shared can give rise to significant tension.¹⁶⁰ When interviewing a family member, or someone you already know well, there is a significant risk that this tension spills over into the relationship beyond the research process. Borland shares that through dialogue and collaboration with her grandmother, they were eventually able to find meaning within the testimony that realigned their interpretations. Depending on the severity of the tension and interpretive conflict, however, reconciliation may not be as easy to achieve.

Interpretation of testimony may be further complicated by 'insider' status, because as Christina Chavez suggests, our position may provide us with a 'rose-coloured observational lens'.¹⁶¹ This thesis examines how individuals make sense of the residues of industry, and how, through an interplay of memory, emotion, and nostalgia, construct ideas of mining communities that suit the needs of the present. I too, through my own experiences, come to this research project with my own imaginations of community and personal interpretations of the past that I have had to, as far as one can, step beyond. Whilst insider status may help us to understand better the perspectives of interviewees, great care must be taken in interpretation, to ensure we are truly listening to what is being shared beyond our own experiences.

¹⁵⁹ Dydia DeLyser, "'Do You Really Live Here?'" Thoughts on Insider Research', *Geographical Review* 91, no. 1/2 (2001): 441–53.

¹⁶⁰ Katherine Borland, "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research', in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 320–33.

¹⁶¹ Chavez, 'Conceptualizing from the Inside'.

Moreover, whilst some aspects of my identity as a researcher placed me as an ‘insider’ within some interviews, other elements left me firmly as an ‘outsider’. Being in my mid-twenties, I was younger than all but one of my participants. In some instances, this was less notable, with only a few years between us, but in others, a sixty-year age gap situated us firmly in different generations. People asked my age frequently, at times out of curiosity, and at others, to gauge my own awareness of significant moments, like the 1984-85 miners’ strike.

For instance, talking about his own childhood, Redvers asks, “‘Because my daughter, she’s 30, how old are you? [25] 25. You would not have been able to cope.’¹⁶² Age difference is not necessarily a barrier in itself- this research is centred around cross-generational interactions- and it can be a rewarding opportunity for cross-generational dialogue. In some cases, however, my interviewees decided that I might be too young to fully comprehend the experiences they were sharing. I used these moments as opportunities to probe further, asking them to help me understand things better. As Portelli remarks, ‘the most important things I had to offer were my ignorance and my desire to learn.... It was what I didn’t know that encouraged people to talk to me, knowing that they were helping instead of being “helped.”’¹⁶³

Likewise, a significant portion of many interviews with male participants, as was to be expected, centred around industrial work. As this thesis will explore, the work was inherently masculine, and my position as a young female researcher naturally places me very separate to this, regardless of how much contextual reading I had done to understand the more technical side of coal mining. In my interview with Barrie Carse, for example, he was highly aware of this, repeatedly stating that he knew we

¹⁶² Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

¹⁶³ Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 7.

would run into ‘snags’ because of how much there was to explain. He often asked me to turn off the recorder so he could make sure I was following. In other interviews, it took a lot of persuading on my part that I would not be offended by swearing or crude stories.

Often, too, power in the interview is discussed in relation to the power the researcher has. These concerns are valid, and well explored, and I was conscious that as a university educated, graduate student, this social position may influence the dynamic of the interview.¹⁶⁴ However, more frequently, these implicit nods to my age and gender made me feel rather disempowered- I often wondered whether I was the ‘right’ person to be doing these interviews and interpreting people’s experiences. Despite having been thorough in explaining all participant information, the nature of the project, and filling out all the proper consent and copyright forms, in a pause during one interview so the interviewee could take a phone call, I was referred to as a ‘young girl here to learn some things for a college project’. I made sure to return to another full explanation of my purpose and what had been signed before I left.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework of this thesis, emphasising the critical role of oral history in engaging with contemporary issues of identity, place-attachment, and community r. Where traditional archival sources often overlook the lived experiences and emotional memories of ordinary people, oral history offers an indispensable tool for

¹⁶⁴ Lenore Layman, ‘Reticence in Oral History Interviews’, *The Oral History Review* 36, no. 2 (2009): 207–30.

understanding how these communities navigate the legacies of industrial decline and continue to shape their identities in the present. In line with the work of oral historians like Alessandro Portelli, Penny Summerfield, and Alistair Thomson, this thesis firmly positions oral history as the most appropriate methodology for capturing the complex, subjective, and evolving ways that individuals in former mining communities engage with their past. Oral history not only documents these personal narratives but also plays a crucial role in shaping and sustaining collective memory, particularly in the context of deindustrialisation where traditional sources fall short

Related to this, therefore, the way in which the interview is conducted, and who conducts it, is important. The creation of life narratives in oral history is a profoundly inter-subjective process, where both interviewer and interviewee engage in a collaborative dialogue from the initial conversation to the final interpretation of the testimony. This democratic approach ensures that the histories of former mining communities are not just recorded, but actively shaped by those who lived them, making oral history an essential tool for capturing the full breadth of these communities' experiences. The chapter has also reflected upon some of the dynamics that emerged between myself and interviewees during this research. In reflecting upon this, it has outlined the way in which the setting and form of the interview, as well as my own changing positionality, has altered my practice as an oral historian and influenced the testimony included within this thesis.

This chapter has outlined the methodological foundation of this thesis, offering both the necessary background on each interviewee and a reflection on the dynamics that shaped the collection of their testimonies. By choosing oral history as the central methodology, this research not only captures the rich, subjective experiences of those living in County Durham's former mining villages but also ensures that their voices contribute to a more inclusive and representative historical narrative. The challenges faced,

particularly during remote interviews, further underscore the flexibility and resilience of oral history as a method uniquely suited to exploring the ongoing impact of deindustrialisation.

CHAPTER 2 THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE IN THE COALFIELD OF WEST DURHAM

*“Notice to Miners- Messrs Strake and Love, owners of Brancepeth, Oakenshaw, Willington, and Brandon Collieries in the County of Durham, have resolved not to employ men connected with the Miners’ Union. They offer work and good wages to pitmen who are at liberty to give their labour unrestricted...House, Coals and Garden for 6d per fortnight. Families will be removed free of cost.”*¹⁶⁵

*“It was hard work for us, but I says it was nowhere near—nothing compared to what me Dad and me Grandad did. There was no health and safety...because they were actually treat like slaves before nationalisation”*¹⁶⁶

This chapter explores the Durham coalfield from a spatial perspective, providing the necessary historical and social context for understanding the experiences and memories of the communities examined in subsequent chapters. By outlining how the large-scale processes of industrial capitalism shaped the small-scale experiences of industrial communities, this chapter sets the stage for the detailed oral history analysis that follows. Establishing this context is crucial for understanding how memory, place, and generation interact within these communities, particularly as they navigate the profound changes brought about by deindustrialisation. This foundational analysis supports the thesis's broader exploration of how the spatiality of deindustrialisation has been experienced and remembered across generations.

¹⁶⁵ Laurie Moran, *The History of Brandon Colliery, 1856-1960* (Houghton-Le-Spring: The Gilpin Press, 1988), 30.

¹⁶⁶ Harry Nixon, Interview with the Author (Bearpark: July 2023).

In doing so, it understands space as socially produced and in a constant state of transformation, as Lefebvre contends.¹⁶⁷ As such, it looks to examine the early contestations and concessions over space that occurred in the Durham coalfield, as lived space was experienced through continuous negotiations between the paternalist representations of space and the representative space created by industrial workers' and their families.

One of the most prominent assessments of this early history of the Durham mining communities is Huw Beynon and Terry Austrin's *Masters and Servants*. The work provides a comprehensive evaluation of the unique 'Durham system' of paternalist control that emerged in the blending of former feudal practices with new ideas of industrial colonisation, and so too does it provide a history of the political and social movements that emerged from below in response to this control. Yet Beynon and Austrin treat space as a passive receptacle of control and contestation, at times implicitly hinting at its uses for asserting these social relations without fully exploring how intrinsically linked the spatial and the social are.

First, therefore, this chapter turns to examine the production of paternalist space. Indeed, many of the colliery villages in existence today have their basis in the creation of basic housing stock centred around a coal mine by newly formed coal companies. The chapter therefore draws upon historiography specifically concerned with the development of villages to the west of Durham city, in order to outline the dynamics of power that developed in these villages in their earliest forms. Again, it adopts a spatial approach to consider how the system of Company paternalism produced

¹⁶⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); see also, in relation to the 'spatial turn', Doreen Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 39 (1995): 182–92; Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2005); David Harvey, 'Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination¹', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 3 (1990): 418–34; Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27.

space that reinforced existing class relations for the needs of industrial capitalism.

Next, this chapter explores the spatiality of the coal mine as a workplace, because whilst so central to the wider village itself, a distinct set of social relations emerged in response to the unusual space of an underground workplace. In particular, it is of interest to understand how the forces of industrial capitalism and the natural world come together within the coal mine to exploit and endanger the worker. At the same time, here we examine how these conditions were crucial to developing a sense of solidarity amongst miners and how spaces of autonomy and independence did emerge within the coal mine as a workplace, as well as how this relationship with the natural world was paralleled in leisure time through use of outdoor spaces in colliery villages.

Finally, this chapter discusses how these conditions, and the social relations forged within them, came to be channelled into labour organisation, namely the Durham Miners' Association, and further into political representation through the Liberal and Labour parties. A considerable scholarship evaluates the organisation and political relationships of the Durham miners, and as such, this chapter does not offer a comprehensive discussion of their workings and actions.¹⁶⁸ Rather, it draws on existing historiography to interrogate how these movements altered the social relations of the coalfield and asks whether these alterations changed the paternalist power dynamics of space. It examines local politics, which are often neglected, to question how deference and dependency evolved over time.

¹⁶⁸ See, for example Garside, *The Durham Miners, 1919-1960*; R. Challinor and B. Ripley, *The Miners' Association: A Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968); Mates, *The Great Labour Unrest*; Keith Wilson, 'Political Radicalism in the North East of England 1830-1860 : Issues in Historical Sociology' (Ph.D., Durham University, 1987), <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1680/>; Moore, *Pitmen Preachers and Politics*.

Lastly, this chapter examines nationalisation, not to delve into the intricate details of policy and politics, but to consider the role of the National Coal Board (NCB) as the final structure of state paternalism that perpetuated the entwinement of village spaces with industry. This analysis lays the groundwork for the subsequent chapters, where oral history will be used to explore how these historical processes are remembered and interpreted by those who lived through them. By establishing this historical context, this chapter justifies the methodological choice to focus on oral history in the chapters that follow, highlighting how these personal narratives offer invaluable insights into the lived experience of deindustrialisation and its impact on community identity and memory

Overall, this chapter situates the developments of colliery villages through time, in order to examine the significance of deindustrialisation later in this thesis. As noted, spatial theory can usefully frame how social relations both alter, and are altered, by space. As Doreen Massey suggests, the identity of a place is fluid and relational, forged through negotiation and constation, it 'is always, and always has been in the process of formation: it is in a sense forever unachieved'.¹⁶⁹ This chapter is concerned with these formations and transformations of place, seeking to outline the constant contestations and negotiations with space that created the colliery villages as we experience them today, in their deindustrialised state. Most fundamentally, this exploration of space-through-time shows the intrinsic centrality of industry despite all other changes, setting the stage for a deeper examination of memory, generation, and space in relation to the deindustrialisation of these villages in the chapters that follow.

Producing A Paternalist Space

¹⁶⁹ Doreen Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 39 (1995): 186.

The history of coal mining in the United Kingdom long pre-dates the industrial revolution, with evidence of coal extraction from the Roman occupation and later medieval period widely apparent. In County Durham in particular, however, the pre-industrial market for coal is notable for both its size, and its capacity to shape the social relations of space in a way which prepared the area for the later growth of industrial capitalism.¹⁷⁰ With its designation as a palatinate in 1081, ‘Prince’ Bishops, associated ecclesiastical bodies, and a number of aristocratic families including the Nevilles and the Eures dominated land ownership within County Durham.¹⁷¹ Although still a largely agrarian society, the extraction of coal for domestic use in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries provided a significant source of income for both the ecclesiastic and lay landowners of the time.¹⁷² In turn, domestic demand for coal and other materials like steel bolstered the trade of cities such as Newcastle-upon-Tyne, with waterways that provided effective means for transportation.¹⁷³ The subsequent emergence of the steam train, and the construction of significant rail infrastructure in the region, further enlarged the capacity for coal exportation.

As Ray Hudson notes, ‘The transformation was a decisive and profound one, with an all-embracing impact: class relations, hegemonic ideas and political practices, and the patterns of economic activity were all

¹⁷⁰ J. B. Blake, ‘The Medieval Coal Trade of North East England: Some Fourteenth-Century Evidence’, *Northern History* 2, no. 1 (1967): 1–26; Margaret. Bonney, *Lordship and the Urban Community : Durham and Its Overlords, 1250-1540* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁷¹ Anne Orde, ‘Ecclesiastical Estate Management in County Durham during the Eighteenth Century’, *Northern History* 45, no. 1 (2008): 159–71; Sill, ‘Landownership and Industry’; Jonathan Paul Boniface, ‘The Durham Gentry: Social Stability and Change in the Palatinate of Durham, c.1286-1346’ (Doctoral, Durham University, 2006)..

¹⁷² A. T. Brown, ‘Estate Management and Institutional Constraints in Pre-Industrial England : The Ecclesiastical Estates of Durham, c.1400-1640.’, *Economic History Review*. 67, no. 3 (2014): 699–719; Christian D. Liddy, *The Bishopric of Durham in the Late Middle Ages: Lordship, Community, and the Cult of St. Cuthbert*, Regions and Regionalism in History (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008).

¹⁷³ Gerard Turnbull, ‘Canals, Coal and Regional Growth during the Industrial Revolution’, *The Economic History Review* 40, no. 4 (1987): 537–60.

radically altered'.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, the wealth generated by such trade would go on to establish new families within the region's landed gentry, of whom the Ridley family is perhaps the most noted. Older landed families, such as the Bowes, joined these newcomers in a preoccupation with coal, increasing their ownership of coal-bearing land, that was in turn typically leased to private coal companies.¹⁷⁵ These private coal companies, for their part, were instrumental in the creation of colliery villages, both in relation to the built environment, and how this built environment generated the social relations of these places.

Between 1800 and 1900, the coal industry of County Durham expanded rapidly. The coalfield to the west of Durham city was relatively late to be exploited, with many larger collieries only being sunk in the second half of the nineteenth century in what had previously been predominantly agricultural land with a number of relatively small-scale lead mining operations.¹⁷⁶ What occurred as a result, therefore, was the rapid creation of housing stock by colliery owners, and a subsequent increase in population through inwards migration, creating the foundations of the villages that now exist today.¹⁷⁷ Speaking of this population movement, and

¹⁷⁴ Raymond Hudson, *Wrecking a Region: State Policies, Party Politics, and Regional Change in North East England* (London: Pion Limited, 1989), 1.

¹⁷⁵ McCollum-Oldroyd, David Andrew (1998) Accounting and estate management in North-East England c.1700-1770 with particular reference to the Bowes estates, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/4644/>

¹⁷⁶ Arthur E. Smailes, 'Population Changes in the Colliery Districts of Northumberland and Durham', *The Geographical Journal* 91, no. 3 (1938): 220–29; Weardale and Teesdale, to the West of the County, had previously been the site of lead mining activity. This was enacted on land leased from landowners, including the Bishop of Durham, and overseen by private companies. For a detailed history of lead mining in the county, see; Les Turnbull, *The History of Lead Mining in the North East of England* (Newcastle upon Tyne: H. Hill, 1975).

¹⁷⁷; The population of Brandon and Byshottles parish, for instance, rose from 478 in 1831 to 1486 by 1861 following the sinking of Brandon colliery by Strakers' and Love Ltd. in 1856. Bearpark, with its colliery sunk in 1872 by the Bearpark Coal Company, appears to have experienced a similar growth in population, although figures are obscured by its inclusion in the broader Durham St. Oswald Parish for census data.

the subsequent rapid creation of housing, the former miner and author Sid Chaplin writes:

“The villages were built overnight—the Americans are much more realistic about mining than we are. They know it's a short-lived thing relatively speaking...so they talk about mining camps; we talk about villages, which is one of the oldest words in the language. It means a permanent settlement. But most of the Durham villages were camps. The first street was Sinkers Row, and an upper and a downer. At best a sort of but-and-ben [a two-roomed cottage with an outer room or kitchen (but) and an inner room (ben)] arrangement. That is a little scullery with a fairly large kitchen and if you wanted a bedroom for the kids, you put planks across the rafters.”¹⁷⁸

Reflecting on these early settlements, a 1950 report from Durham County Council notes that “They were built as quickly and cheaply as possible, and as close to the mine as possible. Little or no thought was given to the real needs of the inhabitants.”¹⁷⁹ Instead, what mattered was how effectively the settlement could serve the needs of the coal company. Moreover, in order to ensure a consistent degree of labour, employment in the collieries was typically tied to the provision of housing by the coal company. This system of tied housing was quite unique to the North East, appearing more as a continuation of the feudal agricultural systems that had preceded industry, and allowed for a very specific set of social relations to emerge between owner and worker.¹⁸⁰

“In Northumberland and Durham, we find every man his house, his firing coal, his garden, and everything of that sort. A little of the paternal system is useful because you can keep your men in times of difficulty.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Chaplin, Sid, ‘Durham Mining Villages’, in *Mining and Social Change: Durham County in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Martin Bulmer (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 63.

¹⁷⁹ Durham County Council, ‘County Development Plan 1951: Written Statement’ (Durham: Durham County Council, 1951), 18.

¹⁸⁰ Huw Beynon and Terry Austrin, *Masters and Servants: Class and Patronage in the Making of a Labour Organisation: The Durham Miners and the English Political Tradition* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1994).

¹⁸¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 22.

Accompanying this system of tied housing for miners and their families was the yearly bond, through which a miner contracted themselves to a colliery owner each year. Breaking of the bond frequently resulted in arrest, trial, and imprisonment, as well as being entered onto a county-wide black list.¹⁸² In part, these ‘surface’ practices were so essential, because of the levels of autonomy and solidarity that could emerge in the ‘underground’ work place itself. Indeed, the colliery village was imbued with the power of the colliery owners in order to ensure a compliant and dependent labour force, and for this reason is of equal historical importance as the coal mine itself.

These levels of control offered colliery owners strong leverage to quash industrial disputes. For instance, in 1863, miners at the Strakers and Love owned Brandon colliery began a strike for wage improvements. In a notice to striking miners, the company wrote:

"Take notice, that by your having absented yourself from our service, you have determined and broken your contract of hiring with us; and we hereby require you to deliver up to us the possession of the cottage house which you have occupied as our servant before the 27th day of October 1863; and in default of you doing so, you will be turned out of possession." ¹⁸³

Indeed, throughout the mid-nineteenth century, various attempts to organise and unionise miners had been made across County Durham, and strike action had certainly been attempted at several collieries.¹⁸⁴ Throughout the early to mid-nineteenth century, there is strong evidence of a burgeoning class consciousness and political participation amongst colliers, with a number of well-attended rallies that signified engagement with both a

¹⁸² Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*; William Henry Maehl, ‘Chartist Disturbances in Northeastern England, 1839’, *International Review of Social History* 8, no. 3 (1963): 389–414.

¹⁸³ Moran, *The History of Brandon Colliery, 1856-1960*, 1988.

¹⁸⁴ James Alan Jaffe, *The Struggle for Market Power: Industrial Relations in the British Coal Industry, 1800-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

growing union movement and Chartism.¹⁸⁵ In short, however, these attempts were unable to produce a trade union movement capable of uniting the efforts of the county's collieries, in large part because of the strong resistance from colliery owners who held the power to dismiss, evict, and blacklist striking workers.¹⁸⁶ Even without explicit strike action, the residence of colliery officials within the villages ensured a close watch was kept on village activities, in order to ensure compliance and discourage dissent.

Moreover, what we see here is the way in which power is wielded spatially by the coal companies, with labour control easily exercised beyond the workplace because of paternalistic constructions of space. The tying of colliery housing to employment is a very literal example of this control, but power was continually reproduced and reinforced in a multitude of ways within these spaces. In Esh Winning, a colliery village to the west of Durham, the manager J Crofton would 'ride around the colliery streets and severely reprimand anyone who did not maintain their garden or keep their house tidy. He lived in a colonnaded villa close to the colliery but looking away from it'.¹⁸⁷

This customary practice, of management being provided with large, well-attended homes that intentionally looked away from the industrial landscape, is perhaps the most overt reminder of the hierarchical social relations that shaped the entire village. In addition, Beynon and Austrin comment upon the use of company embossed bricks in the building of village structures.¹⁸⁸ In the same style, newly constructed terraces and commercial streets often bore the name of company officials. Bearpark's

¹⁸⁵ Wilson, 'Political Radicalism in the North East of England 1830-1860'.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Emery, *The Coalminers of Durham*, 33.

¹⁸⁸ Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*.

‘Fry Street’ for instance, pays homage to the influential partner in the Bearpark Coke and Coal Company, Theodore Fry, serving as a physical reminder of his power and influence.

Elsewhere in the Deerness valley, Pease and Partners appointed Methodist missionaries, whilst their contemporary Joseph Love gifted the Methodist New Connexion a chapel at Cornsay.¹⁸⁹ Methodism held a central position within the Durham coalfield, in particular. The promotion of religion also offered coal companies and their directors with an added level of social control. Methodism advocated for temperance, thrift, and piety, and as Moore contends, many colliery owners were eager to promote these values in the hope of producing a more industrious and placid workforce.¹⁹⁰

Likewise, coal companies sought to further influence employees within the spheres of recreation, leisure, and education, through either constructing facilities themselves, contributing financially to their construction, or at the very least, being part of their opening ceremonies.¹⁹¹ For instance, as well as contributing to the costs of three chapels in Bearpark, Bearpark Coke and Coal Ltd. also erected a literary institute in 1892, later adding a larger institute in 1921 and a recreation ground in 1928.¹⁹² As Rimlinger notes, the provision of social welfare and recreation facilities was ‘profitable from the point of view of productivity...to develop and maintain the capacity and the willingness to work’.¹⁹³ In particular, influence over reading room and

¹⁸⁹ Norman Emery, ‘Pease and Partners and the Deerness Valley: Aspects of the Social and Economic History of Waterhouses, Esh Winning and Ushaw Moor’ (Masters, Durham University, 1984), <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/7831/>.

¹⁹⁰ Moore, *Pitmen Preachers and Politics*.

¹⁹¹ Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*; Emery, ‘Pease and Partners and the Deerness Valley’.

¹⁹² Douglas Pocock, *A Mining World: The Story of Bearpark, County Durham* (Spennymoor: City of Durham Trust and Department of Geography, Durham University, 1985).

¹⁹³ Rimlinger, G.V., *Welfare Policy and Industrialization in Europe, America and Russia* (New York: John Wiley, 1971), 9.

school material, allowed for a strong element of social control that underpinned the actions of the colliery owners.¹⁹⁴

Yet the reliance upon coal companies to provide such village facilities, and the fundamental lack of regulation regarding the standards and types of facilities required, meant that provision could be piecemeal and depended primarily on the wishes of the company directors and stakeholders. Evidencing the potential for this system to generate inequities between coal mining settlements, the 1919 Sankey Coal Commission identified severe shortfalls in the quality of housing, healthcare, education, and recreation within coal mining settlements in the United Kingdom.¹⁹⁵ The major suggestion made by this report, however, was that the wartime nationalisation of the coal mines should be upheld in the post-war period, in order to uphold improved wages and working conditions, and ultimately prevent strike action on the part of the triple alliance. Although the recommendation of nationalisation was not heeded at this time, the 1920 Mining Industry Act did seek to address to some extent the social issues highlighted in the Sankey report through the introduction of the Miners' Welfare Fund, which imposed a levy upon coal exports to generate a fund to be drawn upon by local committees for the construction of welfare facilities.

Overall, what is evident here is that the development of coal mining in the Durham area produced a set of social relations that extended far beyond the workplace, deeply embedding themselves in the physical and social fabric of the community. These spatial relations, forged in the

¹⁹⁴ Roy Hay, 'Employers and Social Policy in Britain: The Evolution of Welfare Legislation, 1905-14', *Social History* 2, no. 4 (1977): 435-55; Brendan Duffy, 'The Progress of Education in the Northern Coalfield Before 1870', *Northern History* 55, no. 2 (3 July 2018): 178-205; Martin, 'Local Spaces of Labour Control or Platforms for Agency? The North East Durham Coalfield, 1820-1890'.

¹⁹⁵ Royal Commission on the Coal Industry, 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry' (London: H.M. Stationery office, 1925); Royal Commission on the Coal Industry and John Sankey Sankey, 'Reports and Minutes of Evidence of the Second Stage of the Enquiry' (London: H.M. Stationery office, 1919).

industrial era, continue to resonate in the collective memory of the community, influencing how these places are remembered and understood by subsequent generations. This chapter provides the historical groundwork for the later exploration of how these memories and social dynamics are transmitted, transformed, and sometimes contested in the context of deindustrialisation.

Indeed, just as this thesis is concerned with the impact of deindustrialisation upon communities, to understand this relies upon the above exploration of how colliery owners ensured that industry became central to communities from their inception in order to create a labour force that was both compliant with and dependent upon existing class relations. In turn, these wider structures ensured continued profit from the system of industrial capitalism, by enmeshing workers and their families so intrinsically with their work even in times of rest. Even the development of the Miners' Welfare Fund, for instance, entrenched the reliance of these communities upon coal, despite being a significant win for miners' themselves. The production of these spaces for the purpose of labour control and social stratification has significant and far-reaching consequences.

'The Pit' as a Space of Work

Thus far this chapter has examined the spatial relationships of the colliery village to establish how the wider structures of paternalism and control were deployed spatially. Now, however, it turns to examine the colliery or 'the pit' itself to explore *why* these strong levels of surface control were needed, and moreover, the way in which the unique spatiality of the coal mine was experienced.

A coal mine is in its most fundamental sense an uneasy liaison between two conflicting spaces, occupying an intersection between nature and

capitalist production.¹⁹⁶ Those working within it, therefore, were subject to two powerful forces, that of the colliery owner who employed them and exploited their labour, and that of the very earth in which they worked. Mumford's *Technics and Civilisations* explores this relationship in detail, making much of the alien nature of the underground landscape of the coal mine. He writes:

"The act of wresting minerals from the earth has historically required the subjugation and demeaning of both nature and humankind, as faceless pairs of hands and unseen laboring backs descend into the dark, inhuman hell of tunnels to strip away the organs of nature."

"Day has been abolished and the rhythm of nature broken; continuous day-and-night production first came into existence here. The miner must work by artificial light even though the sun be shining outside; still further down in the seams, he must work by artificial ventilation, too: a triumph of the "manufactured environment.""¹⁹⁷

The pit in many ways, therefore, was manufactured space, but different to representations of space manufactured by city officials and architects as Lefebvre discusses.¹⁹⁸ By very nature of its underground location, and its intrinsic relationship with the natural world below the surface, the pit was a space quite unlike any other. For this reason, the spatiality of the pit is granted a great deal of attention in many artistic and cultural discussions of coal mining. The metaphorical construction of the coal mine as an underworld is frequent, such as 'the pit of hell' as included in the folk song

¹⁹⁶ For example, see John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000). Bellamy Foster explores the inherent conflict between capitalism and nature using the Marxist concept of the metabolic rift and its disruption by capitalism. In short, not only does capitalism reproduce unsustainable practices that degrade nature, but it disrupts the relationship between human beings and nature, alienating workers from their own inherent belonging within the natural world.

¹⁹⁷ Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, ed. Langdon Winner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 175.

¹⁹⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

The Blackleg Miner.¹⁹⁹ Likewise, Sid Chaplin wrote of the ‘unreal men in their inner hades’ and in his poem *Miner*:

I am the inner Atlas of this spinning globe.
At the dark centre of your green circumference
I crouch, the crawling wonder of my darker world,
The sweating surgeon of the strata depths,
The probing, blasting hero of my diamond doom.²⁰⁰

Robin Chapman was an electrician at Bearpark Coke works, but his father had been employed as a miner at Bearpark drift mine in the early twentieth century. He details here his only experience of a mine following his father to work one day:

“And so, I went in and then I'd gone far enough; it was dark and-- just... What I always remember is turning around and you could just see the light... I'd gone in maybe, I don't know, 100 metres, maybe 100 yards and then turned around and it was dark, and I didn't like it and I turned around and you could just see the light and he says "Well off you go back out" he carried on going to work.”²⁰¹

Robin’s reaction of fear, contrasted to his father’s typical journey to work, speaks to the fundamentally alien temporal and spatial construct of the ‘pit’, in which the normal circadian rhythms of life are disrupted by work, and the emergence of new rhythms embraced by mine workers as part of the everyday arrival at their workplace. Indeed, the pit as a place of work is quite unique in the way in which it demanded the full immersion of one’s

¹⁹⁹ John C. O'Donnell, ‘Industrial Songs as Part of a Culture’, *International Journal of Music Education* 6, no. 1 (1 November 1985): 7–11.

²⁰⁰ Quoted in Henry Stead, ‘Classics Down the Mineshaft: A Buried History’, in *Classics in Extremis: The Edges of Classical Reception*, ed. Richardson, Edmund (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 139.

²⁰¹ Robin Chapman, Interview with the author.

body into the subterranean world, and the way this environment dominated an individual's senses so entirely.

Not only did coal mining alienate the worker in the Marxist sense from the product of their labour, but it also facilitated the alienation of an individual from all that was natural, such as daylight and clean air.²⁰² When JB Priestley travelled through Shotton, to the East of Durham, he described it to be 'a symbol of greedy, careless, cynical, barbaric industrialism...One seemed to be looking at a Gibraltar made of coal dust and slag'.²⁰³ Priestley also commented more generally on industrial development in England that 'We headed the procession when it took what we see now to be the wrong turning, down into the dark bag of greedy industrialism, where money and machines are of more importance than men and women. It is for us to find the way out again, into the sunlight.'²⁰⁴

In many ways, Priestley condemns the worker to be a passive and pitiable figure, subject relentlessly to the ills of industrial squalor. Yet beyond work, many miners found agency in leisure pursuits that counteracted the unnatural alienation of the pit, and as such, found their own way 'into the sunlight' in a more everyday manner than perhaps Priestley imagined. In particular, despite the rather grim image of the colliery represented above, the rurality of many colliery locations sets them apart from other sites of industry, different from the urban images of 'satanic mills' in Manchester, the steel works of Sheffield, or the shipyards of Newcastle and Sunderland, and as such, access to outdoor landscapes was more easily obtained here.

²⁰² Foster, *Marx's Ecology : Materialism and Nature*.

²⁰³ J B Priestley, *English Journey: Being a Rambling but Truthful Account of What One Man Saw and Heard and Felt and Thought during a Journey through England during the Autumn of the Year 1933* (London: W. Heinemann, in association with V. Gollancz, 1934).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

The travel writer H.V. Morton records the testimony of a Welsh miner in 1930:

“Every miner has a hobby. Some are useful; some are not ... Why do we do so many things? It’s difficult to say. It may be a reaction from physical strain. The miner works in a dark, strange world. He comes up into the light. It is a new world. It is stimulating. He wants to do something. It may be, in good times, pigeon racing, fretwork, whippet racing, carpentry, music, choral singing or reading”.²⁰⁵

Ian Cummings, whose father worked at Bearpark colliery, attests similarly:

“They worked hard, and they worked five and half days a week when I was a small boy, and the rest of the time they would be doing things which were sort of the antithesis of working down in the black coal. You know, they were out in the sun, growing leeks, racing whippets and pigeons...If you spend five days a week in a black hole, without seeing any sunlight, working in filth, then you don’t want to be spending time—your hobby doesn’t want to be inside. They want to be outside; you want to be in the allotment”²⁰⁶

Although enacted on land often owned by the colliery owner, or later the NCB, such activities offered the opportunity to exert agency over space and to make use of it in a way that provided personal satisfaction or self-sufficiency.²⁰⁷ Importantly, whilst they may have taken place in colliery villages, they demonstrate further the unique spatiality of the pit itself. As Ian notes, these activities were the ‘antithesis of working down in the black coal’, instead focusing on pursuits that nurtured new life, physical freedom, individual triumph, or simply fresh air and daylight.

Moreover, a specific set of social relations emerged within the pit as a space of work. One’s job position signified one’s rank in this social order,

²⁰⁵ H.V. Morton, *In Search of Wales* (London, 1932), pp. 247–9 quoted in Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (Yale University Press, 2001), 242.

²⁰⁶ Ian Cummings, Interview with the Author.

²⁰⁷ Johnes, ‘Pigeon Racing And Working-Class Culture in Britain, C. 1870–1950’.

with hewers typically the most experienced and influential workers due to their position at the coal face.²⁰⁸ Significantly, hewers were paid piece-rate for the amount of coal hewed, but they were also permitted to self-select their work teams, known as their ‘marras’, and each team were responsible of the division of their pay amongst themselves.²⁰⁹ Where exactly on the coal face each team worked was important, as the geological conditions affected how much coal could be extracted and therefore how much a team was paid.

However, where they were positioned at the coal face was decided by the drawing of cavils; ‘A miner’s place, then, was down to chance, not the whim of a mine manager.’.²¹⁰ The use of the board-and- pillar method in most north-eastern coalfields also ensured less managerial oversight than the alternative long walling system, allowing teams to divide the labour between themselves the best way they saw fit.²¹¹ As a result, at the coal face itself, a certain degree of autonomy was allowed to develop away from the overarching decisions of the colliery owners and their officials.

Likewise, methods, and practices to best cope with the hazardous and strange underground space emerged. The political activist, labour historian, and former miner Dave Douglass writes of his own experiences as a miner, but also reflects more generally on the way in which individuals adapted to the unusual space of the mine. He remarks that “A man who could not

²⁰⁸ Alan Campbell, ‘Skill, Independence, and Trade Unionism in the Coalfields of Nineteenth-Century Britain, with Particular Reference to Scotland’, *Historical Papers / Communications Historiques* 16, no. 1 (1981): 155–74; Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*, 146–48.

²⁰⁹ Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*, 149–50; Emery, *The Coalminers of Durham*.

²¹⁰ David M. Turner and Daniel Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution: Physical Impairment in British Coalmining, 1780-1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 60; Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*, 149–53.

²¹¹ M. J. Dauntton, ‘Down the Pit: Work in the Great Northern and South Wales Coalfields, 1870-1914’, *The Economic History Review* 34, no. 4 (1981): 578–97.

‘switch off’ his surface self and change his nature when he went underground would not last long in the mine”. Douglass describes the pit as ‘a barbaric world, a world of filthy smells and stagnant air, of gasses ever lurking in the roofs and floors, of small, cramped places, of falling rocks, of gushing water and stranded pools, of thick clouds of dust and stifling heat. Sharp objects dart downwards from the roof to tear at the head and back; the floor buckles and rolls and the feet are never sure. Into such a world, shaking with weight and deafened by machinery, men with a solitary beam of light to aid them fight out an existence.’

From this, an idea of the sensory experience of the pit as a space of work can be understood. Indeed, Douglass’ description conveys the complete domination of all senses within the coal mine. The way that the pit as a place of work had to be occupied physically is particularly unusual, due to the frequent need to work with stooped back or in a crawling position. Whilst coal mining was by its very nature an attempt to conquer and extract from the natural world, there was also an awareness that to do so was inherently dangerous, that nature may at any point result in a pit disaster, such as an explosion or a shaft collapse.

More typically, the pit was a space that imposed physically upon workers’ bodies, leaving residual legacies of itself. Tom Lamb, known best for his artwork of coal mining in County Durham, describes his own experiences in a coal mine and the formation of ‘pitman’s buttons’ on his back, scabs from scrapping his back on the roof.²¹² The hazards and hardships of the industry

²¹² Interview with Tom Lamb, Coal Mining Oral History Project, No Date, Durham in Time, Durham County Council, available at <https://www.yumpu.com/user/durhamintime.org.uk>.

meant that “bodies were worn out and discarded, mangled, poisoned in the workplace to varying degrees”.²¹³ Robin again reflects on his father’s work:

“He had lots of scars, like all miners used to have these blue scars all over their back and things like that. In fact, I’ve got a couple. The coal dust gets into them and then it heals up and leaves a little blue, very minor, but that’s the same. So, miners had them all over-on their elbows, on their back...”²¹⁴

Robin’s father passed away when he was fourteen from lung cancer, meaning Robin had to leave school to work and support his mother and sister. The memories that Robin shares of his father revolve around work, but specifically, his awareness from an early age of the danger and risks of coal mining. His father, recalled here in memory, is remembered with the scars obtained from the pit; physical representations of the other-worldly space that had caused Robin such fear, etched upon his father’s body.

The physicality of coal mining is also central to understandings of masculinity, that in turn shaped the wider conceptualisations of gender outside of work, too.²¹⁵ This is made more explicit in Douglass’ description, as he writes:

“A man must become hardened to this hellish cavern; he is in a permanent state of aggression and the temper stimulates hard work; cruel things happen to men underground, as in a war, men must steel their minds against the thought of them. All day long the miners are being prodded and struck by supports and rock; the blood is at boiling point.”²¹⁶

²¹³ McIvor, ‘Deindustrialization Embodied: Work, Health, and Disability in the United Kingdom since the Mid-Twentieth Century’.

²¹⁴ Robin Chapman, Interview with the author (Durham, 2022).

²¹⁵ Stephanie Ward, ‘Miners’ Bodies and Masculine Identity in Britain, c.1900-1950’, *Cultural and Social History* 18, no. 3 (2021): 443–62; McIvor and Johnston, ‘Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries’.

²¹⁶ David Douglass, *Pit Talk in County Durham: A Glossary of Miners’ Talk Together with Memories of Wardley Colliery, Pit Songs and Piliking* (History Workshop, 1974), 1.

There are several layers to this construction of masculinity. First, there is an emphasis upon the physicality and exertion involved in mining, invoking the idea of masculinity as an embodied display of physical strength and ability.²¹⁷ Secondly, the psychological impact of working within such a space is made stark, but so too is the line for acceptable masculine emotions drawn in response.²¹⁸ Anger is normalised, and fear disregarded, constructing a normative masculine identity that centred around physical and psychological steeliness.

Douglass adds that “If it wasn’t for the jokes which come non-stop, we would all be fighting in a few minutes.”²¹⁹ Indeed, working under such conditions also produced a strong level of solidarity and comradeship in many instances. Robin makes this clear, saying “You had to trust—you were trusting your life to someone to do the job right. Otherwise, you know, there could be a nasty accident, and there were. They were frequent.”²²⁰

Echoing this, Ian Cumming comments:

“The family spirit was very much engendered in terms of the environment of the men working down the pit, because you had to have a huge sense of trust, and if you couldn’t trust a man down the pit there was a good possibility that you’d have an accident caused by that person. So, your life and your own safety depended on what the guys around you were doing”²²¹

At the same time, Ian’s testimony emphasises the conceptualisation of the wider village as a ‘family’ based upon the work of male breadwinners. Again, we see that space is not a neutral container, but rather something that actively produces, and is produced by, the interaction of people with and

²¹⁷ Ward, ‘Miners’ Bodies and Masculine Identity in Britain, c.1900-1950’.

²¹⁸ Claire Williams, ‘Masculinities and Emotion Work in Trade Unions’, in *Gender, Diversity and Trade Unions: International Perspectives*, ed. Fiona Colgan and Sue Ledwith (London: Routledge, 2003), 292–312.

²¹⁹ Douglass, *Pit Talk in County Durham*, 1.

²²⁰ Robin Chapman, Interview with the author

²²¹ Ian Cummings, Interview with the author

within it. We see here how alternative social relations came to displace the vertical frameworks of owner paternalism within the pit itself, but simultaneously, served to reinforce the paternalistic ideas of family and the patriarchal structures of the home by entrenching a rigid conceptualisation of masculinity and a man's role as household provider.

Contesting Control

By the 1860s, there was both the renewed demand and a greater potential for unionization in Durham. Four events of the decade- the Mines Act of 1860, the Hartley Disaster, the 'rocking strikes' at Brancepeth collieries, and the Wearmouth strike- highlighted the inherent injustices of the bond system.²²² In 1869, therefore, a group of committed unionists met at Durham's Market Tavern and laid the foundations of the Durham Miners' Association (DMA). By 1872, the bond was abolished, and union membership grew rapidly. There exist several detailed accounts that analyse the activities of the DMA in this period and the proceeding decades, which of course included events of huge significance for the Durham miners in the inter-war and war years.²²³ Here, however, what is of interest is how the formation of the DMA altered the power dynamics of the coalfield, in the face of the inherently paternalistic system that underpinned the interests of the industrial capitalists who owned and managed the county's collieries.

Similar ideas were being considered elsewhere, too; in 1862, the Reverend Henry Solly founded the Working Men's Club and Institute Union (CIU), underpinned by a proposed purpose to moralise, educate, and

²²² Norman Emery, *Banners of the Durham Coalfield* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998).

²²³ For instance, see Mates, *The Great Labour Unrest*; Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*; Garside, *The Durham Miners, 1919-1960*.

ultimately ‘civilise’ the working man through leisure.²²⁴ An underlining concept of the Working Men’s Clubs was that they would be overseen and managed by middle-class patrons, in the belief that working-class men lacked the capabilities and political aptitude to manage a club’s affairs.²²⁵ As such, the initial conception of the club was, once again, as a space for paternalistic control. Yet by 1883, following years of frustrated appeals by working-class club members regarding the restrictive and often impractical controls of patrons, the decision was made to grant each individual club the right to democratic control by a committee of their choosing.²²⁶ As had occurred in many Methodist chapels, a space designed with paternalistic overtures of control intent on policing morality had once again been co-opted in the interests of workers’ organisation and provided a space to develop political consciousness.

Indeed, many leaders of the early union movement had cut their teeth in Methodist halls, such as Tommy Hepburn who adapted his skills in Methodist preaching to the field of union organization.²²⁷ Many of the men who founded the DMA, such as the first general secretary William Crawford, were also committed Primitive Methodists.²²⁸ In fact, the Methodist chapels so often constructed by colliery owners served as useful spaces for union meetings in general, or at the very least, allowed individuals to gain experience in preaching and community organization. Nevertheless, the basis of the early DMA leadership within the Methodist

²²⁴ Richard N. Price, ‘The Working Men’s Club Movement and Victorian Social Reform Ideology’, *Victorian Studies* 15, no. 2 (1971): 117–47.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*; Moore, *Pitmen Preachers and Politics*.

²²⁸ Emery, *The Coalminers of Durham*; Steve Bruce, ‘Methodism and Mining in County Durham, 1881–1991’, *Northern History* 48, no. 2 (September 2011): 337–55.

movement aligned them neatly with principles of temperance, moderation, and co-operation from the outset.²²⁹

Likewise, whilst some colliery owners demanded strict control over village reading rooms and institutes, others were left to be managed by the village itself, allowing for elements of self-education and political literacy to develop.²³⁰ In reality, therefore, the ability for local organization depended heavily upon the attitude of the individual employer; whilst some owners, such as Joseph Pease, permitted the formation of trade unions in the hope that co-operation would prevent antagonistic relationships developing, others as we have seen were quite ready to quash all union activity.²³¹

Whilst the union was a county association, collieries were represented individually at the micro-level of the lodge. Whilst some lodges existed before 1869, remnants of former attempts to unionise, many were built after the formation of the DMA.²³² Each lodge had a chairman, a treasurer, a secretary, and a committee, and would send a delegate to attend DMA meetings. Lodge officials were miners themselves or were frequently checkweighmen.²³³ The role of checkweighman itself was a result of the miners' victory in obtaining the legal right to appoint their own tub-weigher, to eradicate unfair weighing practices from owner employed weighmen.²³⁴

Amongst the many village buildings that served as implicit reminders of the colliery owners' control, the lodge offered, at the very least, the physical

²²⁹ K. Brown, 'The Lodges of the Durham Miners' Association, 1869–1926', *Northern History* 23, no. 1 (1 January 1987): 138–52; Moore, *Pitmen Preachers and Politics*.

²³⁰ Martin, 'Local Spaces of Labour Control or Platforms for Agency? The North East Durham Coalfield, 1820–1890'.

²³¹ Emery, 'Pease and Partners and the Deerness Valley'; Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*.

²³² Brown, 'The Lodges of the Durham Miners' Association, 1869–1926'.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

presence of a representational space for the village's workers. More broadly, David Wray terms the DMA a 'mini-welfare state'.²³⁵ The Association offered members access to convalescence hospitals, injury or death compensation, sickness pay, and in villages in which colliery owners had not, often funded the provision of recreational and work-related facilities such as institutes and pithead baths.²³⁶ The decisions made in this respect by the DMA were of course significantly more democratic than those made by coal owners. Even so, the provision of financial and practical welfare support to villages and their inhabitants by the miners' union continued to reinforce the dependency of such places upon the coal industry.

As such, it is difficult to separate the colliery village as a space in and of itself, because often their very fabric was created through layers of coal owner paternalism and union welfare. Increasingly, villages came to contain both representations of space that enforced the power of the industrial capitalist, and representational space that reminded of the growing potential and latent solidarity of the union. Regardless, both co-operations of space required the perpetuation of a system of industrial capitalism, and the maintenance of coal's place within it.

Though operating with relative autonomy on an everyday level in relation to minor concerns and disputes, lodges were expected to defer to the broader DMA policy in relation to more serious industrial action; those who took unofficial strike action, for example, were severely reprimanded by the executive committee.²³⁷ Historian Lewis Mates argues convincingly for the heterogeneity of coalfield politics within the rank-and-file of the Durham coalfield, with elements of radicalism and syndicalism existing in pockets

²³⁵Wray, 'The Place of Imagery in the Transmission of Culture: The Banners of the Durham Coalfield'.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*.

throughout. Despite this, the DMA as an organisation continued to favour moderation and cooperation with coal owners within industrial affairs.²³⁸

As Ray Hudson writes:

“It was recognised by capitalist interests in the region that this sort of trades union organisation moderated working-class demands and that this internal discipline from within the working class allowed capitalist production to proceed more smoothly. Liberal paternalism served as part of the required world view and an elaborate set of practices-rewards and sanctions- helped moderate liberal men to become and remain trade union leaders and so underpin that hegemonic position of that dominant world view”²³⁹

Yet the Liberal consensus was broken down by the late nineteenth century, as a series of bitter strikes and lockouts would prove the ability of colliery owners to shatter this good faith relationship with the union when faced with loss of profit.²⁴⁰ Increasing socialist influence in the coalfield, and the rise of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) would eventually erode the Liberal base of the DMA entirely by offering a political choice that actively challenged the interests of the coal owners rather than attempting to appease and circumnavigate them. Regardless, the rise of a new political player in the form of the Labour Party continued to offer the opportunity for parliamentary representation drawn from within the union.²⁴¹

In much the same way as there had been similar overlap between colliery owners and politics- Theodore Fry, of Bearpark Coke and Coal, had also been a Liberal MP, for example- there is also an observable interchangeability between leadership roles in trade unionism and politics.²⁴² With increased enfranchisement in the early twentieth century, the rise of the Labour Party and the DMA’s subsequent support for it, and

²³⁸ Mates, *The Great Labour Unrest*.

²³⁹ Hudson, *Wrecking a Region: State Policies, Party Politics, and Regional Change in North East England*.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Mates, *The Great Labour Unrest*.

²⁴² Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*.

ultimately, the election of MPs actively involved in or sympathetic to the miners' union movement, the grassroots labour movement that brought forth the DMA had now grown to secure significant representation in national politics.²⁴³

Likewise, 1919 saw the election of the first Labour council in Durham, led by Peter Lee, an agent, and later, general secretary of the DMA.²⁴⁴ It is unsurprising that the election of a Labour council so deeply enmeshed with the miners' union marked a commitment to the betterment of colliery villages. Perhaps one of the most significant actions by Durham County Council under Lee at this time was the use of the 1919 Housing Act to build council houses in colliery villages across the county, after substantial shortfalls had been highlighted in the quality of housing provided by private colliery owners.²⁴⁵ In doing so, local authority housing provided an alternative to the tied housing that granted owners extended control over their workforce.

When the council homes constructed by Durham County Council were completed in Bearpark, the streets were named after parish and county councillors, a stark contrast to the older terraces named for colliery owners.²⁴⁶ In response to this, Douglas Pocock's historical account of Bearpark cites the 1920s as a period in which 'power was passing to the people'.²⁴⁷ Yet, whilst these figures represented a new sense of democracy and worker's representation, there is a clear sense of a transferred deference

²⁴³ H. C. G. Matthew, R. I. McKibbin, and J. A. Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *The English Historical Review* 91, no. 361 (1976): 723–52; Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*.

²⁴⁴ Jack Lawson, 'The Influence of Peter Lee', in *Mining and Social Change: Durham County in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Martin Bulmer (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 95–105.

²⁴⁵ Royal Commission on the Coal Industry, 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry'.

²⁴⁶ Pocock, *A Mining World: The Story of Bearpark, County Durham*.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

and dependency, as the DMA's 'mini welfare-state' became increasingly formalised through a politics as equally reliant upon coal mining employment.

The Durham Miners' Gala, first held in 1871, perhaps exemplifies the relationship between politics and the Durham miners most potently. Writing of the Gala in the present day, Stephenson and Wray contend 'the Gala is the visible representation of that complex process of socialisation into occupational identity and class politics, and symbolic of the long established and deep-rooted relationship between community and union. Participation in the 'ceremony' of the Gala represents a restatement of allegiance to the community, to the union, and to a unique culture: 'This is how it is; this is who we are'.²⁴⁸

Historically, too, the Gala acted as a very visceral representation of the mining workforce and their communities, as these statements of allegiance and collectivism played out in the physical occupation of space in Durham's city centre. Lodges were represented individually by their band and banner, allowing even the smallest mining community a space for representation and inclusion within the wider ceremony. That said, discussion of the Gala, as a reflection of coal mining communities in the region more generally, should not allow a focus on the themes of solidarity and comradeship to eclipse the diversity of opinion and action within even a singular coalfield such as Durham.

For instance, whilst John Tomaney discusses how many early banners were designed to convey the ideas of moderation and cooperation that were so central to DMA more broadly, Mates also explores how

²⁴⁸ Carol Stephenson and David Wray, 'Emotional Regeneration through Community Action in Post-Industrial Mining Communities: The New Herrington Miners' Banner Partnership', ed. Carol Stephenson, *Capital & Class*, no. 87 (2005): 175–99.

banners such as that of the Follonsby Lodge and Chopwell were used to communicate more radical or revolutionary strands within individual communities.²⁴⁹ In many ways, such variations in lodge banners exemplifies arguments that have contested the homogeneity of coalfield politics, notably Royden Harrison's *Independent Collier*. As Geary notes, for example, industrial militancy was never a necessary consequence of becoming a miner, and thus neither was entire uniformity to standard DMA practice.²⁵⁰

However, as Ewan Gibbs suggests, building upon Beynon and Austrin's characterisation of the Durham Miners' Gala as a 'political project', Gala day facilitated 'the 'imagining' of a large, unified, collective'.²⁵¹ Despite the evidenced heterogeneity of coalfield politics, the Gala acted as a symbolic representation of power and solidarity, and increasingly came to act as a stage upon which the relationship between the Durham Miners' Association and the Labour Party could be demonstrated. Figures such as Keir Hardie appeared alongside union leaders on lodge banners, serving both as a visible commitment from the mining population to the Labour Party and as a reminder of the political strength of the mining electorate and their unions.²⁵²

²⁴⁹ John Tomaney, 'After Coal: Meanings of the Durham Miners' Gala', *Frontiers in Sociology* 5 (15 May 2020); Lewis Mates, 'The "Most Revolutionary" Banner in British Trade Union History? Political Identities and the Birth, Life, Purgatory, and Rebirth of the "Red" Follonsby Miners' Banner', *International Labor and Working-Class History* 100 (2021): 109–35.

²⁵⁰ Dick Geary, 'The Myth of the Radical Miner', in *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies*, ed. Stefan Berger, Andy Croll, and Norman LaPorte (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 43–64.

²⁵¹ Ewan Gibbs, 'Deindustrialisation and Industrial Communities: The Lanarkshire Coalfields c. 1947-1983' (PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2016), 149; Huw Beynon and Terry Austrin, 'The Performance of Power: Sam Watson a Miners' Leader on Many Stages', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1 December 2015): 458–90.

²⁵² Stephenson and Wray, 'Emotional Regeneration through Community Action', 2005.

Yet many banners also depicted figures of more local significance. In the same way that power flowed between union and politics on a national and regional level, the same patterns emerged within parish and district councils too. Often, individuals held multiple or consecutive roles within colliery lodges and councils, as well as other appointments such as on the school board or working men's club committee.²⁵³ In Bearpark, two individuals dominate all official bodies during the first half of the twentieth century- Billy Kingston and Bob Shotton. Both known as 'Mr. Bearpark', their position as parish councillors and lodge officials offered them powerful influence within the village.²⁵⁴

Yet at this local level, the lingering paternalist control of the colliery owners is most apparent. All the while, the collieries remained under private ownership, and the reality of what figures such as Kingston could achieve remained largely constrained to what concessions could be sought from the colliery owners. For instance, DMA lodge officials could offer advice to families being evicted from their colliery-owned homes but had no power to prevent this.²⁵⁵ When the Durham Aged Miners Homes and the DMA constructed aged miners' homes in Bearpark, for retired miners evicted from their colliery-tied homes, colliery owner Sir John Fry appealed for unity of purpose in industrial relations, and Kingston thanked the colliery owners for their donation of bricks during the opening ceremony.²⁵⁶

Indeed, being all too aware of the continued power of private coal companies, and the inequities in wages and conditions this could bring about between collieries, miners' unions had sought the nationalization of the nation's coal mines since the early twentieth century. In 1947, following

²⁵³ Bulmer, 'The Character of Local Politics'.

²⁵⁴ Pocock, *A Mining World: The Story of Bearpark, County Durham*.

²⁵⁵ Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*, 188–90.

²⁵⁶ Unknown, 'Aged Miners' Homes', *The Science and Art of Mining*, 17 October 1931.

the 1946 Coal Industry Nationalisation Act, all the United Kingdom's collieries were transferred from private to public ownership, and to the control of the National Coal Board (NCB). Harry Nixon, who became the fourth generation in his family to work at Bearpark colliery, remarks that his predecessors in the industry 'were actually treat like slaves before nationalisation'. He later adds, 'When the pits and that were nationalised, when we got shot of the landowners and all the ones that owned the collieries and that, it was the best thing that ever happened to the miners'.²⁵⁷

Although not unanimously, the act was widely celebrated among miners as a guarantee of improved wages, safety, and management of their workplace, which Harry himself notes, and a recognition of their vital position within the nation.²⁵⁸ There was a sense that a social and moral obligation had been made to the mining population through nationalisation.²⁵⁹ Keen to make nationalisation a success, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)- which had been formed in 1944, partly in recognition of the need for an effective central authority to advocate for nationalisation and its predicted improvements- adopted a policy of cooperation and conciliation in their partnership with the NCB in the initial years following nationalization.²⁶⁰ For their part, the NCB sought to swiftly modernise the coal mines, through increased mechanization, more thorough

²⁵⁷ Harry Nixon, Interview with the Author.

²⁵⁸ Tony Hall, *King Coal: Miners, Coal, and Britain's Industrial Future* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1981), 88–92; Garside, *The Durham Miners, 1919-1960*, 389; For details of the nuances in reactions to nationalisation, see Peter Ackers and Jonathan Payne, 'Before the Storm: The Experience of Nationalisation and the Prospects for Industrial Relations Partnership in the British Coal Industry, 1947-1972 - Rethinking the Militant Narrative', *Social History* 27, no. 2 (1 May 2002): 184–209.

²⁵⁹ Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984–85*; Perchard, "'Broken Men'" and "'Thatcher's Children'"; Perchard et al., 'Fighting for the Soul of Coal'; Perchard and Phillips, 'Transgressing the Moral Economy'.

²⁶⁰ Ackers and Payne, 'Before the Storm'; Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine: Coal and the End of Industrial Britain* (London: Verso, 2021), 31–39; Roy Church and Quentin Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889-1966* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 222.

health and safety procedures, and more rigorous training for recruits and existing employees.²⁶¹

As we well know now, in retrospect, any sense that this would sustain the industry throughout the twentieth century would be gradually eroded and finally destroyed in the decades that followed, a reality that would generate much of the anger and anguish that will be explored in later chapters. Even in the first decade following nationalisation, the NCB's repeated emphasis on coal mining as a 'job for life' contrasted sharply with widespread concerns about the viability of the United Kingdom's coal trade. The coal industry faced significant challenges, including increasing competition from alternative energy sources like oil and natural gas, rising production costs, and declining domestic demand.²⁶² These factors cast doubt on the long-term sustainability of coal mining. Nonetheless, the NCB continued to promote coal mining as a secure career option to attract and retain workers, bolster morale, and mitigate the disruptions caused by the transition to a nationalised industry.²⁶³ This promise was part of a broader strategy to stabilise the workforce and gain support for the nationalisation effort amidst growing economic uncertainties.

As Joel Krieger argues, while nationalisation aimed to stabilise and modernise the coal industry, it also introduced new complexities and

²⁶¹ J. Tomaney, 'Politics, Institutions and the Decline of Coal Mining in North East England', *Mining Technology* 112, no. 1 (1 April 2003): 43; Ackers and Payne, 'Before the Storm', 201–2; Clinton E. Jencks, 'The Impact of Nationalisation on the Working Conditions in British Coal Mining' (PhD, University of California, 1971).

²⁶² Martin Chick, *Industrial Policy in Britain 1945-1951: Economic Planning, Nationalisation and the Labour Governments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Perchard et al., 'Fighting for the Soul of Coal'.

²⁶³ N. Geoffrey Bright, "'Off The Model": Resistant Spaces, School Disaffection and "Aspiration" in a Former Coal-Mining Community', *Children's Geographies* 9, no. 1 (2011): 63–78; Robert Vernon, 'An Island of Coal: The British National Coal Board and Their Plans for Coal 1947 to 1987', *Comunicações Geológicas* 110 (2024): 87–94; Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984–85*.

tensions.²⁶⁴ In the Durham coalfield, these effects were particularly pronounced. The state's dual role as both regulator and employer led to conflicting priorities, with economic pressures often clashing with political goals. The NCB's push for modernisation and efficiency, though well-intentioned, sometimes exacerbated these tensions by prioritising cost-cutting and productivity with policies that favoured mine closures and rationalisation. The NUM, including the Durham area branch, largely acquiesced to such policies throughout the 1960s, encouraging miners from closing pits to transfer to more economically viable sites.²⁶⁵

Krieger's concept of the 'dialectic of control' illustrates how state ownership created a dynamic interplay between control and resistance, as Durham miners and their communities resisted the undermining of their autonomy and the imposition of new bureaucratic structures.²⁶⁶ The strong sense of comradeship and solidarity among Durham miners, forged through years of hazardous work and shared struggle, became a significant force of resistance against these top-down policies. This ongoing struggle highlighted the inherent contradictions in the nationalisation project and its effects on labour relations and community cohesion in the Durham coalfield.

At the same time, increased standardisation, more rigorous health and safety training, and growing bureaucracy from the NCB could also not entirely eradicate the hazards that had long produced strong levels of comradeship and solidarity. Fatalities did decrease sharply following nationalization, and so too did the number of serious injuries lessen,

²⁶⁴ Krieger, *Undermining Capitalism*.

²⁶⁵ Andrew Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics: Volume 2: 1969–1995* (London: Routledge, 2005).

²⁶⁶ Krieger, *Undermining Capitalism*.

although not quite so drastically.²⁶⁷ Increased ventilation, improved drainage, and better lighting undoubtedly served to gradually lessen both the dangers, and the ‘otherworldly’ nature of the underground space, but mechanization brought with it increased coal dust, noise, and mechanical injuries.²⁶⁸ As such, the coal mine continued to dominate all the senses of those who worked within it and more pertinently for the long term, continued to leave its physical traces on workers’ bodies.

Despite this, and the initial widespread celebration for long-sought public ownership, there was also elements of discontent as many of the former colliery managers and officials retained their posts.²⁶⁹ Writing in a 1979 Strong Words Collective booklet, one contributor notes that:

“Before nationalisation, we were against the mine owners. But when the pits were taken over, who became the managers? The owners again. The very same men who we were trying to get rid of. We weren’t altering the top men but just their terminology.”²⁷⁰

In some ways, the retention of such figures allowed for an effective transition for the industry, as they often held knowledge and skills essential to the proper and safe running of collieries.²⁷¹ Interviewee Barrie Carse, for instance, entered the NCB Planning Department following an accident at work at Bearpark Colliery, liaising with what he terms the ‘top brass’ of management, and then later going on to be a cover manager himself. He

²⁶⁷ Seyed Kazem Oraee-Mirzamani, ‘Coal Mining in the UK: Recent Effects of Technological Change on Productivity and Safety’ (University of Stirling, 1983), <http://dspace.stir.ac.uk/handle/1893/21631>.

²⁶⁸ McIvor and Johnston, *Miners’ Lung*; Keith Gildart, ‘Dust, Diesel, and Disability in the British Coal Industry: A View from the Coal Face, 1985-1992’, 31 December 2019, <https://wlv.openrepository.com/handle/2436/622692>.

²⁶⁹ Ackers and Payne, ‘Before the Storm’.

²⁷⁰ Ron Rooney, ‘Changing Times’, in *But the World Goes on the Same: Changing Times in Durham Pit Villages*, ed. Terry Austrin et al., Strong Words (Whitley Bay: Erdesdun Publishers, 1979), 36–42.

²⁷¹ Ackers and Payne, ‘Before the Storm’; Hall, *King Coal: Miners, Coal, and Britain’s Industrial Future*, 1981, 96.

says that “Well, that was the great advantage- that I could speak with authority, because I'd done it, you know?”²⁷²

Yet despite his position within the managerial ranks of the NCB, Barrie was not unaffected by closures. He shares that:

“I was in management, and obviously getting a good wage, but I wasn't getting the full appointment because, as pits were closing, they were moving the manager from a pit that had closed to one where the manager had retired. So, you couldn't get the appointment...and that was unfortunate...”²⁷³

Indeed, the idea that the ‘gaffers simply changed their coats’ following nationalisation is perhaps also a significant oversimplification of the position of many colliery managers, both before and after nationalisation.²⁷⁴ Many, like Barrie, occupied a complex ideological position between their own upbringing within colliery communities, work in the coal mines, and their status as agents of owners or the state. Perchard highlights that mine managers had to adapt to new organizational structures and policies introduced by the National Coal Board (NCB), which included changes in managerial practices and a shift in focus from purely production-driven goals to incorporating worker safety and welfare considerations. Nevertheless, such comments provide an insight into elements of dissatisfaction about the apparent lack of radical change following nationalisation.²⁷⁵

Where these continuities are most overt, however, but less discussed, is within the National Coal Board’s management of the colliery villages more broadly. As well as control of the collieries themselves, the NCB assumed

²⁷² Barrie Carse, Interview with the Author (Ushaw Moor: 2022)

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ackers and Payne, ‘Before the Storm’.

²⁷⁵ Andrew Perchard and Keith Gildart, ‘Managerial Ideology and Identity in the Nationalised British Coal Industry, 1947–1994’, *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 44, no. 1 (2023): 230–61.

responsibility for the welfare and recreation facilities of colliery villages. In 1952, the Coal Industry Social Welfare Scheme (CISWO) was established, replacing the former structure of the Miners' Welfare Commission. For despite the creation of the Miners' Welfare Fund over two decades earlier seeing an increase in provision of welfare facilities such as pit head baths, by the time of nationalisation, only 366 pit head baths were in operation. By 1962, there was 632, ensuring that 'ninety-five of Britain's mine workers now left their pit dirt at the pit'.²⁷⁶

Likewise, the NCB also took over approximately 140,000 houses, many which had been allowed to severely deteriorate under private ownership, as well as over 225,000 acres of land formerly held by private coal owners.²⁷⁷ Although the provision of local authority housing in colliery villages now offered a degree of security, it is noteworthy that NCB owned housing remained tied to colliery employment, and despite processing evictions with less antagonism than the private colliery owners of the past, the NCB still requested that those who left employment vacated their homes.

Beynon, Hudson, and Strangleman, in a 1999 paper reflecting on the redevelopment of coalfield areas, quote a member of the East Durham Development Agency saying:

"...in the past [communities] relied upon a paternal National Coal Board to look after them. They lived in Coal Board houses, working the pit, going to miners' institutes for social evenings, playing football in the ground which

²⁷⁶Clinton E. Jencks, 'Social Status of Coal Miners in Britain Since Nationalization*', *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 26, no. 3 (1967): 301–12.

²⁷⁷Mary E. Murphy, 'Role of Accountants in the British Nationalization Program', *The Accounting Review* 27, no. 1 (1952): 63–72.

the miners had provided. Everything was done by themselves or by NCB.’²⁷⁸

As is clear from this quote, the idea that ‘the gaffers merely changed their coats’ is applicable beyond the management of the mine itself, to the management of villages as a whole. Where once local facilities were constructed with bricks engraved with the name of the colliery owner, after 1947 the engraving read ‘NCB’.

Nationalisation represented a repackaging of Company paternalism into the state management of work and leisure, and as Ray Hudson observes, cultural and political resources continued to be ‘enmeshed in the traditions of dependency and Labourism that had come to a position of dominance in the locality’.²⁷⁹ Once again, therefore, we see that industry continued to form a fundamental basis in the structuring of the wider community even into the second half of the twentieth century. As a result, it is unsurprising that deindustrialisation would have significant repercussions, as the foundations of these places were rapidly stripped away.

Conclusion

This chapter has adopted a spatial perspective to explore the interplay between industrial capitalism, space, and the small-scale experiences of industrial communities. It has embraced Henri Lefebvre's notion of space as a socially produced entity in a state of constant transformation, and as such,

²⁷⁸ Huw Beynon, Ray Hudson, and Tim Strangleman, ‘Rebuilding the Coalfields’, The Coalfields Research Programme (Cardiff University, 1999).

²⁷⁹ Ray Hudson, ‘Making Music Work? Alternative Regeneration Strategies in a Deindustrialised Locality: The Case of Derwentside’, in *Production, Places and Environment* (London: Routledge, 1999), 264–84.

has examined the early contestations and concessions over space that defined the coalfield's history.

While acknowledging the value of existing work, like that of Huw Beynon and Terry Austrin in assessing the "Durham system" of paternalist control, this chapter has taken a step further by reframing the spatial dynamics of power and control. To do so, it has examined the production of paternalist space, tracing the origins of colliery villages from basic housing stock centred around coal mines to the construction of spaces of leisure, worship, and welfare, and has demonstrated how this spatial arrangement reinforced existing class relations in service of industrial capitalism.

Furthermore, the chapter has explored the spatiality of the coal mine as a workplace, demonstrating the distinct social relations that emerged within the underground environment. In particular, it has discussed the complex interactions between industrial capitalism and the natural world within the mine, where exploitation and danger coexisted alongside the development of worker autonomy and solidarity. As has been shown, these dynamics extended into leisure time, as outdoor spaces in colliery villages provided opportunities for autonomy and independence.

Lastly, the chapter has demonstrated how the conditions and social relations forged within these spaces found expression in labour organisation, notably the Durham Miners' Association, and subsequently in political representation through the Liberal and Labour parties. Whilst not seeking to provide an exhaustive analysis of these movements, the chapter has drawn from existing historiography to probe how they altered the social relations of the coalfield and question whether these changes disrupted the paternalist power dynamics of space.

Therefore, this chapter has established the rich historical context of mining villages within County Durham. In employing spatial theory, it has explored the formation and transformation of colliery villages, underscoring

the constant contestations and negotiations with space that have shaped these communities. Through this exploration of space-through-time, this chapter has established the intrinsic centrality of industry in shaping the identity and experiences of these communities, providing a critical foundation for the detailed oral history analysis that follows. The spatial dynamics explored here are not merely historical; they continue to influence how these places are remembered and experienced across generations, which will be the focus of the chapters that follow. This connection underscores the thesis's core contribution to understanding the spatiality of deindustrialisation and memory, as seen through the lens of multi-generational oral history

CHAPTER 3 ‘THE COLLIERY COMPLEX’: COMMUNITY BY EXTENSION?

“The common lifestyle, with its hardships and anxiety, played out within the physical proximity of the colliery rows, induced a togetherness where everyone shared everyone else’s joys, burdens, and griefs. No news was private, not visit to the outside netty could be concealed. Every fresh round of baking, ever making of a pot of tea, could be a communal occasion. Doors were left open, certainly never locked.”²⁸⁰

“It was-- it was very close knit and it was the sort of place where nobody locked their doors. And people would kind of go in and out of each other's houses. And there was always somebody there that would help somebody out.”²⁸¹

This chapter critically examines the concept of community in the colliery villages to the west of Durham, with a particular focus on how these communities are remembered by those who experienced the coal mining industry firsthand. While this chapter primarily draws on testimony from a single generation—those who lived and worked during the industrial era—it lays the foundation for a broader exploration of memory, place, and generation that will be developed in later chapters. By focusing on this generation, the chapter reveals how their memories are deeply intertwined with the physical and social landscapes of these villages, offering insights into how these spaces were experienced and understood at the time.

Much attention has already been devoted to exploring and explaining the concept of community within mining settlements, both in the United

²⁸⁰ Pocock, *A Mining World: The Story of Bearpark, County Durham*.

²⁸¹ Anne Carter, Interview with the Author (Gateshead, July 2021).

Kingdom and globally.²⁸² There are also wider debates about whether ‘community’ is a practical or fruitful subject for sociological analysis, and if so, how it might be defined.²⁸³ However, during the oral history interviews, individuals consistently returned to the theme of community and centred their memories of it in their narratives. Building on Gilbert’s notion of ‘imagined mining communities,’ the chapter examines how this first generation conceptualises their past communities through the intertwined lenses of memory and place.²⁸⁴ By focusing on their testimony, the chapter uncovers the ways in which the physical and social spaces of the colliery villages were central to the formation of community identity.

It begins by exploring how these communities are recalled both spatially and emotionally, drawing on narratives that highlight the physical and psychological closeness of mining villages. These memories include everyday structures of mutual aid and support within the villages, as well as broader communal experiences like annual holiday trips and the Durham Miners’ Gala. Throughout, the chapter underscores the enduring influence of industry in shaping both the social relations and spatial dynamics of the village.

²⁸² Norman Dennis, *Coal Is Our Life : An Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956); Bill Williamson, *Class, Culture, and Community: A Biographical Study of Social Change in Mining* (Abingdon: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Barron, *The 1926 Miners’ Lockout*; David Gilbert, ‘Imagined Communities and Mining Communities’; Dennis Warwick and Gary Littlejohn, *Coal, Capital, and Culture: A Sociological Analysis of Mining Communities in West Yorkshire* (London: Routledge, 1992); Gibson Burrell, ‘The Role of Coal-Mining Towns in Social Theory: Past, Present and Future’, *Global Discourse* 7, no. 4 (2017): 451–68; M. I. A. Bulmer, ‘Sociological Models of the Mining Community’, *The Sociological Review* 23, no. 1 (1 February 1975): 61–92; Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*.

²⁸³ For discussions of the meaning of the term ‘community’, see SB Sarason, *The Psychological Sense of Community: Prospects for a Community Psychology* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974); David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, ‘Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory’, *Journal of Community Psychology* 14 (1986): 6–23; for discussions regarding the social production of space, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2005).

²⁸⁴ David Gilbert, ‘Imagined Communities and Mining Communities’.

Yet in doing so, it also considers exclusions and divisions that arise for those who are perceived as not belonging to the dominant industrial culture. Importantly, this chapter seeks to look beyond the constructions of mining communities as they are imagined in memory, examining too divisions or tensions within these spaces. The most blatant division, which is already well-discussed in existing literature, is that of gender.²⁸⁵ Although far-removed from definitions of femininity that invoke ideas of fragility and meekness, women within the coalfield villages of Durham still exhibited a clear gendered identity based around domesticity and unpaid labour. As this chapter argues, despite being actively distanced from male spaces of work and leisure, women too were enmeshed within industrial rhythms and were vital actors in the creation of the social networks that made up a community.

Relatedly, here, understandings of masculinity, too, are examined.²⁸⁶ Drawing on the testimony of men who were formerly, or who hoped to have been, employed in coal mining, it is apparent how expectations of normative masculinity were bound up with industrial employment, and thus how central both were to individual identity. In exploring this in opposition to the role of women as domestic housewives, even separate for the most part in leisure, the chapter seeks to understand how prominent these gendered

²⁸⁵ Linda McDowell and Doreen Massey, 'A Woman's Place?', in *Geography Matters! A Reader*, ed. John Allen and Doreen Massey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d.), 124–47; Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*; Geoff Bright and Gabrielle Ivinson, 'Washing Lines, Whinberries and Reworking "Waste Ground": Women's Affective Practices and a Haunting within the Haunting of the UK Coalfields', *Journal of Working-Class Studies* 4, no. 2 (1 December 2019): 25–39, doi:10.13001/jwcs.v4i2.6225; Walkerdine and Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community after De-Industrialisation: A Psychosocial Approach to Affect*; Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the Eighties* (London: Virago, 1984); Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production*.

²⁸⁶ For discussions of masculinity, in particular reference to industrial work, see John Beynon, *Masculinities And Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001); Nayak, 'Last of the "Real Geordies"? White Masculinities and the Subcultural Response to Deindustrialisation'; Ward, 'Miners' Bodies and Masculine Identity in Britain, c.1900-1950'; McIvor and Johnston, 'Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries'.

expectations and gendered spaces were in coal mining communities, and thus later understand the difficulties in undoing these long-held ideas once deindustrialisation began.

Finally, this chapter explores further divisions in these communities, considering how these close-knit, often idealised, social networks also served to divide and exclude those beyond the accepted norms and behaviours of a dominant structure of feeling. Indeed, here, it is useful to interrogate the place of oral history in studying community. For as Alessandro Portelli argues, the “importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge.”²⁸⁷ As such, interviewees construct community as they experienced, or now remember it, meaning that whilst some recall a harmonious, supportive community, others share feelings of exclusion and alienation. Here, this chapter examines the testimony of individuals who felt excluded based on their ethnicity, class, and disability, to demonstrate an alternative experience to that of a homogenous, idyllic mining community.

‘What made a mining village different from other villages?’: Memories of an industrial community

Interviewee Robin Chapman was raised in Bearpark, later becoming an electrician at Bearpark Coke Works. Our interview took place at his home in Gilesgate, Durham, with his wife Margaret also present, who at times contributed her own thoughts and prompted the direction of his stories. For the most part, however, Robin responded to the loosely structured interview

²⁸⁷ Alessandro Portelli, ‘What Makes Oral History Different’, in *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*, ed. Luisa del Guidice (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 21–30.

with a remarkable flow of testimony. Still, after our interview, he sent an email to me, stating ‘After your visit I got to thinking more about mining communities and Bearpark in particular. I have put my thoughts into words’ attaching a document entitled “What made a mining village different from other villages?”

Throughout our interview, Robin is celebratory of the village community of the past, praising its ability for self-sufficiency and the networks of mutual aid his family drew upon following his father’s death. In his written account, as its title suggests, he argues for the unique specificity of social relations within mining villages, constructing an idealised image of a homogenous, well-organised community. Significantly, he describes it not as a village, but as ‘the colliery complex’. In Robin’s memory, therefore, Bearpark is remembered metaphorically as a series of interconnected sites that centre around the coal mine itself. In fact, perhaps due to his former occupation as an electrician, Robin’s description positions the village like a closed electrical circuit, as he suggests it “was a self-sustaining industrial process with little need for external sources.”²⁸⁸

His account traces the early development of Bearpark from a small agricultural settlement to a mining village. Housing stock was built and then, as functional consequences of the colliery “Amenities such as the church and chapels, the school, the miner’s welfare hall etcetera soon followed. The Co-op store provided food, clothes, butchery and drapery and even funeral services.... Local farms provided staples such as potatoes and milk delivered to the homes. A cobbler had premises in the colliery houses and kept the population well shod.”

In Robin’s account, even spaces of potential leisure are underpinned by their functionality. He writes that “many miners kept hens either in their

²⁸⁸ Robin Chapman, Email correspondence with the Author (February 2022)

own gardens or at the nearby allotments. Gardens and allotments were used mainly for the production of food... They made their own entertainment such as the billiard hall, reading room, working men's club and village pub. There was a recreational ground near to the colliery houses with a football field, a cricket field and bowling greens. ”²⁸⁹

Significantly, as discussed in chapter one, many of these spaces were imbued with overtures of control, with the housing, churches, and leisure facilities subsidised or fully funded by colliery owners. Whilst Robin does not discuss the spatial implications of the larger, isolated housing provided to figures of authority in the village here, he does note that “Car ownership was mainly limited to the Doctor, the colliery manager the colliery agent and the store manager.”²⁹⁰ As such, there is an implicit awareness that levels of social hierarchy based upon authority did exist in the village. Yet in memory the social implications of this are not dealt with explicitly, instead being glossed over in the construction of an idealised homogenous community.

In many ways, what he describes is reminiscent of Lefebvre's assessment of the new town Mourenx, which was far from celebratory. To Henri Lefebvre, the creation of a functional new town to meet the needs of industry, like Mourenx or indeed, like many of the mining villages of Durham, represented the increased organisation of space and time by capitalism, and the increased alienation of workers from culture, spontaneity, and freedom.²⁹¹ Lefebvre was concerned that “the more space is functionalised ... the less susceptible it becomes to appropriation”

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso Books, 1995), 116–27.

meaning that everyday life and behaviour fail to alter or challenge the fundamentally capitalist space.²⁹²

To some extent, this rigid organisation of the everyday around the capitalist venture of coal mining is evident in other interviews. Hannah Ashton, who was raised in Bearpark, recalls her daily routine of “going to walk into school in the morning, as the miners were coming off shift at night. So they would—because they didn’t shower at the pithead they were still black coming from work.”²⁹³ Likewise, Alison Hiles who lived at Langley Park notes having ‘to be awfully careful at the end of the shift, because all the men would be in tin baths all the way along the gardens’.²⁹⁴ Neither Hannah nor Alison had family directly employed in the coal mines of their villages, yet as their testimony demonstrates, the shift patterns of the coal mine acted as significant markers in people’s everyday life.

Indeed, despite the inherent functionality of the villages as produced spaces, and the manner in which the structures of industrial capitalism underpin these recollections, there is nevertheless emotional, personal meaning in these memories, too. For instance, Ian Cummings, of Bearpark recalls fondly his weekly visits to his grandparents but does so in reference to the colliery and its surrounding landscape:

“Every Friday after school from being four-year old I would walk up to Bearpark and down to their home. They lived in Taylor Avenue overlooking the pit heaps and the colliery- on a Friday. And then sometimes, not always, I would go and play in the pit yard; sometimes I’d get a ride on the locomotive”²⁹⁵

In fact, the childhood memories of multiple interviewees are infused, even in passing mention, with reference to the colliery, in a manner which

²⁹² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 356; Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*.

²⁹³ Hannah Ashton, Interview with the Author (Zoom, 2021)

²⁹⁴ Alison Hiles, Interview with the Author (Esh Winning, 2021)

²⁹⁵ Robert ‘Ian’ Cummings, Interview with the Author (Zoom, Remote Interview, 2020)

demonstrates how intrinsic industry was to the everyday experience of the colliery village. For instance, Jacqueline Evans, who lived on Front Street in Langley Park, recalls her childhood bedroom in reference to the view of the pit heaps opposite her window.²⁹⁶ Eric Wood, raised in Langley Moor until the colliery closure drove his father's relocation, recounts sitting 'on the pit heap' acting as 'a lookout for the police coming' for men playing illegal gambling games.²⁹⁷

In Bearpark, the pit heaps were located directly opposite the village school. Anne Carter remembers the school garden as 'virtually on the pit heap' and remarks on the dangers of this in relation to the Aberfan disaster.²⁹⁸ Despite the National Coal Board (NCB) recognising the need to extend health and safety considerations beyond the workforce, to encompass the general public in the wake of Aberfan, the report of the general enquiry into the disaster repeatedly stressed a failure on the part of communities to recognise and take responsibility for the dangers of industrial waste.²⁹⁹

The work of John Preston on industrial disasters and children refutes this claim, pointing to evidence of community activity in the form of letters, public meetings and petitions demanding increased safety measures.³⁰⁰ Whilst drawing on international case studies of industrial disasters, Preston does not explicitly recognise how widely these events permeated into the consciousness of industrial communities, becoming psychologically damaging even at substantial distance. For instance, Hannah Ashton speaks of her childhood fear, recalling that:

²⁹⁶ Jacqueline Evans, Interview with the Author (Zoom, Remote Interview, 2020)

²⁹⁷ Eric Wood, Interview with the Author (Zoom, Remote Interview, 2020)

²⁹⁸ Joan B. Miller, *Aberfan: A Disaster and Its Aftermath* (London: Constable, 1974); J. Preston, 'From Aberfan to the "Canvey Factor": Schools, Children and Industrial Disasters', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37, no. 4 (28 October 2014): 607–22; Anne Carter, Interview with the Author.

²⁹⁹ Iain McLean, 'On Moles and the Habits of Birds: The Unpolitics of Aberfan*', *Twentieth Century British History* 8, no. 3 (1 January 1997): 285–309.

³⁰⁰ Preston, 'From Aberfan to the "Canvey Factor"'.

“Aberfan happened—and I used to sit and watch the—and we used to still go in the garden—and I used to be digging with my spoon, looking up at those pit heaps. I was terrified of the pit heaps coming down on us. But you know, it was never addressed—it was never addressed as you’d think ‘Perhaps other children might be frightened because they’re under pit heaps’. Never mentioned.”³⁰¹

Once again, we see how emotions are entangled within these memories of industrial places, that provide personal meaning to a place otherwise designed for the accumulation of profit. Rather than fear for themselves, however, more frequently interviewees remember feelings of fear or anxiety for family members at work in the coal mine. Robin recalls hearing of a fatality at his father’s workplace and that “he became as a child aware of what could happen”.

He recalls pleading with his father when he came home from his shift, saying “Dad, don’t go down the mine Daddy” but that he also remembers “[my father] said ‘But what would I do? I’m a miner.’ That was the work. He says ‘I’m a miner. That’s that is my job’”³⁰²

Not only this, but the hazardous nature of coal mining was a key factor in the development of close relationships amongst colleagues. Robin speaks of the ‘acknowledged trust each miner had with his workmates as each depended on each other to keep themselves as safe as they could in the undoubtedly dangerous environment of the colliery’.³⁰³ We have discussed how this environment generated solidarity within the workplace and in workers’ unionisation already, but Ian Cummings recalls this solidarity ‘percolated up outside the pit as well’ to create a framework of mutual aid and support within the wider community.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Hannah Ashton, Interview with the Author.

³⁰² Robin Chapman, Interview with the Author

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Robert ‘Ian’ Cummings, Interview with the Author

Robin shares his own experiences of this. When his father passed away, Robin, aged fourteen, left school and took up employment at Bearpark coke works to provide an income to support his mother and sister. He reflects on his manager's strict discipline, but also his tendency to provide Robin with overtime, stating "He was looking after me. He knew my dad had died. He knew—everybody knew everything about everyone else."³⁰⁵ A later manager modified the work allocation system to allow Robin an easier commute from work to enable him to care for his sister.

In the same way, Eric Wood reflects on Langley Moor during his childhood:

"In School Street, everybody knew everybody's business. You know, and if you—it literally was a cup of sugar, John, you're out next door to see Aunty. Everybody knew everybody. They had their own system of moral code and judgement. And that was enforced, you didn't need external groups to enforce it..."³⁰⁶

Likewise, Maureen Smith, now in her mid-eighties and still living in the village adjacent to her childhood home, reflects:

"I grew up mainly at Meadowfield during the war, and there was the usual shortage of food, which today, well, people wouldn't be able to cope with, but it was very friendly, and Langley Moor. Everybody knew everybody and people cared about each other. If you were poorly during the night, you weren't frightened to go and knock for a neighbour. You knew all your neighbours."³⁰⁷

Robin, Eric, and Maureen all note that 'everybody knew everybody'. Ian recalls, similarly:

'It was a very tough life for those people involved in it, but also, I think, a fabulous way of living because of the closeness, because of the community. Everyone would do anything for anybody. You know, the doors were never locked'³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Robin Chapman, Interview with the Author.

³⁰⁶ Eric Wood, Interview with the Author (Zoom, 2020)

³⁰⁷ Maureen Smith, Interview with the Author (Zoom, 2020).

³⁰⁸ Ian Cummings, Interview with the Author.

These types of recollections, of doors left unlocked and everyone knowing each other, appear frequently in testimony from older interviewees reflecting on village life before the colliery closure.³⁰⁹

The idea of this past community is deeply spatial, understood through the physical closeness and the absence of boundaries between families, as remembered by those who lived through the industrial era. This spatial understanding is crucial in how this generation constructs and recalls their sense of community. The strong, interconnected social networks described by the interviewees are not just personal memories; they are reflections of how these places functioned and how they are remembered today. This chapter's focus on the memories of one generation offers a detailed understanding of the community's past, setting the stage for later chapters that will explore how these spaces and memories are reimagined by subsequent generations.

Eric explains:

“Social pressure kept people together, the highs and the lows, the goods and the not so goods. And in—partly because there were times of ill health where people rallied round. And if you're off work for a while, you know, you'd be slipped five bob in the toilet in the working men's club. I've seen the father standing there, somebody's gone in just put two half crowns in his hand, knowing they'd get them back. Not when, but they would get them back.”³¹⁰

Here, again, we see how, in memory, the mining community is imagined as a homogenous, idealised space. This is not to say that these strong social

³⁰⁹ Similar sentiments are also shared by participants quoted in Jane Parry, 'Care in the Community? Gender and the Reconfiguration of Community Work in a Post-Mining Neighbourhood', *The Sociological Review* 53, no. 2_suppl (1 December 2005): 149–66; Stephenson and Wray, 'Emotional Regeneration through Community Action', 2005. Likewise, in a former mining community in West Virginia Shannon Elizabeth Bell, “‘There Ain't No Bond in Town Like There Used to Be’: The Destruction of Social Capital in the West Virginia Coalfields1”, *Sociological Forum* 24, no. 3 (1 September 2009): 631–57.

³¹⁰ Eric Wood, Interview with the Author.

networks of mutual aid and support that Eric describes did not exist. Instead, it is simply that to a significant extent, they are prioritised in testimony above discussions of the circumstances that demanded their existence. For instance, as explored in chapter one, these villages were created in the pursuit of profit through industrial capitalism, fundamentally underpinned by the paternalistic designs of coal owners.

Even by the time of Eric's childhood, when nationalisation had taken place, such places remained tied to the processes of global capitalism and managed through the state authority of the NCB. Whilst passing mention is given to police presence, or hierarchies of authority and status as in Robin's testimony, any tensions or contestations over such power dynamics are largely absent in the interviews. Perhaps, in part this is because they conflict with the community myth that individuals construct in memory, but it is also a telling point about how the emotional, everyday practices within place come to define how people look back and remember it.

Indeed, it is not just in its response to hardships that community is remembered so fondly, but naturally, also its place in times of leisure and recreation. Ian speaks happily of the 'trips to go to the seaside and so on, which were done all within the community, because the community was that lot of people who worked at the pit or did work that was associated with the pit'.³¹¹ The closure of a pit for a fixed two-week holiday meant that all workers took their leave at the same time, and a trip, usually to the coast, would often be organised by the working men's club or welfare institute. Indeed, in 1930, the Derbyshire Miners' Holiday Camp was opened in Skegness, with funding from the Miners' Welfare Fund, to be used by miners and their families during this holiday.³¹² In County Durham, it was

³¹¹ Ian Cummings, Interview with the Author.

³¹² Julie-Marie Strange, Francesca Carnevali, and Paul Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (Pearson Education, 2007), 206.

more commonplace for trips to take place to Scarborough, South Shields, or even Blackpool, by train or by coach.³¹³

Norman Anderson, of Bearpark, recalls “If you didn’t go the village was empty. There was no bugger here. They were all at South Shields. And it was chocca honestly.”³¹⁴ Also commenting on this, Robin remarks that “For many this was the only time they left the village.”³¹⁵ Despite this, there is no sense in interviewee’s testimony that the holiday represented any sort of utopian escape, rather just a pleasant break from work.³¹⁶ Instead, people position the trip as yet another example of the strength and insularity of community, recalling it almost as a transplantation of the everyday social relations and routines of a community to an alternative location. Therefore, whilst community was largely centred around a shared experience of place, belonging within it is also understood as a key element of individual identity that could be performed elsewhere, too.

Robin compares the club trip to another community excursion to the ‘Big Meeting’, the colloquial term for the annual Durham Miners’ Gala.³¹⁷ As David Wray suggests, ‘the Gala can be described as part union rally, part political rally, part community get together, and part family picnic’ and

³¹³ For instance, in 1948, 1809 people departed from Brandon by train to Scarborough, a trip organised by the working men’s club, Laurie Moran, *The History of Brandon Colliery, 1856-1960*, 2020 Reprint (Houghton-Le-Spring: The Gilpin Press, 1988).

³¹⁴ Norman Anderson, Interview with the Author (Bearpark, March 2022)

³¹⁵ Robin Chapman, Interview with the Author.

³¹⁶ For discussions of working-class holidays, in particular seaside holidays, see Robert Troschitz, ‘Liminal Seaside: Working-Class Tourism in the Nineteenth Century’, in *The Making of English Popular Culture*, ed. John Storey (London: Routledge, 2016), 108–17; John K. Walton, ‘The Demand for Working-Class Seaside Holidays in Victorian England’, *The Economic History Review* 34, no. 2 (1981): 249–65; John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Darren Webb, ‘Bakhtin at the Seaside: Utopia, Modernity and the Carnavalesque’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 3 (2005): 121–38.

³¹⁷ Ibid; David Temple, *The Big Meeting: A History of the Durham Miners’ Gala* (Washington: TUPs Books in association with the Durham Miners’ Association, 2011).

acted as a ‘process of consolidation for the social solidarity of the mining communities.’³¹⁸ Each village was represented by a colliery banner in the march through the city of Durham, with many drawing on common themes in their designs, such as Aesop’s ‘Unity is Strength’ fable, or the ‘All Men are Brethren’ motif.³¹⁹ The banners, borne and surrounded by village residents in their march, served as a visible reminder of the strength of individual communities amidst an event which drew on a much wider understanding of solidarity and community within the mining occupation as a whole.³²⁰

Indeed, the Gala is remembered by interviewees as a performative display of the everyday social relations that made up mining communities, and the sense of a togetherness moulded by industry played out in the much more ordinary setting of the village, too. What is apparent is that industry provided a rather rigid structure of rhythms and routines, and within these, the social relations that make up a community emerged. Not only did the design of colliery villages demand a physical closeness, and a blurring of public and private spaces, industry also required an emotional solidarity amongst people in response to its dangers and hardships. As such, similar to the observations of Walkerdine and Jimenez in Welsh ‘Steeltown’, interviewees within the Durham coalfield understand their former communities as a protective ‘envelope’, in which mutual aid and support flourished.³²¹

³¹⁸ Wray, ‘The Place of Imagery in the Transmission of Culture: The Banners of the Durham Coalfield’; Stephenson and Wray, ‘Emotional Regeneration through Community Action’, 2005.

³¹⁹ Emery, *Banners of the Durham Coalfield*.

³²⁰ Wray, ‘The Place of Imagery in the Transmission of Culture: The Banners of the Durham Coalfield’.

³²¹ Walkerdine and Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community after De-Industrialisation: A Psychosocial Approach to Affect*.

When ‘women knew their place’: Gender and Industrial Community

Coal mining in the United Kingdom had been an employment limited to men since 1842, and as such, the industry itself was characterised by masculinity.³²² Indeed, the hardships and danger of work at the colliery served as a source of communal pride, and more specifically, represented a traditional masculinity obtained through manual labour and courage.³²³ Yet beyond the workplace, like many historic coalfield communities, the colliery villages of Durham were comprised of gendered spaces that were distinctly separated from each other.³²⁴ Here, this chapter explores the manner in which men and women negotiated the everyday rhythms of an industrial space, examining how community and identity were actively constructed within these gendered bounds.

Redvers Crooks, whose father was a miner on long-term incapacity payments, had hoped to find work at Bearpark colliery with his friends, yet was also acutely aware of the realities of colliery work, and directly correlates this to his sense of familial and community pride.

“Bearpark Colliery face was eighteen inches, you had to work in eighteen inches chipping the coal off the wall, off the face, in water, and it must have been harrowing. And I’m really proud, not just of my father, but every miner in this village who worked there”.³²⁵

³²² Angela V. John, ‘Colliery Legislation and Its Consequences: 1842 and the Women Miners of Lancashire’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 61, no. 1 (1 September 1978): 78–114.

³²³ McIvor and Johnston, ‘Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries’.

³²⁴ Jay Emery, ‘Belonging, Memory and History in the North Nottinghamshire Coalfield’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 59 (1 January 2018): 77–89; McDowell and Massey, ‘A Woman’s Place?’, Natalie Thomlinson, “‘I Was Never Very Clever, but I Always Survived!’: Educational Experiences of Women in Britain’s Coalfield Communities, 1944–1990’, in *Education, Work and Social Change in Britain’s Former Coalfield Communities: The Ghost of Coal*, ed. Robin Simmons and Kat Simpson (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 173–95.

³²⁵ Interview with Redvers Crooks (Bearpark, October 2021).

For many, therefore, the risks added to the mysticism of pit work, positioning it as a rite of passage to becoming a man.³²⁶ As such, whilst women's lives were largely dictated by strong gendered expectations of their role in a coalfield community, men too were bound by rigid understandings of masculinity that were intrinsically linked to industrial work.³²⁷ In analysing a multitude of miners' autobiographies, Howard notes the 'compulsive fascination' of the colliery upon boys and young men raised in coal mining villages.³²⁸ He quotes from one autobiography:

"But these shafts still drew us back, time after time, with a sort of hypnotic compulsion. Practically every kid in the village had had a relative mauled, broken or killed by this pit, and yet we still played around it, and we all knew as we grew up, no matter what we did, that someday it would claim us."³²⁹

Many followed their friends or relatives into the industry, having been socialised through their younger years in the expectation of doing so.³³⁰ Although notes the pull of a guaranteed good wage in the coal industry, his remarks also speak to a broader desire to both follow family tradition and a pride in this generational continuity.

Yet for Barrie becoming a coal miner was 'the last thing my parents wanted, but...there wasn't much around in the way of jobs', and so Barrie joined his father in the coal industry, although he too felt his education

³²⁶ For discussions of this occupational socialisation, see for instance William Stuart Howard, 'Miner's Autobiographies, 1790-1945: A Study of Life Accounts by English Miners and Their Families.' (PhD Thesis, Sunderland Polytechnic, 1991); Strangleman, 'Networks, Place and Identities in Post-Industrial Mining Communities'; Perchard, "'Broken Men'" and "Thatcher's Children".

³²⁷ McIvor and Johnston, *Miners' Lung*; Ward, 'Miners' Bodies and Masculine Identity in Britain, c.1900-1950'.

³²⁸ William Stuart Howard, "Miner's Autobiographies, 1790-1945: A Study of Life Accounts by English Miners and Their Families." (PhD Thesis, Sunderland Polytechnic, 1991), p.200.

³²⁹ Bullock J, *Bowers Row* (Wakefield, 1976) quoted in Howard, "Miner's Autobiographies, 1790-1945.", p.200.

³³⁰ Dennis, *Coal Is Our Life: An Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community*, 1956; Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs*.

allowed him to progress to the managerial levels within the National Coal Board.³³¹ Particularly at this time, when alternative employment was kept deliberately scarce by national policy, the coal mine offered one of the only options for employment for young men like Barrie, and as he notes too, his industrial employment kept him out of National Service, which he felt was not for him.³³²

For others, such as Redvers, there was a sense that education did not matter, because ultimately coal mining employment would be waiting for them when they left school.

“Let's say the early 70s when I was at the secondary modern as we used to call it. There was-- every son and daughter's father was basically a miner who lived in the village otherwise they would have to travel, and they probably couldn't afford a car, wasn't many cars on the on the road then. So, we didn't have a lot of belief and coming to 14 and 15, the lads in the year above me...they worked at the pit when they left school, and their fathers worked there, too. So, they put them in for and they got they got straight on. There were loads employed, when I was still at school, and they were over the moon to get a job because money meant they could go out”³³³

From such testimony, we see a dominant structure of feeling in action; the accepted norms, customs and behaviours of a community implicitly dictate the socialisation and ultimate direction of individual lives.³³⁴ In particular, this is underpinned by accepted gender norms of what is expected of a boy entering manhood, and individual identity thus becomes bound by these broader definitions of masculinity and work, standing in contrast to ideas of femininity and domesticity that were equally as constrictive.

In particular, marriage to a miner was a significant determiner of the everyday routines and rhythms of day-to-day life for women in coalfield

³³¹ Barrie Carse, Interview with the Author (Ushaw Moor, 2022).

³³² Hudson, *Wrecking a Region: State Policies, Party Politics, and Regional Change in North East England.*; Barrie Carse, Interview with the Author.

³³³ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author, (Bearpark, October 2021).

³³⁴ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 1977.

villages. Even into the later twentieth century, when levels of female employment were increasing nationally, employment of married women remained notably low in coalfield areas prior to industrial closures.³³⁵ To a great extent, this was due to the large amount of unpaid domestic labour required. For instance, until the widespread construction of pithead baths by the NCB, the preparing of a bath and the washing of miners' clothes occupied a significant place within the routine of wives and mothers within coal mining communities.³³⁶ Likewise, the practicalities of working around colliery shift patterns made childcare difficult.

To return to Robin's testimony, the death of his father resulted in Robin having to leave school to become the breadwinner and support his mother and sister. Despite this, domesticity in this context was far removed from the middle-class ideal, represented in the separate spheres ideology of the late Victorian and early twentieth century, which equated femininity with physical fragility.³³⁷ Beynon and Austin quote a recollection of miners' wives as the 'slaves of slaves', noting the extent of unpaid physical labour undertaken by such women, such as bringing buckets of fresh water and coal into the home before modern amenities were added as standard.³³⁸

In my interview with Redvers, he discusses his memories of women in Bearpark when he was growing up in the 1960s and 1970s. Here, he struggles to align the position of women in the past with his present-day advocacy for gender equality, stating "I nearly used the term women knew their place but that was totally, totally wrong. It was—although I shouldn't

³³⁵ Hudson, *Wrecking a Region: State Policies, Party Politics, and Regional Change in North East England*.

³³⁶ Mari A. Williams, 'Aspects of Women's Working Lives in the Mining Communities of South Wales, 1891–1939', *Folk Life* 38, no. 1 (January 1999): 56–70.

³³⁷ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2018).

³³⁸ Beynon and Austin, *Masters and Servants*, 171–73.

have used that term, they sort of did.”³³⁹ Redvers does not explicitly state whether his disdain for the treatment of women is a retrospective development, or whether he felt this way at the time, but what is certainly evident is a strong memory of clearly gender-segregated spaces, in which a ‘woman’s place’ is limited to the traditional sphere of domesticity.

This clear demarcation of gendered spaces applied not only to spaces of labour, but spaces of leisure too. Working men’s clubs, for instance, were encouraged by their central union to only permit women into certain areas of the club, such as the library, although the actual decision over when and where women were permitted in the club varied between sites in the United Kingdom.³⁴⁰ Very few clubs permitted female membership, and all required the supervision of women in attendance by a male relative. Instead, alternative spaces for social organisation, namely the church or chapel, allowed women to engage with and construct community relationships in leisure time.³⁴¹

Yet too frequently, women’s work and position in coalfield communities have historically been framed as only relevant or important in the way in which it supported the work and political organisation of men.³⁴² Instead, women acted as key actors in the creation and maintenance of a community. Whilst the workplace provided the basis for male sociability, the domestic space of the home offered the opportunity for women to create social networks too. Stuart Macintyre, although focusing upon the coal mining

³³⁹ Redvers Crooks, *Interview with the Author*, (Bearpark, October 2021).

³⁴⁰ Cherrington, *Not Just Beer and Bingo! A Social History of Working Men’s Clubs*.

³⁴¹ Angela V. John, ‘Scratching the Surface. Women, Work and Coalmining History in England and Wales’, *Oral History* 10, no. 2 (1982): 13–26.

³⁴² Carole Harwood identifies this trend in arguments, countering them in relation to a longer history of women’s agency and political organisation in South Wales’ coal communities, see Carole Harwood, ‘A Woman’s Place’, in *Striking Back*, ed. Welsh Campaign for Civil and Political Liberties and National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) (Cardiff: Welsh Campaign for Civil and Political Liberties and the NUM, 1985).

villages of the Rhondda valley and Fife, notes the way in which the closely packed terrace houses generated a sense of communality despite ostensibly being private space; outdoor lavatories, frequently used washing lines, and outside coal stores ensured residents were often outdoors and in close proximity to their neighbours, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century.³⁴³ Asked if there was a sense of community in the village of Ushaw Moor when growing up, interviewee Barrie Carse responds:

“Yes, I think that the fact that people lived in narrow streets. Women used to jump over the wall, and there was a strong community sense, much stronger than what there is here because people are more separated.”³⁴⁴

It is worth noting, however, that the practice of tied housing, in which accommodation was dependent upon employment in the colliery, ensured that women were often entirely reliant upon the work of male relatives to maintain their home. As already noted, this was a paternalist practice that continued following nationalisation, with much privately-owned housing being transferred to NCB ownership. Nevertheless, whilst the role of women in the coalfield is often positioned as relational and passive, the everyday rhythms of women’s time and space dictated by men’s work, these strong social networks established by women were essential in generating the basis of a systems of mutual aid and communality.³⁴⁵ These systems have received the most attention for their importance in the 1984-85 miners’ strike, but they had also long operated on an everyday level in a manner which sustained a sense of community, drawn upon not only in relation to

³⁴³ Stuart Macintyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working-Class Militancy in Inter-War Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

³⁴⁴ Barrie Carse, Interview with the Author.

³⁴⁵ McDowell and Massey, ‘A Woman’s Place?’; Anna Reading, ‘Making Feminist Heritage Work: Gender and Heritage’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 397–413.

colliery accidents, but other instances of difficulty, grief, or illness.³⁴⁶ For instance, Maureen Smith (a bus conductor herself whilst her husband worked at Brandon Pit House, which she recognises herself made her an anomaly amongst her female peers), recalls:

“When I was a little girl, there was a young lad, he was dying of TB. He was only in his twenties, and his Mam said, 'Is there anything you'd like?' and he said, 'I'd love one of Mrs. Brown's clouty puddings' which was a pudding made in a-- you probably won't know what I'm talking about--But erm, she knocked her up at twelve o'clock at night, and the lady made him this pudding, and erm, he died at four o'clock. He ate it and then he died. Now, would you dare knock anybody up now? I don't think they would.”³⁴⁷

As is evidenced here, these networks were particularly useful in times of illness or injury. Unsurprisingly, much attention is devoted to men's ill-health directly related to work in the coal mine, and this will be explored in the next section of the chapter. However, incidences of female ill-health were also common within coalfield communities, with hard labour, particularly the preparation of miners' baths, and poor housing conditions frequently causing long-term disability or impairment.³⁴⁸

Despite this, women's health is largely absent from my interviews, receiving only one brief mention, in a way that is reflective of the broader invisibility of its occurrence within industrial history. Nevertheless, when it is discussed by Robin, whose mother was hospitalised when he was ten years old, it is done so in a way that emphasises the social networks of

³⁴⁶ Allen, 'Women, "Community" and the British Miners' Strike of 1984-85'; Carol Stephenson and Jean Spence, 'Pies and Essays: Women Writing through the British 1984-1985 Coal Miners' Strike', *Gender, Place & Culture* 20, no. 2 (2013): 218-35; Spence and Stephenson, "'Side by Side With Our Men?'" Women's Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners' Strike'.

³⁴⁷ Maureen Smith, Interview with the Author, (Zoom, 2020).

³⁴⁸ Alexandra Jones, "'Her Body [Was] like a Hard-Worked Machine": Women's Work and Disability in Coalfields Literature, 1880-1950', *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (2017), doi:10.18061/dsq.v37i4.6103.

support that assisted his family during his mother's illness..³⁴⁹ For most of this time, Robin stayed with his Aunt Liza who lived in the village, whilst his younger sister stayed with a neighbour; the village 'rallied round' in his words, drawing on female-led networks of mutual aid.

As has been demonstrated here, then, the distinctly gendered division of coalfield communities was a fundamental element of their very existence. Both men and women's labour contributed in different but equal ways to the construction of the social networks and relationships that form a community, and both operated within the rhythms and routines of industry to develop channels of mutual support and solidarity. Yet by the concluding decades of the twentieth century, much of what had seemed fixed, and rigid was altered by the changing tides of industrial closure, and understandings of gendered work were not left untouched. This will be explored in the next chapter, having established the significance of men and women's work and identity to community cohesion here.

'People just weren't close': Belonging and Exclusion in an Industrial Community

This rather unique and seemingly well-ordered manner of social organisation, borne from occupational singularity and geographical isolation, earned a great deal of attention from social theorists, remarking on the homogeneity of mining settlements and the position of the miner as the

³⁴⁹ Robin's mother was hospitalised at Winterton Psychiatric Hospital in Sedgefield. The psychiatric health of women in coalfield communities is an important topic that has thus far received little academic attention, but due to its absence in my interviews it would be impossible to address it fully here.

archetypal proletariat.³⁵⁰ Yet more recent assessments highlight the oversimplification of mining communities, instead pointing to variations both within and between different coalfields in the United Kingdom.³⁵¹ In particular, here, this chapter is concerned with addressing the oversimplification of coal mining communities as being experienced uniformly, with everyone receptive of the same levels of inclusion and solidarity.

As sociologist Mike Savage notes, ‘anyone that conducts research on local belonging cannot but be struck by the power of popular nostalgia for old ways of neighbourhood life’.³⁵² Indeed, whilst oral history’s advantage is the insight it gives into granular, personal experience, it is important to remember that in doing so, we receive a subjective account that may not be representative of everyone’s understanding. For instance, Robin’s account, quoted earlier in this chapter, depicts the mining community of his childhood as harmonious, self-sufficient, and supportive. Yet as Savage also argues, these nostalgic constructions of the past serve to legitimise ideas of belonging and authenticity, whilst simultaneously enforcing ideas of otherness and exclusion, particularly along class and ethnic boundaries.³⁵³ This is not to suggest that Robin’s testimony is invalid, or that he did not experience his past in the way he recounts, but rather that his experiences

³⁵⁰ Dennis, *Coal Is Our Life : An Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community*, 1956; Warwick and Littlejohn, *Coal, Capital, and Culture: A Sociological Analysis of Mining Communities in West Yorkshire*; Clark Kerr and Abraham J. Siegel, ‘The Interindustry Propensity to Strike: An International Comparison’, in *Industrial Conflict*, ed. Arthur Kornhauser et al., Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series in the Social Sciences (New York: McGraw Hill, 1954), 189–212.

³⁵¹ Ackers, ‘Life After Death: Mining History without a Coal Industry’; David Gilbert, ‘Imagined Communities and Mining Communities’; Strangleman, “‘Mining a Productive Seam? The Coal Industry, Community and Sociology’”, 2018; Howell, *The Politics of the N.U.M.*; Harrison, *Independent Collier*.

³⁵² Mike Savage, ‘Histories, Belongings, Communities’, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11 (1 April 2008): 151–62.

³⁵³ Ibid.; Mike Savage, ‘The Politics of Elective Belonging’, *Housing, Theory and Society* 27, no. 2 (January 2010): 115–61.

may not be shared by all, and that to accept them as a universal fact is to entrench historical exclusions further.

Although people may move into the village following marriage, migration into Bearpark for any other reason, such as immigration from overseas, seems particularly uncommon. Stefan Gemski, for instance, recalls being from the only family of overseas origin in Bearpark when he and his siblings grew up there between the 1960s and 1980s. In contrast to other interviewees, who describe in near-idyllic terms the close-knit nature of community, and the solidarity within it, Stefan provides another perspective. His father was a member of the Polish army and had remained in the United Kingdom after being stationed near London during the Second World War.

When first approached, Stefan remarked that being asked to participate had prompted some reflection on his past, after some consideration as to whether he would like to take part in the process. He notes before the interview that he is sure that, as a child, he did not fully recognise experiences hostility or discrimination that resulted from his father being Polish. When he begins to discuss this in his interview, he voices aloud this thought process, saying “Now, the, the attitudes at the time, I kind of as a kid, when you're growing up, this is the bit of trying to sort of recall-- was there any animosity because of my dad's sort of background?”³⁵⁴

Stefan's testimony speaks to the nature of adult memory. Whilst sometimes we are faced with involuntary associative memory at the prompt of a sound, smell, taste, or touch, other times we must make a voluntary effort to recall the past.³⁵⁵ As such, what we remember is always mediated through the lens of making sense of it in the present day, and here Stefan

³⁵⁴ Stefan Gemski, Interview with the Author, (Waterhouses, County Durham: November 2021)

³⁵⁵ Paula Hamilton, 'The Proust Effect: Oral History and the Senses', *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, 2012, 218–32.

explicitly voices that process. Here, he does so without any prompting on my behalf, instead probing this memory himself as part of a much longer discussion of his childhood. He continues:

“And I can, I can remember vaguely a couple of incidents where he got into fights with people, you know, who had a drink or two and then started to get a bit aggressive. And I can kind of remember a couple of incidents, but they weren't common. Most of it was just, instead of any kind of overt aggression or dislike, people just weren't close. It was it was kind of weird, looking back, you know, weren't very neighbourly. Some people were neighbourly. But some people, most people weren't, they would just kind of let you get on do what you want to do. Now, we were a large family and so because I think it was possibly because of my dad's background.”³⁵⁶

For Stefan, this reflection does not appear to be some sort of monumental shattering of a long-held myth of a strong community, but rather a more nuanced attempt to understand his family's treatment within the community through the perspective of memory. Yet through this deliberate exercise in trying to make sense of the past, Stefan's testimony provides a direct contrast to the recollections of the closely-knit, supportive community described earlier in this chapter by other residents.

Here, we see how that 'protective membrane' conceptualised by Walkerdine and Jimenez is put into operation to exclude and reject, in order to reinforce the inclusion and acceptance of those already within it.³⁵⁷ Stefan expresses doubt over the exact reasoning behind their exclusion and considers it to perhaps be his father's ethnicity or their family size. More pertinently, he suggests that his father's struggle to find work, and reliance on piecemeal factory shifts, may have contributed most to their status as outsiders. He reflects:

³⁵⁶ Stefan Gemski, Interview with the Author.

³⁵⁷ Walkerdine and Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community after de-Industrialisation: A Psychosocial Approach to Affect*.

“He was the only one in a little mining village and in the '60s, which was when it was, you know, the rest of the village--really the vast majority of people were still attached to the coal mining industry, and they worked at a Bearpark pit- that was still going at the time.”³⁵⁸

Hannah Ashton, who also grew up in Bearpark at the same time as Stefan, expresses that she too ‘had a bit of a different upbringing to many people in Bearpark’, although for different reasons. Her father ran a transport firm, linked but not directly reliant upon the village’s industry, and both her parents had been university educated. Hannah describes their home, a larger house on the outskirts of the village, as ‘almost a parallel universe’ to the terrace row homes of her school peers. She notes:

“My Father wasn't part of going to the Dog and Gun, he wasn't part of the drinking culture, he didn't used to go to the Working Men's Club. So it was, you know-- I know people used to say we were snobbish. Perhaps they thought we were, I don't know. But it was just my parents were just-- that wasn't their cup of tea. And when they opened a bingo in the village and people were desperate to go to the bingo, I remember looking at my Mum--I had no idea as a kid--I said, "Would you go to the bingo?". The look I got! This was the woman who was the President of the Federation of University Women. So, she used to go into Durham for meetings. And here's me going "Why don't you go to the bingo?", I had no idea that--that life was--that you did one or the other and my mother wasn't a bingo mother at all.”³⁵⁹

Reflecting on this, Hannah says of her peers, “I was envious for a lot of their lives because it was much more normal... you just want to be like every other kid, don't you.”³⁶⁰ Here, perceptions of class identity, and the influence of being situated spatially outside of the village centre, form the basis of her feelings of exclusion. Yet despite the differences between Stefan and Hannah observable here, it is clear that both note the significance of their fathers not being employed at the colliery, and thus also not being involved with the dominant industrial culture. Once again, it is evident how

³⁵⁸ Stefan Gemski, Interview with the Author.

³⁵⁹ Hannah Ashton, Interview with the Author.

³⁶⁰ Hannah Ashton, Interview with the Author.

strongly the rhythms and routines of industry dictated community life in these coal mining villages, but it is also apparent how alienating it felt to fall outside of these rhythms, to be spatially but not socially located within a community.

For another interviewee, Oonagh Claber, it was being the daughter of Bearpark's village doctor that "did kind of separate you from everybody a little bit."³⁶¹ She recalls that:

"My dad, even though he was a very normal ex miner's son himself--being the doctor was... he was a bit of a-- not a celebrity, but do you know what I mean? He was like the--sort of--an important person in the village, which is kind of bizarre if you knew him".³⁶²

Whilst Oonagh does not recall feeling excluded as a child- like other interviewees, she remarks "everybody knew who you were and everyone looked out for your really"- there is a clear awareness that her family were viewed differently based upon her father's occupation.³⁶³ Whilst other accounts stress the homogeneity of social relations in the village, Oonagh suggests that there were levels of social stratification based upon ideas of authority and deference.

Moreover, to return to Eric's discussion of community quoted earlier, he notes that the village 'had their own system of moral codes and judgement' and that they 'didn't need external groups' to enforce that.³⁶⁴ Yet in being established within the boundaries of a dominant industrial culture, these systems of judgement undoubtedly acted to further enforce exclusion in setting strict social norms for what was considered morally acceptable and

³⁶¹ Oonagh Claber, Interview with the Author (Zoom: July 2021).

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Eric Wood, Interview. With the Author.

stigmatising those acting outside of these norms. Robin, too, comments that ‘Serious crime was virtually unknown, and the people policed themselves to a large extent.’³⁶⁵

Such statements, however, leave questions about how ‘serious crime’ was defined, how this self-policing looked in practice, and how it was experienced by different groups within a community. Redvers does offer some insight in recounting his own experiences, and his actions not being reported because ‘You could not be a grass, to the police. It was just unheard of. I mean all sorts went on.’ He recalls one particular incident:

“There was one day I was wheeling my Uncle George, who was an examiner. He had COPD [Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease] as well, it put him in a wheelchair, you know, with all the workings, the harsh workings. Anyway, I was pushing him in the club and this lad said 'Hoy him round' rather than move out of the way, so I parked George up- me Uncle George- and I grabbed him. I threw him to the ground and as he was crawling under the snooker table, I'm kicking him, violently kicking him and no one stopped us because they said well, he deserves it, because he's a disabled person. Not one committee member reported me. [laughs] I had a temper you see.”³⁶⁶

Redvers’s testimony also serves to highlight attitudes towards disability within coalfield communities. Although here Redvers acted in defence of his uncle, with the implicit support of other members in the working men’s club, the words of the other individual involved suggest a level of disrespect and disregard for George in relation to his disability. Whilst work-related illness and injury were so frequent in coal field communities that they did not necessarily result in outright stigma or rejection, the inability to participate fully in the dominant industrial culture introduced levels of exclusion, nevertheless.

³⁶⁵ Robin Chapman, Correspondence with the Author.

³⁶⁶ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

Historian Arthur McIvor, who has written extensively on the subject of industrial disability, comments that ‘bodies were worn out and discarded’ in the workplace, but here we see how ill and disabled bodies continue to be disregarded beyond the workplace too.³⁶⁷ Despite the prevalence of disability, spaces of leisure often lacked adaptations to make them accessible to all.³⁶⁸ Indeed, in a community in which masculine identity was so centred around hard physical labour, and in which even leisure frequently meant outdoor pursuits or heavy drinking, inability to participate may lead to a stripping of personhood to an extent, as we see with the blatant objectification of George in his wheelchair.

Moreover, whilst there is a significant body of work that examines the health-related consequences of industrial work, the emotional response to disability and unemployment in these sectors is less frequently explored.³⁶⁹ As Long and Brown note, there is an emphasis upon the physical ill-effects of coal mining, with the impacts upon mental well-being often neglected. As they argue ‘the low visibility of work-related mental disturbance in mining does not automatically equate to a low incidence.’³⁷⁰

In part, the apparent low incidence of work-related mental illness was due to a prioritisation of physical illness on official records, because this categorisation was more likely to be accepted when claiming support and compensation.³⁷¹ However, it is also likely that the long-maintained ‘macho’ culture of industrial work, in which displays of emotion were viewed as a deviation from an accepted masculinity, served to discourage

³⁶⁷ McIvor and Johnston, ‘Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries’; Arthur McIvor, *Working Lives: Work in Britain since 1945* (Macmillan International Higher Education, 2013).

³⁶⁸ Kirsti Bohata et al., *Disability in Industrial Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

³⁶⁹ McIvor, *Working Lives: Work in Britain since 1945*.

³⁷⁰ Long and Brown, ‘Conceptualizing Work-Related Mental Distress in the British Coalfields (c.1900–1950)’.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

workers from expressing concerns of mental illness.³⁷² As such, despite the remembered idea of communities that exhibited unwavering solidarity—through the ‘goods and the not-so-goods, as Eric phrased it— the reality was more complex. In response to this culture of silence and the stigma surrounding psychological illness within coal field communities, strategies to cope manifested themselves in other ways.³⁷³

Redvers’s father was signed off work with post-traumatic depression following an accident, although it was his Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) emphasised on doctor’s letters and in disputes with the British Coal regarding compensation for disability caused through his employment. Redvers explains what he knows about his father’s accident, which occurred when he was only one year old.

“He went to work, and the cage was open. And he went in and shouted. And his cage fellow mustn't have heard him, and he just sent it down as he thought it was empty. If he didn't think it was empty, he's a sadist. And then they found me Dad in the corner of the cage, trembling, because it had gone down. I don't know the depth of Bearpark colliery, but I know it'll be a deep mine. And for him to go through that, it would have killed a few, and it sadly ruined his health. So, from then he was on the sick and then he was finished in 1963, with ill health. That's it, for any man.”³⁷⁴

He later adds, “He used to tell me he’d chucked his medication in the fire—whether he did or not I don’t know.” Gary Crooks also speaks of his grandfather, who was Redvers’s father, saying:

“My Grandad, who was a miner at Bearpark colliery, turned into a bit of a lunatic after he fell down the colliery lift shaft. He was a big drinker. He

³⁷² Ali Haggett, *A History of Male Psychological Disorders in Britain, 1945-1980*, Mental Health in Historical Perspective (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.69.

³⁷³ Ibid.; Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

³⁷⁴ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

made my dad collect coal from the slag heap and chop logs to fund his drinking”³⁷⁵

As Ali Haggett notes, alcohol was a commonly employed coping strategy, or form of self-medication for men in communities where ill-health, particularly mental illness, was stigmatised.³⁷⁶ To align with the accepted norms and behaviours of the community, disabled and unemployed individuals may have felt more pressure to perform their masculinity, having been otherwise removed from the traditionally masculine space of work.³⁷⁷ Violence, too, acted as a channel to perform this masculinity, in spaces where paternal authority underpinned the entire social structure. As such, work-related trauma was often transmitted across generations, engraining a damaging interpretation of masculinity that served to traumatise once more in the future. Gary continues:

“... My dad was a miner for a while, but mostly he worked on building sites. I was frightened of him. He would hit me with a belt... When I was eleven, my mum got together with Alan. He was a miner at the colliery at Esh. He used to drink and then he got violent and then at other times he got depressed. He tried to hang himself in our house.”³⁷⁸

The mythologised construction of a family-like, homogenous mining community serves to overlook these alternative, difficult experiences. Memories of depression, suicide, domestic violence, and child abuse do not fit neatly into the narrative of a supportive community in which the ‘doors were never locked’ and where people ‘rallied round’. Whilst in *Disability in Industrial Britain*, the authors argue that there was an ‘interpenetration of

³⁷⁵ Gary Crooks, quoted in Adrian Clarke, *Gary's Friends* (Hove: The West Pier Press, 2007), p.2.

³⁷⁶ Haggett, *A History of Male Psychological Disorders in Britain, 1945-1980*.

³⁷⁷ David M. Turner and Daniel Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution: Physical Impairment in British Coalmining, 1780–1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p.132.

³⁷⁸ Clarke, *Gary's Friends*, 2007.

home and neighbourhood, marking the house as a liminal social space of disability', they also recognise evidence that suggests the burden of care did fall primarily on women within the household.³⁷⁹ This is not to say that broader neighbourhood support did not occur frequently, but rather, it was not consistent or constant, and left individuals like Gary and his family members to struggle with a privatised cross-generational trauma.

Indeed, Gary's grandfather struggled with the aftereffects of his accident for many years and attempted to take his own life.³⁸⁰ The term 'lunatic' is a term that stigmatises and misrepresents mental ill-health and positions psychological illness as a type of personal deficiency, but here Gary's usage seems intended to demarcate a more serious form of mental illness, one that was debilitating and severe enough to form grounds for exclusion from the wider community.³⁸¹ Indeed, despite psychological distress, and even suicide, being rather commonly associated with work-related trauma, there remained a stigma attached to unemployment on account of mental ill-health; those visibly psychological unwell saw their behaviour stigmatised as lunacy, and those unable to express or represent their illness coherently risked accusations of malingering.³⁸²

Although the testimony quoted above draws on a variety of individual experiences, feelings of stigma, alienation, and exclusion are apparent in all. Whilst this chapter began by exploring experiences of community from within the dominant industrial structure of feeling, here we have examined the experiences of those who fell outside the bounds of these accepted

³⁷⁹ Bohata et al., *Disability in Industrial Britain*.

³⁸⁰ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author. Redvers is Gary Crooks' Uncle, and Gary's grandfather mentioned here is therefore Redvers' father.

³⁸¹ Roy Richard Grinker, *Nobody's Normal: How Culture Created the Stigma of Mental Illness* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021).

³⁸² Long and Brown, 'Conceptualizing Work-Related Mental Distress in the British Coalfields (c.1900–1950)'; Haggett, *A History of Male Psychological Disorders in Britain, 1945–1980*.

norms and behaviours, to whom the industrial rhythms and routines were acutely observable, but not always open for participation. In doing so, these experiences counter the conceptualisation and memorialisation of such mining villages as ideal and homogenous communities, instead revealing their past to be a great deal more nuanced and complex.

Conclusion

This chapter has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of the concept of community within the coal mining villages to the west of Durham, demonstrating the complexities of belonging, exclusion, and divisions that shaped these close-knit settlements. In doing so, it has engaged with existing debates on the very definition of 'community' in sociological and historical analysis, while focusing on how interviewees themselves construct the idea of community in memory, drawing upon Gilbert's notion of "imagined mining communities."

The chapter has offered an examination of how the idea of community is recalled spatially and emotionally, being particularly attentive to how interviewees recollect the physical and psychological closeness of mining villages. The oral histories used here are invaluable in capturing the nuanced interplay between individual and collective memory, particularly for those who directly experienced the coal mining era. These testimonies provide a rich, personal perspective that is often absent from official records or policy documents. By focusing on the memories of this generation, this chapter uncovers the deep emotional and psychological impacts of deindustrialisation on individuals and communities. While this chapter centres on a single generational cohort, it also opens up questions about how these memories will be engaged with and transformed by future generations, a theme that will be explored in subsequent chapters

This chapter also turned to memories of mutual support structures and traditions that underpinned these communities, which served to emphasise the central role of industry in shaping social relations and understandings of community. Crucially, it has stepped beyond the idealised constructions of mining communities in memory, exploring the divisions and tensions that existed within these spaces. Gender is one prominent division discussed in this chapter, with women occupying a distinct gendered identity based on domesticity and unpaid labour, despite their active participation in the social networks of the village. Simultaneously, the chapter demonstrated how understandings of masculinity were closely intertwined with industrial employment, highlighting the challenges of dismantling deeply ingrained gender norms during deindustrialisation.

Furthermore, the chapter explored other divisions within these close-knit communities, demonstrating how these idealised social networks could serve to divide and exclude those who did not fit within the dominant structure of feeling. The role of oral history is particularly important here, as through recognising that interviewees construct community based on their experiences and memories, individuals introduce nuanced understandings within and between narratives. Some remembered harmonious, supportive communities, while others recounted feelings of exclusion and alienation based on ethnicity, class, or disability, challenging the notion of a homogenous, idyllic mining community.

In sum, this chapter has critically examined ideas of community, identity, and exclusion in the coal mining villages of County Durham, as remembered by those who experienced these places during the industrial era. Through the use of oral history, this chapter has provided a detailed understanding of how this generation recalls and interprets their past, emphasising the role of memory and place in shaping their identities. While this chapter has focused on a single generational perspective, it lays the groundwork for the broader multi-generational analysis that will follow. The next chapters will build on this foundation by exploring how the memories

of this industrial past are engaged with, reinterpreted, and transmitted to and by subsequent generations, revealing the enduring impact of this idea of coal communities on the collective memory of the region.

CHAPTER 4 DEALING WITH DEINDUSTRIALISATION

“A lot of other people didn't have those opportunities and it was the scars, and the whole energy that were left behind post miners' strike--you know--and people had kinda--that whole industry had collapsed, and that whole identity was gone. You know, so there was a lot of kind of--you know--a lot of the guys who worked there went--went to the working men's club and drank themselves to death--you know--and a lot of the young people... couldn't see a way forward.”³⁸³

“And after the strike because there was just no work around really, it was just-- A lotta lads that I went to school with and that didn't have jobs, they sorta got jobs when they got a little bit older when there was work more work around then but at the time there was nowt. Nothing.”³⁸⁴

Introduction

This chapter begins by setting the stage for a deeper exploration of the emotional and spatial impacts of coalfield contraction in County Durham, focusing on the multi-generational memories of those affected. By examining the timeline of colliery closures, this chapter highlights not only the historical trajectory of industrial decline but also how these events are remembered and reinterpreted across generations. This approach underscores the thesis's broader contribution to understanding how deindustrialisation is experienced and remembered within the context of place and community

³⁸³ Gary Crooks, Interview with the Author.

³⁸⁴ Norman Anderson, Interview with the Author.

Significantly, too, this timeline demonstrates that the highest number of colliery closures in the area occurred in the 1960s, continuing throughout the following decades. These earlier closures remain unexplored in Durham, and yet the oral history testimony included here demonstrates their significant emotional impact on both individuals and communities. This chapter explores testimony from two distinct generations—those with direct experience of industry through their own employment in coal mining, and those who were children or teenagers at the time of closure, whose experiences are dominated by deindustrialisation.

By examining how these two cohorts remember and interpret the impact of colliery closures, this chapter reveals the complex interplay between memory, place, and generational identity. These testimonies illustrate how the spatial and emotional landscapes of these communities have been shaped by the industrial past and how these memories continue to influence present-day relationships with place. This chapter adheres to the multi-generational focus of this thesis by examining how these two cohorts experienced and now remember industrial closure, and how these memories shape their relationship to place. The use of oral history is central to this analysis, as it allows for the capture of personal and emotional narratives that are often missing from official records. By giving voice to those who lived through these changes, this chapter not only enriches the historical understanding of deindustrialisation but also demonstrates the value of oral history in exploring the spatial and emotional dimensions of industrial decline

First, it turns to testimony that explores the emotional responses to earlier closures, in particular considering the experiences of migration that occurred due to colliery transfers at this time. Then, it turns to interviewees' memories of the miners' strike of 1984-85, unpicking the manner in which it is framed as a pivotal moment in individual understandings of deindustrialisation and the way that these recollections are imbued with personal and collective emotional responses. As will be discussed here,

interviewees recognise their own paradoxical response to closure, being both glad to see the demise of a dangerous and difficult occupation, yet deeply disdainful of the effects upon individuals and communities alike.

Next, this chapter examines the impact of colliery closures on individual and community identity, interrogating changes in leisure patterns, health, and gender roles, particularly in the changing policy context of the 1980s. Here, it draws on individual testimony that discusses how people comprehended and coped with changes to the everyday rhythms of life that had long been structured by work, considering observations of increased alcohol consumption and mental health concerns.³⁸⁵

Finally, whilst closure undoubtedly had significant and damaging consequences for those employed in the coal mining industry, and their spouses, it also bore longer-lasting repercussions for those growing up in its wake. On a practical, financial level, well-paid and stable employment became more difficult to obtain. As such, this chapter explores interviewees' testimony regarding this cross-generational legacy of closure, examining the apparent emotions of anger, grief, and hope as they appear in memory.

‘Our fate was sealed’: Emotional Responses to coalfield Contraction in County Durham

County Durham as it exists today is an area which to a great extent has been defined and designed for the specific purposes of industrial work. To

³⁸⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: A&C Black, 2004).

reiterate, the majority of the small former mining towns of the region came to be only to serve the requirements of a labour force brought to the area by the establishment of a coal mine there.³⁸⁶ Throughout the early twentieth century, employment figures reflect the concentration of labour within the coal industry of County Durham.³⁸⁷ Yet with increasing rates of unemployment in the post-war period, followed by the gradual and fragmented contraction of the coal industry throughout the later twentieth century, it was a sector characterised by its vulnerability and fragility to the fluctuations of global markets.

Following nationalisation in 1947, the National Coal Board (NCB) were keen to increase the productive capacity of specific locations within the coalfields, overseeing the onset of a protracted series of colliery closures and the concentration of labour to the most economically viable sites. In order to ensure the continued productivity of such collieries, the NCB also effectively lobbied government to discourage the establishment of new industries as ‘to do so would be to invite an exodus from the mines to better-paid jobs in healthier and safer environments’.³⁸⁸ Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the decrease in global demand for coal saw the rate of closures and the restructuring of labour intensify.

Yet continued opportunity for relocation to other collieries, and relatively generous retirement and redundancy schemes allowed these closures to pass with little resistance from the workforce or the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).³⁸⁹ Although not warmly accepted, such

³⁸⁶ Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*.

³⁸⁷ John Benson, *British coalminers in the nineteenth century: a social history* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980).

³⁸⁸ Raymond Hudson, *Wrecking a Region: State Policies, Party Politics, and Regional Change in North East England* (London: Pion Limited, 1989), p.357.

³⁸⁹ Perchard and Phillips discuss this in the Scottish context, using a moral economy framework, in Perchard and Phillips, ‘Transgressing the Moral Economy’; See also

closures followed by relocation did not represent a complete severing of the social and moral contract imagined within the optimism of nationalisation.³⁹⁰

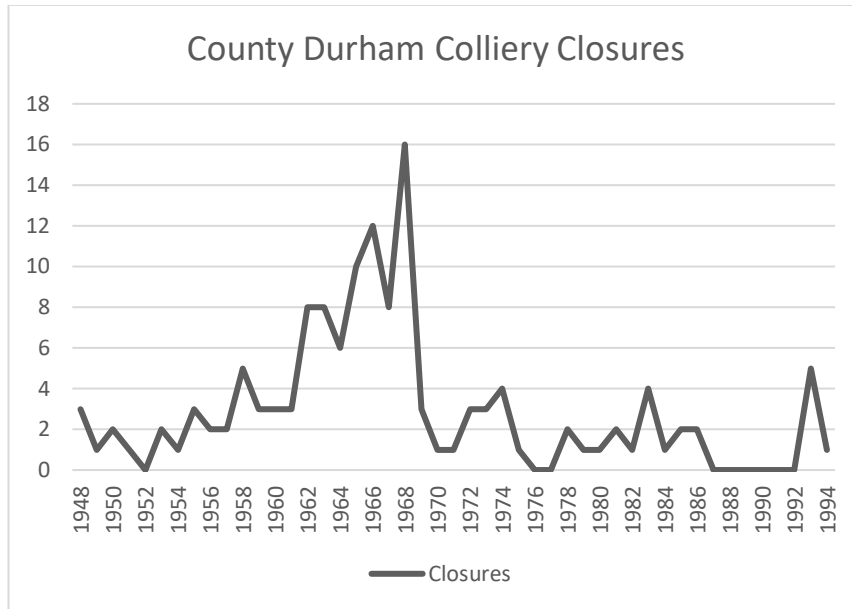


Fig.3 Colliery closures in County Durham following nationalisation.

As the above figure demonstrates, the 1960s saw the highest levels of pit closures in County Durham. By 1962, unemployment in the region stood at 3.2%.³⁹¹ Although aware of the need to ensure the continued supply of labour to the remaining coal mining industry, increasing pit closures began to mark greater outward migration from the region, and higher levels of unemployment as the sporadic introduction of new industries to the region failed to provide sufficient levels of replacement jobs. Between 1962 and

R. C. Taylor, 'The Implications of Migration from the Durham Coalfield: An Anthropological Study' (PhD Thesis, Durham University, 1966).

³⁹⁰ Phillips, 'Deindustrialization and the Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields, 1947 to 1991', 2013; Perchard et al., 'Fighting for the Soul of Coal'; Perchard and Phillips, 'Transgressing the Moral Economy'; Gibbs, 'The Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields'.

³⁹¹ McDowell and Massey, 'A Woman's Place?'

1971, 15,000 miners and their families left Durham, Northumberland and Scotland.³⁹²

For some in Durham, their experiences of industrial closure align more closely with a dominant cultural narrative that centres around the strike of 1984-85 as a pivotal point in their emotional experiences of deindustrialisation.³⁹³ However, whilst scholarship on the Scottish context highlights the significant emotional and spatial impacts of earlier closures also, this period has been largely unexplored within County Durham.³⁹⁴ As such, there remains highly emotional memories related to this period that have been thus far overlooked.

In one interview, Eric Wood, joining via video-call from his home in Warwickshire, gently prompts the direction of the interview by adding “What I do hope is picked up is the manner in which the pits were closed and the way in which the miners were treated.”³⁹⁵ Eric was raised in Langley Moor until around 1962, when in his early teenage years, his family relocated to Nottinghamshire after his father accepted a transfer following a colliery closure. Eric recalls the events preceding the move with precision, accompanying his father on the ‘bus to Crook’, the ‘port-a-cabin’ office, and his father signing for his transfer ‘on the dotted line’.

Speaking sixty years later, Eric conveys his family’s sense of powerlessness in the face of such macro-economic restructuring. “Our fate was sealed” he says, “That was it. And I remember he signed it. We came

³⁹² Perchard et al., ‘Fighting for the Soul of Coal’.

³⁹³ Arnold, “‘Like Being on Death Row’”; Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, ‘Echoes of Protest: Untold Stories of the 1984–1985 UK Miners’ Strike’, *Oral History* 45, no. 1 (2017): 100–110.

³⁹⁴ Ewan Gibbs, *Coal Country: The Meaning and Memory of Deindustrialisation in Postwar Scotland* (London: London University Press, 2021); Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners’ Strike in Scotland, 1984–85*; Perchard et al., ‘Fighting for the Soul of Coal’; Perchard, “‘Broken Men” and “Thatcher’s Children””.

³⁹⁵ Eric Wood, Interview with the Author (Zoom: August 2020)

out he said 'That's it. Done now.'" He notes that at that time there was "no sense of anger, or betrayal, it just happened" and yet now, his comments are underpinned with a sense of resentment, as he says "I mean, it was it was cruel and callous, and there must be-- still are thousands of people feel untimely ripped and placed in communities together, which maintain some tradition, but all the real community strength had ebbed away and gone."³⁹⁶

As discussed in Chapter 2, there was little official resistance to these earlier closures by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), nor its Durham branch.³⁹⁷ Yet that does not mean that closures and subsequent relocations were not severely emotionally charged and strongly felt. Instead, such changes disrupted communities and dislocated people from their ties of kinship and support.³⁹⁸ Subsequent chapters will go on to discuss the cross-generational legacies of this dislocation, as well as the manner in which it altered the spatial dynamics of place. Here, however, we return to Eric's memories of the period, which highlight the painful experiences of closure and a sense of forced migration.

The colliery closures no doubt created a significant deal of financial anxiety. Eric was one of five children, and he frames his father's options to relocate or accept unemployment, as being questioned 'How do you want to die, be shot or be executed on a guillotine?' He made the choice to relocate, but it is clear from such impassioned framing that this was a painful decision. Yet for Eric, this was because of the way such relocations created tears in what he remembers as a community whose 'backbone' was the phrase 'I am my brother's keeper'.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics*.

³⁹⁸ Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984–85*.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

Closures were not just about loss of work; they were fundamentally altering the dynamics of places that had long centred around industry and its management. Significantly, as outlined in chapter one, these were communities brought into existence for the purposes of industrial capitalism. In turn, spaces of leisure, recreation, and welfare were created first as a paternalistic arm of private ownership, but they were later state managed under the NCB.

However, Eric is particularly keen to stress that he is not romanticising coal mining itself. During Eric's childhood, his father had been "Adamant. Adamant. That whatever happened I was not going down the pit", at one point taking him to the pit's entrance and stating, "You'll never go down that pit, have a good look at it, son, because you will never get in there." His father, for his part, "spent the biggest part of his working life in a four-foot seam on his knees" and the first time "he stood up on his legs to work" was following another transfer from Nottinghamshire to Staffordshire. Eric recalls him returning from his first day of work at Silverdale Colliery "saying he'd been standing up all day and he couldn't believe it."⁴⁰⁰ As Tony Hall contends, there is a 'great paradox' that emerges within mining communities. 'They will describe at lengths the horrors and hardship of mining. They will encourage and even plead with their sons to find another job. Yet at the same time there can be no other group that would fight as hard for their traditions, collieries, colleagues, and industry'.⁴⁰¹

Informed by these early memories, Eric is emphatic that he would 'hate the thought that we went back to coal mining' which 'provided food and livelihoods and a sense of community but at the terrible price' of

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Tony Hall, *King Coal: Miners, Coal, and Britain's Industrial Future* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p.47.

constant danger and difficult working conditions.⁴⁰² Others express similar sentiments. Robin Chapman was working for the local water board, who took on 'one or two' former miners, as the industry began to contract. He recalls one such new employee saying, "Robin, I never knew such jobs existed. This is wonderful. I'm getting as much money as I got at the pit and I'm not dirty. I'm not physically working hard, just lifting a few pipes."⁴⁰³ As is apparent from such comments, few mourned the departure from coal mining itself, recognizing it as not just a dirty and unpleasant job, but a dangerous one too with the real potential for physical harm.

For many, there is also an awareness that coal, as much as it provided such an intrinsic part of the region's character, is a finite resource. When I began my search for participants, I joined multiple social media groups dedicated to community history or industrial history in the North East. Whilst much attention is given simply to reminiscence or reflection on the past in these groups, a minority of commentators voiced impassioned opinions about how much coal was left unmined in the region, and their hopes that the coal mining industry may be revived.

I asked interviewee Barrie Carse about this, which prompted a rather exasperated response. 'Coal in the ground where?' he replied, "You've got to remember they were working three miles out to sea. So, if they're working three miles out to sea-- I'm not gonna say there isn't a certain amount of coal, but nothing that's of great significance."⁴⁰⁴ Interviewee Ian Cummings discusses this too, saying:

"There's no way we will ever return to that now. The minerals have gone, the coal's gone, the iron's gone... We can no longer rely on the countryside around us to provide us with the means to have the work here. We're all here

⁴⁰² Eric Wood, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁰³ Robin Chapman, Interview with the Author (Gilesgate, March 2022).

⁴⁰⁴ Barrie Carse, Interview with the Author.

now because of that geographical thing that happened millions of years ago, but we now have to change that and do it a different way.”⁴⁰⁵

Indeed, the very nature of coal mining as an extractive process means that closures have been a feature of the industry throughout its long history, as supplies are continually exhausted. It is also an industry dependent upon the global market, and by the end of the twentieth century, a decline in demand for British coal and an increase in alternative energy sources also created an economic exhaustion for the coal industry. Ian also reflects on this, commenting:

“The pit closure in itself wasn't a bad thing, in my view, and the view of actually many of the miners. What was done badly, terribly badly, and perhaps done in spite, was the fact that there was no plan for what happens afterwards. There were no jobs afterwards.”⁴⁰⁶

Eric voices similar sentiments: he remains composed, but there are flickers of anger in his tone. He says:

“There had to be a move at some point because the dependency on coal was disappearing but to do it in such a brutal, unthinking, uncaring way... was not the way to do it”⁴⁰⁷

For many, like Ian and Eric, it was not the fact that the coal mines closed- this was an eventual inevitability and brought an end to a dangerous, difficult employment- but the broader landscape of how they closed, how communities were treated by the government, and how they have since been left to decline. Huw Beynon- writing of the 1984-5 miners' strike, although this sentiment is also evident in Eric's reflection on his father's relocation- notes that many miners felt they had their 'backs to the wall'.⁴⁰⁸ Indeed, the optimism of nationalisation's potential to protect miners' interests was soon

⁴⁰⁵ Ian Cummings, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁰⁶ Ian Cummings, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁰⁷ Eric Wood, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁰⁸ Beynon, *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike*.

proven short lived. By the election of the Thatcher government, within the same decade where the 1974 *Plan for Coal* had offered a sliver of soon crushed hope for the industry, it was evident that the social and moral contract once thought due to the mining industry's workers risked being torn up entirely, never to be replaced.⁴⁰⁹

Speaking of this, interviewee Harry Nixon, who had been the NUM lodge secretary for Bearpark colliery in the months before its closure, remarks that "I'm 80 year old now, and I will—for the few years I've got left, I will never, **never**, forgive them Eton, Oxford and Cambridge lot down there." He is angry, but he adds with a chuckle, pointing to the soft toy upon his mantelpiece that holds a placard reading 'Iron Lady burn in hell', "And that's what that's there for".

In 1983, Ian MacGregor was appointed head of the NCB, following his three-year period as chairman of British Steel, during which he had overseen a programme of rationalisation that had earned him a reputation as a 'butcher of jobs'.⁴¹⁰ His appointment was undoubtedly part of the changing government relationship with industry under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative premiership, with an increasing focus upon the coal industry's rationalisation and contraction, and a hard-line approach towards union relations.⁴¹¹ However, like the longer timeline of industrial closure, changes in the NCB's approach had also been shifting since the mid-twentieth century. Despite increasing the sale of houses after the 1984-85 strike, the NCB had stopped building houses and had been selling existing stock since

⁴⁰⁹ Perchard et al., 'Fighting for the Soul of Coal'.

⁴¹⁰ LBC/IRN, 'Arthur Scargill on MacGregor Coal Board Appointment', *British Universities Film & Video Council*, 1983, <http://bufvc.ac.uk/tvandrado/lbc/index.php/segment/0007200264007>.

⁴¹¹ Beynon, *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike*; Francis Beckett and David Hencke, *Marching to the Front Line: The Miners' Strike and the Battle for Industrial Britain* (London: Constable, 2009).

the 1960s.⁴¹² Whilst the election of Thatcher, and her appointment of MacGregor to the NCB may have marked a significant shift in industrial relations, therefore, the NCB's role within communities themselves had been transforming over a much longer period.

Despite these earlier changes, however, the year-long 1984 miners' strike is often framed as defensive action to protect not only jobs, but communities and a particular way of life, perhaps due to an awareness that these later closures marked a finality for the coal industry that had not been present until then.⁴¹³ Bearpark colliery closed just three weeks into the strike of 1984-85 but had been declining in size in the previous decade and many men had already accepted transfers to other, usually coastal, collieries prior to this. As such, this meant that the village was still engaged with the strike action even without its own colliery. In a village like Bearpark, though, that had seen all surrounding pits closed before its own closure so soon into the strike, it is starkly evident how the strike itself was just a single moment in a much longer process of social change.

My interview with Gary Crooks took place at the office of his community interest company, Positive Directions NE, which offers training and support to young people and those released from prison in the County Durham area following his own experiences of incarceration and unemployment. Gary is well-accustomed to being interviewed, having had a

⁴¹² Huw Beynon, Raymond Hudson, and Emma Hollywood, 'Regenerating Housing', The Coalfield Research Programme (Cardiff University, 2002).

⁴¹³ Smith, *A Civil War without Guns: 20 Years On, the Lessons of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike*; Beynon, *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike*; Samuel, Bloomfield, and Boanas, *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5*; Seumas Milne, *The Enemy Within: The Secret War Against the Miners*, Fourth Edition.. (London: Verso, 2014); Beverley Trounce, *From a Rock to a Hard Place* (Stroud: The History Press, 2015); Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 'National Women Against Pit Closures: Gender, Trade Unionism and Community Activism in the Miners' Strike, 1984-5'; Spence and Stephenson, "'Side by Side With Our Men?'" Women's Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners' Strike'.

book, an independent film, and numerous newspaper articles centred around his experiences.⁴¹⁴ As such, he spoke with a confident ease, his narrative composed and honed through repetition.⁴¹⁵ This is not to devalue Gary's testimony; instead, his repeated selection of memories for both this interview and those past, provides a significant insight into how the retelling of memories is used as an exercise in self-composure, and self-identification.⁴¹⁶ When individuals do this, we see how elements of the past being utilised in the present, and we are alerted to what is deemed most significant and powerful even when more emotional reactions are not present.

Starting first with a discussion of his childhood in Bearpark, Gary quickly gets to the topic of the miners' strike, stating that 'things kind of went wrong' with its onset both in his own home and the previously 'idyllic village life' of Bearpark.⁴¹⁷ I also interviewed Gary's uncle, Redvers, at his home in Bearpark, who was equally as quick to mention the strike. Yet

⁴¹⁴ *Bearpark: Gary's Story* (Made Good Films, 2016), <https://www.madegood.com/bearpark/>; Julian Abel, 'Gary Crooks- You Don't Have to Be Alone', *Survival of the Kindest*, n.d., <https://compassionate-communitiesuk.co.uk/podcast/22-survival-of-the-kindest-gary-crooks-you-dont-have-to-be-alone/>; Barry Nelson, 'Former Durham Drink and Drunk Abuser Helps Others Turn Their Life Around', *The Northern Echo*, 8 May 2012, <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/9692478.former-durham-drink-drunk-abuser-helps-others-turn-life-around/>; Farrell, 'North-South Divide in Opioid and Painkiller Prescribing with High Use in England's Most Deprived Areas', *Sky News*, 7 October 2022, <https://news.sky.com/story/north-south-divide-in-opioid-and-painkiller-prescribing-with-high-use-in-englands-most-deprived-areas-12706821>. *Bearpark: Gary's Story*; Abel, 'Gary Crooks- You Don't Have to Be Alone'; Nelson, 'Former Durham Drink and Drunk Abuser Helps Others Turn Their Life Around'; Farrell, 'North-South Divide in Opioid and Painkiller Prescribing with High Use in England's Most Deprived Areas'.

⁴¹⁵ A similar idea is discussed by Etter-Lewis, in relation to the way interviewees may respond to a question quoting a previous conversation, in doing so magnifying the importance and further honing a narrative to fit a certain standard of self-composure, Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, Sherna Berger Gluck, and Daphne Patai, 'Black Women's Life Stories: Reclaiming Self in Narrative Texts', in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁴¹⁶ Summerfield, 'Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice'; Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Thomson, 'Anzac Memories Revisited'.

⁴¹⁷ Gary Crooks, Interview with the Author (Langley Moor, October 2021).

unlike his nephew, Redvers speaks of the period less calmly, instead allowing residual feelings of anger and pain to feed into his testimony. Recalling the period, he begins “The strike was erm...Oh my god, it was painful. The strike...” but also that at first, “Everybody was bolshie. We're gonna beat the government.”⁴¹⁸

The strike action, in protest of colliery closures, was by its very nature a rallying cry against the loss of work and potential long-term unemployment, and a painful reminder of how close these events potentially stood. Despite this, enthusiasm for the strike and its potential to secure longevity in industrial work gradually waned as time passed and hardship increased. Redvers worked for Durham County Council at this time, and as such, looked on at these growing difficulties from the outside. Nevertheless, he expresses the pain of watching friends and neighbours struggle.

“I suppose they spent their savings. But as soon as they didn't have any, any money at all, that's when it became obvious. I mean, you've got to remember that strike was over a year. And they went through the motions. Nothing. Pete Thomas* came to me says Rev can I dig your garden? because he didn't want to ask for money. And I said, Pete, I'll give you 25 quid just to dig-- you see at that time, he had two kids and they had nothing. Nothing. So, the 25 quid wouldn't have gone far.”⁴¹⁹

Redvers's testimony evidences the concern he felt for his striking friends, and also provides an example of community networks in play, being drawn upon for support in times of hardship.⁴²⁰ ‘It was the worst time. It was the worst time for them’ Redvers recalls emphatically. Again, he reminds of the fact that this was happening to ‘them’ and not to him, whilst still demonstrating a clear sense of pain at what he witnessed in his community. Moreover, as he continues, Redvers' recollections identify apparent divisions emerging within the community:

⁴¹⁸ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author (Bearpark, October 2021).

⁴¹⁹ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁴²⁰ Beynon, *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike*; Samuel, Bloomfield, and Boanas, *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5*.

“I had friends that were going on picket lines, and one that I played football with, he was a copper. And I was friendly with Grant Harris*, who was a miner, and they went to school together and they were facing each other. Horrendous. Horrendous time. Then the police are waving money at them. And it was just shocking. Absolutely heart-breaking to be honest.”⁴²¹

As Penny Green notes, the strike had a ‘radicalising influence’ on even historically ‘moderate’ coalfields, like Durham was. The witnessing of police behaviour, and the hard-line attitude of the government, served to generate a significant degree of anger and anguish.⁴²² For Gary, witnessing this ongoing strike during his formative teenage years had a profound impact on his understandings of this community and his own personal development. He describes Bearpark as having a ‘strong sense of community’ during his earlier childhood, yet as the strike continued, he recalls:

“I witnessed violence in the community, as the strike went on, the sense of rebellion, and rage against the government kind of turned inwards, with the sense of desperation, you know, people being hungry, out of work, you know, no fuel, all of those kinds of things.”⁴²³

Ballin and Johnson, in their *Echoes of Protest* project, identify how the miners’ strike is framed within many interviewees’ narratives as a pivotal point within their childhood memories, akin to Mannheim’s conceptualisation of a sharp historical break in which a new generation is formed.⁴²⁴ For Gary too, the period represents a crucial moment in which emerged a composite of both collective trauma, at the community level, and individual trauma, within the home.⁴²⁵ The strike represents a break in

⁴²¹ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁴²² Penny Green, *The Enemy Without: Policing and Class Consciousness in the Miners’ Strike* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1990).

⁴²³ Gary Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁴²⁴ Ballin and Johnson, ‘Echoes of Protest’; Karl Mannheim, ‘The Problem of Generations’, in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge: Collected Works*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti, vol. 5 (New York: Routledge, 1952), 276–322.

⁴²⁵ Thomson, ‘Anzac Memories Revisited’; Gilad Hirschberger, ‘Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning’, *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, no. Article 1441 (2018).

Gary's imagination of his community; the idyllic before, and the fractured after.⁴²⁶ He shares:

"And then in my own home though--things kind of went wrong with the onset of the miners' strike and there was a lot of--kind of--domestic violence in the home and I witnessed violence in the community...So, that kind of informed my behaviour over the next couple of decades, really, a lack of fuel and a lack of food. And those kinds of things. I drifted in the petty crime with a bunch of other people in the community."⁴²⁷

Gary's first burglary was breaking into his school in order to obtain a copy of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, because he could not wait to read the ending, but after that, he was 'very rarely' at school because it 'didn't matter'. He continues:

"I didn't realise that there was a Durham University--that could have been open to me--until I was 26. So, no one ever spoke about that kind of journey being available to people like us."⁴²⁸

Redvers, Gary's Uncle, shares a similar experience saying, "we didn't have a lot of belief and coming to 14 and 15, the lads in the year above me...they worked at the pit when they left school, and their fathers worked there, too."⁴²⁹ Indeed, despite the fact that the importance of education was stressed so prominently within Durham's mining communities- so much so that educational themes appeared on numerous lodge banners- the deliberate national policy to keep regional employment concentrated on the coal and steel industries meant alternative options were scarce.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁶ David Gilbert, 'Imagined Communities and Mining Communities'.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁴³⁰ Wray, 'The Place of Imagery in the Transmission of Culture: The Banners of the Durham Coalfield'; Emery, *Banners of the Durham Coalfield*; Hudson, *Wrecking a Region: State Policies, Party Politics, and Regional Change in North East England*.

As a result, colliery closures had a profoundly damaging impact for communities that had long orbited a central, single industry.⁴³¹ Like Gary, who perceives the miners' strike as the crucial moment in which everything changed, Eric too divides the past into 'before' and 'after' industrial closure. What is important here is not so much how existent this sudden change was, but rather how deindustrialisation comes to form such a pivotal point in memory, becoming a moment from which individuals draw their understandings of communities and places, and their relationships to them.

Instead, what Eric mourns is the loss of community at being made to leave a place in which he was so enmeshed within the social fabric. 'We could have been going to Siberia,' he remarks, after drawing on Shakespeare to describe his feelings of being 'untimely ripped from Durham'.⁴³² Like Gary's experiences over two decades later, therefore, industrial closure marked a turning point for Eric, forming potent memories of the past. Yet for others who had historically fallen outside of this 'imagined mining community', perceive the fracturing of these bounds by industrial closure differently. Stefan Gemski, who notes feeling excluded from the community of Bearpark because his father was both Polish and not employed at the colliery, reflects on industrial closure, in his interview here:

"We were we were pretty poorly off because getting work was kind of difficult for my dad, and I suppose that changed when the pits started to break up, you know, they were all closing here there and everywhere...I suppose the landscape changed in terms of you were no longer in a society where there was one employer and people had worked for that employer for generations in some cases, and that identity was lost... So that really mixed things up a little bit. My dad was able to get regular work at that point, by this point, sort of here am I sort of 17 years old, something like that. And so,

⁴³¹ David Waddington, *Out of the Ashes?: The Social Impact of Industrial Contraction and Regeneration on Britain's Mining Communities* (London: Stationery Office, 2001).

⁴³² Eric Wood, Interview with the Author

life became a kind of a bit more normal in a way you know, after that point”⁴³³

Testimony from those such as Stefan, who experienced deindustrialisation from a different perspective than those directly involved with industry, is limited both in this project and in wider scholarship of deindustrialisation. Perhaps, in part, this is due to the manner in which individual memory is often influenced and shaped by a wider collective memory and broader public discourse; deindustrialisation is so often framed, as Eric and Gary do, as a monumentally negative rupture that it is difficult for more marginalised perspectives to emerge from beneath this idea.⁴³⁴ Whilst this dominant narrative is still vitally important to understanding experiences of industrial closure, and how it is later recalled from memory, accounts such as Stefan’s do serve to remind that there are alternative understandings into which further investigation is required.

‘A Time of Flippin’ Doom and Gloom’: The Aftermath of Industrial Closure

Eric’s father relocated, and it was an injury at work that ultimately ended his career in coal mining. Yet by the concluding decades of the twentieth-century, relocation became a less feasible option, with increasingly fewer collieries in the region, or even the country, to transfer to. In West Durham, the coal mines were gone by the conclusion of the strike action in 1985, but

⁴³³ Stefan Gemski, Interview with the Author.

⁴³⁴ Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure’; Jeffrey K. Olick, ‘Collective Memory: The Two Cultures’, *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (1999): 333–48.

more across the region and country would soon join them in closing amongst the accelerated closures pursued after the NUM's defeat.

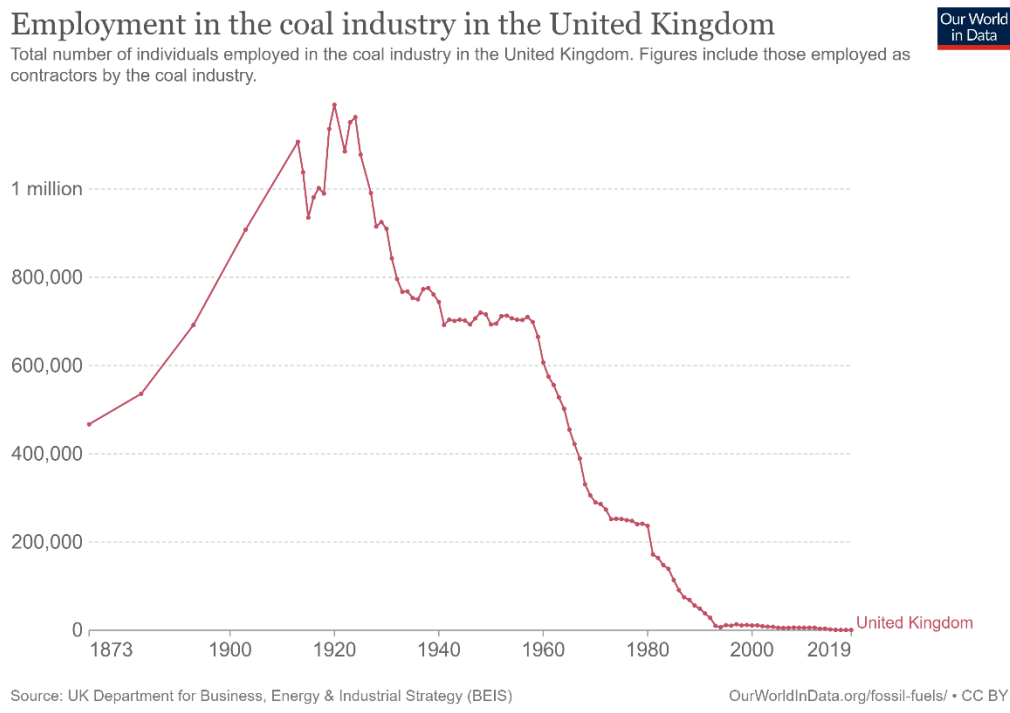


Fig. 4 Number of individuals employed in the United Kingdom's coal industry from 1873-2019.⁴³⁵

There had been an awareness within Durham County Council from as early as the 1960s that colliery closures would be significantly problematic for the area. Through legislation such as the 1966 Industrial Development Bill, it was hoped that financial incentives would encourage investment in regions such as the North East to absorb potential job losses from further colliery

⁴³⁵ Available at 'Employment in the Coal Industry in the United Kingdom', *Our World in Data*, n.d., <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/employment-in-the-coal-industry-in-the-united-kingdom> using data from; 'Historical Coal Data: Coal Production, Availability and Consumption', *GOV.UK*, 27 July 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/historical-coal-data-coal-production-availability-and-consumption>.

closures ‘if the need should arise’.⁴³⁶ In particular, it was hoped that the introduction of ‘modern industry’, including light manufacturing, technological manufacturing, and service-orientated industries, would offer employment to both men and women in the region in the context of increasingly elevated levels of unemployment.

Whilst this approach saw some success, with large firms such as tyre manufacturers Dunlop setting up in Washington, what is perhaps most historically significant for the region is that much of this investment did not last and would rather rapidly compound issues of unemployment and job loss upon closure. Indeed, this issue would significantly worsen following the 1979 election of a Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher, with the removal of capital export controls resulting in the departure of many companies to locations where labour costs were significantly lower.⁴³⁷ This, and a tightening of monetary policy as well as a high sterling exchange rate, encouraged cheaper imports at the expense of British manufactured products. Between 1979 and 1985, close to two million jobs had been lost in the United Kingdom manufacturing industry as a result.⁴³⁸

In this context, many miners accepted a recently increased redundancy lump sum, or took early retirement, with the regulations around the Mineworkers’ Pension Scheme also recently relaxed.⁴³⁹ Redvers again observed this as a relative outsider, well involved with the community of Bearpark, but not employed at the colliery. He notes that most of the miners he knew “took the 1000 pounds for every year they worked and that

⁴³⁶ Hudson, *Wrecking a Region: State Policies, Party Politics, and Regional Change in North East England*.

⁴³⁷ Ray Hudson, ‘Thatcherism and Its Geographical Legacies: The New Map of Socio-Spatial Inequality in the Divided Kingdom’, *The Geographical Journal* 179, no. 4 (2013): 377–81.

⁴³⁸ Jim Tomlinson, ‘Deindustrialisation and “Thatcherism”: Moral Economy and Unintended Consequences’, *Contemporary British History* 35, no. 4 (2021): 620–42.

⁴³⁹ Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine: Coal and the End of Industrial Britain* (London: Verso Books, 2021).

escalated into-- I mean some got 40,000 pounds and 40,000 was a lot of money.”⁴⁴⁰

Although some, like Robin’s new colleagues at the water board, did find alternative work, many more experienced difficulty finding other employment after redundancy.⁴⁴¹ At this time, there was a clear shift in government attitude towards employment, with an increased focus on ‘employability’ through training schemes, that can otherwise be understood as a shifting of responsibility from state to individual regarding employment.⁴⁴² Amidst unfavourable labour market conditions, therefore, such programmes entered many into a series of training programmes to constantly adopt new skills and characteristics perceived as more suited to the current labour market.⁴⁴³

The NCB, for its part, launched two government funded schemes aimed at retraining redundant mine workers, the Manpower Services Commission, and the British Coal Enterprise (BCE) scheme. Nerys Jones, in a study of Westoe Colliery in South Shields, found that only ten per cent of the 1,200 men made redundant upon closure had found alternative employment.⁴⁴⁴ For many men, it seemed BCE re-training opportunities offered few options for sustainable, long-term work. One of Jones’ interviewees comments

⁴⁴⁰ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁴¹ Edward Fieldhouse and Emma Hollywood, ‘Life after Mining: Hidden Unemployment and Changing Patterns of Economic Activity amongst Miners in England and Wales, 1981–1991’, *Work, Employment and Society* 13, no. 3 (1999): 483–502; Beatty and Fothergill, ‘Labour Market Adjustment in Areas of Chronic Industrial Decline’.

⁴⁴² Frank Coffield, ‘Breaking the Consensus: Lifelong Learning as Social Control’, *British Educational Research Journal* 25, no. 4 (1999): 479–99; Frank Coffield and Learning and Skills Network (Great Britain), *Just Suppose Teaching and Learning Became the First Priority ...* (London: Learning and Skills Network, 2008).

⁴⁴³ Coffield, ‘Breaking the Consensus: Lifelong Learning as Social Control’; Tracy Shildrick, *Poverty and Insecurity: Life in ‘low-Pay, No-Pay’ Britain* (Bristol, England: Policy Press, 2013).

⁴⁴⁴ Jones, ‘Coal Was Our Life’.

‘In the Gazette every night there were adverts for security guards: £1.60 an hour, rising to £1.80 after three months. When I used to pop into the Job Shop, I used to cringe at the jobs advertised. I thought ‘Christ, you can’t expect anyone to work for that; you’d be better off turning to crime.’”⁴⁴⁵

There were some notable exceptions to this trend, such as the establishment of a Nissan manufacturing plant in Sunderland in 1984, of which then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher commented, “Not only will it provide a steadily growing number of jobs in an area which really needs them, but it also shows in the clearest possible way how such areas can help to recover their prosperity and self-esteem.”⁴⁴⁶ Yet with such a large available pool of labour, firms like Nissan could afford to be selective in their hiring process, often recruiting from outside the area.⁴⁴⁷ Likewise, lower than average car ownership levels, and poor transport infrastructure, effectively isolated many rural mining communities from such opportunities.⁴⁴⁸

As Coffield, Borrill, and Marshall bluntly surmise, therefore, for many there was a limited choice between unemployment, or ‘shit jobs and govvy schemes’.⁴⁴⁹ I asked Norman Anderson if he had observed similar in Bearpark. Norman has lived in Bearpark all his life, running a local roofing firm. The interview took place on a quiet weekday evening at Bearpark Working Men’s Club, of which he is chairman. Like Redvers, Norman watched the decline of industry from the outside during his mid-twenties. Nevertheless, he echoes the sentiments of Jones’ interviewee, recalling that “In the 80s there was nothing, no jobs or owt, there were those government training schemes, which were slave labour for about twenty-one pound fifty

⁴⁴⁵ Jones, “Coal Was Our Life”.

⁴⁴⁶ ‘Speech Opening Nissan Car Factory | Margaret Thatcher Foundation’, accessed 5 November 2021, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106470>.

⁴⁴⁷ Beatty, Fothergill, and Powell, ‘Twenty Years On’.

⁴⁴⁸ Royce Turner and Martin Gregory, ‘Life after the Pit: The Post-Redundancy Experiences of Mineworkers’, *Local Economy: The Journal of the Local Economy Policy Unit* 10, no. 2 (August 1995): 149–62.

⁴⁴⁹ Carol Borrill, Sarah Marshall, and Frank Coffield, *Growing up at the Margins: Young Adults in the Northeast* (Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986).

a week or something and nobody had a—there was no apprenticeships or nowt, there was nothing.”⁴⁵⁰

He adds, “It was a time of flippin’ doom and gloom when you look back to it wasn’t it.”⁴⁵¹ He follows the comment up with a slight laugh, but Redvers confirms that Norman’s statement was accurate. “Once the redundancy payments were spent”, he remarks, “Some had nothing in two years. They had nothing in two years because they didn’t know what to do with their lives.”⁴⁵² For such individuals, closure signalled a detachment from the rhythms of work that had long organised their patterns of leisure and provided an affective comfort through familiarity.

What followed for many, therefore, was a period of ‘limitless leisure’ that was often severely damaging on an individual, familial, and community level.⁴⁵³ Indeed, the psychological impact of unemployment cannot be understated; levels of depression, anxiety, and suicide were found to be significantly higher than average in former coalfield areas.⁴⁵⁴ As such, long-term unemployment is shown to frequently beget ill-health, in turn preventing a return to the workforce and a reliance on state welfare.⁴⁵⁵ Yet with a tightening of restrictions around qualification for welfare since the

⁴⁵⁰ Norman Anderson, Interview with the Author (Bearpark, October 2021)

⁴⁵¹ Norman Anderson, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁵² Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁵³ Jeremy Seabrook, *Unemployment* (London: Quartet Books, 1982); John Burnett, *Idle Hands: The Experience of Unemployment, 1790-1990* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁴⁵⁴ Marie Jahoda, *Employment and Unemployment: A Social-Psychological Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Nottingham University, ‘The Three Mines Study’ (Trent Regional Health Authority, 1994); Ken Coates and Michael Barrat Brown, *Community Under Attack: The Struggle for Survival in the Coalfield Communities of Britain* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1997).

⁴⁵⁵ McIvor, ‘Deindustrialization Embodied: Work, Health, and Disability in the United Kingdom since the Mid-Twentieth Century’.

Thatcher government, access to welfare support for long-term health conditions and unemployment has been increasingly complicated.⁴⁵⁶

With the loss of the pit, and working routines, redundancy money provided poor consolation. When asked how the redundancy pay was typically used, Redvers responds “They drank. They drank. Morbidly drunk on an afternoon and a night. For two years.”⁴⁵⁷ Just as alcohol had often been used as a coping mechanism and a form of self-medication in response to ill-health and disability related to industrial work, it was also being used here in response to unemployment and its associated health problems.⁴⁵⁸ Bearpark Working Men’s Club at this time was, according to Norman, “absolutely chocca...absolutely heaving” on an afternoon.⁴⁵⁹

When prompted further about his memories of this, Redvers outlines a struggle to embed new routines, as new norms struggled against the old.⁴⁶⁰ Positioning work as the gravitational source of routine, he says of the increased time spent drinking “that’s all they ever did but they worked in between and you know, they used to come in and play dominoes, or play darts and play snooker. That was the life”.⁴⁶¹ Whilst talking, Redvers is visibly unsettled by these memories. Throughout his discussion of this period, he makes repeated references to death. Most overtly, he shares how the club’s bar came to be named “death row” by him and his friends, being

⁴⁵⁶ For a detailed discussion of changes to Welfare under the Thatcher government, see Paul Pierson, *Dismantling the Welfare State?: Reagan, Thatcher and the Politics of Retrenchment*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴⁵⁷ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁵⁸ Arthur McIvor, ‘Blighted Lives: Deindustrialisation, Health and Well-Being in the Clydeside Region’, *20 & 21: Revue d’histoire* 144, no. 4 (2 September 2019): 98–113; Haggett, *A History of Male Psychological Disorders in Britain, 1945-1980*.

⁴⁵⁹ Norman Anderson, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁶⁰ This description is reminiscent of Lefebvre’s arrhythmia, understood as a disruption and discordance of ‘everydayness’, ‘when relations of power overcome relations of alliance, when rhythms ‘of the other’ make rhythms ‘of the self’ impossible’ in Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: A&C Black, 2004), p.99.

⁴⁶¹ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

“a row where all the miners sat in their 40s and 50s. And they all had the, you know, the cirrhosis. We said oh he's next, he's on death row, because they were drinking, just drinking all the time”.⁴⁶² Most specifically, he recalls the declining health of one man, who he remembers as “the fittest man alive. You could see the abs coming through when he was a miner.”⁴⁶³

Redvers conveys no sense of moral judgement upon these men, instead framing them as casualties from a drastic change of economic and social circumstance. From such testimony, with Redvers describing what he witnessed as a young adult, we begin to see the origins of cross-generational memories of deindustrialisation and its effects. Whilst previously premature death and ill-health were ever present risks in such communities due to the inherent risks of coal mining, here it is apparent that their presence lingered, transformed by different risks once the coal industry departed.

At times, this underlying distress worked its way into the oral history interviews. As oral historian Emma Vickers also finds, often seemingly benign narratives can suddenly pivot towards emotional and traumatic memories that may blindside interviewers.⁴⁶⁴ For instance, during my interview with Norman Anderson, his testimony regarding his work as a roofer suddenly shifts in tone, as he turns to discuss the sudden death of his colleague and friend.

“...I mean, he worked with us on the Saturday, and he'd had troubles after the first lockdown, he'd come back, he had pains in his chest and stuff. Worked at the coal mine from being a boy and--er-- they found he had cancer, lung cancer and he was told on that particular day that he had lung cancer, that his tests had come back, and on the night he--he died-- his daughter found him on the morning.”⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Emma L Vickers, ‘Unexpected Trauma in Oral Interviewing’, *The Oral History Review* 46, no. 1 (1 March 2019): 134–41.

⁴⁶⁵ Norman Anderson, Interview with the Author.

Norman shares this unprompted. He is visibly composed, but his words convey a clear sense of horror and fear that demonstrate his emotional response.

“And he-- it was sad-- it was so sad--It was terrible, aye. Horrible. He worked for us, but he was me friend and that as well you know, he would come in here with us and he worked for us for years, just me and him at the time and he was a good worker and everything worked but er-- I couldn’t believe it. Absolutely terrible.”⁴⁶⁶

In many ways, however, this inclusion of a traumatic, upsetting memory, which Norman couched between more benign discussions of his work, is a telling reflection of the way in which industrial ill-health, death, and trauma continue to linger within everyday life even following deindustrialisation.

As levels of male employment in the region declined, levels of female employment rose in turn.⁴⁶⁷ Although he is quick to distance himself from such views, Redvers reflects upon the difficulties many men felt in accepting this switch in the household breadwinner role, stating “But it was like second nature to them. They couldn’t think outside that box where they would treat their wives as an equal”.⁴⁶⁸ Dicks, Waddington, and Critcher contend that in practice, therefore, increased female employment simply created a dual burden for women as men failed to undertake more domestic activity in response.⁴⁶⁹ Unemployment often has significant consequences

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Fernando M. Aragón, Juan Pablo Rud, and Gerhard Toews, ‘Resource Shocks, Employment, and Gender: Evidence from the Collapse of the UK Coal Industry’, *Labour Economics* 52 (1 June 2018): 54–67; Katy Bennett, ‘Women and Economy: Complex Inequality in a Post-Industrial Landscape’, *Gender, Place & Culture* 22, no. 9 (21 October 2015): 1287–1304; Phillips, ‘The Meanings of Coal Community in Britain since 1947’.

⁴⁶⁸ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁶⁹ Bella Dicks, David Waddington, and Chas Critcher, ‘Redundant Men and Overburdened Women: Local Service Providers and the Construction of Gender in Ex-Mining Communities’, in *Men, Gender Divisions and Welfare*, ed. Jeanette Edwards, Jeff Hearn, and Jennie Popay (London: Routledge, 1998), 287–311; see also Bella Dicks, ‘Coping with Pit Closure in the 1990s: Women’s Perspectives’, in

for their home and family structure; in the same way that the arrhythmia induced by a widespread loss of work disrupts on a community level, changes to work and income patterns naturally also disrupt at the micro-level of the home.⁴⁷⁰

This dual burden shouldered by women in deindustrialised areas is also observed by Valerie Walkerdine and Luis Jimenez in their study of a deindustrialised South Wales town. Drawing on interviews with both men and women, they argue that industrial closure ruptured the strongly gendered aspects of ‘the community matrix’, primarily the idea of the industrious male breadwinner and the domestically orientated female.⁴⁷¹ Their interviews identify that the loss of these gender relations is traumatic on an individual and community level, undermining long established identities and social relations.⁴⁷² For instance, deindustrialisation, and unemployment more broadly, has been linked to increasing levels of family breakdown and a rise in lone parenthood, which in turn, disproportionately burdens women and significantly complicates employment opportunities.⁴⁷³

Yet finding women to interview regarding similar experiences in County Durham proved difficult. There is a great deal of scholarship on women’s participation in activism and community support during the

Gender and Qualitative Research (1996) (Routledge, 1996); Bennett, ‘Women and Economy’.

⁴⁷⁰ Strangleman, ‘Networks, Place and Identities in Post-Industrial Mining Communities’.

⁴⁷¹ Valerie Walkerdine and Luis Jimenez, *Gender, work and community after de-industrialisation : a psychosocial approach to affect* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.154-61.

⁴⁷² See also Dicks, Waddington, and Critcher, ‘Redundant Men and Overburdened Women’; Lorna McKee and Colin Bell, ‘His Unemployment, Her Problem: The Domestic and Marital Consequences of Male Unemployment’, in *The Experience of Unemployment*, ed. Sheila Allen et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986), 134–49.

⁴⁷³ Helen Blakely, “‘A Second Chance at Life’: Labour, Love and Welfare on a South Wales Estate” (Ph.D., Cardiff University, 2011), <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/54208/>; David Webster, “Welfare Reform: Facing up to the Geography of Worklessness,” *Local Economy* 21, no. 2 (May 1, 2006): 107–16.

miners' strike of 1984-85.⁴⁷⁴ This work certainly evidences the strong emotional responses amongst women to the threat of deindustrialisation, but this thread has been less frequently followed to seek female testimony regarding the period after the coal mine closures occurred. Those who have included women's voices when taking a *long durée* approach to deindustrialisation, for instance Ewan Gibbs' *Coal Country* on post-war Scotland, use such testimony to argue convincingly for the broader impact of industrial closure upon community and individual identity beyond male workers.⁴⁷⁵ However, despite the gender split of my interviewees being almost equal, finding women whose male householders had been actively involved in mining who were willing to be interviewed proved difficult. Many such women responded that they did not feel they had anything important to say, despite encouragement to the contrary. Instead, they suggested I ask male relatives.

Perhaps, of course, this is purely coincidental bad luck, but there is also the possibility that this dismissal of their own experiences by women reflects more broadly upon a continued perception of deindustrialisation as something that happened to men, and that the need for women to find work or cope with male unemployment was simply a reactive necessity to this reality rather than a significant part of industrial history.⁴⁷⁶ Both Deborah Fink and Kathleen Ryan reflect on the tendency of female interviewees to

⁴⁷⁴ Allen, 'Women, "Community" and the British Miners' Strike of 1984-85'; Spence and Stephenson, "'Side by Side With Our Men?" Women's Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners' Strike'; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 'National Women Against Pit Closures: Gender, Trade Unionism and Community Activism in the Miners' Strike, 1984-5'; Beynon, *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike*; Stephenson and Spence, 'Pies and Essays: Women Writing through the British 1984-1985 Coal Miners' Strike'.

⁴⁷⁵ Walkerdine and Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community after De-Industrialisation: A Psychosocial Approach to Affect*; Dicks, 'Coping with Pit Closure in the 1990s'; Gibbs, *Coal Country: The Meaning and Memory of Deindustrialisation in Postwar Scotland*.

⁴⁷⁶ Anna Reading, 'Gender and the Right to Memory', *Media Development* 2 (2010): pp.11-15; Reading, 'Making Feminist Heritage Work: Gender and Heritage'.

‘dodge’ recognition of their own importance and qualify their narratives with comments such as ‘I didn’t do anything important’.⁴⁷⁷ Yet for Ryan and Fink, these women agreed to be interviewed, and thus did voice their contributions, even if they themselves deemed them unimportant. Here, those voices are entirely absent.

Redvers, however, offers his own perception of women’s response to the changing role of women following deindustrialisation:

“Some women didn't even think about-- it wasn't as if they were, you know, stamped on. They couldn't change. That's the way their mother was and their grandmother was, so they had to be. So they didn't have the mindset to say yeah, I'm not doing that. No, I'm under the cosh. And I'm happy to be under the cosh, because god knows what I'd be getting up to.”⁴⁷⁸

Although eight of my interviewees were female, only Maureen’s husband worked in the coal industry, and she was already working before the pit closed. As such, without female testimony to support or contest this, it is almost impossible to judge if Redvers’ comments do reflect how some women felt. Whilst previously, his memories were rich with individual names and details, at this discussion of gendered identities he enters into more generalised, anonymous terms, ‘some’ women and ‘some’ men.

In doing so, former gendered identities are recalled as static and uniform, dictated by a broader set of accepted norms and behaviours rather than individual experience. Identifying these fixed notions of identity can perhaps be viewed as a broader attempt to explain the less tangible, but more collectively felt, affective atmosphere of disruption and trauma caused by deindustrialisation, as observed by Walkerdine and Jimenez. Nevertheless, caution should certainly be applied when applying such

⁴⁷⁷ Kathleen M. Ryan, “‘I Didn’t Do Anything Important’: A Pragmatist Analysis of the Oral History Interview”, *The Oral History Review* 36, no. 1 (1 January 2009): 25–44; Deborah Fink, *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition, and Change* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 117.

⁴⁷⁸ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

generalised ideas to individual experience and there is a pressing need to investigate further the long-term, practical and emotional implications deindustrialisation had for women in Durham's former coal mining villages.

‘A Lot of Dreams Got Crushed’: A Post-Industry Generation

For young people entering the job market following industrial closure, therefore, optimism about sustainable career opportunities was in short supply. Many young men who were approaching adulthood at the time of industrial closure had spent the first two decades of their lives in communities that had historically socialised male residents for industrial work, which in turn formed a key component within masculine identity.⁴⁷⁹ To return to Gary, he speaks of the former prospects of employment in the coal industry as a ‘foundation’ from which young men could build their life upon, and notes that without it, “a lot of young people couldn’t see a way forward”.⁴⁸⁰

“Eventually”, Gary says, “they found construction or factory work” but in the process “a lot of dreams got crushed”. From his point of view, these jobs were “soul crushing”, yet he does not elaborate on exactly why these roles appeared to be so psychologically and emotionally more taxing than the coal mining jobs previously anticipated.⁴⁸¹ Indeed, men like Eric’s father, quoted above, had expressed vehement opposition to their sons also becoming coal miners, framing them perhaps not as ‘soul crushing’ but certainly unpleasant and dangerous.

⁴⁷⁹ Nayak, ‘Last of the “Real Geordies”? White Masculinities and the Subcultural Response to Deindustrialisation’.

⁴⁸⁰ Gary Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

In some respects, therefore, Gary's comments may be viewed as a romanticised 'smokestack nostalgia' to borrow Heathcott and Cowie's pejorative term.⁴⁸² Yet as Tim Strangleman argues, nostalgia cannot be entirely dismissed, and is instead of a telling feature of how individuals engage with both their present and their future.⁴⁸³ Using this framework, nostalgia can instead be viewed as an affective response to the changing material and social conditions within the deindustrialised villages of County Durham; Gary's testimony speaks to the idea of hope, and then relative hopelessness, as inherent to the personal, emotional process of making sense of industrial closure. Individuals and communities alike had, to a significant extent drawn their social relationships and identity from the shared occupation of coal mining; with that in mind, it is unsurprising that individuals turn to the past to try to make sense of the present.⁴⁸⁴

Moreover, whilst prolonged strike action and industrial closure evidentially impacted those who lost employment as a result, for those of Gary's generation, growing up in the wake of closure had significant long-term consequences for their own attitudes to work. For many entering the workforce in the decades that followed industrial closure, it was a lack of well-paid, secure employment and long spells of unemployment that they faced.⁴⁸⁵ Gary continues to detail the trajectory of his teenage years and

⁴⁸² Cowie and Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*.

⁴⁸³ Strangleman, "'Smokestack Nostalgia,' 'Ruin Porn' or Working-Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation"; Tim Strangleman, 'Work Identity in Crisis? Rethinking the Problem of Attachment and Loss at Work', *Sociology* 46, no. 3 (2012): 411–25.

⁴⁸⁴ For a further discussion of this, see Tim Strangleman, 'The Nostalgia for Permanence at Work? The End of Work and Its Commentators', *The Sociological Review* 55, no. 1 (2007): 81–103.

⁴⁸⁵ Nayak, 'Displaced Masculinities'; Luke Telford, "'There Is Nothing There': Deindustrialization and Loss in a Coastal Town', *Competition & Change* 26, no. 2 (1 April 2022): 197–214; Anthony Lloyd, 'Working to Live, Not Living to Work: Work, Leisure and Youth Identity among Call Centre Workers in North East England', *Current Sociology* 60, no. 5 (1 September 2012): 619–35; Ray Hudson, 'Rethinking Change in Old Industrial Regions: Reflecting on the Experiences of

early 20s into more serious violent crime and drug dealing. He speaks freely and with little overt emotion, despite the emotive experiences he shares, perhaps due to his now long history of providing his life story in interviews.

Gary's testimony exemplifies the lingering impacts of deindustrialisation, where the loss of stable, identity-forming employment led to a search for alternative, often destructive, pathways. This shift is emblematic of a broader intergenerational struggle to find meaning and purpose in a landscape where traditional industries and the associated community structures have eroded.⁴⁸⁶ As already discussed, Gary's experiences at this time were shaped not only by the collectively felt shock of deindustrialisation, but also ongoing personal struggles at home. Yet as he himself identifies, the two were intrinsically linked. In 2007, Gary took part in a project set up by photographer Adrian Clarke; entitled Gary's Friends, it is 'a collection of portraits of people affected by drug addiction and alcoholism in the villages around Durham'.⁴⁸⁷ In his accompanying interview with Clarke, Gary details the physical abuse inflicted on him by his father, and then later his stepfather, Alan, a former miner. Speaking to Clarke of Alan, Gary recalls:

"He used to drink and then he got violent and then at other times he got depressed. He tried to hang himself in our house: he pulled the bed to the bedroom window and put a rope round his neck and jumped out: we found him with bubbles coming out of his mouth and my mum had to cut him down. On New Year's Eve he slit his wrists in front of me, my sister, and a friend of ours. I bandaged them up for him. He isn't with my mum anymore, but I still see him occasionally. He's still a drinker".⁴⁸⁸

North East England', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 37, no. 4 (2005): 581–96.

⁴⁸⁶ Strangleman, 'The Nostalgia for Permanence at Work?'; Perchard, "'Broken Men" and "Thatcher's Children"'.

⁴⁸⁷ Adrian Clarke, *Gary's Friends* (Hove: The West Pier Press, 2007).

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

Gary is not alone in recalling such exceptionally traumatic memories in Clarke's book; many others photographed share similar childhood experiences of violence and witnessing the severe mental distress of their parents. At the same time, many of Clarke's interviewees share that their relationship with Gary stemmed from his former role as their drug dealer, and in turn, reveal the lasting damage caused by drug addiction on their physical and mental health. From this, we are able to observe the cyclical nature of inter-generational trauma. Even in the present day, levels of alcohol consumption are greater in County Durham than England's average, matching trends for other similar deindustrialised areas that have struggled to adequately economically and socially recover.⁴⁸⁹ These persistent issues underscore the deep-seated and unresolved challenges that have been passed down through generations, as communities continue to deal with the legacy of industrial decline. The testimonies collected here reveal how these inherited struggles manifest in ongoing social and psychological difficulties, providing a poignant reminder of the enduring impact of deindustrialisation on community and individual wellbeing

To return to Seabrook's study of unemployment and the frequent associated period of 'limitless leisure', he notes a recurring link between worklessness and "violence, marital breakdown and mental health difficulties".⁴⁹⁰ At the same time, illness and disability related to industrial work naturally persisted after deindustrialisation. The ever-presence of observable ill-health, and premature death, therefore, continues to impart psychological distress on both those affected and those around them.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁹ "InstantAtlas Durham – Living Well – Alcohol Related Harm," accessed December 2, 2021, <https://www.durhaminsight.info/living-well/alcohol-related-harm/>

⁴⁹⁰ Jeremy Seabrook, *Unemployment* (London: London : Quartet Books, 1982), 1–3.

⁴⁹¹ Curtis and Thompson, "“This Is the Country of Premature Old Men” Ageing and Aged Miners in the South Wales Coalfield, c.1880–1947”; see also Ronnie Johnston and Arthur McIvor, 'Oral History, Subjectivity, and Environmental Reality:

At the same time, however, Gary has since drawn upon this inter-generational trauma in a way that has forged a very different life path for him than what he imagined for himself as a teenager. Indeed, after his final spell in prison, he recalls that:

“I started thinking maybe, with my experiences--you know--you know--sitting in prison cells looking at life in prison, and the drugs and all--like--all the heinous, negative stuff--maybe I could take that negative stuff and do something positive with it”⁴⁹²

One aspect of this is his community interest company, Positive Directions NE, that ‘works with a range of adults and young people who need to change direction or focus due to challenging personal circumstances’.⁴⁹³ Another is his role in running Bearpark Community Boxing Gym. As a teenager, Gary recalls “I joined the boxing because I wanted to learn how to fight and properly learn how to fight. So that's what I did.” Specifically, he notes that he did so because “that's what made me feel like a man”, again speaking to the cross-generational transmissions of understandings of masculinity based upon physical strength and violence.⁴⁹⁴

However, now he reflects that “the gym should always be much more than just for people who want to fight... I think these community hubs should be exactly that. It should be a place--it should be a bit of a beacon of hope that--you know--where you can come and-- we've just had it recently, actually. Two young guys lost a good friend, he jumped in front of a train. And they were feeling suicidal--you know, the impact of that. Because quite often what will happen--I'm sure you're aware--there'll be a spate of suicides

Occupational Health Histories in Twentieth-Century Scotland’, *Osiris* 19 (2004): 234–49; McIvor and Johnston, ‘Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries’.

⁴⁹² Gary Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁹³ Further details on Positive Directions NE can be found at <https://www.positivedirectionsne.co.uk/>

⁴⁹⁴ Gary Crooks, Interview with the Author.

around one. But they came to the gym, and they came to talk about it. And you know, they brought their pain in there, and they got the support.”⁴⁹⁵

Of course, from Gary’s testimony, it is apparent that there are still the pervasive issues of mental illness and isolation within the wider community. However, while Gary spoke of the hopelessness that pervaded in the initial aftermath of closure, here he speaks directly of hope. The boxing gym, in this sense, acts as a direct challenge to the cross-generational inheritance of a masculinity that perpetuated violence and stigma regarding mental health. Individuals like Gary are actively reshaping the social fabric of their communities, creating new spaces of hope and support in areas still dealing with the aftereffects of industrial decline. These efforts not only challenge the cross-generational inheritance of trauma but also represent a reimagining of place, where the community becomes a site of resilience and renewal in the present.

Conclusion

This chapter has interrogated the timeline of deindustrialisation in County Durham, challenging the dominance of the 1984-85 miners’ strike in understandings of coal mining’s decline by highlighting the significance of earlier closures in the 1960s. It has undertaken a thorough exploration of oral history testimony from two distinct generations, those with direct experience of the coal mining industry and those who came of age during the era of deindustrialisation.

The memories of Eric Wood, shared here through his testimony, evidence the strong emotional effects of the earlier wave of closures. His experiences of relocation as a teenager, as his father moved from Durham to

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid

the Midlands through a colliery transfer scheme, provide poignant insight into the ways in which deindustrialisation relates to individual and collective understandings of place and community. Oral histories like Eric's are invaluable in capturing the interplay of individual and collective memory, offering a window into the personal and emotional histories that are often overlooked when relying solely on official records or policy documents. These testimonies bring to light the lived experiences of those directly impacted by deindustrialisation, revealing the profound emotional and psychological effects that are otherwise missed in more traditional historical sources.

Eric and other interviewees grappled with the paradoxical nature of closure, acknowledging relief at the conclusion of dangerous occupation while simultaneously expressing deep disdain for the profound effects it had on individuals and communities. Indeed, the testimony quoted here makes clear the impact of colliery closures on individual and community identity, highlighting the challenges of coping with unemployment and addressing issues like increased alcohol consumption and mental health concerns.

Indeed, the multi-generational nature of the oral histories collected here has allowed this chapter to trace these emotions across generations, revealing how the memories of the past continue to influence the present. Although these experiences are taken from the micro-level of individual villages, the way in which anger, loss, and pride in the past are shared through memories is a phenomenon noted in studies of deindustrialisation globally. Gary's interview in particular emphasises the cross-generational legacy of closure, most notably in relation to conceptualisations of masculinity.

However, whilst anger, grief, and hopelessness pervade his narrative of the initial aftermath, Gary's testimony also demonstrates the potential for cross-generational renewal. Whilst some aspects of the past are inherited, some are transformed or outright rejected. Traumatic memories like Gary's,

and collective memories of the industrial past, can be damaging across generations, but they can also be a significant source for progressively altering places to meet the needs of the present.

In short, this chapter has demonstrated how a complex web of emotions, identities, and transformations unfolded as County Durham dealt with deindustrialisation. In doing so, it has provided a critical foundation for understanding the lasting impact of colliery closures on the region and its people. By highlighting the emotional and spatial dimensions of deindustrialisation, it sets the stage for the deeper exploration of deindustrialised spaces and the evolving cross-generational relationships with the industrial past that will be explored in the following chapters. This connection underscores the thesis's central contribution to understanding how memory, place, and generation intersect in the context of industrial decline, offering new insights into the enduring legacy of coal mining in County Durham

CHAPTER 5 THE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES OF DEINDUSTRIALISATION IN COUNTY DURHAM

*“forgotten spaces organised amnesia the activity of coal mining
erased beneath the surface of the visible rising mine-waters
entail acidic salts they saturate voids
Romans left more traces in Durham County than the collieries
by the end of the twentieth century few traces of their
existence nothing commemorates places where several
generations thousands worked
and dozens sometimes hundreds died the sense of emptiness
experienced in a place which is losing its memory. how to
know a place or represent something you can’t see that isn’t
there everything I don’t remember”*⁴⁹⁶

*“It is interesting that we, you know, -we do live in an ex industrial area and
even this-- you mentioned, as you came over the hill and looked down into
the village, ah, beautiful. It's so rural and beautiful, but it was the sight of a
pit 70 years ago. And, you know, it looks a lot different if you look at the old
photographs.”*⁴⁹⁷

Introduction

This chapter explores cross-generational relationships to deindustrialised places. Having already, in previous chapters, examined both the economic and political context of industrial closure, and the contemporary responses to this, this thesis now turns to interrogate the legacy of colliery closures in County Durham. In doing so, it looks to further understand the entanglements of memory, identity, and place within deindustrialised areas, asking how a place’s past comes to influence its present.

⁴⁹⁶ This is an extract from an untitled poem by John Seed, within a collection of poetry, prose extracts, and extracts from historical documents in John Seed, *Brandon Pit House: Recollections of the Durham Coalfield* (Ripon: Smokestack Books, 2016), 104.

⁴⁹⁷ Stefan Gemski, Interview with the Author.

To do this, the chapter draws primarily upon Halbwachs's theoretical understanding of collective memory, and Mannheim's generational theory.⁴⁹⁸ Memory, and its transmission across generations, feature prominently within recent work in the field of deindustrialisation studies.⁴⁹⁹ However, as this chapter outlines, the cross-generational transmission of memory is not a uniform or universal process across deindustrialised sites. Nevertheless, there exists a dominant cultural narrative about the decline of coal mining in the United Kingdom, which centres around the 1984-85 miners' strike, and the subsequent colliery closures.⁵⁰⁰ The use of oral history testimony allows for insight into how individuals interact with these dominant narratives, negotiating with them by drawing upon individual experience and memory to make sense of the present.

Moreover, this chapter seeks to challenge this idea of a homogenously experienced process of deindustrialisation that aligns with the dominant

⁴⁹⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Mannheim, 'The Problem of Generations'.

⁴⁹⁹ High, 'Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization', 2013; Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation: Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring*; Clark, "'People Just Dae Wit They Can Tae Get by'": Exploring the Half-Life of Deindustrialisation in a Scottish Community'; James Rhodes, 'Youngstown's "Ghost"? Memory, Identity, and Deindustrialization', *International Labor and Working Class History* 84, no. Fall (2013): 55–77; Jackie Clarke, 'Closing Moulinex: Thoughts on the Visibility and Invisibility of Industrial Labour in Contemporary France', *Modern & Contemporary France* 19, no. 4 (2011): 443–58; MacKinnon, *Closing Sysco*; Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place*; Beynon and Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine: Coal and the End of Industrial Britain*; David Byrne, 'Industrial Culture in a Post-Industrial World: The Case of the North East of England', *City* 6 (01 2002): 279–89; Emery, 'Belonging, Memory and History in the North Nottinghamshire Coalfield'; Bright, "'The Lady Is Not Returning!': Educational Precarity and a Social Haunting in the UK Coalfields'; Stephenson and Wray, 'Emotional Regeneration through Community Action', 2005.

⁵⁰⁰ David Nettleingham, 'Canonical Generations and the British Left: The Narrative Construction of the Miners' Strike 1984–85', *Sociology* 51, no. 4 (2017): 850–64; Julian Rappaport, 'Community Narratives: Tales of Terror and Joy', *American Journal of Community Psychology* 28 (1 February 2000): 1–24; Laurel Richardson, 'Narrative and Sociology', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 19, no. 1 (1 April 1990): 116–35; Kate McLean and Moin Syed, 'Personal, Master, and Alternative Narratives: An Integrative Framework for Understanding Identity Development in Context', *Human Development* 58 (1 July 2016): 318–49.

cultural narrative. In particular, it investigates how the earlier closure of Brandon Pit House, before the acceleration of deindustrialisation almost two decades later, has affected the way in which the industrial past is remembered, both in physical structures and emotional legacies. This, in turn, allows for further consideration of cross-generational consistencies and differences in the perception of place, belonging, and community.

Firstly, this chapter examines the physical landscapes of deindustrialisation that surround the two former collieries. There is a great deal of existing literature that discusses the ruination of sites of former industry and the way in which individuals and communities engage with these sites.⁵⁰¹ Yet much of this work focuses upon urban sites of deindustrialisation and is concerned with the affective practices of people with visible ruins. The semi-rural colliery villages of County Durham are somewhat different to such sites, in that many sites of industry were demolished with deliberate speed. As such, this chapter seeks to understand how people engage with this transformation of space, drawing upon the work of both Henri Lefebvre and Pierre Nora to extricate the diverse ways residents negotiate with sites of memory, or in other instances, come to terms with the lack of such spaces.

Next, this chapter turns to explore the relationship between memory, community, and belonging. Here, it considers how patterns of migration, and perceptions of incoming ‘strangers’ following the closure of Brandon Pit House have shaped individual relationships to a wider collective

⁵⁰¹ Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics, and Materiality*; Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place*; Kolenda, ‘Aestheticising the Post-Industrial Debris’; Michaela Tripp, ‘Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place. Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline’, *Regional Studies* 47, no. 8 (September 2013): 1380–81; James Rhodes, ‘Rust Belt Chic: Deindustrialization, Place and Urban Authenticity’, *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2–3 (1 September 2019): 265–86; Strangleman, “‘Smokestack Nostalgia,’ ‘Ruin Porn’ or Working- Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation’; High and Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*.

memory. In doing so, it turns also to Bearpark, examining the communal commemorative practices enacted there, considering how the past is made useful in the present day. This section also interrogates constructions of belonging and authenticity. In particular, it seeks to understand the way in which memories of, or nostalgia for, an imagined idealised community of the past are used to stake powerful emotional claims to place and collective memory, in a way that asserts individual identity in the present.

Finally, although explorations of cross-generational relationships to place are woven throughout this chapter, here it turns to discuss them fully in their own right. In particular, this section considers how younger residents understand and negotiate with the deindustrialised places they're residing in, and how tensions may arise, both within and between generations, from alternative understandings of place. Moreover, too, it returns to discussions of memory, thinking not only of how individuals draw on their memories of lived experience, but also how memory and the industrial past more broadly is drawn upon in new ways that are useful for younger generations without that lived experience.

‘You can't share the feeling’: The Physical Landscapes of Deindustrialisation

Deindustrialisation in County Durham is most typically associated with the timeline of accelerated colliery closures and political conflict in the late 1970s and 1980s. Yet the rationalisation and restructuring efforts of the National Coal Board (NCB) from the late 1950s had seen colliery closures occur over two decades before this generally acknowledged timeline. The effects of such earlier closures are frequently overlooked, because these closures were typically pre-negotiated, and men were provided the

opportunity to join a colliery elsewhere, either locally or nationally.⁵⁰² However, these places that experienced earlier industrial closure now sit within the broader deindustrialised landscape of County Durham, and this alternative time frame also has significant implications for people's relationship to place, and how the industrial past is understood in the present.

In my interview with Jonathan Elmer, who had in 2021 recently been elected a Green Party County Councillor for the Brandon division, he reflects on a lack of visible representation of the industrial past in the area he serves. The Brandon division encompasses Brandon itself, but also Langley Moor, Browney, Stonebridge, and Meadowfield; Brandon Pit House, the largest and latest colliery in that area to close, shut in 1968. Jonathan suggests that:

“When pits first started closing, the idea that that you would need to try and find some way of conserving that heritage, probably just wasn't on people's minds, because they just probably didn't realise that it would eventually affect the entire area and everything in it. And I guess people at the at the back end of it, they knew what was happening, the writing was on the wall, at that point, so they did what they could to capture the remnants of heritage that were being lost”⁵⁰³

In fact, at this time efforts were being made in County Durham to preserve the region's mining heritage, namely through the opening of Beamish Open Air Museum in Stanley. The museum aimed to challenge traditional approaches to heritage, what Laurajane Smith terms the ‘authorised heritage discourse’, by adopting a bottom-up approach in the obtaining and curating of collections, as well as providing an immersive historical experience to

⁵⁰² Jim Phillips, ‘Deindustrialization and the Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields, 1947 to 1991’, *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84 (ed 2013): 99–115.

⁵⁰³ Jonathan Elmer, Interview with the Author Zoom: [Remote Interview], June 2021.

visitors.⁵⁰⁴ As Natasha Vall observes, “Beamish was conceived during the 1960s when dramatic changes to the regional coalmining industry were benignly managed. A world was being lost but the future appeared bright, and Beamish held the promise that the past could be revisited, and nostalgic yearnings assuaged.”⁵⁰⁵

Indeed, despite being modelled as a radically different type of museum, which offered historical recognition to working-class life, Beamish remains a site of authorised heritage, with elements of the past curated to decide what should be remembered.⁵⁰⁶ At the very same time, elements of that past were being erased from the colliery villages themselves, leaving only carefully selected, officially designated spaces like Beamish to commemorate the past in a way which may not always align with actual personal experiences.

Maureen Smith, introduced in the previous chapter, is now in her late eighties and has lived in Langley Moor or adjacent Brandon all her life. In our interview, we discussed a lack of visible representation of the villages’ industrial past. “We don’t have anything really down here,” she comments, before I ask if she would like to see more of the village’s mining history remembered within the physical environment. She responds, indicating that she is not sure about how other residents feel, but “Personally, for me, yes, but I mean, I’m just me, you know...”.⁵⁰⁷ Maureen’s comments speak to a broader privatisation of memory, but also suggest shortfalls in the creation

⁵⁰⁴ Laura Carter, ‘Rethinking Folk Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History* 28, no. 4 (1 December 2017): 543–69; Hannam and England, ‘The Making of Two Mining Museums’; Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

⁵⁰⁵ Vall, ‘Coal Is Our Strife: Representing Mining Heritage in North East England’.

⁵⁰⁶ Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1992), 98–100.

⁵⁰⁷ Maureen Smith, Interview with the Author, Zoom: [Remote Interview], August 2020.

of authorised spaces of remembering, like Beamish.⁵⁰⁸ Maureen's memories are intrinsically linked to her attachment to place, and as such, she hopes for visible representations of the industrial past that attend to both her memories of this past and her memories of place.

By the late 1970s, deindustrialisation was reaching an accelerated pace in the United Kingdom; the economic, political, and emotional landscapes of industrial closure had changed.⁵⁰⁹ In Jonathan's words, 'the writing was on the wall' for the coming end of the coal industry in County Durham. As such, after the closure of Bearpark colliery in April 1984, when a rapid demolition of all colliery workings and buildings was undertaken, interviewee Ian Cummings, recalls his awareness of the historical significance of its closure. In the period preceding and during the closure, Ian recorded on video the pit and its community, later retrieving items like the pit head gear in the days before the site was demolished, 'in celebration' of what he could 'see starting to go'.⁵¹⁰ Indeed, Bearpark was the last colliery in the West Durham area to close, with neighbouring collieries closing intermittently in the previous three decades. The ongoing strike action also served as a reminder of the threat to the industry as a whole.

Pierre Nora suggests that in a period of temporal acceleration, as occurred in the later stages of deindustrialisation, the past is frequently abandoned in search of progress.⁵¹¹ For sites of deindustrialisation, what Ian describes as a 'disappearing' of industry and industrial solidarities was often an enforced forgetting, an erasure of memory by the design of the

⁵⁰⁸ Richard Sennett, 'Extract from "Disturbing Memories"', in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Daniel Levy, and Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 283–87; Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World*.

⁵⁰⁹ Vall, 'Coal Is Our Strife: Representing Mining Heritage in North East England'.

⁵¹⁰ Robert 'Ian' Cummings, Interview with the Author, Zoom [Remote Interview]: August 2020.

⁵¹¹ Nora, 'Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory'.

hegemonic forces that drove industrial closure.⁵¹² In particular, the timing of Bearpark Colliery's closure allowed Ian to reflect on this reinvention of place post-industry in surrounding villages and observing this enforced forgetting in practice, Ian became an active agent in contesting it. Ian describes being motivated by his observations that neighbouring communities who had experienced industrial closure earlier, in the 1960s and early 1970s, seemed to swiftly have lost or forgotten their industrial character.

Moreover, there is a significant difference between the experiences of semi-rural colliery villages and urban industrial areas in relation to the way in which the landscape now looks and is used. The work of Alice Mah considers place attachment in Walker, and how people construct a sense of home alongside the legacy of industry and the visible ruination of such former industrial areas.⁵¹³ As Wheeler notes, these urban frameworks map somewhat, but not entirely, onto hybrid rural-urban landscapes such the former mining villages of Durham.⁵¹⁴ Whilst there are shared patterns of economic struggle between rural and urban sites of deindustrialisation, Mah's observation that in Walker there has been 'little to replace the evidence of industrial decline' in terms of the physical landscape, this is not so readily observable in the semi-rural villages in question here.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹² High, 'Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization', 2013; Ian Thompson, 'After Coal: Reclamation and Erasure in the Great North Coalfield', in *The Post-Industrial Landscape as Site for Creative Practice: Material Memory*, ed. Gwen Heeney (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 27–35.

⁵¹³ Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place*.

⁵¹⁴ Rebecca Wheeler, 'Mining Memories in a Rural Community: Landscape, Temporality and Place Identity', *Journal of Rural Studies* 36 (1 October 2014): 22–32.

⁵¹⁵ Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place*; Martin Whitby et al., 'The Rural Economy of North East England' (Centre for Rural Economy Research: Newcastle University, 1999).

Instead, where the industrial past is still present in these villages, it is more a result of its deliberate insertion for the purposes of commemoration than a lingering ruination. Indeed, often total demolition was carried out swiftly following closure in an attempt to cleanse painful memories, to ‘eradicate all traces of this failed industry’.⁵¹⁶ Early reports on regenerative efforts in coalfield communities focus on the reinvention of place to improve the ‘self-respect of communities afflicted by dereliction’.⁵¹⁷ Yet as Mills and McIntosh suggest, the erasure of industrial landscapes can produce complicated responses. Whilst some may be pleased to see the removal of all remnants of industry, others may feel that an important part of their experience has been deliberately expunged from the historical record.⁵¹⁸

As well as this, there are also contestations about how the industrial past is then represented as heritage in the present. Often, the debates around heritage centre around the use of the past as a visitor attraction, such as in museums. Bella Dicks explores this extensively, unpacking the contested meanings and engagements with heritage sites such as the Rhondda Heritage Park, and the representation of working-class histories.⁵¹⁹ However, these debates are also occurring on a much smaller scale too. In Bearpark, for example, the former Miners’ Welfare Institute is now the village community centre. When serving as a councillor, Redvers Crooks established a youth club in the centre, but conflict with other users of the

⁵¹⁶ Stirling Central Regional Council Minutes, Land and Buildings Sub-committee, 18/07/1988, held at Stirling Council Archives, 5 Borrowmeadow Road, Stirling in Catherine Mills and Ian McIntosh, “‘I See the Site of the Old Colliery Every Day’”: Scotland’s Landscape Legacies of Coal’, *Landscapes* 21, no. 1 (2 January 2020): 50–71.

⁵¹⁷ Alice Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline* (University of Toronto Press, 2012); Martin Whitby et al., ‘The Rural Economy of North East England’ (Centre for Rural Economy Research: Newcastle University, 1999).

⁵¹⁸ Mills and McIntosh, “‘I See the Site of the Old Colliery Every Day’”.

⁵¹⁹ Dicks, ‘Performing the Hidden Injuries of Class in Coal-Mining Heritage’; Dicks, *Heritage, Place, and Community*.

space made the experience difficult. In particular, however, he is critical of the Bearpark Artists Collective, who also used the space as their studio.

“I must admit, I went in, and the work was absolutely fantastic. But that's not enough for me. Selling pictures for 1000s of pounds. And wanting 300 pounds [for a workshop]. But you're taking the soul of the village away by--you're turfing all the kids out onto the streets with nothing to do.”⁵²⁰

This reimagining of space is deeply tied to memory, as former industrial spaces are repurposed, often leading to contestations about whose memories and histories are being preserved or erased. These conflicts highlight the complex process of negotiating the past in a way that is meaningful to current residents while respecting the industrial heritage that shaped the community. There are two aspects to Redvers's anger about this. Firstly, he is angry because a space of leisure he used as a teenager himself was seemingly taken away from village teenagers and children in the present. As discussed in chapter one, the Miners' Welfare Institute had originally provided one place for representational space to develop, through use by community members, in villages otherwise predominantly composed of paternalist representations of space. In the present day, Redvers feels its most fitting use would be to provide a similar purpose for leisure and socialising, in a village where there are few alternative sites for young people to do so.

Secondly, Redvers's anger also speaks to the broader issue of class barriers to accessing cultural spaces, as well as the commercialisation of working-class culture itself.⁵²¹ Whilst the Institute was formerly a space that allowed for expressions of working-class leisure, education, and culture, it

⁵²⁰ Redvers Crooks, Interview with the Author.

⁵²¹ Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: SAGE, 1997); Steven High, 'Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization', *International Labor and Working Class History* 84, no. Fall (2013): 140–53.

has since, in his opinion, been co-opted for purposes that offer little service, access or representation to working-class people in the village.⁵²²

Interviewee Dave Shotton attests similarly. Dave is a former resident of Langley Park. He is a retired chemist, who now spends his time as a community historian and archaeologist, as well as running a small business offering ghost walks in Durham city. He explains that he had given ‘one or two talks’ in a shop called ‘Outstanding Art’, on North Road in Durham city, ‘the poorest part of Durham’ he explains. He continues, describing how ‘you sort of walk in, and you’ve got these paintings on the wall which are worth thousands of pounds, and you’ve got miners lamps painted pink and blue. I went in there and these pink and blue miner’s lamps sort of tore my soul out, you know?’⁵²³

Like Redvers, Dave shares a very emotional response to this experience. In his testimony, the site of the gallery is jarring to him in its position within an area marked by deprivation, but in particular, it is the commodification of the miner’s lamp that elucidates such a strong response. Indeed, the sale and display of these modified symbols of former working-class culture perhaps speaks to the broader processes of working-class erasure within cultural spaces following deindustrialisation.⁵²⁴ Later, Dave also raises questions that are central to Laurajane Smith’s discussion of the

⁵²² Spence discusses the relative invisibility of working-class art and wider artistic portrayals of miners in Jean Spence, ‘Miner Artist/Minor Artist? Class, Politics, and the Post-Industrial Consumption of Mining Art’, *Frontiers in Sociology* 5 (2020): 62–62.

⁵²³ Dave Shotton, Interview with the Author (Zoom: 2020)

⁵²⁴ Gildart et al., ‘Revisiting the History of the British Coal Industry’; Arthur McIvor, ‘Where Is’ Red Clydeside’? Industrial Heritage, Working-Class Culture and Memory in the Glasgow Region’, in *Constructing Industrial Pasts: Heritage, Historical Culture and Identity in Regions Undergoing Structural Economic Transformation*, ed. Stefan Berger (Oxford: Berghan Books, 2020), 47–68, <https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/69781/>.

authorised heritage discourse, about who has the power to define what is worthy of being preserved and displayed as heritage.⁵²⁵ He recalls that:

“Fifteen, twenty years ago, I was swimming in the river, and I would pull out tub wheels and these are the wheels of tubs who brought coal from the ground that helped us win World War Two. Other people were doing this and signed it off as scrap, whereas there's now a friend of mine who is conserving this stuff because I think that will be important, you know?”⁵²⁶

Here, Dave stakes a potent claim to an item otherwise deemed as worthless, drawing upon elements of the past that he feels significant in order to assert its value. Indeed, Smith asserts that ‘heritage is *not* a thing, site, or place, nor is it ‘found’, rather heritage is the multiple processes of meaning making that occur as material heritage places or intangible heritage events are identified, defined, managed, exhibited, and visited’.⁵²⁷ Yet Dave continues:

‘People have criticised me saying that you're not documenting this properly, we should leave this for the archaeologists, so do we leave this in the river until it's virtually rotted away and then somebody might take notice of it, or do we get it out now?’

At the same time, Dave is also critical of how the mining industry has been subject to a ‘romanticisation’ through sites such as Beamish Museum, visited by ‘people who have very little notion of what mining was like.’ We are reminded again of Steven High’s contention that the ‘wounds of class’ go beyond economic loss, extending into the cultural erasure that occurs when working-class history is commodified for middle-class consumption.⁵²⁸ Arthur McIvor, too, observes the impact of neoliberal policies that sanitise post-industrial Glasgow whilst still purporting to

⁵²⁵ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; see also Dicks, *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visibility*.

⁵²⁶ Dave Shotton, Interview with the Author.

⁵²⁷ Laurajane Smith, ‘Discourses of Heritage: Implications for Archaeological Community Practice.’, *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, 5 October 2012.

⁵²⁸ High, “‘The Wounds of Class’”.

represent the authentic working-class reality.⁵²⁹ In part, Dave's comments may represent a claim to authenticity, asserting a legitimacy for his own construction of the industrial past. He continues:

"You know, when you see people walking around with blue scars on their skin because they had been hurt and the coal dust is ingrained in there and, like I say, it's what's called a miners' tattoo. And you know, miners coughing and spitting because they have this lung disease because of coal dust in their lungs the whole of their working life. You know, you forget that, you forget the fact that they do this and after twenty-five years or so, their bodies were broken down."⁵³⁰

Offering an alternative perspective, interviewee Ian discusses his work at Beamish Museum, where he predominantly works within areas representing the Edwardian era. Of this, he says, 'It has to be sanitised, for all sorts of reasons... it was a very rough and dangerous time to live. You've got children working down the pit, women going down the pit, you've got fights at the drop of a hat, you've got train drivers who were drunk on a daily basis because the water that they had to drink wasn't safe so they would drink beer. So, that's something which is actually quite difficult to show in a museum, without being thoroughly depressing and putting people off.'⁵³¹

Whilst Ian is aware that Beamish may not provide a truly authentic reconstruction of the past as it was, he is also keenly aware of Beamish's wider significance to the region beyond representing local history. He remarks that it 'seems that the heritage industry has become the industry for County Durham' and that 'it's got to be a tourist attraction because if it's not a tourist attraction people won't come.'⁵³² In reality, the North East as a region has the lowest number of people employed in the heritage industry in England, but here what is significant is that Ian is drawing upon the past

⁵²⁹ McIvor, 'Where Is' Red Clydeside'?

⁵³⁰ Dave Shotton, Interview with the Author.

⁵³¹ Ian Cummings, Interview with the Author.

⁵³² Ibid.

with an eye on the area's current needs, considering economic and social renewal through its history.

He also adds that he does try to have conversations with visitors about the more difficult, unpleasant elements of the past, if they're interested. He says, 'we hope that people will take away more than just the tram experience, having learnt about some of the more interesting things, or some of the things that I think are more interesting about the way of life.'⁵³³ Indeed, whilst there may always be ongoing tensions between representing what is authentic and displaying what is attractive to tourists, what visitors take from a site very much depends on their own interpretation and engagement with it.⁵³⁴ Likewise, in his role as a volunteer, Ian is also able to engage with this past, interpret it through individual experience, and present his own perspective to visitors; this, for him, is a valuable aspect of his part in a much larger museum, and a way for him to feel his heritage is represented.

In other instances, sites of former industry, visible to Mah as ruins in Walker, have been adapted and re-used in Durham in a way that reinforces each village's historic connection to the rural landscape in which they are located.⁵³⁵ Afforestation on former colliery sites is a common approach, designed to be economically, environmentally, and socially beneficial. In the case of Bearpark, this process of reclamation has also been accompanied by attempts to acknowledge the village's mining past. Although there are no visible structures that remain of Bearpark Colliery, the site is now reclaimed

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Dicks, *Heritage, Place, and Community*; Bethan Coupland and Nikolas Coupland, 'The Authenticating Discourses of Mining Heritage Tourism in Cornwall and Wales', *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 18, no. 4 (2014): 495–517.

⁵³⁵ 'Land Reclamation Programme 1997/98', Annual Review (Durham County Council, n.d.), Accessible at <https://neregenarchive.online/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Land-Reclamation-Programme-1997-98.pdf>; Thompson, 'After Coal: Reclamation and Erasure in the Great North Coalfield'.

woodland, named by local schoolchildren in 2012 as Miner's Wood.⁵³⁶ The site was designed in line with the Woodland Trust's vision of the conservation of nature, offering rich habitat for a diverse range of flora and fauna.

However, it is also a space of leisure for Bearpark residents, offering space to walk in nature, picnic, and cycle. Community involvement in the project has been a key element throughout; although managed by Durham County Council, the woodland was planted with the help of local school children, and the community group Friends of Bearpark Woods plays a key role in its maintenance.⁵³⁷ Examining this transformation using Lefebvre's spatial triad, we see how the re-conceptualisation of space by council planners has fundamentally altered its representational and lived aspects, and how a negotiation between the community and the planners has led to the production of a new space that reimagines the former pit's location.⁵³⁸ The shift from a place marked by the absence of the pit to one of public recreation and natural conservation has resulted in a profound change in spatial practices, transforming the site from one of work, then dereliction, to a sanctioned space for leisure activities.

Here, Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire* is also useful.⁵³⁹ Miners' Wood is one such site of memory, an attempt at remembrance in the absence of *milieux de memoire*, the sites of real memory, like the swiftly demolished colliery, which offer richer emotional and sensory insights into the lived experience of the past. In Bearpark, other such sites remain standing, but are inaccessible; the union lodge remains, for instance, but is

⁵³⁶ 'Bearpark Colliery Reclamation', *Woodland Trust*, accessed 3 July 2023, <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/woods/bearpark-colliery-reclamation/>.

⁵³⁷ 'Bearpark Colliery Woods', *Bearpark Colliery Woods*, accessed 21 July 2022, <https://bearparkwoods.wordpress.com/>.

⁵³⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

⁵³⁹ Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*.

boarded up, adorned with warning signs to trespassers, and awaiting its renovation into flats. Instead, commemorative sites, those sanctioned by planners and those which fit into a broader reimagining of a place, are offered in response to the social need to remember.

Yet for some, a *lieux de memoire* represents a fundamental disconnect between such places and their own experiences. Before my interview with Harry Nixon, a former miner at Bearpark colliery, we stood in his conservatory admiring the view. From his house, we looked down upon the site of the old colliery, now unrecognisable as a site of industry beneath the dense woodland. He agreed with my comments about its beauty, but then lamented that plans to create a golf course there, instead of woodland, had been scrapped. To Harry, Miners' Wood was pretty, but pointless; from his perspective, the golf course would have been economically beneficial to a village struggling with the effects of industrial closure.

This was not because Harry did not wish to remember the past. Indeed, Harry's house is decorated with mining memorabilia which he talked me through proudly- a miniature reproduction of Bearpark's banner in a sculpted coal surround, his lamps and pit tokens, framed collections of union badges, and a soft toy upon his mantelpiece wearing a 'coal not dole' t-shirt, bearing a placard reading 'Iron lady rot in hell'. For him, these items are imbued with personal memory that comes from lived experience, offering meaningful and emotional uses to him in the present. Miners' Wood, unrecognisable from his remembered experiences of work, offers no such psychological comfort or opportunity to remember, regardless of the commemorative name given.

Yet these intangible aspects of the past are difficult, often impossible, to fully transmit to future generations.⁵⁴⁰ It is not necessarily that the older generation make deliberate efforts to exclude newcomers or younger residents from this collective memory. Instead, attempting to preserve the intangible structures of feeling that make up the industrial community and transmit these to future generations is a somewhat complex task. For instance, I asked Eric Wood, introduced in the previous chapter and who had left his childhood home after his father accepted a transfer to another colliery, if he frequently spoke with his own children about his childhood in the colliery village of Langley Moor. He replies: “Not a lot. Because it's a different world...Because there are things you've experienced, you go through and you feel, which you can't readily transmit, you can talk about them and bore people to death as I'm doing now—”

Eric pauses to contemplate for a moment, after I reassure him that nothing that he is sharing is boring, before continuing “You can't share the feeling. You can't share the sense of holding it, knowing it, smelling it, er and just getting on with it and I think if anything, it's given me a legacy and a kind of stoic 'If something happens, you get on with it.' And if somebody dies, fine, you've got to get on with it”.⁵⁴¹ Eric's comments encapsulate the inherent challenge of transferring sensory and emotional memories to subsequent generations. Memories are complex and multifaceted experiences tied to our senses, emotions, and physical presence in a specific moment in time. The feeling of holding something, the weight of it in our hands, the texture beneath our fingertips, the scents in the air—these

⁵⁴⁰ For discussions of the uses and challenges of intangible heritage, see: Natsuko Akagawa and Laurajane Smith, *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage: Practices and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2018); Stefan Berger, Christian Wicke, and Jana Golombek, ‘Burdens of Eternity? Heritage, Identity, and the “Great Transition” in the Ruhr’, *The Public Historian* 39, no. 4 (1 November 2017): 21–43; Christian Wicke, Stefan Berger, and Jana Golombek, *Industrial Heritage and Regional Identities* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁵⁴¹ Eric Wood, Interview with the Author, Zoom: [Remote Interview], August 2020.

sensory details are difficult to capture in language alone.⁵⁴² While we can articulate and describe our memories to others, there is a fundamental limitation in conveying the entirety of the sensory and emotional aspects that define them.

Instead, a *lieux de memoire* like Miner's Wood relies upon the potential for people to find meaning within it that is useful to their present-day experiences. It is not a *milieux de memoire*, as is being longed for by Eric in his wish to transmit a real, full memory of the past, but that does not mean it cannot still be a productive site for engaging with aspects of a collective history and identity. For instance, Ian's daughter, Chloe Cummings, in her mid-twenties, introduces herself with a statement that demonstrates the entanglement of familial bonds and community repositories of memory, and links an awareness of the industrial past to an enjoyment of the present landscape.

“My name is Chloe Cummings. I come from a long line of mining families. I live in Bearpark, which is one of the last pits to close. You can still see a lot of remnants around here, like the landscape and erm, most of the places that used to be railway lines, it's just walks now. But um, it is a really nice place to live, particularly for the walks, interesting to walk along these places where people would have been working.”⁵⁴³

Here, Chloe exemplifies the present uses of landscape to form an affective connection to the past and to comprehend the residual structures of feeling in which nature represented a freedom, a psychological and physical relief from the hard labour of coal mining. In doing so, she is able to present a composed narrative of place that aligns with her own sense of identity and belonging to place. Others note that the woodland and walking routes that now cover old sites of industry are frequently used by parents and

⁵⁴² Katherine Waugh, 'Failing to Connect? Methodological Reflections on Video-Call Interviewing during the Pandemic', *The Oral History Review* 50, no. 1 (2 January 2023): 62–81.

⁵⁴³ Chloe Cummings, Interview with the Author, Zoom [Remote Interview], August 2020.

grandparents as both a form of leisure with children, but also as brief historical lessons, especially when there is a family connection to coal mining. Chloe herself notes the exceptionality of her strength of knowledge, due to her father's very active efforts to instil it in her.

Yet whilst others may not know the same intricate details of the industrial landscape as Chloe does, she recognises amongst her peers a shared culture that values Bearpark's heritage and the 'hard work' it represents. She notes it as an intangible presence, 'hard to pin down exactly what it is' but obvious to her as a felt experience of place.⁵⁴⁴ She adds "We might not necessarily be proud of the built environment of our region but we're certainly still proud of how strong the connections are with each other."⁵⁴⁵ This chapter will explore the construction of these close connections next. Here, what is significant is Chloe's perception of the intangible, that which Eric struggled so much to transmit. Indeed, Chloe is not experiencing the intangible elements of the past but is instead perceiving the creation of a new affective atmosphere, based upon the past but relevant to the present.

'The caring seems to have gone out the window': Community after Industrial Closure

Now this chapter turns to explore the relationships that people have with place more broadly, beyond specific sites of memory. Here, it considers how ideas of belonging and authenticity are constructed as part of attachments to place, and how these ideas of place are drawn upon in the

⁵⁴⁴ Chloe Cummings, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

formation of identity. In doing so, it returns to examine the alternative timelines of industrial closure in County Durham, highlighting the manner in which earlier closures, and subsequent migration, have altered understandings of place in specific ways.

Indeed, whilst the coal communities of County Durham are intrinsically linked to migration and flows of labour- many of the villages that exist today came into being with the inwards migration of workers to meet the labour demands of newly established collieries during the nineteenth century- the early twentieth century had provided a degree of population stability centred around a working colliery in many Durham communities.⁵⁴⁶ Yet the rationalisation and restructuring efforts of the National Coal Board (NCB) from the late 1950s would once again encourage migrancy through the Inter-Divisional Transfer Scheme, with many County Durham miners accepting transfers to collieries in Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire, and the West Midlands.⁵⁴⁷ Later, more widespread deindustrialisation, resulted in further migration in search of alternative employment.

In the previous chapter, this thesis turned to the testimony of interviewee Eric Wood, exploring his memories of his family's departure from Langley Moor after his father accepted a transfer to the Nottinghamshire coalfield. For Eric, this migration is expressed as a forced displacement. As a child, he had no option but to leave with his family, but his testimony suggests that his family were obligated to leave in search of

⁵⁴⁶ Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*.

⁵⁴⁷ Emery, 'Belonging, Memory and History in the North Nottinghamshire Coalfield'; A. Moyes, 'Post-War Changes in Coalmining in the West Midlands', *Geography* 59, no. 2 (1974): 111–20; Gareth Evans and Peter J Larkham, 'Designing and Living in a New Industrial Suburb: Experiences in the Cannock Chase Coalfield from the 1950s to the 1970s', *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 31, no. 5 (1 October 2004): 673–91; J. North and D. J. Spooner, 'The Geography of the Coal Industry in the United Kingdom in the 1970s: Changing Directions?', *GeoJournal* 2, no. 3 (1 May 1978): 255–72.

work as is common following deindustrialisation.⁵⁴⁸ Fullilove suggests that ‘Dis-PLACE-ment, is, by definition, a rupture of the geographic and the social. Disruptions of this kind force people to remake their emotional connections, including those we know as “place attachment”’.⁵⁴⁹ Eric expresses this best himself:

“I always feel untimely ripped from Durham. Because, you know, at the age of 14, to leave all of your friends, all of your family. I remember standing on the platform in Durham station with my mother and four other kids, there were five of us at that time, saying cheerio to my grandparents and we could have been going to Siberia. We had no idea where Stoke-on-Trent was because that's the station we were heading to. And we just got on the train. And off we went. So, everything-- I mean you imagine at 14, the friends I'd been to junior school with, we'd gone to Ushaw Moor together and then just left them. Gone.”⁵⁵⁰

Yet rather than diminish the affective bonds that attach people to place, disruption at times instead ‘triggers and illuminates otherwise latent or taken-for-granted states and attitudes.’⁵⁵¹ Almost seventy years following his departure described above, Eric notes, “There's always been a close relationship from my point of view with Durham, professionally and personally... so it's quite emotional going back.”⁵⁵² This affective bond to Durham acts as psychological comfort to Eric, creating a composure in his narrative because he can establish a strong sense of place-based identity through memory. As such, attachment to place does not necessarily coincide with continued residence, but rather exists through the recollection of place-

⁵⁴⁸ See, for instance: Barrie Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

⁵⁴⁹ Mindy Fullilove, ‘Revisiting “The Frayed Knot”: What Happens to Place Attachment in the Context of Serial Forced Displacement?’, in L. C. Manzo & P. Devine-Wright (Eds.), *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods and Research* (London: Routledge, 2014), p.141.

⁵⁵⁰ Eric Wood, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁵¹ Nikolay Mihaylov and Douglas Perkins, ‘Community Place Attachment and Its Role in Social Capital Development’, in L. C. Manzo & P. Devine-Wright (Eds.), *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods and Research* (London: Routledge, 2014), p.64.

⁵⁵² Eric Wood, Interview with the Author.

based memories, in this case evoked through the act of sporadic returns. In such instances, ‘memory is a “glue” that connects people to their places.’⁵⁵³

As May and Muir suggest, however, remaining and ageing in a changing place can produce similar effects to emigration on one’s sense of belonging, creating a sense of dislocation that leads to a nostalgic reliance upon memories of an idealised past.⁵⁵⁴ Maureen, like other older interviewees remembers how ‘everybody knew everybody’ when the colliery was in operation. “The pit closing changed everything. When they closed down and [people] moved away and it changed”, reflects Maureen, “It’s not the same now. We were all very friendly and we knew everybody. You know, you could rely on everybody.” When prompted to further explore the specificities of this change, she continues “Generally, caring for people, that’s what changed. The caring seems to have gone out the window”.⁵⁵⁵

This generational perspective highlights a significant shift in community cohesion, where the tightly knit social fabric of the past is perceived to have frayed in the absence of the unifying presence of the colliery. This change in social dynamics is not merely a reflection of the physical closure of the mine but also of a broader transformation in the community’s relationship with place, where memories of shared labour and mutual reliance have given way to a more fragmented social reality

⁵⁵³ M. Lewicka, ‘In Search of Roots: Memory as Enabler of Place Attachment’, 2013.4) p.51.

⁵⁵⁴ Vanessa May and Stewart Muir, ‘Everyday Belonging and Ageing: Place and Generational Change’, *Sociological Research Online* 20, no. 1 (1 February 2015): 72–82; see also Vanessa May, ‘Belonging from Afar: Nostalgia, Time and Memory’, *The Sociological Review* 65, no. 2 (1 May 2017): 401–15; Les Back, ‘Researching Community and Its Moral Projects’, *Twenty-First Century Society* 4, no. 2 (June 2009): 201–14.

⁵⁵⁵ Maureen Smith, Interview with the Author.

Likewise, of Bearpark, interviewee Norman Anderson says, ‘now there's still old families, what I call old Bearpark families, they're still here, there's still quite a number. But there's a hell of a lot of people that you don't know. You know. You don't know who they are, where they're from, or owt like that.’ When asked when those changes started to take place, he responds, “It sort of crept in, I think. And you get like, there's a lot of houses even now when they're coming up for sale, investors are buying them and just sticking anyone in them. Yeah, I means the guy near where I live, he's got two. Now this old lady died a couple of year ago and he's got that, that's three he's got.”⁵⁵⁶

Indeed, with Thatcher's right to buy policy coming into effect in 1980, alongside the continued sale of NCB owned housing, an increased number of privately owned homes has also been reflected in an increase in buy-to-let landlords who do not live in the community themselves.⁵⁵⁷ Norman shares his anger and frustration at this happening in Bearpark:

“He doesn't give a monkey's who he puts in them. He doesn't care. He had flippin' rats in the garden and all this that and the other. I caught him and told him and “I'll sort it out” never bothered.... And they're starting, it seems there's quite a few old people and it seems like as soon as they're dying this bloke's buying them up.”⁵⁵⁸

Both Maureen and Norman highlight this decline of ‘caring’. Whilst Maureen focuses upon the fragmentation of social relations in isolation, Norman's testimony provides an insight into the spatial dynamics of deindustrialisation. Indeed, as has been established in previous chapters, Bearpark is a village that has been historically spatially regulated from

⁵⁵⁶ Norman Anderson, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁵⁷ Beynon, Hudson, and Hollywood, ‘Regenerating Housing’; see also David Byrne, ‘After Industry and After the Welfare State’, in *Class After Industry: A Complex Realist Approach*, ed. David Byrne (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 35–52, doi:10.1007/978-3-030-02644-8_3; Katy Bennett, ‘Homeless at Home in East Durham’, *Antipode* 43, no. 4 (2011): 960–85, doi:10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00788.x.

⁵⁵⁸ Norman Anderson, Interview with the Author.

above, first through company paternalism and then through state-management. As Norman's testimony demonstrates, the increasing fragmentation of space through private ownership following industrial closure is increasingly shaping the way residents experience place and interact within it, where the sense of collective identity that once centred around shared industrial spaces has been disrupted. The shift from communal to private ownership has, in Norman's view, exacerbated social divisions and weakened the bonds that once held the community together

Interviewee Alison Hiles also discusses this in relation to the use of leisure spaces in Langley Park, where she was formerly a District Councillor. She explains that there,

“CISWO, the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation, owned two recreation grounds in the village, and part of the agreement in handing them over to the Parish Council was that they should remain--or one of them should remain used free--for free by the cricket club, the football club and the bowls club...But anyway, so, the council was very happy to allow the sale of it, provided that those sports clubs had rights on it. Since then, things have gone haywire because it was bought privately, and the bloke really wants to make the cricket field into a housing estate but that's another issue.”⁵⁵⁹

Like Norman, Alison describes the increasing privatisation of space that had formerly been accessible for public use through its ownership by NCB managed CISWO. However, she continues that “the other playground... had been vandalised to the extent that the tennis courts weren't usable and the pavilion was burnt down one night. But, the putting green wasn't being used and sprouted heather quite naturally. Heather seeds last about 25 years in the soil. That's because it wasn't being mown, the heather grew and with my new job with natural England, I recognised it as Lowland Heath, which is a very rare habitat, and got in touch with the school... to talk to them about

⁵⁵⁹ Alison Hiles, Interview with the Author (Esh: July 2021)

what we're going to do with the wreck and we all decided it was going to become a nature reserve.”⁵⁶⁰

This designation of the former recreation ground as a nature reserve is an interesting adaptation of the space into something new and seemingly useful for the present day, particularly due to Alison’s collaboration with local school children. Yet Alison also shares her frustration, at a campaign from “the children and grandchildren of the miners” who are unhappy with the recreation ground becoming a nature reserve. She explains that they “feel an ownership of it, because it belongs to CISWO--and I can't blame them for that at all--who are remembering as the way it was and not the way it has been and blaming the parish council for letting it go when, actually, what let it go was the community who vandalised it. So that's an ongoing campaign now...They want their rec back. They don't want it back as a nature reserve. They want the swings back in and they want the tennis court back and they want the pavilion rebuilt.”⁵⁶¹

Like the already discussed Miners’ Wood in Bearpark, Alison’s testimony implies tensions both within and across generations, highlighting evident divisions within deindustrialised communities that are playing out within everyday debates about the uses and meanings of space. In particular, the assertion that the campaign is being run by the children and grandchildren of miners also suggests that there are claims to authenticity occurring that imply a right to authority over such former industrial spaces bases upon a perceived link to the memories of the industrial past.

Offering a different perspective, interviewee Marion Wilson describes the village of Bearpark as continuing to be ‘close-knit’, with subsequent generations still frequently remaining in residence, suggesting Norman’s

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

perception of instability is either not observable to all, or not fully pervasive.⁵⁶² Indeed, Marion uses the term ‘insular’ to describe the village, a word usually used pejoratively to suggest a parochialism and close-mindedness but here used in reference to a sense of belonging and emotional closeness. Marion herself describes her residence in Bearpark as ‘just a part of’ her own identity. Explaining this in greater detail, she says “my grandparents, they came into the village when the village came about. You know, like my paternal Grandfather, his dad sort of moved around to each colliery because he was someone who went in and sort of blasted the way through the ground to sort of get the miners up and running. So, my granda’ was born in the village, so it’s sort of a sense of history”.⁵⁶³ In doing so, Marion offers a powerful emotional claim over space, constructing an authenticity in her belonging to place that asserts her family’s position in the creation of Bearpark and its industry.⁵⁶⁴

Marion also reflects on a 2014 commemorative ceremony marking the thirty-year anniversary of the colliery closure, describing it as ‘jam-packed’ with people of all ages.⁵⁶⁵ They attend, she suggests, because it offers a connection to their parents and grandparents and thus there is personal emotion imbued in these collective actions. Indeed, although narrators who witnessed the closure of the pit in 1984 recall feelings of sadness and loss felt at the time, they discuss the presence of the industrial past in the present day as a productive and empowering force that reinforces strong social networks and communal solidarities. As such, this opportunity to remember

⁵⁶² Marion Wilson, Interview with the Author, Zoom [Remote Interview], August 2020.

⁵⁶³ Marion Wilson, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁶⁴ Julia Bennett, ‘Narrating Family Histories: Negotiating Identity and Belonging through Tropes of Nostalgia and Authenticity’, *Current Sociology* 66, no. 3 (1 May 2018): 449–65.

⁵⁶⁵ Marion Wilson, Interview with the Author; Mark Tallentire, ‘Marking 30 Years since Bearpark Colliery Closed’, *The Northern Echo*, 4 April 2014, <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/local/northdurham/11128203.marking-30-years-since-bearpark-colliery-closed/>.

offers a form of resistance to the spatial changes occurring within Bearpark. Stephenson and Mellor suggest, ‘communities are taking pride in their past, which is enabling them to heal the wounds of defeat and economic decline and begin to assess their future needs’.⁵⁶⁶ Here, they refer specifically to the Durham Miners’ Gala, but as is clear from Marion’s testimony, this process is also happening on a much smaller, place-specific basis.

Yet to return to the work of Natasha Vall, places that experienced colliery closures earlier, such as Brandon Pit House’s 1968 closure, were often subject to swift and hopeful attempts to modernise and progress, erasing all sense of the industrial past. Steven High suggests the process of deindustrialisation is ‘not altogether different to what happens in wartime’ drawing on Bevan’s argument that “to lose all that is familiar can mean a disorienting exile from the memories they have invoked.”⁵⁶⁷ Despite this, as we see from Maureen’s testimony, that industrial past remains a key element of individual relationships to place, but there is little opportunity to exercise these memories collectively.

In the absence of such opportunities to remember, Maureen turns to nostalgic memories of an imagined, idealised community to explain the change in place through her narrative.⁵⁶⁸ Such nostalgia frequently acts as a defence mechanism against accelerated change and perceived threats to an established sense of order, in this case, population change driven by the reorganisation of capital that ‘brought strangers into the village’.⁵⁶⁹ This

⁵⁶⁶ Mellor and Stephenson, ‘The Durham Miners’ Gala and the Spirit of Community’, 2005.

⁵⁶⁷ High, ‘Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization’, 2013.; Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007).

⁵⁶⁸ David Gilbert, ‘Imagined Communities and Mining Communities’; Bennett, ‘Narrating Family Histories’.

⁵⁶⁹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Anthony Smith, ‘Extract from “The Ethnic Origins of Nations”’, in *The Collective*

turn to memory as a legitimising agent for establishing belonging in the face of change may strengthen individual relationships to place and may even maintain a more contained collective memory amongst an exclusive network of friendship and familial ties constructed before community change.⁵⁷⁰ In many ways, the transmission of collective memory is a closed cultural circuit that both generates affective bonds to place and is maintained by them.⁵⁷¹

Indeed, Maureen is not inherently hostile towards such ‘strangers’, nor are they totally unknown to her. During our interview, we were interrupted by a knock on the door, her downstairs neighbour collecting a parcel she had taken in for him. Their exchange was friendly, and they were familiar with each other, and yet she uses him as an example of an outsider coming into the village, saying “Well, that man what just come to the door, he's a student and he's very nice. I don't--- I don't really have a problem with them.”⁵⁷² Instead, Maureen's relationship with strangers seems rooted in a fundamental disconnect. She perceives newcomers as individuals who are not part of her imagined community, a group that shares with her a collective memory and historical context, and which represent a comforting sense of belonging and familiarity.

Memory Reader, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 231–37.

⁵⁷⁰ Megill, ‘History, Memory, Identity’; Mary P. Corcoran, ‘Place Attachment and Community Sentiment in Marginalised Neighbourhoods: A European Case Study’, *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 11, no. 1 (2002): 47–67.

⁵⁷¹ For further explorations of the relationship between collective memory and place, see Sofya Aptekar, ‘Looking Forward, Looking Back: Collective Memory and Neighborhood Identity in Two Urban Parks’, *Symbolic Interaction* 40, no. 1 (2017): 101–21; Igor Knez and Ingegård Eliasson, ‘Relationships between Personal and Collective Place Identity and Well-Being in Mountain Communities’, *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017); Maria Lewicka, ‘Place Attachment, Place Identity, and Place Memory: Restoring the Forgotten City Past’, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 28, no. 3 (1 September 2008): 209–31.

⁵⁷² Maureen Smith, Interview with the Author.

‘You can tell that there’s something missing there’: Remembering Industry Across Generations

This has significant implications for the cross-generational understandings of deindustrialised places, particularly for those who do not have a personal connection to a place’s past. For whilst these full-bodied memories of the past allow older, longer-standing residents to reflect on what they feel has been lost after industrial closure- the disappearance of industries, the erosion of economic stability, and the fracturing of the social fabric- younger generations exist within the affective atmosphere these reflections generate, without those fully formed sensory, emotional memories that allow for its comprehension.⁵⁷³

When this is combined with a total disconnect from the collective memory, growing up in a place with a past that is inaccessible to them may be particularly disorientating. This was apparent within an interview with Liam Adamson, aged 27, who had grown up in Meadowfield, a small village adjacent to Langley Moor and Brandon. Liam’s parents moved to Meadowfield in the 1980s. His father was born in London, his mother more locally in Sacriston, but they were the ‘strangers’ that Maureen describes. Whilst his maternal grandfather had been a miner at Bearpark colliery, Liam’s father was a prison-officer who commuted to Stockton for work; their ties of friendship, employment, and family lay beyond the place they resided in.

The industrial past exists for Liam as an absence, although he struggles to articulate exactly how and why. He comments “You can tell that there’s something missing there, it’s—a little bit empty”.⁵⁷⁴ It is in this context that

⁵⁷³ Emery, ‘Geographies of Deindustrialization and the Working-Class’.

⁵⁷⁴ Liam Adamson, Interview with the Author, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: July 2020).

Liam had to establish a sense of belonging and to negotiate his relationship to place. There is an awareness of the village's industrial past in his narrative, but Liam cannot remember learning anything about it in school or from his family. Instead, he credits his knowledge to popular films and his own research as an adult. Most of this information relates to the miners' strike of 1984-85, rather than specific details of the industrial history of his hometown, already deindustrialised by the time of strike action. Liam turns to the dominant narratives of industrial closure that he encounters in popular culture to seek composure in his own narrative of place and to understand the residues of loss around him.⁵⁷⁵

Even so, he struggles to align them entirely with his own experiences in Meadowfield. As already discussed, this dominant cultural narrative does not adequately capture the experiences and memories of those in places that experienced closure earlier. For individuals like Liam, their exclusion from a place's collective memory is exacerbated further by the physical absence of the industrial past. This dominant narrative serves to overshadow and minimise the earlier closures, rendering these communities and their lived realities largely invisible in the historical record.⁵⁷⁶ Consequently, younger, or newer, residents find themselves struggling to reconcile their own experiences with the historical accounts they encounter. The absence of outlets for their experiences and memories perpetuates a cycle of disconnection, leaving them searching for ways to establish a sense of belonging and understanding in a place where the industrial past has been intentionally erased.

Moreover, although concerned with post-soviet industrial neighbourhoods of Russia, Alexandrina Vanke's extension of William's

⁵⁷⁵ Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure'.

⁵⁷⁶ Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith, 'The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (January 2010): 4-15.

differentiated structures of feeling is also observable here. As Vanke observes, generation is a significant factor in how individuals relate to place, often leading to the emergence of alternative, co-existing structures of feelings.⁵⁷⁷ Even for individuals themselves, they may engage with multiple structures of feeling, generating a more ambiguous relationship to place. Indeed, whilst older interviewees like Maureen and Eric highlight the damaging nature of change to their villages, younger interviewees like Liam describe the same places as static and ‘stagnating’. Explaining this, Liam says, “It’s very set in its ways—there’s always going to be the same sort of takeaway shops, where everyone goes round and gets their food there, the same corner shops, the same pubs. Nothing’s ever going to change or revamp”.⁵⁷⁸ For Liam, Meadowfield is a place in limbo, suspended between the past and present with little useful being drawn from either.

Within this environment, participants like Liam struggle to find meaningful social, economic, or cultural uses for the places around them. Talking of his experiences in Meadowfield as a child and a teenager, he describes himself as a ‘bit lost’ with the only way to spend time out of the house was ‘sat in the park...just [doing] nothing with your time at all’.⁵⁷⁹ For these narrators, caught between the affective atmosphere of loss that permeates such deindustrialised spaces and the exclusion from a collective memory that may help them make sense of this, there emerges a more ambiguous relationship to place. Discussing his choice to leave Meadowfield to live in Newcastle, Liam comments:

⁵⁷⁷ Alexandrina Vanke, ‘Co-Existing Structures of Feeling: Senses and Imaginaries of Industrial Neighbourhoods’, *The Sociological Review*, 30 January 2023, 00380261221149540; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Marxist Introductions (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁵⁷⁸ Liam Adamson, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

‘A lot of people tend to stay in the village, stay in the same pubs, and live, breathe, and die in the places that they were born. Some people, like I say myself, would like to escape and know the other sort of life as well’.⁵⁸⁰

The denigration of immobility is key here because it speaks to broader ideas of territorial stigmatization, and what it means to stay in and belong to a place viewed to be so stereotypically ‘grim’.⁵⁸¹ This perception of being stereotyped, or ‘stigmatyped’ to borrow Wray’s extension of the idea, is not uncommon and appears too in Geoff Bright’s ethnographic work in the Derbyshire coalfield. Bright draws on the work of Skeggs to explore this point, particularly her contention that there occurs a ‘moral and discursive positioning of all types of the working class with degeneracy’ that is linked to ideas of immobility and lack of aspiration.⁵⁸² Despite this, all interviewees expressed pride in the villages they were raised in, and a strong emotional attachment to the places and the industrial past that appeared to refute the derogatory labels upon these deindustrialised places.

However, as the sociologist and social psychologist Erving Goffman outlines, it is possible to be both stigmatised and the stigmatiser.⁵⁸³ Unlike Eric and Maureen, who position increased mobility and population change as a damaging consequence of industrial closure in Brandon, Liam characterises his mobility as a defence mechanism against the parochial and monotonous atmosphere of deindustrialised place. Amongst those who remain, he notes, ‘there’s just a hole in [their] mentality’.⁵⁸⁴ As already discussed, despite growing up there, Liam observes the spatial dynamics of

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Loïc Wacquant, ‘Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality’, *Thesis Eleven* 91, no. 1 (1 November 2007): 66–77; James Rhodes, ‘Stigmatization, Space, and Boundaries in de-Industrial Burnley’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 684–703; Bright, “‘The Lady Is Not Returning!’”: Educational Precarity and a Social Haunting in the UK Coalfields’;

⁵⁸² Bright, “‘The Lady Is Not Returning!’”: Educational Precarity and a Social Haunting in the UK Coalfields’; Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*.

⁵⁸³ Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

this in practice from the perspective of an outsider. Perhaps as a reaction to this, he also actively differentiates himself on the basis of his mobility and constructs his own sense of place through experience at the edges of collective memory.

For those who grow up amongst these competing narratives of place, and whose place-memories are confined to their own generational experiences, it is unsurprising that their understanding of place is ambiguous and disorientated, and that they struggle to express a composed conceptualisation of their existence within it. For instance, despite his disparaging comments about Meadowfield and Brandon cited earlier, Liam describes the psychological comfort of returning to his local pub there, stating, ‘It just feels a little bit more of a home’.⁵⁸⁵

Despite this, Liam perceives rootedness in place as an uncritical acceptance of one’s position in space, or a failure to ‘escape’ in the way that he did. Indeed, it is not uncommon for immobility to be viewed with stigma, particularly in deindustrialised spaces associated with decline.⁵⁸⁶ Indeed, to return to Doreen Massey, places are not static and coherent entities, they are processes, made through interaction with the past and contestation in the present. As a result, belonging is equally as multifaceted. In particular, increased homogeneity amongst the population, and the rise to prominence of neoliberal discourses of social mobility, individualisation, and austerity politics, are reflected in the fragmentation of identity and complex relationships to place.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵ Liam Adamson, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁸⁶ For instance, see: Tracy Shildrick, ‘Poverty, Social Class and Social Immobility’, in *Poverty Propaganda* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), 87–112; James Rhodes, ‘Stigmatization, Space, and Boundaries in de-Industrial Burnley’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 684–703.

⁵⁸⁷ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

In contrast, in Bearpark, where experiences of industrial closure fit more neatly into this dominant narrative, efforts to engage in the cross-generational transmission of a shared past appear much easier. In her interview, Marion Wilson identifies the village primary school as a key site for this process, pointing out that lessons on the village's industrial past are taught in every year group.⁵⁸⁸ Indeed, in their statement of intent for the curriculum, the school notes 'We want to create a curriculum that gives children a sense of pride about living in Bearpark (Heritage)', and as such, the school provides an effective site for exploring the village's past and generating a cross-generational attachment to place.⁵⁸⁹ Crucially, however, this turn to the past is more about the present and is not an uncritical exercise in 'smokestack nostalgia'.⁵⁹⁰ Instead, it seeks to emplace children within a supportive web of community, encouraging a sense of pride in the current day. The curriculum also notes 'We will show children the world beyond Bearpark', actively rejecting a parochial approach to history and instead attempts to generate a powerful sense of place and belonging that is useful in instilling confidence, pride, and self-identity for children to utilise beyond their school and village.

Marion also shares her observations that childcare, and other more 'traditional' feminine roles, continue to be carried out largely by women in the village.⁵⁹¹ Whilst the former community may have centred around the masculine work of coal mining, as observed in previous chapters, women have always played a crucial role in maintaining the social networks of place beyond work. Marion's comments about both the school and the gender imbalance of childcare suggest that women in Bearpark continue to be significant actors in the creation of community in the village, but perhaps

⁵⁸⁸ Marion Wilson, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁸⁹ 'Our Curriculum 2023', *Bearpark Primary School*, accessed 3 June 2021, <https://www.bearpark.durham.sch.uk/our-curriculum/>.

⁵⁹⁰ Cowie and Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

now inhabit a more central role in the absence of the dominant masculine culture associated with work.

The school's latest Ofsted report marks it as 'requiring improvement' but highlights the school's success in building a strong sense of community and effective relationships with parents.⁵⁹² Indeed, Simpson and Simmon's ethnographic research within a small primary school in a former industrial village outlines the manner in which the school has replaced the colliery as a site for community building and communal leisure, and the same is observable in Bearpark.⁵⁹³ Marion explains:

"It's neighbours helping neighbours or, you know, you see it at school. Someone will go along to school, take the children to school and they're not feeling very well, and you know, someone will say 'Look, if you don't mind, I'll bring the kids home from school for you'. You know, it's helping people, that's what makes a good community".⁵⁹⁴

As such, not only does the school operate as a site to explore a shared history of place, it is also operating as a regenerative tool for community building in the absence of the former community nucleus, the colliery. This is not to say that the people of Bearpark experience the village uniformly; there is undoubtedly also ambiguous relationships to place and the past here too, as in Brandon. Instead, we see another alternative structure of feeling emerge here, based upon the past but focused on the present, and clear direct attempts to transmit memory across generations in a useful, productive manner.

⁵⁹² 'Inspection of Bearpark Primary School' (Ofsted, 2020), <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50147741>.

⁵⁹³ Katherine Simpson and Robin Simmons, 'Education and Social Haunting in Post-Industrial Britain: Primary School Pupils' Experiences of Schooling in a Former Coalmining Community', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 69, no. 6 (2 November 2021): 715–33.

⁵⁹⁴ Marion Wilson, Interview with the Author.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine, most fundamentally, the relationships of people across generations to places experiencing deindustrialisation. It follows a broader trend within the field of deindustrialisation studies that is concerned with the interplay of memory, generation, and place. However, in focusing upon different sites of industrial closure in County Durham, set less than ten miles apart, it has demonstrated the varied experience of deindustrialisation even within one coalfield. In doing so, it has highlighted the need to step away from homogenising accounts of universal experiences of industrial closure that diminish individual experience. Whilst the transmission of memory, and attachment to the past of a place is significant across deindustrialised communities, the way in which these are enacted on an everyday basis is notably different.

In particular, this chapter has demonstrated that people's relationship to place is complex and multifaceted. This is true both in how different individuals relate to the same sites of memory, such as Miner's Wood in Bearpark, but also within individual experience too, as people such as Liam construct ambiguous meanings of their home. This is unlikely to be a phenomenon isolated solely to deindustrialised places, but certainly, the centrality of the industrial past in people's construction of place and belonging is significant. In exploring this, too, the chapter has highlighted the problems that arise from attempting to confine memory to authorised spaces or dominant narratives of the past; whilst designated commemoration may be useful to some people, for others, its failure to align with their own experiences and memories is difficult to manage.

CHAPTER 6 RENEWAL IN DEINDUSTRIALISED COUNTY DURHAM

*“Just give us the opportunity to show what we can do. Clearly, the days of big industry like coal mining-- coal mining's gone, the communities are still here.”*⁵⁹⁵

*“Really, I think that's what people should remember- that we were incredibly important, the whole of the North, in Great Britain, in a sense, you know. I think what's important is not just that we were a dirty little pit village, but that it was--we were hugely important in the industrial revolution and that makes us who we are now, in a sense. Yes, it's all gone but actually, part of what this country is built on is the fact that--the people that served and worked here, and I think that's what is very important that people remember, that these--you know--they might have been just miners, but actually, they were hugely, hugely important.”*⁵⁹⁶

Introduction

Since the 2016 Brexit referendum, and the subsequent 2019 general election, the former industrial areas of the United Kingdom have found themselves subject to a renewed scrutiny in relation to politics. The North East in particular came into sharp focus with Sunderland being the first to declare its decision to leave the European Union, with public celebrations televised nationally. The whole region, except for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, followed Sunderland in their vote to leave. In 2019, the North East electorate delivered more significant

⁵⁹⁵ Ian Cummings, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁹⁶ Oonagh Claber, Interview with the Author.

change, voting in Conservative MPs in what had been long-held Labour seats within its so-called ‘Red Wall’.

This chapter is concerned with these political changes in the region, but interrogates them from a historical perspective, asking how and why the industrial past continues to hold such significance across generations in the present day. This is not a reiteration of the ‘left behind’ narrative that positions the post-industrial white working-class as old-fashioned, uncritically nostalgic, racist, and unintelligent.⁵⁹⁷ Rather, it is a fundamental challenge to this, asking instead if there is a more nuanced engagement with the past in play in County Durham. Indeed, the industrial past certainly holds a significant role in political decisions of the present, but it is not quite so simple as a broadly felt desire for an uncritical reconstruction of the region as it was.

Here, the work of Davis and Boym on nostalgia is useful in exploring the complex ways in which individuals draw upon the past in relation to perceived uncertainty and disruption in the present.⁵⁹⁸ In particular, this chapter follows the idea of a ‘progressive’ nostalgia, as put forth by Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, understood as ‘a particular and unashamedly overtly emotional way of remembering that actively and self-consciously aims to use the past to contextualise the achievements and gains of present day living and working conditions and to set a politically progressive agenda for the future’.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁷ Arshad Isakjee and Colin Lorne, ‘Bad News from Nowhere: Race, Class and the “Left Behind”’, *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 37, no. 1 (1 February 2019): 7–12; Harold D. Clarke, *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ford and Goodwin, ‘Understanding UKIP’.

⁵⁹⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

⁵⁹⁹ Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, “‘Nostalgia for the Future’: Memory, Nostalgia and the Politics of Class”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23, no. 7 (9 August 2017): 612–27.

This chapter first sets out to explore the manner in which the past configures within conceptualizations of a regional identity, asking how the industrial past and subsequent industrial closures figures in imaginings of the region from both those inhabiting, and those observing it.⁶⁰⁰ Whilst still remaining attentive to experiences of stigmatization and decline within testimony, looking to Massey's work on uneven regional development in doing so, it also examines evidence of the industrial past being drawn upon in ways that are progressive and hopeful for the region's future renewal, with particular attention to technological and renewable industries.⁶⁰¹

Next, this chapter moves to interrogate some of the ways in which this regional position relates to national politics. In particular, it uses individual testimony to situate the recent decline of the Labour Party in the region, the Conservative promises of 'levelling up', and the Brexit vote, within the historical context of deindustrialisation. The work of Svetlana Boym is particularly useful here in enabling a differentiation between restorative and reflective nostalgia, in order to explore the heterogeneity in individual's appeals to the past in their political decisions.⁶⁰²

Finally, this chapter questions how these large-scale political changes and decisions are playing out at a local level. As outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, strong trade unionism within County Durham's mining communities had forged significant political

⁶⁰⁰ Although all living in County Durham, interviewees typically referred to the 'North East' more broadly when discussing a regional identity, and so that categorization will be used here.

⁶⁰¹ Doreen Massey, 'Uneven Development and Spatial Structures', in *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production*, ed. Doreen Massey (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1995), 65–120; Doreen Massey, 'In What Sense a Regional Problem?', *Regional Studies* 13, no. 2 (1 April 1979): 233–43.

⁶⁰² Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 2001.

influence, and ensured the creation of representative, democratic space within villages. Here, this chapter seeks to understand how deindustrialization has altered or erased such spaces, and in turn, how this has altered cross-generational relationships to politics more broadly. In particular, it looks to the Durham Miners' Gala as a key signifier in examining this relationship.

'We're quite a special breed': Creating a Regional Identity from the Industrial Past

Whilst as Tom Hazeldine suggests, levels of distinct northern consciousness may appear somewhat 'low-wattage' in England when compared to the 'nationalist imaginaries' of the Basque Country or Catalonia, there does still exist a strong element of cultural differentiation and strong place-based identity that centres around the understanding of the 'North East' as a distinct region.⁶⁰³ This identity is simultaneously constructed both within and outside the region, as 'knowable imagined communities' are formulated to define a sense of place from its past.⁶⁰⁴ Region, in this sense, is understood as an emotional and cultural division of space, as opposed to an arbitrary geographical boundary.⁶⁰⁵ As such, the manner in which regional identities are constructed is complex and multifaceted. The broad conception of the North East's industrial past is drawn upon in

⁶⁰³ Tom Hazeldine, *The Northern Question: A History of a Divided Country* (Verso Books, 2020); Bill Williamson, 'Living the Past Differently: Historical Memory in the North East', in *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, ed. Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Northumbria University Press, 1992), 149–68.

⁶⁰⁴ Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster, *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, 2nd ed.. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Northumbria University Press, 2005), Preface.

⁶⁰⁵ Edward Royle, *Issues of Regional Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

different ways by different people, both those inside and outside of the region itself, and these alternative constructions of place at times interact, overlap, and conflict, continuously shaping this imagination of place.⁶⁰⁶

Interviewee Ben Mummery is a resident of Langley Park. In his mid-thirties, Ben is employed by a large, US based IT company. He picks up on a point of discussion that becomes a common theme throughout most of my interviews, that the North East as a region lacks sufficient employment opportunities and both public and private investment. To Ben, this is tied to stereotypical perceptions of the area based upon its former industrial character. He remarks, “We're still seen in the South as it's grim up north, and everyone wears a flat cap and has a Whippet on a bit of string, and we're not very clever, you know, and we need to kind of-- we're still in a very sort of, wide transitioning period for me. I think if we had a little bit more investment... we're in a very transitional period that seems to be lasting more than twenty or thirty years.”⁶⁰⁷

Within Ben's comments, there also emerges a distinct sense that the North East can be separated from other Northern regions in turn, noting a sense of political neglect in the North East even in comparison to other Northern regions such as the North West. Using the example of the HS2 train project, he comments:

‘The high-speed train job that was going to cost billions of quid is a great example. You know, Parliament said it goes to ‘the North’. Wasn't Leeds as far as it went? But that's half way up the country mate, do you know what I mean? HS two or three or whatever it was

⁶⁰⁶ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

⁶⁰⁷ Ben Mummery, Interview with the Author (Zoom, August 2020)

called, was a very, very, very good example of how people in power view the North East. We tend to be the last to get things.”⁶⁰⁸

Ben’s comments outline a lived experience of the uneven regional development that is inherent in capitalist societies, as described by Doreen Massey.⁶⁰⁹ In particular, as Ray Hudson explains, the rise of Thatcherism and neoliberalism was ‘characterised by a continuing marginalisation of the region relative to the main centres of growth and affluence, both within the European community and globally’.⁶¹⁰ Deindustrialisation, therefore, marked the shifting of industrial regions like the North East to the periphery, having previously maintained a position of relative prominence due to their economic outputs.

Dave Shotten reflects upon the former position of the region, constructing a powerful account of the North East’s significance to the broader national history:

“A country is not valued by the amount of gold that lies in its bank vaults, the real wealth of a country is the amount of labour, the amount of work that that country can do, and once upon a time, work and power were one and the same thing. From a chemist’s point of view, what you’ve got to understand is energy is vitally important. World War Two was won because the North East of England managed to produce massive amounts of coal. You take a bomb, you take a ten-ton bomb, a thousand tons of coal have gone into that ten-ton bomb. We won because we were able to produce more coal than Germany. It’s as simple as that.”⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁸ Ben Mummery, Interview with the Author.

⁶⁰⁹ Massey, ‘Uneven Development and Spatial Structures’; Doreen B. Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production*, Critical Human Geography (London: Macmillan, 1984).

⁶¹⁰ Ray Hudson and John Pickles, ‘Geographical Uneven Development and Regional Futures: A Conversation’, in *Regional and Local Development in Times of Polarisation: Re-Thinking Spatial Policies in Europe*, ed. Thilo Lang and Franziska Görmär (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019), 29–59.

⁶¹¹ Dave Shotten, Interview with the Author (Zoom: August 2021).

Such reflections on the past are often countered by a focus on the current peripheral and marginalised position of deindustrialised places within political and economic spheres of influence. Rather than apply an uncritical nostalgia that lionises the past at the expense of the present, however, many interviewees contested this economic and political marginalization by adapting the memory of the past in ways progressive for the present.⁶¹² For many, the most pressing issue that informed their political choices was a need for renewed economic opportunity in the North East. ‘One word. Jobs’ states Ian Cummings, an interviewee from Bearpark who has been introduced in previous chapters, when asked what the region needs.⁶¹³ Ian draws upon the memory of industry within this discussion, emphasizing the adaptability of industrial skills and community behaviour to the present-day context.

“I think that we’re quite a special breed. I’m not suggesting that people in the North East are the only people who have these characteristics, but we do have a sense of comradeship, we do have a sense of belonging and self-worth, we do have a sense of self-reliance, and we’re quite skilled as a regional people. If you look at somewhere like Nissan..., Why should we in the North East have such a world beating factory? And it’s because of some of those characteristics”⁶¹⁴

Ian credits the former heavy industries of the area for the presence of these characteristics, emphasizing the adaptability of former industrial identities to the present-day. Of course, the traits Ian lists are behaviours that are socially constructed, here within a residual structural feeling formerly engendered through industrial work.⁶¹⁵ What matters most here, however, is Ian’s perception of their

⁶¹² Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 2001.

⁶¹³ Ian Cummings, Interview with the Author.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid

⁶¹⁵ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 1977; Strangleman, “‘Smokestack Nostalgia,’ ‘Ruin Porn’ or Working- Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation’.

distinctiveness, and the image constructed of the North East by those who live within it. The way in which people perceive the places that they live is fundamental to understanding their perceptions of what the area needs and what political priorities should be. Ian's comments form part of a broader discussion about the need for more work in the region; to him, these identities, historically constructed in place, influence the belief that the North East is prepared for more skilled employment than it currently receives.

Jonathan Elmer, the Green Party councillor elected for the Brandon division, echoes Ian's sentiments. In his opinion, the industrial past of the region places it in good stead to lead the way in the development of green and renewable industries. He says:

“What I'd like to try and create a case for in Brandon, but much further afield as well is that there is actually an opportunity still to transition into a much more modern industry that actually respects the heritage and history of this area. So renewable energy technology is exactly that. And we could, through investment, position ourselves to be competitive in relation to that sort of an industry”.⁶¹⁶

Already, the renewable energy sector is a significant contributor to County Durham's economy, and in the North East region more broadly, there has been a number of notable investments into green industries.⁶¹⁷ The collective memory of coal mining, with its associated skills and community solidarity, provides a cultural

⁶¹⁶ Jonathan Elmer, Interview with the Author (Zoom: August 2020).

⁶¹⁷ Jane Robinson and Henry Kippin, 'How the North East Is Leading the UK's Transition to Net Zero', *Newcastle University*, accessed 30 January 2023, <https://from.ncl.ac.uk/research-the-north-east-leading-the-uk-transition-to-net-zero>; 'Net Zero in the North East: Regional Transition Impacts' (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, October 2021), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1026765/net-zero-north-east-final-report.pdf; 'The North East Strategic Economic Plan' (North East Local Enterprise Partnership, January 2019), <https://www.northeastlep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/north-east-strategic-economic-plan-jan-2019-final.pdf>.

foundation for this transition, and means it is more than an economic strategy but also a means of reimagining the region's industrial identity in a way that honours its past.. By drawing on these memories, the region has the potential to redefine itself as a leader in sustainable industry, ensuring that the legacy of the coalfields continues to shape the economic and social fabric of the North East in a progressive and forward-looking manner.

However, Jonathan stresses that the shift towards more climate-friendly industry must be a well-managed transition that protects the area's communities. Indeed, his comments align with broader discussions of a 'just transition' for the North East, in light of what Beynon and Hudson term the 'unjust transition' of swift industrial closure in the late twentieth century.⁶¹⁸ Likewise, Jonathan is keenly aware of how meaningful the historical experiences of these coal mining communities are in any approaches to present-day transitions, noting:

“Well, the interesting thing about County Durham is that it historically, its economy has been about energy through coal. So that's actually the industry of our area. And the tragedy is that when all of the coal mines were closed, there was no thought given to the transition of the people that worked there into a new modern industry. There were just there was just devastation, by creating mass unemployment. And it was really destructive and thoughtless in the way the whole thing was, was the way the whole thing happened, that you can't imagine a worse way of doing it.”⁶¹⁹

Opinions on this shift to green industries, however, are divided. Dave, whose testimony above demonstrates the centrality of coal to his

⁶¹⁸ H. Beynon and R. Hudson, 'Moving to a Green Economy? The Story of an "Unjust" Transition in the UK', *International Union Rights* 29, no. 1 (2022): 23–25; 'The "Just Transition": A Fairer Way to Fight Climate Change', *Greenpeace UK*, accessed 31 December 2023, <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/challenges/environmental-justice/just-transition/>.

⁶¹⁹ Jonathan Elmer, Interview with the Author.

construction of the region's national significance, perceives the shift to green industry as an attack on this heritage. "Coal is now a dirty word" he contends, continuing "I mean, rightly or-- I don't know whether you believe in global warming. Is it Greta Thunberg that has made us believe that anyone that digs coal out of the ground is some kind of criminal?".⁶²⁰ Indeed, whilst for Jonathan the potential upsurge in green industry poses an opportunity for the North East to embrace a new industrial character, to Dave the increasing criticism of fossil fuels such as coal represents a further marginalisation of a region so historically linked to its extraction.

Beyond this, others recognise the potential for a continued growth in the region's scientific and technological industries.⁶²¹ Speaking from his own position in the IT industry, Ben says:

"And you know, we could come out with a generation of kids who are fabulous at coding and programming and IT companies could spring up everywhere and then we could be the country's epicentre of technology, or we could be the epicentre of something else. I think it's the next generation coming through who are going to define how the North East is seen in years to come"⁶²²

Such aspirations for the region have historical precedence. As leader of Newcastle City Council between 1960 and 1965, T. Dan Smith embarked upon projects to significantly modernise the city, expressing his hope that a growth in the science and technology industries would replace the region's declining heavy industries.⁶²³ Smith was also involved with the development of Peterlee new town, which was

⁶²⁰ Dave Shotten, Interview with the Author.

⁶²¹ Rachel Burdis, 'North East England's Tech Sector Is Going from Strength to Strength', *Invest North East England*, 2 February 2022, <https://investnortheastengland.co.uk/news/north-east-englands-tech-sector-is-going-from-strength-to-strength/>.

⁶²² Ben Mummery, Interview with the Author, (Zoom, 2020).

⁶²³ John Francis Griffiths, 'Mr Newcastle: The Career of T Dan Smith' (Doctoral Thesis, Northumbria University, 2019).

initially recognised as the United Kingdom’s first ‘science campus’. Although Smith’s plans would ultimately falter following his corruption charge in 1970, there has been some level of investment into the sector since, such as the development of Sedgefield’s NETpark.

Despite this, there are concerns that such investments are not fully benefiting the former mining communities of County Durham. Marion Wilson, a Durham County Councillor and Bearpark Parish councillor, discusses her experiences of this. She says:

“It’s a lack of jobs, a lack of investment. And a lack of the right kind of jobs, you know, it seems that investment is going into places—I shouldn’t really say this because it’s Labour council—it seems like investment is going into places like Netpark, you know, which is the scientific sector. A lot of people in Bearpark are still harking back to the colliery and what have you and to that level of education, you know. We need factory jobs, building work, that sort of thing”⁶²⁴

Indeed, whilst figures on educational attainment for County Durham as a whole may be balanced by pockets of relative affluence, such as the City of Durham, the Index of Multiple Deprivations highlights patterns of rural deprivation across the region’s former coal mining villages. Bearpark, for instance, is amongst the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in the Education, Skills, and Training domain.⁶²⁵ The idea that such places are hindered by a nostalgic wallowing in the past, therefore, overlooks the reality that many such places remain deprived of public investment in education and infrastructure. As such, not only is there uneven development across the nation, but also within regions themselves.

⁶²⁴ Marion Wilson, Interview with the Author, (Zoom, 2020)

⁶²⁵ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, ‘Indices of Deprivation 2015 and 2019’, *English Indices of Deprivation 2019: Mapping Resources*, accessed 25 July 2021, http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/iod_index.html.

Taking, for instance, the Nissan manufacturing plant in Sunderland. Opening in 1984, then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher commented of the factory's opening "Not only will it provide a steadily growing number of jobs in an area which really needs them, but it also shows in the clearest possible way how such areas can help to recover their prosperity and self-esteem."⁶²⁶ The plant does now, in 2023, still employ 6,700 people, making it one of the largest employers in the region, although the firm does often recruit from outside the area.⁶²⁷ Yet lower than average car ownership levels, and poor transport infrastructure effectively isolate many semi-rural former mining communities, like Bearpark, from such opportunities in the region's urban areas.⁶²⁸ Likewise, Marion reflects on the further issues faced by such communities, saying:

"It's difficult because Durham on a whole-- County Durham lose out on a lot of grants because the government say we're not a rural county. So, we lose out because they won't class us as a rural county, so all the funding that comes into villages, we don't get."⁶²⁹

Indeed, this perhaps speaks to a much wider issue for County Durham, in that there exists wide disparity within the region.⁶³⁰ The city of Durham itself, for instance, is bolstered by the presence of its university, and falls within the top 10% of least deprived areas in the United Kingdom. Interviewee Hannah Ashton, who was raised in Bearpark but emigrated to Australia as an adult, reflects on this:

⁶²⁶ 'Speech Opening Nissan Car Factory | Margaret Thatcher Foundation'.

⁶²⁷ Beatty, Fothergill, and Powell, 'Twenty Years On'.

⁶²⁸ All-Party Parliamentary Group for Left Behind Neighborhoods, 'Connecting Communities: Improving Transport to Get 'left behind Neighbourhoods Back on Track' (OCSI, Campaign for Better Transport and Local Trust, 2021), https://bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/Back_on_Track_Report_Mar_2021.pdf.

⁶²⁹ Marion Wilson, Interview with the Author.

⁶³⁰ Ray Hudson and Alan M. Williams, *Divided Britain* (London: Belhaven Press, 1989), 188–90; Fred Robinson, 'The North East: A Journey through Time', *City* 6, no. 3 (1 November 2002): 317–34.

“Because it's too far from London. They do not care. Or you have people like Dominic Cummings, who basically Durham just happens to be something on the way to go and visit, you know, the land and landed gentry out in the county town. But no, and I think when people think of Durham, they think ‘Oh, the cathedral’ and you think that's not Durham, that is not how people are living.”⁶³¹

Less than ten miles away from the city, multiple former mining settlements, like Bearpark and Brandon, fall within the country's top 20% most deprived areas. Other towns in the region, such as Seaham and Stanley, former centres of heavy industry, also record significantly high levels of deprivation. Whilst individual councillors such as Marion act as representatives for these rural areas, the County Council as a whole must balance the governance of a relatively polarised area, in which priorities between the rural spaces of deindustrialisation, and the affluence of a university city such as Durham compete to be addressed.

‘Things Don’t Have to Be Like This’: The Past in Political Opinions

In the run up to the 2019 general election, the Labour Party released a campaign video that centred around ‘Thatcher’s toxic legacy in the North of England’. Entitled, ‘The North remembers. You can never trust the Tories’, the video sought to enliven the feelings of anger and betrayal that surrounded the miners’ strike of 1984-85 and the subsequent rush of industrial closures.⁶³² This was a starkly different approach than that taken in previous Labour Party election campaigns under Blair and Brown, which had both focused upon appeals to an improved future; Blair’s 2001 campaign slogan was a simple

⁶³¹ Hannah Ashton, Interview with the Author.

⁶³² “‘The North Remembers’ – Labour Releases New Campaign Videos on Margaret Thatcher’s Toxic Legacy,” The Labour Party, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://labour.org.uk/press/the-north-remembers-labour-releases-new-campaign-videos-on-margaret-thatchers-toxic-legacy/>.

‘Forward, not Back’.⁶³³ In contrast, the 2019 election was permeated by deliberate appeals to the past. Campaigns such as that above ‘sought to reunite Labour’s people with a nostalgic reimagining of the party’s political practice’.⁶³⁴ This shift to a more nostalgic appeal underscores the deep emotional resonance of the industrial past in the political consciousness of the region.

However, this nostalgia is multifaceted; it is not merely a longing for a lost era but also a critique of ongoing regional inequalities and a call for renewed attention to the needs of deindustrialised communities. At the same time, the Conservative campaign centred around the slogan of ‘Get Brexit Done’, based upon the 2016 decision to leave the European Union which proceeded a campaign that drew heavily upon a nostalgic reimagining of national identity.⁶³⁵ The selective use of this nostalgia in political campaigns reflects the complex ways in which memory is mobilised to address contemporary concerns, revealing both the potential and the limitations of invoking the past in the pursuit of future change.

In an article published in early 2019, months before the December election, David Skelton comments that although Labour support had waned, voting Conservative was ‘counter-cultural’ in the North East and predictions that there would be a Conservative switch in 2017 lacked ‘insight into the region’s psyche’.⁶³⁶ Interviewee Jacqueline Evans was raised in Langley Park. Although not from a

⁶³³ Patrick Wintour, “‘Forward, Not Back’ Is Blair’s Battlecry”, *The Guardian*, 4 February 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/feb/04/uk.advertising>.

⁶³⁴ Jake Watts and Tim Bale, ‘Populism as an Intra-Party Phenomenon: The British Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 21, no. 1 (1 February 2019): 99–115.

⁶³⁵ Edoardo Campanella and Marta Dassù, ‘Brexit and Nostalgia’, *Survival* 61, no. 3 (4 May 2019): 103–11, doi:10.1080/00396338.2019.1614781.

⁶³⁶ David Skelton, ‘Realignment Postponed? Political Continuity and Change in the North Eastern Suburbs’, *The Political Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2019): 44–52.

mining family herself, she witnessed the closure of the colliery there in her early teenage years. In our interview, she reflects on the position of the Labour Party in the Durham coalfield during her childhood and early adulthood, saying “I remember my uncle saying, “You could put a donkey up for election in Langley Park and as long as it was red it would get elected” which of course, is no longer true.”⁶³⁷

Indeed, the 2019 general election saw the first defeat of the Labour Party in North West Durham since the constituency was recreated in 1950. This change reflects a broader renegotiation of political identity in the region, where collective memory of the industrial past plays a critical role. The memories of Labour’s historical ties to the coal industry are juxtaposed with contemporary frustrations over perceived neglect, leading to a complex and often contradictory political consciousness. These shifts are not merely reactions to present-day politics but are deeply rooted in the ways the region’s industrial heritage is remembered and mobilised in political discourse.

This connection between memory and place is essential for understanding the evolving political landscape in County Durham. Elsewhere in the area, Conservative MPs also won the historic Labour seats of Sedgefield, Darlington, and Bishop Auckland, reflecting a wider shift to the political right in areas of former heavy manufacturing and industry in the nation as a whole. Although his constituency, the City of Durham, remains a Labour seat, interviewee Robin Chapman is one such voter who changed political allegiances in recent years. I ask him why, to which he responds:

⁶³⁷ Interview with Jacqueline Evans (Zoom, July 2020)

“I don't know exactly why--well my view is, I know exactly why. People were fed up over years and years, ever since a contraction of the coal industry. And many places have never really recovered, and people can remember, like me, people could remember what it was like, and they could see that it was the North East was becoming forgotten. The same happened in Northumberland. The same happened in the Yorkshire coalfields and, you know, Labour dominated the whole scene, regardless of public opinion. And they became very, very cozy, you know... And I think that's the sort of thing that that people have realised. It doesn't have to be like this. You don't have to be controlled by the Labour Party. And the Labour Party is just a shadow of itself. And a lot of people voted because their dad voted that way, their Granddad voted that way, but people have moved away from that dependence into a realization that things don't have to be like this.”⁶³⁸

A wider Conservative switch amongst older, retired voters like Robin is often credited to a deliberate emotional appeal to restorative nostalgia employed by the party.⁶³⁹ To some extent, this is apparent within Robin's testimony, as he also adds “Because I'm old enough to know. It doesn't have to be like this. And what was the secret? Full employment.”⁶⁴⁰ Another interviewee, Barrie Carse, who is several years Robin's senior, also reflected on his hopes of seeing employment opportunities restored to pre-deindustrialisation levels. Of this, he says:

“Well, I'll give you my politics. I voted Labour all my life until the last election and I voted Tory and I'm pleased I did. When you see the number of jobs that are coming to the North East through Boris it's phenomenal. And all of these years we voted Labour and what the hell did we get? Nothing. They just closed down closed down, closed down”⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁸ Robin Chapman, Interview with the Author (Gilesgate, January 2022)

⁶³⁹ Michael Kenny, ‘Back to the Populist Future?: Understanding Nostalgia in Contemporary Ideological Discourse’, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 22, no. 3 (2 September 2017): 256–73; Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 2001.

⁶⁴⁰ Robin Chapman, Interview with the Author.

⁶⁴¹ Barrie Carse, Interview with the Author.

Robin, too, speaks of then Prime Minister Boris Johnson using only his first name, aligning with the leader's construction of a humorous, relatable populist image, enthusing that his election represented a 'brave new world' for the North East.⁶⁴² Indeed, both Robin and Barrie adopt an approach that combines both restorative and reflective nostalgia at different points; they hope for the full employment of the past, deployed in a way they see to be beneficial and progressive for the region's future.⁶⁴³ Yet this turn to the past and their memories of it is drawn upon selectively, excluding or reconstructing the central role of the Conservative Party in escalating deindustrialisation in the region in the late twentieth century, and overlooking the reality that by 2019, the Conservative Party had been in power for close to a decade. There is evidence of contradictory consciousness at play here, to turn to Gramsci.⁶⁴⁴ Robin and Barrie both recognise the issues of regional inequalities and how these have shaped their own experiences in County Durham, but simultaneously, this consciousness is subsumed within the hegemonic discourse of the group in control, here the Conservative Party. Robin continues:

"Boris, completely fresh, completely new bit of a buffoon, bit of a character, someone you'd remember, he goes on telly and you'd know him straight away, and he was making all of these promises of levelling up and people realise...As soon as you start looking at figures, How much is spent per capita in London, the southeast, then what is spent in the Northeast, and it's a fraction and when you look at the other areas like Northumberland, North Tyneside similar sort of figures are coming up all the time"⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴² Daniel Beck, 'Humorous Parodies of Popular Culture as Strategy in Boris Johnson's Populist Communication', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 13 May 2023, 13691481231174164.

⁶⁴³ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 2001; Smith and Campbell, 'Nostalgia for the Future'.

⁶⁴⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971).

⁶⁴⁵ Robin Chapman, Interview with the Author.

‘Levelling up’ was the flagship policy of the 2019 Conservative campaign, with £4.8 billion allocated to a fund designed to diminish regional inequalities in 12 key areas, that ranged from employment skills to pride in place.⁶⁴⁶ As the above testimony demonstrates, these promises appealed to many in the North East who felt the region had been long neglected and declining. Yet between 2021 and 2022, less than 3% of the funds allocated to the levelling up fund were spent, with only 6% of the national allocation spent in the North East. In 2022, the region recorded the highest rates of child poverty in England, exhibited continued high rates of long-term unemployment, ill health, and reduced life expectancies, and productivity fell well below the national average.⁶⁴⁷

Alongside the appeal of Conservative promises, there is also a clear sense of anger in the above testimony towards the Labour Party. Robin is critical of former Labour leader Tony Blair for being ‘a Labour Party [politician]’ with ‘Conservative politics’ but is also scathing in his criticism of the ‘Corbynite sort of Labour, which, I mean, God almighty, that's just goes back to Communism’.⁶⁴⁸ Others describe a continued failure by Labour to grasp the public mood following Brexit under Corbyn. Interviewee Eric Wood is adamant in his contention that he would ‘never trust a Tory’ but is nevertheless

⁶⁴⁶ HM Government, ‘Levelling Up the United Kingdom’, Executive Summary, (2 February 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>; Conservative Party, ‘The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto- Get Brexit Done: Unleash Britain’s Potential’, November 2019, https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf; House of Commons Library, ‘The Levelling Up Agenda’ (UK Parliament, 11 June 2021), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2021-0086/>.

⁶⁴⁷ Marcus Johns and Hannah Hutts, ‘Looking out to Level Up’, State of the North 2023 (Institute for Public Policy Research, January 2023), <https://www.ippr.org/files/2023-01/looking-out-to-level-up-state-of-the-north-2023.pdf>.

⁶⁴⁸ Robin Chapman, Interview with the Author.

highly critical of Corbyn's party leadership and the 2019 Labour campaign. Eric suggests that Corbyn's brand of politics failed to ring true with a historic trend of 'patriotic, pro-military, pro-royalty' social conservatism within the North East, whilst also failing to present an alternative plan for addressing the regional inequalities felt in peripheral regions.⁶⁴⁹

Perhaps what is most significant about this testimony is that it highlights the manner in which individual consciousness, and thus political consciousness, does not naturally fit within the arbitrary boxes of political parties. A multitude of competing factors, including present circumstances, past experiences and the hegemonic narrative perpetuated by those with political power, influence how people vote at any given time. Yet when we voice these opinions, as interviewees do here, this multifaceted nature of consciousness is flattened, and trying to unpack it through explanation can lead to contradictory statements such as Robin's seems above.

Discussions of politics within my interviews also all unfailingly turned to Brexit. Indeed, the 2019 general election was also dominated by the subject of the vote to exit the European Union. Whilst County Durham did vote to Leave, voter turnout in the election was significantly higher in the South of the United Kingdom, and so too was the proportion of voters who opted to Leave.⁶⁵⁰ As such, the conceptualization of the Brexit vote as an act of Northern rebellion is instantly complicated by such statistics. Moreover, attempts to explain the motivations of those in the region who did vote to leave that characterise such voters as ill-informed, unintelligent, or racist are a

⁶⁴⁹ Eric Wood, Interview with the Author

⁶⁵⁰ Danny Dorling, 'Brexit: The Decision of a Divided Country', *BMJ* 354 (6 July 2016): i3697.

clumsy oversimplification of a broader relationship towards politics that has developed in the area.⁶⁵¹ As we can see in the words of Robin and Barrie, quoted above, who both voted to Leave, anger and a structural sense of loss that are most commonly cited as drivers of the vote are no doubt present, but so too is a hopefulness for a better future and an underlying commitment to the preservation of accepted social relations.⁶⁵² ‘Left out’ rather than ‘left behind’, Lisa McKenzie suggests, may be a more accurate framing for such communities.⁶⁵³

Even so, such arguments still fail to fully address the complexities of opinions within regions in which the ‘Leave’ vote did ultimately prevail. In Durham, for instance, 42.4% of voters opted to ‘Remain’. Ian Cummings, of Bearpark, was one such remain voter. In his interview, he explains his pessimism at the result, saying that to him Brexit marks ‘another nail in the coffin. It puts more into the hands of Tory moguls down in the South East, who care nothing and know nothing about villages like Durham’.⁶⁵⁴ Too often, discussions of remain voters as the affluent metropolitan elite, simply ignore remain voters such as Ian in the semi-rural deindustrialised villages of County Durham, but his comments demonstrate a disconnect and

⁶⁵¹ Lisa McKenzie, ‘The Class Politics of Prejudice: Brexit and the Land of No-hope and Glory’, *British Journal of Sociology* 68, no. S1 (2017): S265–80.

⁶⁵² In the Scottish context, there are similar conversations both in the present and historically regarding independence and devolution, although Scotland itself voted to remain in the EU. For greater discussion of this, see Phillips, *The Industrial Politics of Devolution*; Jim Phillips, ‘Oceanspan: Deindustrialisation and Devolution in Scotland, c. 1960–1974’, *The Scottish Historical Review* 84, no. 1 (April 2005): 63–84; Jim Phillips, Valerie Wright, and Jim Tomlinson, ‘Deindustrialization, the Linwood Car Plant and Scotland’s Political Divergence from England in the 1960s and 1970s’, *Twentieth Century British History* 30, no. 3 (2019): 399–423; Gibbs, *Coal Country: The Meaning and Memory of Deindustrialisation in Postwar Scotland*; Andy Clark, *Fighting Deindustrialisation: Scottish Women’s Factory Occupations, 1981–1982* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022).

⁶⁵³ McKenzie, ‘The Class Politics of Prejudice’, 2017.

⁶⁵⁴ Robert ‘Ian’ Cummings, Interview with the Author.

dissatisfaction with national politics that is observable across the Brexit divide.

Eric, too, speaks with disdain about Brexit, terming it a ‘Tory plot to worsen the lot of the working class’. Yet much of his anger is directed towards the then Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn who he feels “betrayed the working class, because he had a duty to get up to the North East’ in order to make the case for remaining in the European Union to prevent “wages, and workers’ rights and environmental protection” being “stripped away.” Eric is certainly not the first person to level such accusations of betrayal at Corbyn, but a more typical contention is that the Labour Party failed to enthusiastically support the democratic decision to Leave the EU.⁶⁵⁵ For Eric, however, it was this rather non-committal approach that he found to be a fundamental betrayal of the Labour Party’s history. He states, “Labour has always been a party of the International. We stand together. Not alone.” and in his opinion, Labour missed the opportunity to draw upon its historical internationalism to outline the potential benefits of remaining in the EU.⁶⁵⁶ Eric continues:

“People were voting for something they thought would make things better. And it played upon the worst xenophobic fears of Johnny Foreigner and little Englander, and I do think places like Sunderland in particular, Hartlepool to some degree, Middlesbrough were all conned. They fell for the propaganda because no one was pointing out the alternative from a Labour perspective. There was a silence”⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁵ See, for instance, Peter Osborne, ‘Jeremy Corbyn’s Betrayal of the Working Classes’, *The Daily Mail*, 29 March 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3510162/PETER-OBORNE-Corbyn-s-betrayal-working-classes.html>; Brendan O’Neil, ‘Jeremy Corbyn’s Brexit Betrayal Is Complete’, *The Spectator*, 26 February 2019, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/jeremy-corbyn-s-brexite-betrayal-is-complete-26-february-2019/>.

⁶⁵⁶ Eric Wood, Interview with the Author

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

Marion Wilson, the Labour Party councillor introduced earlier in this chapter, also discusses the strong anti-EU sentiment in her village of Bearpark as being based upon a dislike of immigration. Although she points out that she ‘could count on one hand the amount of people in the village who are from other ethnic-- countries or minorities...’, she notes fears “that these people are coming in and they're taking their jobs and they're taking the money and you know, they're getting benefits for doing nothing and, erm, where sort of in a village like this where you've had, especially the men who have had hard lives of work, they just see this as people coming here and taking what we've had to work hard for.”⁶⁵⁸

In their study of Brexit and Teesside, Telford and argue that concerns regarding immigration more typically center around economic anxieties in the context of deindustrialisation and the resulting precarity of employment.⁶⁵⁹ As Valerie Walkerdine explores in relation to the stigmatization of working-class Leave voters, too often ‘the history that produces the vote for Leave in these locations is ignored or at best understood as an explanation for the unreason of the vote.’⁶⁶⁰ Marion, for her part, clearly recognises the way that the past figures into people’s political decisions of the present, but she ultimately blames the “right wing [approach] just to hammer, hammer, hammer away at people” for stoking such anxieties about immigration. Marion does not, despite her elected position as a Labour county councillor, offer insight into how her own party approached these issues, instead seemingly accepting it as an

⁶⁵⁸ Interview with Marion Wilson (Zoom, March 2020)

⁶⁵⁹ Telford and Wistow, ‘Brexit and the Working Class on Teesside: Moving beyond Reductionism’.

⁶⁶⁰ Valerie Walkerdine, “‘No-One Listens to Us’: Post-Truth, Affect and Brexit’, *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 17, no. 1 (2 January 2020): 143–58, doi:10.1080/14780887.2019.1644407.

inevitable outcome that the aggressive ‘right-wing’ approach had succeeded.

Whilst Eric does not direct his anger about Brexit towards the working-class voters he discusses, he nevertheless constructs an image of a group of people fooled by promises in the face of oversimplified concerns. As such, whilst speaking without overt judgement, his comments feed into this broader narrative of the left-behind, ill-informed working-class voter. For whilst he considers himself working-class- he explains “I worked for a living. Therefore, I am a member of the working class, as it used to say on the old Clause Four, to secure for the worker by hand or brain, the full fruits of his or her labour”- there is a clear distinction between himself and the working-class voters he previously discusses.

Indeed, when asked, many interviewees struggled to identify a clear class category for themselves, but most settled upon working-class or lower middle-class. For many, it was a struggle to align their current position as university educated, middle-income homeowners with what they perceived to be their working-class roots, but some cited a shared cultural heritage and place-based identity that was not altered by their current economic status.⁶⁶¹ Yet many differentiated themselves from a perceived ‘other’ working-class in the same manner as Eric.⁶⁶²

⁶⁶¹ This conceptualization of class identity which draws upon the class identity of parents and grandparents is explored in greater detail here: Sam Friedman, Dave O’Brien, and Ian McDonald, ‘Deflecting Privilege: Class Identity and the Intergenerational Self’, *Sociology* 55, no. 4 (1 August 2021): 716–33.

⁶⁶² For further discussions of this conceptualisation of an ‘underclass’, see, for example Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender : Becoming Respectable* (London: SAGE, 1997); Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21st Century*, UK ed. edition (London: Pelican, 2015); Fiona Devine, *Rethinking Class : Cultures, Identities and Lifestyles* (Basingstoke:

Interviewee Jacqueline Evans, who was raised and lived in Langley Park before moving to Lancashire to attend university, suggests that such divisions were driving forces in the Brexit vote and uplift in Conservative support due to ‘the massive creation of an underclass, who those who are just about doing all right now, probably look down on’.⁶⁶³ She is critical of such divisions, but at the same time, Jacqueline actively constructs this difference in her own narrative. When asked if she believes the Labour Party still represent working class communities, she responds “I think working class communities **think** the Labour Party don't represent them anymore.”⁶⁶⁴ Once again, there is an implicit dismissal of these communities as simply having been conned. Jacqueline does, however, reflect on this, aware of some of the contradictions within her own assessments. She says:

“Yeah, to be fair, my cousin once said to me, and she's quite balanced. She works in catering in a local hospital. And we were discussing immigration and that 'taking our jobs' one. And she said to me, you know, I was obviously saying that's not true. It doesn't really ring out and immigrant people are highly sensible. They'll only come to places where there's work available. And she said, well you would say that. You're not in the same labour market that they'll be taking-- looking for the jobs in. And it shut me up. I have to say I did shut me up. I thought ooh, maybe she's right. Maybe I don't know what it-- how it affects it.”⁶⁶⁵

In failing to attend to this history, the anger and anxieties felt in deindustrialised areas as a result of systematic marginalization are frequently delegitimised, from those inside the community as well as outside. However, is important to note that this is not a discussion of

Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Ruth Levitas, *The Inclusive Society?: Social Exclusion and New Labour* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

⁶⁶³ Jacqueline Evans, Interview with the Author (Zoom, July 2020).

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

whether racism exists in deindustrialised communities- it undoubtedly does, as it does elsewhere- but rather an exploration of the tensions that arise within communities regarding the conceptualisation of others' politics, and the way these internal divisions play into much wider broadly conceived stereotypes about 'left behind' places.⁶⁶⁶

Beyond this, the conceptualization of a 'white working-class' serves to ignore the multi-ethnic composition of Britain's working-class.⁶⁶⁷ As Marion attests to, the demographic composition of County Durham remains predominantly White British, and indeed, a fundamental problem in this research, and in the field of deindustrialisation studies more generally, is the lack of Black and Minority Ethnic testimony. Certainly, there remains key questions to be asked regarding the intersection of racial and class-based experiences within deindustrialised areas, and how this interacts with the dynamics of belonging and community, in order to counter this conceptualisation of a homogenous post-industrial white working-class experience.

'We're still here, we haven't given up': Local Spaces of Renewal

Whilst much of the testimony quoted above discusses national politics, and the nation-wide issue of Brexit, the concerns that underpin these discussions are local and are inextricably linked to

⁶⁶⁶ 'Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2020 to 2021', *GOV.UK*, accessed 26 July 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2020-to-2021/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2020-to-2021>; Durham Constabulary, 'Data FOI 1188 19- Hate Crimes Linked to Incident with Hate Qualifiers 2009-2019' (2019).

⁶⁶⁷ Omar Khan and Faiza Shaheen, 'Minority Report: Race and Class in Post-Brexit Britain' (London: Runnymede Trust, 2017).

experiences of the historically entrenched regional inequalities that are discussed first in this chapter. Beynon and Hudson offer a comparative analysis of the recent political changes in both South Wales and Durham, examining the way national politics has in turn shaped local politics. In *The Shadow of the Mine*, they trace the influence of the free-market economics that drove deindustrialisation within the discourse of New Labour and the hollowing out of state support, culminating in the austerity politics of Conservative governments since 2010.⁶⁶⁸ As they note, austerity was acutely felt in deindustrialised areas such as County Durham, where a cut to spending by the Labour run Durham County Council of £244 million was required by 2020.⁶⁶⁹

When austerity moved the local Labour council to make such dramatic cuts, they did so in a context in which they were already losing the relationship to the electorate that had been secured through industrial trade unions. As stated by Peter Hain, quoted by Beynon and Hudson, ‘those organic links between big trade unions in mines and heavy industry and so on, and then social clubs, welfare clubs, rugby clubs and so on, that organic link between the [Labour] Party and those community roots has basically just dissolved.’⁶⁷⁰ Marion Wilson notes the particular pressure of such cuts on education, healthcare, and childhood support, and a frustration at not being able to do more. Despite these challenges, Marion remains confident of her position. She comments:

“It’s still a strong Labour village. If it came down to an election, people would vote Labour. A local election I should say. However,

⁶⁶⁸ Beynon and Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine*.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁶⁷⁰ ‘Wishy-Washy Centrism Wrong For Labour, Warns Lord Hain’ BBC Wales, 14 December 2019 in *Ibid.*, 333.

from the last general election, people's attitudes have changed so much that a lot of the normal Labour voters voted Conservative...but that was in a general election. They would still stick to the Labour policies and what have you if we were voting local.”⁶⁷¹

Yet in Brandon, the former mining town that sits close to Durham City, recent local elections saw the election of the area’s first Green Party councillor, Jonathan Elmer. When interviewed, Jonathan says of the former Labour councillors that “they were hard working and got things done for people. But they never made any effort whatsoever to promote themselves, because they always just assumed they would win. So, there's a very, very high degree of, of complacency with regards to the need to actually compete in an election. And that's something that has existed for decades, in these entrenched Labour areas.”⁶⁷² Continuing, he discusses the intensive campaigning carried out by the Green Party in opposition to the sitting Labour councillors:

“The councillors don't really know how to campaign because they've never had to do it before. And they've never received training, never seen-- understanding how to deliver an effective campaign as a priority. So, all of those factors, and they made us think, well, actually, yeah, we could, we could deliver an effective campaign in in Brandon and we're very unlikely to experience a counter campaign because of this high level of complacency and political entitlement. So that's exactly what we did...And we, we use pretty harsh key messages as well, which we have to do, because of the first past the post system, there's no proportional representation. So now there's only a winner. There's no prize for second place. And so our message was we work hard all year round, unlike the Labour Party who only turn up at election time, and we repeated that over and over and over again, till we got to an effective frequency so that people remembered that message. There were other messages as well but that one was particularly harsh and hard cutting, but and people remembered it and

⁶⁷¹ Marion Wilson, Interview with the Author.

⁶⁷² Jonathan Elmer, Interview with the Author.

of course, the Labour Party, you know, eventually did turn up about two weeks before the election and just played into that message”⁶⁷³

Despite such intensive campaigning, Jonathan notes that this was highly targeted to individuals who had participated in recent elections, and that this secured only a narrow victory for one seat, with a Labour councillor retaining the other.⁶⁷⁴ This is not solely an issue present in the former industrial regions of the United Kingdom, but it is particularly pertinent in these areas due to the erasure of political space through deindustrialisation. As Steven High argues, industrial closure sees that ‘old solidarities are eroded, and working-class institutions crumble under the weight of the crisis’.⁶⁷⁵ Spaces which had previously operated as ‘hotbeds’ of political activity, such as Miners’ Welfare Halls and Working Men’s Clubs, are waning or no more.⁶⁷⁶ As Cherrington outlines, “The fact that clubs were democratically managed, by members, added an inherent political dimension with the desire for more democracy in other spheres”⁶⁷⁷

In particular, deindustrialisation, by making defunct these spaces of local democracy, has also served to sever the organic links between industrial communities and politics. As discussed in detail in the first chapter of this thesis, the strength of the Durham Miners’ Association, and later the National Union of Mineworkers, granted industrial communities significant political influence, both locally and nationally. Dave Shotten was formerly “heavily involved” with the Labour Party, and whilst he does not share his own current political

⁶⁷³ Jonathan Elmer, Interview with the Author.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ High, ‘Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization’, 2013.

⁶⁷⁶ Ruth Cherrington, *Not Just Beer and Bingo! : A Social History of Working Men’s Clubs* (Bloomington: Bloomington : Authorhouse, 2012).

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

affiliations in his interview, Dave does reflect on how politics in County Durham has changed over time.

“Democracy is less than it used to be” he begins, “I would suggest that what is called the Labour Party now has nothing to do with the Labour Party I was involved in, in say the early 1980s.” He notes the waning strength of the trade union movement following industrial closure, adding that “the way that a member of parliament is chosen at a grass roots level has changed a great deal. I mean, in reality, in the 1980s, people within the constituency had an input into who became the member of parliament. Nowadays, the MP candidate is given to you, and you can choose to support them or not and it makes very little difference whether you choose to support them or not...”⁶⁷⁸

Dave is particularly critical of the advent of New Labourism under Tony Blair, suggesting that now “the reality is that a Labour MP has more in common that a Conservative MP than they do with their constituents.”⁶⁷⁹ Indeed, under Blair, the party certainly shifted its position closer to the Conservative ‘common sense’ laid out under Thatcher, focusing upon the aspirational working-class and purporting to offer the solution for all to become middle-class through equality of opportunity.⁶⁸⁰ As Dave recognises, however, Blair’s attention to political spin, to focus groups, and to the modernization of the Labour Party served to transform the party into something fundamentally different, unable to quite settle on how best to appeal to the changing demography of deindustrialised Britain. Most significantly, whilst

⁶⁷⁸ Dave Shotten, Interview with the Author.

⁶⁷⁹ Dave Shotten, Interview with the Author.

⁶⁸⁰ Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 174–85; McKenzie, ‘The Class Politics of Prejudice’, 2017; Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*.

Labour did commit to the amelioration of the poverty that had increased during the last two decades of the twentieth century, little was done to address the underlying inequalities, made starkly regional by industrial closure.

Significantly, too, Dave turns to the Durham Miners Gala as a way to exemplify these political changes. When I ask him if he still attends (he does not, due to ill-health), he describes his childhood memories of the Gala, and then as the interview is about to move on, he interjects “Can I stop you? Why is it that leaders of the Labour Party are afraid to go to Miners' Gala. Ask me that. Did Tony Blair ever go to the Miners' Gala? No. Did Gordon Brown go? No. Corbyn went and look what it did for him. There's a tradition, you know, yeah, it's the Labour Party, we don't want to soil our hands by mixing with people who actually do Labour. Once upon a time it used to be a major event, second only to Christmas. Families would go there and it's a minority now.”⁶⁸¹

In fact, however, the Durham Miners' Gala is not an event in decline. In 2023, an estimated 200,000 people attended, and despite an initial slump in attendance during the 1990s, the Gala continues to be one of the largest trade union events in Europe. Dave is, of course, correct that Corbyn's attendance marked a break in the absence of Labour Party leaders at the Gala, and his successor, Keir Starmer, has since not attended. Yet this does not diminish the social and political significance of the event. Harry Nixon, who is in his late eighties and lives in Bearpark, still attends the Gala every year. “I've never missed a one as far back as I can remember” he says, taking with him his children and now, his grandchildren. Of the Gala, he says, “In my

⁶⁸¹ Dave Shotten, Interview with the Author.

opinion it's a demonstration against the Tories...It's one day a year to show them that we're here, we're still here, we haven't given up".⁶⁸²

Drawing upon the event's history as a socialist demonstration of trade union strength, international solidarity, and community representation, the Gala now serves not just to celebrate this past but acts as a platform for present day movements and community regeneration.⁶⁸³ As Matt Perry argues, in his 2019 introduction to Ellen Wilkinson's *The Town that was Murdered*, 'sometimes wrongly perceived as nostalgia, the Gala has become a model of how to retain a mass platform for the renewal of socialist politics, working-class identity and trade unionism'.⁶⁸⁴

Indeed, alongside historic banners march current trade union banners, sometimes of those actively engaged in industrial action; in 2016, for example, striking teaching assistants marched with the Unison banner as part of their protest against pay cuts.⁶⁸⁵ Pertinently, despite the Gala's intrinsic historical link to the coal industry, it now embraces a focus upon renewable energy, and the just transition discussed at the start of this chapter. For the first time, in 2023, the Gala included a 'climate bloc'; the North East Climate Justice Coalition marched with a banner declaring 'Coal is our Heritage, Green Jobs our Future'.

In many ways, therefore, the Gala offers a snapshot view the contemporary political priorities, actions, and struggles, being one day

⁶⁸² Harry Nixon, Interview with the Author.

⁶⁸³ Stephenson and Wray, 'Emotional Regeneration through Community Action', 2005.

⁶⁸⁴ Matt Perry, 'Introduction to New Edition', in *The Town That Was Murdered*, by Ellen Wilkinson (Dagenham: Merlin Press, 2019), vii–xxiv.

⁶⁸⁵ Bruce Unwin, 'Teaching Assistants to March in Miners' Gala Parade.', *The Northern Echo*, 13 June 2016, <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/14554335.teaching-assistants-march-miners-gala-parade/>.

a year in which current movements and campaigns crystalise into one visible event in the North East.⁶⁸⁶ In 2017, for instance, the chairman of the Fire Brigade's Union Matt Wrack, delivered an impassioned speech about the governmental failings that led to the Grenfell fire a month earlier, and in 2023, Labour MP Zarah Sultana addressed the ongoing cost of living crisis occurring in the UK.⁶⁸⁷ As such, the Gala is historic in its origins, and the day is steeped in rich history, but it also remains highly attuned to the present day, evolving each year to address contemporary concerns.

Interviewee Oonagh Claber is conscious of both the Gala's history and its relevance today. Speaking of the continued socialist basis of the Gala in the present day, she comments:

"I mean, it is still about--I kind of get cross when people kind of go mad saying 'the union's doing this about the miner's'...but it's a union event! That's what it's about, do you know what I mean? It is a union organised event. And so, therefore--you know--you don't want the National Front there because actually, it's not their--it's not their gig."⁶⁸⁸

However, later in our interview, she also adds:

"I think what's also important is to remember that a lot of the stuff that was done with the unions and stuff like that, when we talk about the Miner's Gala, it has made things better for everybody else in the world, in the country, you know what I mean? In terms of safety--so all of those things are important. So the strikes are important in the sense that--that it wasn't just about more money. It's about safety. So

⁶⁸⁶ Gillian Whitley, 'From Being One to Being-in-Common: Political Performativity, Proxemics, and the Joys of Provisional Unity', *Performance Matters* 4, no. 3 (2018): 101; Perry, 'Introduction to New Edition'.

⁶⁸⁷ 'Watch: Matt Wrack's Emotional Tribute to the Firefighters at Grenfell Tower', *Durham Miners' Association*, July 2017, https://www.durhamminers.org/matt_wrack_grenfell_speech.

⁶⁸⁸ Oonagh Claber, Interview with the Author.

it's I think all of those things are kind of important, do you know what I mean? I think just... yeah, that's what should be remembered.”⁶⁸⁹

Within this testimony, Oonagh demonstrates an awareness of how the union activity of miners, here exemplified in the Gala, has continued to influence industrial relations in the present day. At the same time, her words stake a powerful claim to the coal industry's relevance to the national history of the United Kingdom, and in particular, County Durham's contribution within that.

Whilst during his interview, Jonathan expresses his regret that younger people in his ward seem disengaged with local politics, the Gala itself certainly continues to operate as an effective inter-generational space in which politics and community converge.⁶⁹⁰ Liam Adamson, an interviewee introduced in the previous chapter discussing his upbringing in Meadowfield, speaks enthusiastically about his attendance of the Gala. He says he goes because of both “The social side and the solidarity”. Expanding on this, Liam says:

“It's supporting sort of like, a movement really against sort of the way that we can be treat over the, god knows how many years, a lot of the North East, or especially County Durham, where you see a lot of certain bits get done up or as I say, a lot of investment in certain places, other areas just don't get acknowledged really for it, but it's more of a knowing that you'll stick by each other really. And it and it just seems a lot more of a community”.⁶⁹¹

The continued strength of the Gala, and the way in which younger people like Liam draw from it social and political meaning, certainly

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁰ Mary Mellor and Carol Stephenson, ‘The Durham Miners’ Gala and the Spirit of Community’, ed. Mary Mellor, *Community Development Journal* 40, no. 3 (2005): 343–51; Stephenson and Wray, ‘Emotional Regeneration through Community Action’, 2005. Jonathan Elmer, Interview with the Author.

⁶⁹¹ Liam Adamson, Interview with the Author.

does not fully counter the erasure of representative political space on a very local level. As discussed, local spaces such as working men's clubs and welfare halls offered a much more consistent opportunity for political socialisation and education and ensured intrinsic links between community relations and politics. However, the Gala does allow for the inter-generational transmission of examples of solidarity, resistance, and political strength.⁶⁹² Just as David Nettleingham observes in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, noting the intergenerational significance of the miners' strike and the 'canonization of the last generation of miners', the Durham Miners' Gala also becomes a resource for political identity in the present.⁶⁹³

As Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite suggests, nostalgia can be a powerful political tool to contest a sense of invisibility and marginalisation, if deployed correctly within politics.⁶⁹⁴ The Gala is one such example of this in practice. As such, despite the ongoing debates regarding the Labour Party's position within the North East, and wider concerns about the political future of the region, the Gala is evidence in itself that there remains a powerful strand of grassroots political impetus in the region. Whilst deindustrialisation may have fundamentally altered or erased former everyday spaces for political organisation, and disrupted transmission of this across generations, the Gala serves as a reminder that the former mining communities of the region retain the potential to build from the past and spur renewal efforts from below.

⁶⁹² Liam Adamson, Interview with the Author.

⁶⁹³ David Nettleingham, 'Canonical Generations and the British Left: The Narrative Construction of the Miners' Strike 1984–85', *Sociology* 51, no. 4 (2017): 850–64.

⁶⁹⁴ Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "'Reopen the Coal Mines'? Deindustrialisation and the Labour Party', *The Political Quarterly* 92, no. 2 (1 April 2021): 246–54.

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, the past certainly holds a strong influence over present day politics in County Durham. However, rather than an uncritical, nostalgic longing for what once was, appeals to the past are nuanced and multifaceted. Aspects of a collective memory of the region's industrial past are drawn upon selectively by different interviewees, in ways that align with their present political priorities. What is clear is that there is anger, and a structural sense of loss for people across the political spectrum in County Durham, and a strong awareness of the regional inequalities at play. Deindustrialisation is a process that was "willed" into being by political actors, and as such, the political landscape of deindustrialised spaces is engaged in an emotional relationship with this past that has crossed generations.⁶⁹⁵

The regional inequalities experienced by the North East, most potently in the semi-rural villages that formerly centred around industry, continue in spite of recent pledges to 'level up' the area to counter the economic and social marginalisation of the area through deindustrialisation. The testimony of a small number of individuals, as is quoted here, is in no way conclusive as to the reasoning for the recent political changes seen in County Durham, or the UK's post-industrial regions more broadly. People's relationship to politics is also often highly personal and complex. At times, individuals seem to demonstrate contradictory consciousness, recognising the lived realities of deindustrialisation in acknowledging unequal regional development and working-class erasure, whilst simultaneously drawing upon hegemonic discourses and existing power structures to

⁶⁹⁵ Phillips, 'Deindustrialization and the Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields, 1947 to 1991', ed 2013.

inform their political choices. The oral testimony quoted here shows how the complexities of people's political understanding defies arbitrary definition, and problematises the very idea that we can accurately categorise the political affiliations of individuals and communities at all; consciousness is not singular or static, and as such, the way that people engage with politics is much more complex than the 'red wall' or 'left behind' conceptualisations suggest.

The oral history testimony quoted above demonstrates that people remain hopeful that renewal is possible for the region. In line with ideas of a 'just transition', interviewees express their opinions of the multiple ways in which the region's industrial past can be used progressively, whether through attracting new industries to brownfield sites or the embracing of a new green industrial revolution. Of course, opinions of how to achieve this politically are divided, and this chapter has certainly shown that there now exist complex relationships with the Labour Party, who's history is so fundamentally tied to the region's former industry. Regardless of this, as we see from the continued strength of the Durham Miners' Gala, the region still holds the potential for grassroots political organisation and regeneration of former community strength that builds upon the memories inherited from the industrial past.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has provided a detailed exploration of cross-generational experiences of coal mine closures in County Durham, critically examining how the industrial past continues to shape everyday life in the deindustrialised present. By focusing on the interplay of memory, place, and generational identity, this research makes a significant contribution to the field of deindustrialisation studies, offering new insights into the long-term social, cultural, and political legacies of industrial decline in the UK.

Through the use of life narrative oral histories, it has looked to understand how the macro-processes of capitalism have shaped the micro-processes of former industrial villages in the Durham coalfield. In doing so, it adds to the already rich, cross-disciplinary field of deindustrialisation studies. It is situated within the relatively recent body of literature that considers the long-term social, cultural, and political legacies of deindustrialisation in the United Kingdom by adopting this approach in relation to County Durham. Whilst existing research about the area predominantly focuses upon communities to the east, the former sites of coastal collieries, here the research has turned attention to communities in the west that have otherwise largely been neglected.

This research has relied extensively on oral history as a methodological tool to explore the lived experiences of industrial closure, positioning it as a crucial method for uncovering the nuanced emotional and psychological impacts of deindustrialisation that are otherwise absent in archival or written records. The use of life narrative interviews has allowed this thesis to capture the complexities

of memory and its role in shaping both individual and collective identities across generations. This approach not only enriches the historiography of deindustrialisation but also highlights the value of oral history in documenting the ongoing, lived realities of communities navigating the legacies of industrial decline.

For as Paul Thompson contends, the value of oral history lies not so much in what it tells us about events but in what it reveals about 'how these are experienced and remembered in the imagination'.⁶⁹⁶ Indeed, in probing autobiographical memory through life narrative interviews, this research highlights the complex understandings of deindustrialisation and the ongoing emotional responses to the associated economic and social change.

Although this thesis is historical in its approach, it has as much discussed the present and the future of the villages of County Durham as it has their past. Memory, contends Frisch, is 'living history, the remembered past that exists in the present'.⁶⁹⁷ As such, memory is an actively changing and adapting phenomenon, understood best as a process rather than an absolute fact. As Myszal observes, 'the reconstruction of the past always depends on present-day identities and contexts'.⁶⁹⁸

"Imagined Communities" after Deindustrialisation

⁶⁹⁶ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 162.

⁶⁹⁷ Michael H. Frisch, *A shared authority : essays on the craft and meaning of oral and public history* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

⁶⁹⁸ Barbara A. Myszal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003).

This thesis began with an examination of the historical development of coal mining villages in Durham, using the theoretical framework established by spatial theorists such as Henri Lefebvre to understand the centrality of industry to these communities. By applying Lefebvre's concept that '(Social) space is a (social) product,' this research has revealed how the physical and social spaces of these villages were deeply intertwined with industrial activity and how their transformation through deindustrialisation has significantly altered community dynamics.⁶⁹⁹ This spatial approach has provided a critical lens for understanding the profound impact of industrial closure on both the material and social landscapes of County Durham. By analysing the production of space historically, we gain insight into the processes that have shaped the experiences shared in interviews conducted in the present.

In adopting this approach, this thesis adds to the existing literature on the paternalist beginnings of Durham's coal mining villages. It has demonstrated the manner in which global forces of industrial capitalism brought these settlements into existence, but more pertinently, how patterns of control and dependency were entrenched through representations of paternalist space. Relatedly, this approach has allowed for a greater understanding of the development of representative space within the villages through both formal union politics and within spaces of leisure and recreation. Most fundamentally, however, assessing the villages spatially in this way has underscored the centrality of industry, which has allowed for a greater exploration of the significant impact of industrial closure.

⁶⁹⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

Moreover, this thesis has extended this analysis across the threshold of nationalisation. Despite the nationalisation of the United Kingdom's coal mines being heralded as a significant success for the miners and their union, the change did little to unembed the wider colliery villages from their dependence upon a central industry. Indeed, this continued to play out spatially; where once housing was owned by the coal company, for instance, it was now owned by the National Coal Board. As demonstrated, this had significant long-term consequences once industry was removed.

For example, the sale of both NCB-owned and council housing has introduced difficult changes. In discussing the purchase of property by buy-to-let landlords, for instance, Norman is concerned with their lack of upkeep, as well as the dwindling numbers of 'old Bearpark families'. Whilst villages had once been highly regulated spaces- either through company paternalism or state management- this sense of order is increasingly disappearing. Likewise, even spaces forged in opposition to this control, those that served as representative spaces for industrial workers, like the Working Men's Club, have become increasingly defunct in the absence of the social relations that required them.

Indeed, this thesis has also explored the centrality of industry within people's memory. As has been shown, the colliery- and associated sites like the pit heaps- figure prominently within interviewees' recollections of their childhood. Interviewee Robin Chapman went so far as to describe the village of Bearpark as the 'colliery complex'; indeed, this conceptualisation of space as so centred around industry is shared within a number of older participant's testimony. Moreover, despite the highly regulated nature of space within the villages that has been outlined, interviewee narratives stress the supportive social networks of mutual aid and self-sufficiency, omitting discussions of inequalities and control.

In interrogating these recollections of past communities, this thesis has highlighted the dynamic and ever-shifting nature of memory, particularly how nostalgia and the experiences of the deindustrialised present have shaped mythologised constructions of an idealised community. By focusing on the intergenerational transmission of memory, this research has shown how these nostalgic narratives serve not only as psychological comfort but also as a means of asserting belonging and authenticity in a rapidly changing landscape. These findings underscore the importance of memory as a living, evolving force that continues to influence how communities understand their past and navigate their future.

What is more, because these intricate descriptions of the village's past often form key elements of people's personal life narratives- for instance, Marion Wilson's description of her grandfather's role in sinking Bearpark's coal mine- they can also be seen as powerful claims to authenticity and belonging to place in the present. This seems particularly necessary within the changing spatial context of the villages following deindustrialisation, where historic spaces of representation can only represent you if you have an emotional link to their former purpose and industrial origins.

As well as exploring these memories of industrial communities, this thesis has also problematised them, questioning their supposed homogeneity and stability. Indeed, to return to the argument of Assman, drawing on a collective memory is a way of asserting 'We are this' but also 'We are not them'.⁷⁰⁰ Insularity within social relations, by its very nature, excludes. This thesis has demonstrated alternative memories of place and community by introducing the

⁷⁰⁰ Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*.

testimony of those beyond the close-knit networks that centred around industry. For people like interviewee Stefan, deindustrialisation actually marked the start of a more 'normal' way of life as the industrial networks from which he and his family were excluded began to dissolve.

A more complex aspect of exclusion relates to experiences of industrial ill-health and disability. The coal industry, especially before nationalisation, was characterised by dangerous working conditions that made illness, injury, disability, and death common occurrences within coalfield communities. For some interviewees, their memories centre around the tight-knit networks of community support during times of illness or grief; in these cases, the community acted as a safety net, offering emotional and practical assistance. Conversely, however, other interviewees recall experiences marked by isolation and stigma, particularly in relation to work-related psychological distress. As such, this often meant that those suffering from psychological distress faced not only the burden of ill-health but also a societal reluctance to acknowledge or address it. In such cases, individuals found themselves doubly marginalised, both by their condition and by the prevailing cultural norms that expected men to embody a stoic and unyielding masculinity.

This is particularly pertinent due to the manner in which both industrial ill health and understandings of it has crossed generations. Significantly, the mechanisms employed to cope with disability, namely increased alcohol consumption and displays of performative masculinity through violence, were reflected within the responses to deindustrialisation and unemployment. Gary, in particular, is attentive to this, discussing how his grandfather's alcoholism and violence translated into the same patterns of behaviour from his father, and how he has since actively worked to deconstruct these inherited beliefs and behaviours within his own life.

County Durham within a dominant narrative of deindustrialisation

The miners' strike of 1984-85 is often positioned as a watershed moment for the coal industry of the United Kingdom. A number of interviewees quoted remember it as such. Whilst acknowledging this, this thesis has also problematised this timeline in relation to County Durham, extracting the discussion of deindustrialisation from the 'stranglehold' of a strike-centric narrative.⁷⁰¹ For whilst a small number of coal mines on the eastern coast of the county were still in operation by the time of the strike, all but one in the west were already closed. The one remaining colliery there, Bearpark, closed three weeks into the strike action. Indeed, the process of deindustrialisation had been occurring in County Durham in earnest since the 1960s.

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognise that whilst the strike and its subsequent defeat did not mark the start of deindustrialisation in County Durham, they still signify a pivotal moment within a changing political and social landscape. Previous closures had offered the possibility of relocating to alternative collieries, but with an increasingly smaller number of collieries to transfer to by the late twentieth century, many miners were left with no choice but to accept redundancy pay outs. This had a profound impact, particularly on the younger generation at the time, as they were the first cohort entering adulthood within an almost entirely deindustrialised context. As such, their memories are characterised by the realities of a region in transition, where the economic and social landscape was being reshaped by political forces beyond their control.

Therefore, the dominant narrative of deindustrialisation still serves a purpose for interviewees despite their own experiences not fitting

⁷⁰¹ Arnold, "Like Being on Death Row".

neatly within it. The testimony used in this thesis demonstrates how individuals navigate the interplay between personal and collective memory by utilising the broader narrative of the miners' strike as a cultural reference point to make sense of their own experiences. For individuals like Eric, whose father relocated following industrial closure in the 1960s, relating to this overarching narrative, rooted in collective memory, offers a sense of composure and connection to a broader historical context.

Similarly, for younger individuals who have no lived experience of their community's former industry, drawing upon an inter-generational collective memory of the past can help comprehend the affective residues of loss within deindustrialised places. However, in some instances, as is the case for interviewee Liam, they may also find themselves excluded from such transmissions of memory due to their position as 'strangers' with no direct connection to a place's past. In order to make sense of the social and physical landscape that surrounded him growing up, Liam turns to popular representations of deindustrialisation to inform his understanding of place.

At the same time, the strike period seems to mark a significant change in approach towards preserving and commemorating the industrial past. Just as Nora contends, the acceleration of time creates a sort of 'commemorative vigilance', or an obsession to record and preserve in order to retain some sense of memory and meaning.⁷⁰² To return to Jonathan's articulation of this in his interview, 'when pits first started closing, the idea that you would need to try and find some way of conserving that heritage, probably just wasn't on people's minds...I guess people at the at the back end of it, they knew what was

⁷⁰² Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*.

happening, the writing was on the wall, at that point, so they did what they could to capture the remnants of heritage that were being lost'.

Yet in doing so, the idea of industrial communities and their experiences of deindustrialisation becomes increasingly historically fixed, enforcing this dominant narrative at the expense of understanding experiences of earlier closures. Despite the lack of formal commemoration, people in communities like Brandon, who experienced deindustrialisation earlier, still very much turn to the industrial past in their life narratives and position closure as a significant rupture. In including their testimony here, this thesis takes a small step towards addressing the invisibility of these experiences amidst the dominant, popular understanding of deindustrialisation.

The Future of the Industrial Past

Whilst this thesis has outlined some of the enduring painful legacies of industrial closure in County Durham, it has also identified within interviewees' narratives elements of hope and optimism. In doing so, it has challenged conceptualisations that position residents of deindustrialised areas as perpetual victims of decline, 'left behind' within modern society. As Svetlana Boym contends, a turn to memory and an engagement with nostalgia does not always signify an uncritical urge to reconstruct the past.⁷⁰³ Instead, people can and do engage with the past critically and reflexively, drawing upon relevant elements to suit the present needs and construct ideas for the future.

⁷⁰³ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 2001.

This does not mean that these engagements with the past are free of tension. Indeed, this thesis has demonstrated the significant debates and struggles for meaning that surround individual engagement with the industrial past. This is apparent both within everyday practices of remembering, for instance, the conflicting interpretations of what constitutes heritage and whose experiences it represents, and within broader discussions of the political, economic, and social needs of the area. There is no singular interpretation of the past, just as there is no singular interpretation of the present.

This thesis has contributed to the broader academic debates surrounding deindustrialisation by unpacking the complexities that lie behind the oversimplified narratives of ‘left behind’ deindustrialised areas and the recent political shifts, such as the fall of the ‘red wall’ in northern England. By engaging deeply with individual testimonies, this research has revealed the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of political consciousness in these communities, challenging the notion of static or monolithic political identities. Instead, it has shown how memories of the industrial past and the present realities of deindustrialisation are intricately woven into the fabric of contemporary political life, offering a more nuanced understanding of these so-called ‘left behind’ regions. As has been shown, it is a rather difficult feat to articulate all of this within a life narrative interview. Whilst people may indicate a stronger connection to one political party, actual conversations reveal that consciousness, like memory, remains in flux.

Moreover, this thesis has stepped beyond the rather obsessive focus upon national politics, that too often serves to generalise the experiences of deindustrialised areas and situate them firmly in decline. Instead, it has outlined some of the myriad of ways the past is drawn upon as a resource for renewal in County Durham. In doing so, it has built upon existing work on the Durham Miners’ Gala as a

source of emotional regeneration, by providing an updated assessment of the event, but so too has the oral history testimony here has explored some of the more everyday practices of remembering that serve a similar purpose. In particular, it has demonstrated how the fostering of cross-generational understanding of the past allows younger people to engage critically with sites of deindustrialisation in the present and find useful meanings within the residues of industry.

By challenging dominant conceptualisations that position residents of deindustrialised areas as passive victims of decline, this research has illuminated how these communities critically and reflexively engage with their past. These engagements reveal a deep resilience and a capacity for renewal, as residents draw upon their industrial heritage to navigate the present and envision a future that honours, yet moves beyond, the legacies of their past. This thesis, therefore, not only contributes to the academic discourse on deindustrialisation but also offers a hopeful perspective on the potential for regeneration in post-industrial communities.

EPILOGUE

The paragraphs below are written by interviewee Robin Chapman, who sent this to me around ten days after our interview took place. His words provide a fitting epilogue for this thesis, in the way in which his writing, mostly autobiographical in nature, represents the village of Bearpark as a space transformed through time by industry. In writing about the community of the past, Robin is equally commenting upon the present. His concluding words, ‘never to be seen again’ encapsulate a sense of loss and finality, but in his very writing about it as an extended contribution to his own life narrative, Robin demonstrates how his idea of a disappeared mining community continues to hold relevance in his own life today.

“What made a mining village different from other villages?”

I have based my comments and observations on the mining village of Bearpark from 1939 to 1964. When the pit was sunk in 1872, Bearpark was a very small wholly agricultural community consisting of a few farms. Mining brought a need for workers and industrial skills to construct and operate the mine. Houses were built firstly for the shaft sinkers and later on for the coal miners themselves. When these workers arrived, they must have known that they had to create a self-supporting community which they did in a surprisingly short time.

When I consider the operation of the mine and the associated works it was a model of self-sufficiency. Coal was brought to the surface where it was washed to separate stone from coal. Stone was discarded and formed into slag heaps. The best coal was separated to be processed into coke which had a higher value than coal and was a first stage of added value. When coal was heated in the coke ovens the gaseous compounds evolved were not discharged to the atmosphere but were considered as valuable by-products and processed to produce coal gas, coal tar, sulphate of ammonia, creosote, naphthalene oil and petroleum (benzene) all of which were sold as added value to the basic coal product. The coal gas was cleaned and burned to heat the coke ovens and to power large gas engines connected to electricity generators which supplied all the electricity for all the industrial plant and the village of Bearpark and part of Ushaw Moor together with nearby farms. Waste heat from the coke oven flues was passed

through boilers which provided all the steam services used in the by-product process including driving steam turbines in the exhaust house and giant paddles used to separate coal tar in the gaseous stream before being passed on to the other distillation processes. Water for the process was drawn from the River Browney and after used to cool the coke was sent to a sump for settlement of solids before being returned to the river. The settled solids were mainly coke fines which were collected and when mixed with a small amount of cement were sold to make breeze blocks for the building trade. Seggar clay was lifted from the mine and this was used to make firebricks which were essential maintenance material for the coke ovens themselves.

This shows that the colliery complex was a self-sustaining industrial process with little need for external sources. When you combine this idea with the creation of the mining community once the houses were built for the miners the colliery complex provided work and a coal allowance for heating their houses, and all manner of skills. This also became largely self-sustaining. Amenities such as the church and chapels, the school, the miner's welfare hall etc soon followed. The Co-op store provided food, clothes, butchery and drapery and even funeral services. In addition, many miners kept hens either in their own gardens or at the nearby allotments. Gardens and allotments were used mainly for the production of food. The Doctor lived in the village and provided a round the clock service to his patients as did his father before him. Car ownership was mainly limited to the Doctor, the colliery manager the colliery agent and the store manager. Local farms provided staples such as potatoes and milk delivered to the homes. A cobbler had premises in the colliery houses and kept the population well shod. So, the village folk were to a great extent, independent and had little need to travel far from the village. They made their own entertainment such as the billiard hall, reading room, working men's club and village pub. There was a recreational ground near to the colliery houses with a football field, a cricket field and bowling greens. Combine this independence with the acknowledged trust each miner had with his workmates as each depended on each other to keep themselves as safe as they could in the undoubtedly dangerous environment or the colliery. The village policeman lived in the community and socialised with the miners. Serious crime was virtually unknown and the people policed themselves to a large extent. Excursions were organised to places like South Shields or Redcar and a fleet of buses would take hundreds of families on their annual outing. For many this was the only time they left the village.

Truly a unique way of life and common to mining villages across the country. Never to be seen again.

Robin Chapman”

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APPENDICES

Appendix A- Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet for Interviewees

Title of Study: *The Industrial Past in the Deindustrialised Present: A Cross-Generational Oral History of County Durham Mining Towns*

You are being invited to take part in an audio-recorded oral history interview, as part of research into experiences of industrial closure in County Durham and how this has affected life in the ex-mining villages in the decades that followed up until the present day.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. However, you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

What is the purpose of the research?

The research is an updated exploration of County Durham mining villages, that have largely been overlooked in existing studies and reports into industrial closure. It aims to examine how ideas of community, identity and heritage have changed in the decades following the closure of the pits, and how the social, economic and political feelings of the villages have been affected. For this reason, the research is cross-generational, to understand how different generations understand their relationship with the village and its industrial past.

Oral history allows people to contribute their own experiences and opinions about the history of their communities and your participation is incredibly valuable in this research.

Who is carrying out the research?

My name is Katherine, and I'm a History PhD candidate at Newcastle University, funded by the Northern Bridge Consortium. I expect to complete my PhD in 2022/2023, at which time the findings of this research will be put together as my dissertation. All participants will be welcome to access this and any related work I produce over the course of my PhD.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been asked to take part because of your connection to a former mining village. You do not need to have any special knowledge of the village's history or have any direct relationship to mining yourself.

What does taking part involve?

Participants will be taking part in an oral history interview, which is an opportunity for you to share your experiences of life in a former mining village. You are free to share as much or as little as you wish about yourself and your life within the interview, and there is no right or wrong response to any of the questions.

The interviews are expected to last between 1 to 3 hours, but this will vary for each participant and depend on what you choose to discuss during the interview. At any point, you can ask to take a break, continue on another day, or terminate the interview. Due to Covid-19, interviews will take place remotely, and will be using a videocall platform such as Zoom or Skype. Only the audio will be recorded and stored securely. You may wish to let the interviewer know if you have a preference over which platform is used for the call.

It is a flexible process, and there are no set dates and times which you have to commit to. If you have any special requirements for the interview, please let the interviewer know so that these can be accommodated to make the interview as convenient as possible for you.

Has this study received ethical approval?

This study has received ethical approval from Newcastle University on. There are no identified risks to participants in this research.

What will happen to your interview?

Your interview will be recorded then written down (transcribed). You have the right to put your own name to your interview recording and transcript or to use a pseudonym (in which case your name will never be used in any publication). You will be sent a copy of the recording and transcription, to check that you are happy with the recording and how it has been written down.

In order to use your material in any publications we must ask you to sign a Recording Agreement Form. If you wish, your interview can also be used by subsequent historians and researchers who might wish to consult the archived interviews (subject to your further agreement via the Recording Agreement Form completed at the conclusion of the interview). The University will be processing the personal data within your interview and transcripts as part of the performance of a task carried out in the public interest in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR May 2018). *Please see the notes at the bottom of this document for information about Data Protection.*

Please consider these issues and if you agree to be interviewed, you will be asked to complete a Recording Agreement Form before the interview takes place. This protects your legal rights and ensures that your interview recording and transcript are properly and professionally archived and

looked after. This is in line with your legal rights and the moral, ethical and legal requirements laid down by the UK Oral History Society.

For any questions about the research, please contact:

Katherine Waugh

Email: k.waugh3@newcastle.ac.uk

Data Protection Information

Newcastle University will be using information from you in order to undertake this research study and will act as the data controller for this study. This means that Newcastle University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. When we use information from people who have agreed to take part in research, we ensure that it is in the public interest.

Your rights to access, change or move your information once it has been stored are limited, as Newcastle University needs to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, Newcastle University will keep the information about you that has already been obtained. To safeguard your rights, the minimum personally-identifiable information will be used.

You can find out more about how Newcastle University uses your information at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection/PrivacyNotice> and/or by contacting Newcastle University's Data Protection Officer (Maureen Wilkinson, rec-man@ncl.ac.uk).

We will use your name and contact details to contact you about the research study. Individuals at Newcastle University may look at your research data to check the accuracy of the research study. The only individuals at Newcastle University who will have access to information that identifies you will be individuals who need to contact you regarding the research and management of your data.

If you agree to take part in the research study, information provided by you may be shared with researchers running other research studies at Newcastle University and in other organisations. Your information will only be used by organisations and researchers to conduct research. This information will not identify you and will not be combined with other information in a way that could identify you. The information will only be used for research purposes and cannot be used to contact you.

