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COMMUNITY, WORK AND RELIGION:
MENTALITIES IN THE VILLAGES OF THE NORTH WALES COALFIELD,
C. 1930 - C. 1960.

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COMMUNITY, WORK AND RELIGION:
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This study uses oral evidence in conjunction with other sources to attempt an empirical reconstruction of local social milieux but also considers the subjective dimensions of narratives and ~~considers~~ the extent to which respondents draw on a communal store of reminiscences. It ~~considers~~ that particular genres of narratives and other oral formats may have originated as social actors discussed contemporary events, may have been shaped by subsequent discussion, and may have functioned as integrative ideologies for local groups and communities.

Oral evidence is used to gain access to the informal and undocumented aspects of local life but also investigates the potential of oral evidence as a means of gaining access to the social and oral culture of the communities under study. The study posits that if the mores of communities are socially constructed - are constructed as a by-product of routine social interaction - that this process should leave a discernable legacy in the oral culture of these communities.

The study considers two mining villages in what was formerly East Denbighshire: Rhosllanerchrugog, an open village first settled by squatters in the late eighteenth century; and Llay, a village which began as a model housing estate constructed by a paternalist colliery company in the 1920s.

The study considers three areas of local social life: the community, the workplace and local religious organisations. ~~After attempting~~ a general description of the social milieu to be found in each, ~~the study presents~~ a series of case studies.

The chapter on the community considers the ways in which the different origins of the two communities have impacted on their respective social organisations. The chapter considers social and oral culture, and describes the decline of the Welsh speaking community as ~~indices~~ of changing patterns of social organisation. It also considers the ways in which local people have contributed to the construction of the self images of their respective communities.

The chapter on religious life examines relations between the Nonconformist churches, which are widely imputed to have had a defining effect on Welsh society, and the local population. It ~~describes~~ a general reluctance to embrace the full implications of Nonconformist creeds and describes instances of resistance to Nonconformist asceticism.

The first chapter on the workplace considers the impact of new extractive technology which shifted the frontier of control in favour of the colliery management. It describes attempts to reassert control made by the workmen and considers the development of a culture of informal pay bargaining in the conditions presented by cost, push inflation and institutional sclerosis in the early years of the nationalized industry.

The second chapter on the workplace considers workplace narratives and describes the lore about occupational beliefs as a consolatory ~~folklore~~ which helped workmen accommodate themselves to a harsh physical environment. The chapter also considers how the circulation of narratives about the conventions of oral culture were used to describe and articulate relations within the work group and enabled workmen to resist the demands of supervisors.

Preface.

I found it hard to avoid the legacy of the coal mining industry while growing up in the Wrexham area. While there are few formal memorials, the landscape of the area is still marked by the scars of industrialisation. However, as the legacy of redundant buildings and waste tips is steadily effaced by subsequent economic development and land reclamation, it is increasingly the case that the main memorials to this period of the area's development are contained within the memories of the local people who lived through it. It is inevitable that distance in time and old age will dim these memories. I was present at the 1982 dedication of the Gresford Disaster Memorial in my capacity as a very junior member of the Gresford Colliery Silver Band. This acknowledgement of the community's loss which came so many years after the date of the 1934 explosion and fire was, in many ways, the area's valediction to the local coal industry. While Llay Main and Hafod, the collieries which my study is specifically concerned with, both closed before I was born, I can testify that the communities of Rhosllanerchrugog and Llay are both very much alive. I am glad I have been able to take the opportunity to give an account of them and hope this account does some justice to these remarkable communities and to their residents, whose accounts of their experiences enabled me to look at Rhos and Llay through other eyes.

This project has seemed like a very long haul. I did the first interviews for my BA thesis on popular religion in Llay in 1989. However, the gestation of the project probably goes back much further than that and could probably be traced to the many occasions in my childhood when I was regaled with second-hand versions of the tales told by former miners who were and are my father's colleagues at the British Insulated Calendar Cables plant on the Wrexham Industrial Estate.

I would not have been able to complete this thesis without the support of my parents, Derek and Elizabeth, whose unfailing conviction that having letters after your name had to be a good thing kept me working when I thought otherwise. My parents have offered me a great deal of practical

help besides and I owe to them many of the contacts that enabled me to put together my project. This thesis is therefore dedicated to my parents and to Mrs. Enid Hughes Jones, a dear family friend, who died during its completion.

My very good mate Brian Roberts listened to examples of what seemed to be at times a remarkably unamusing regional humour and bore with patience my prototypical analyses of just about every memorate, folk tale, motif and likely story that detained my interest. Brian also hacked his way through dense and tangled jungles of verbiage as he helped with the proof reading of the thesis. All the remaining errors are my own.

John Walsh was the first person with whom I discussed the idea of talking to miners' families about popular beliefs as, in the first instance, a possible subject for an additional BA thesis. Much of this thesis is concerned with tying up ends left dangling then and as I studied church history and popular culture under his careful tutelage. I owe Dr. Walsh a great deal of thanks for his initial patience with my project and for his generous and solicitous continuing support.

Beth Thomas offered me hospitality during my visit to the Welsh Folk Museum and I am very grateful for her advice about sociolinguistics and the history of the Welsh language. Both are subjects about which I have a lot more to learn. Yiannis Gabriel invited me to a seminar at the Bath Management school. His articles and papers encouraged me to take seriously the more frivolous aspects of the interviews I was considering and helped me to put together my own ideas on the meaning of workplace narratives.

I owe a great deal of thanks to all the respondents whose interviews I considered for this survey. Whether I met them in person or became acquainted with them through transcribing the interviews recorded by others, I feel that I came to know them all very well and was impressed both by their accounts of their experiences and by their candour and generosity in sharing them. I owe particular thanks to a group of what the field guides tell me I should refer to as 'key informants' who were generous with their time, who loaned me documents and gave me a lot of

valuable advice about the technical and social aspects of coalmining. Ithel Kelly and Tom Ellis told me about things from the management point of view while Jackie Read and Joe 'Bugail' Williams spoke, as they had many times before in their long careers as trade union officials, for the men. Unfortunately Joe died while I was writing up my thesis so I have lost the opportunity to thank him directly. I consider that he represented the very best of older generation of Councillors, trade union officials and local men of affairs.

My project would have been much more limited in scope had it not been possible for me to have referred to the interview surveys completed by other researchers. The breadth of coverage described by these surveys allowed me to concentrate on depth in my own interviews. The way that the interviewers in several of these surveys simply allowed their informants to have their say and describe their own understanding of the past of the area enabled me to develop my ideas about the involvement of the community in the construction of the significant past.

I came to know Lynn Davies's ground breaking work on the folkways of the Welsh mining industry through his publications. Val Brennan's interviews, transcripts of which are deposited at Clwyd Record Office, Harwarden, represent the first dedicated survey of the North Wales coalfield. The exacting and methodical approach she adopted makes them remarkably effective interviews. Recorded in 1981, they allow contact with the last generation of mine workers who worked in the mines before face mechanisation and as such, are a particularly valuable resource. The large number of interviews undertaken for the Wrexham Museum Project by Robert Wynn, William Harrison and Mr. D. Jones have in many ways provided the backbone of my research. The interviews recorded by Kathy Growcott and Tim Liardet deposited at the at County Library in Mold contributed valuable insights. The interviews undertaken by Rev. Colin Gibbs for his 'Clatter of Clogs' project were delightful and amusing to listen to and were most influential in causing me to think about respondents' conceptions of their own history.

I am also grateful to those who shared with me their attempts to recover past through other means. Paul Parry's knowledge of the Flintshire coalfield and particularly the Point of Ayr Colliery provided an interesting counterpoint to my Denbighshire-based study. Beryl Baigent contacted me from Canada after hearing about my research and I owe her a great debt for allowing me to use the autobiographical account of her life in the village she was preparing for her family. Her poems, along with the interviews I have considered, convince me that the Welsh discovered magical realism even before they discovered America. I was also pleased to be able to use the manuscript Phillip Williams based on interviews with his mother, the redoubtable Maggie Williams.

I corresponded with Ray Williams, a former manager of Hafod Colliery, and Ken Brown, a former Llay Main man now living in Australia, about the search for black diamond. Llewelyn Williams gave me the benefit of his great knowledge of Rhos-lore and Rhos-iaith. I felt the benefit of several discussions about local arcana with the Fordean and folklorist, Richard Holland. Michael Pollard and Roy Palmer generously let me consult material they had gathered during their own investigations of the Gresford disaster.

I owe a great deal to the staff of the Clwyd Record Office, most particularly to the staff at the Harwarden Office, who patiently attended to my needs as I mined the NUM and NCB collections. Thanks are also due to the staff at the other local archives I consulted, particularly the staff of the reference section of Wrexham Library who produced endless copies from the microfilm records of the local newspapers. Local history collections are frequently gathered and maintained because of the seldom recognised enthusiasm and commitment of staff at branch libraries and I was able to consult such material at Buckley and Rhos Branch Libraries. Mrs. Wineyard, the librarian at Llay Branch Library who kept me supplied with reading material throughout my youth, turned up some interesting items which were of use to this project. The archives of the Broughton and District Local History Society are lovingly kept at Brynteg Branch Library.

I also owe many thanks to the staff at the Bersham Industrial Heritage Centre, the County Library at Mold and the Wrexham Museum Office for

hospitality during my visits and for very generous conditions of access to their oral history collections.

I owe many thanks to the students and staff at the Centre for the Study of Social History at Warwick University and many apologies to those who were burdened by my procrastination. The many suggestions I received in the early stages of the project were very influential in determining the approach I eventually took. The Department offered me several invaluable opportunities to broaden my mind which involved travel to destinations as disparate as Colchester and the Ukraine. James Obelkevich began what Tony Mason completed. I owe particular thanks to Tony for encouraging me to press on with the project notwithstanding his doubts and, not infrequently, my own doubts, about its methodological basis. The marginal comments he made on my drafts were a consistent source of stimulation and entertainment. The completion of project owes a great deal to the judiciously blended mixture of flattery and threat Tony deployed to help me over the final hump.

The History Department at Chester College provided employment when hard times came to the North Wales coalfield once more. Throughout the period of my research my main connections with the community I presumed to study were made through the Wrexham Homelessness Action group, WATCH, and through the local Labour Party. I would like to thank colleagues and comrades for their support and patience.

This dedication would not be complete without some mention of Alan Sugar whose Amstrad PCW 8512 was, in its day, such a breakthrough in bringing word processing power to the mass market. The endearing idiosyncracies of my own machine helped this thesis take its present form and afforded me many hours of innocent amusement besides. Some thanks are also due to Professor Laurie Taylor whose appearance as a presenter on Radio Four's 'Afternoon shift' did much to ease my boredom on the long afternoons as I attempted to batter my thesis into shape. Professor Taylor's contributions

to the programme have enabled me to affirm my own commitment to the humanistic tradition of inquiry and, like the pillar of flame which led the Israelites through the wilderness, offered illumination and guidance in the dark hour between three and four on selected weekdays.

Roger Laidlaw, June 1995.

Introduction.

One sentence from When Was Wales? effectively paraphrases much of the work of Gwyn Alf Williams:

Wales is an artefact which the Welsh produce.¹

Many scholars have sought to describe how Wales has been defined as an entity by the efforts of the Welsh to assert its existence as a discrete community. The salience of this theme may be attributed to the historical circumstances which have conditioned the development of the Welsh nation. Wales had a tenuous existence as a political and administrative entity after the Act of Union and the survival of the idea of Wales may be attributed to the vigour its literary and vernacular cultures. The rediscovery of these ancient glories was an important feature of the rise of modern political consciousness. However, as elsewhere in Europe, a rise of national consciousness correlated with social and economic modernisation, and thus with the erosion of the heritage it celebrated. Welsh intellectuals were distinguished myth makers and creativity availed where ancient culture ailed. Many of traditions the Welsh regard as part of their heritage were invented in this period of cultural revival.²

The transition from rural into urban life meant the loss of an old world of experience and the substitution of a very new one. In the nineteenth century, Welsh people in new urban settlements mingled with immigrants, and often learned English for the first time. New communities sprang up in areas of Wales previously innocent of settlement and were often indelibly marked by the hasty circumstances of their construction. The immigrants participated physically and socially in the construction of these new communities. Many, including the most influential inhabitants of these communities, were distinguished by a strong faith in ideologies which offered a prescriptive world view. Perhaps, in view of the recent

¹ Gwyn Alf Williams, When Was Wales? - A History of the Welsh (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 304.

² Prys Morgan, 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 43 - 100.

7/

establishment and insecure nature of life in these communities, they were searching, in the political and religious meta-narratives of Marxism and Calvinism, for something solid to cling to.

Studies of Welsh society have sometimes concentrated on the theme of the construction of communities. Scholars have been interested in how the inhabitants of communities structure their present experiences around their interpretation of the heritage of past experience. These community studies have mainly been located in a rural context³ and there have been few intimate studies of the life of urban communities.⁴

Despite the fame of the industrial communities of Wales, studies describing them have been limited in their perspective. The study of the industrial populations of Wales has mainly concentrated on the struggles and tribulations of organised labour. Though the identity of interest assumed between the general population and their industrial representatives was undoubtedly reflected in the large degree of popular support these institutions actually enjoyed, no study which concentrates on trade union organization, the decisions and actions of leaders, and a narrative of

³ Trefor M. Owen, 'Community Studies - An Overview', in I. Hume and W.T.R. Pryce (eds.) The Welsh and Their Country (Llandysul, 1986), pp. 91 - 133.

⁴ Graham Day, 'Whatever Happened to the Sociology of Wales?', Planet Vol. 77 (Oct - Nov 1989), p. 71.

strikes can describe the day to day concerns of the community.⁵

Another important theme in the study of industrial Wales has been the examination of ~~the~~ myths about its social, cultural and political life.⁶ The history of labour in South Wales sometimes seems to be a collection of sacred narratives and archetypes. While these myths have undoubtedly been generalised from the experience of life in the industrial communities, they tell us little about everyday life and indeed studies have concentrated on examining the allegiance of communities to these symbols as the more interesting historical phenomenon.

Studies of industrial Welsh society have tended to concentrate on South Wales, relatively little research has been produced on North Wales, and very little attention has been paid to the compact industrial pocket of North-East Wales⁷. Synthetic textbooks tend to gloss over the lack of historiography by assuming it to be a reflection of the area's relative unimportance. Dai Smith, in arguing that the history of Wales in the

⁵ M.J. Daunton, 'Down the Pit: Work in the Great Northern and South Wales Coalfields 1870 - 1914', Economic History Review Vol. XXXIV (1981), p. 579.
⁶ Daunton mentions Hywel Francis and David Smith, The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century (London, 1980), as being particularly deficient in this respect, *Ibid.* p. 579, n. 6, but notes that Merfyn Jones's study of North Wales quarrymen takes a broader view.
⁷ Jones, 'Y Chwarelwyr: the Slate Quarrymen in North Wales' in Raphael Samuel (ed.) Miners, Quarrymen and Saltworkers (London, 1977), pp. 99 - 135. *Ibid.* p. 579, n. 7.)

⁸ See Dai Smith's kaleidoscopic account of the generation and influence of these myths and symbols of Welshness on the modern history of Wales: D. Smith, Wales! Wales? (London, 1984).

⁹ Deian Hopkin, describing North-East Wales as an 'historical no-man's land' in 1984, considered that 'one of the intriguing questions we have to set ourselves, is really why have we ignored this part of the world so totally?' speaking on 'Labour and Politics in North-East Wales, 1900 - 1939', at a Llafur Dayschool, Wrexham 22 Sept 1984, see also Neil Evans, 'Report on Contributions to the Discussion "Llafur in the 1980s"', Llafur Vol. 3, No. 2 (1981), p. 90.

twentieth century has been defined by the relationship between the Southern Valleys and the rest of the principality, did not consider that the Northern coalfield was in any way a counterweight to the influence of its Southern counterpart. He even edged towards writing it out of the history of Wales altogether:

North-East Wales, in location and accent, teeters on the edge of the Merseyside conurbation, all red brick, flat land, sluggish canals and low hedgerows.^e

-/ The lack of studies concentrating on North East Wales may be due to the lack of a university institution in the area. It could equally well be to do with a lack of culturally available stereotypes. Emyr Humphries, the distinguished novelist, thought that of the four corners of Wales, the North Eastern corner was the least known and least regarded and sought in his own novels to rehabilitate the area's Welsh credentials.^e

Though the historical investigation of the intimate life of the industrial communities has been limited, awareness of the particularity of the social patterns forged by industrialisation has been heightened by their disintegration and social investigators have sought to describe communities coping with the shift to post-industrial society.¹⁰ The study of the internal and informal life of communities is everywhere constrained by the extent and nature of the material which is available. Attempts to write the history of marginalised and submerged groups has led to the

^e Dai Smith, Wales! Wales?, p. 4.

^e M. Wynn Thomas, 'Afterword', in Emyr Humphries, A Toy Epic (Bridgend, 1989), pp. 122 - 125.

¹⁰ Mervyn Jones, Life on the Dole (London, 1972); John Sewell, Colliery Closure and Social Change: A Study of a South Wales Mining Valley

7,1 / University of Wales, Board of Celtic Studies, Social Science Monographs, No. 1 (Cardiff, 1975); Isabel Emmett, 'Fe Godwn Ni Eto: Stasis and Change in a Welsh Industrial Town', in Anthony Cohen (ed.), Belonging - Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures (Manchester, 1982), pp. 132 - 164.

investigation of new methodologies for the recovery of experiences which would otherwise have been lost. Welsh historical studies played a distinguished role in the early years of the oral history movement¹¹ and have seen very interesting recent developments in the writing of the history of Welsh women.¹² However, the historical examination of industrial communities on their credentials as communities is a project which largely remains undone. Michael Lieven's study of Senghennydd¹³ as microcosm of South Wales and as macrocosm which bounded the experiences of its inhabitants is a valuable contribution. The brief article on the 'World of the Anthracite Miner' by Ioan Matthews,¹⁴ which indicates the importance of patterns of settlement and ~~the~~ rhythms of employment for patterns of trade union and political development and indicates an awareness of the symbolic dimension of community life, ~~and~~ must be regarded as an indication of important work in progress.

>/ In the main studies which describe how the industrial communities of Wales were constructed have concentrated on the role played by external agencies. Since these individuals and agencies were not an intrinsic part of the life of the community they accordingly saw local life from the perspective of the outsider. The most substantial body of writing is on the importance of the role of the literary and filmic media in the construction

¹¹ The 176 interviews with the inhabitants of coalfield communities undertaken by the staff of the South Wales Coalfield History Project in the early seventies were one of the earliest large scale area studies in

Britain/ see/ The Final Report of the South Wales Coalfield History Project / S.S.R.C./Departments of History and Economic History, University College Swansea (July 1974).

¹² See the survey in Angela John's 'Introduction' to/ A. V. John (ed.), Our Mother's Land: Chapters in Welsh Womens' History 1830 - 1939 (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 1 - 17.

¹³ Michael Lieven, Senghennydd - The Universal Colliery Village (Llandysul, 1994).

¹⁴ Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner', Llafur Vol. 6, No. 1 (1992), pp. 96 - 104.

of myths about the mining communities of South Wales.¹⁵ Michael Lieven depended for his study of ~~the~~ social life ~~of~~ Senghennydd on the minute attention to detail paid by the local press. However, he was aware that even the local journals operated their own agenda and mediated the news through a vocabulary of symbolic expression. Local papers transformed routine events drawn from local life into diverting dramas and admonitory morality plays. When the disaster of 1913 drew the attention of the world, the national and local press reconstructed the 'complex contradictory and often frightening word of the miner' as a picture of a 'sociable chapel-going community', and recast the ~~1913 Senghennydd explosion, a~~ disaster, which might have been viewed as an indictment of the exploitative nature of industrial capitalism, into as a tragedy which united the national community 'from the humblest labourer to the concerned monarch'.¹⁶

¹⁵ On literature, see Glyn Teglaï Hughes, 'The Mythology of the Mining Valleys', in Sam Evans and Gwilym Rees-Hughes (eds.), Triskel Two - Essays on Welsh and Anglo-Welsh Literature, (Llandybie, 1973), pp. 42 - 61; David Smith, 'Myth and Meaning in the Literature of the South Wales Coalfield - the 1930s', Anglo-Welsh Review (1976), pp. 21 - 42; Dai Smith, 'A Novel History', in Tony Curtis (ed.), Wales: (The Imagined Nation, Studies in Cultural and National Identity (Bridgend, 1986); Stephen Knight, 'How Red Was My Story? ... the Working Class Novel in Wales', Planet Vol. 98 (April 1993). On film, see Peter Stead, 'Wales in the Movies', in Curtis (ed.), Wales: the Imagined Nation, pp. 159 - 180. The most celebrated but perhaps least typical of the interwar novels about mining life is Richard Llewellyn's How Green Was My Valley (1939), about which see the chapter in Dai Smith, Wales? Wales!, pp. 98 - 123, and Derrick Price, 'How Green Was My Valley: A Romance of Wales', in Jean Radford (ed.), The Progress of Romance - the Politics of Popular Fiction (London, 1986), pp. 73 - 96. A critical perspective on the endurance of these myths after the virtual collapse of the old ~~manner of~~ Valleys life may be found in the text of John Evans's 1992 lecture to the Welsh Union of Writers Conference, published as: J. Evans, How Real Is My Valley: Postmodernism and the South Wales Valleys (Ponypridd, 1994).

¹⁶ Lieven, Senghennydd, p. 244.

Though these agencies presented the industrial communities of Wales to the outside world, their products offer few clues as to how these communities structured their social life. Malinowski observed that 'law and order arise out of the very process that they govern'¹⁷ and many other scholars have followed him in regarding culture as a by-product of routine social interaction.¹⁸ The interaction of a group cannot go on for long without mutually accepted standards of conduct emerging. Members of a long standing group such as a community may attribute an independent existence to it and are likely to use symbols to describe and affirm the ways in which the group impinges on the autonomy of the individual. The anthropologists who contributed ethnographic studies of British communities to the volumes edited by Anthony Cohen¹⁹ mainly used participant observation to examine the process by which local cultures were constructed. This study proceeds with the intuition that if the process of defining the community is indeed centred around oral interaction within the community, ~~that~~ it may be possible to gain some insights into the operation of this process in past historical milieux by using an oral history methodology. Even if the validity of oral sources as accounts of the past is contested, they offer, as John Tosh has noted 'precious evidence of how popular historical consciousness is constructed'.²⁰

Though it takes care to measure the world described by oral testimony against the one described by the documentary records of the institutions which played a role in local social life - the places of worship, the

¹⁷ Quoted in: W.J.H. Sprott, Human Groups (Harmondsworth, 1958), p. 54.

¹⁸ Most influentially: Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality - A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (Harmondsworth, 1971).

¹⁹ Anthony Cohen (ed.), Belonging - Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures (Manchester, 1982) and Anthony Cohen (ed.), Symbolising Boundaries - Identity and Diversity in British Cultures (Manchester, 1986).

²⁰ John Tosh, The Pursuit of History - Aims Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History 2nd edn. (London, 1991), p. 216.

voluntary organisations, the colliery companies - ~~this project~~ is primarily based on the open ended interviews about local social life generated by several oral history surveys and has supplemented them with a series of more detailed interviews undertaken specifically for this project.²¹ The fact that the bulk of this material was recorded in the eighties and nineties limits the reach of the survey in terms of the generational cohorts it was possible to consult. However, a limited amount of documentary material generated by similar attempts to describe local oral culture in earlier periods is also available. The study considers the work of several folklorists active in the area and considers the reports produced by various visitors and social observers. Aspects of folklore and social observation are often captured in local newspaper columns. Though columnists frequently exhibited a dillentante interest in local social life and were frequently in search of the picturesque, their work, which may be in many areas the most substantial body of contemporary writing which reflects discussions about local life and local identity, is much neglected by historians. The relationship between oral culture and autobiography is little understood but it is certain that the local writing consulted for this study described some of the same situations as those referred to by interview respondents and probably transcribed some aspects of the orally circulated conventional wisdom to do so.

Evidentially, interviews are a very rich source. The narrative a respondent offers in an interview is likely to be a bricolage composed of elements drawn from many sources. A single interview may accordingly yield many, very different kinds of evidence about the past.²² Accordingly, a range of skills and approaches may be required to interrogate the source. A conventional account of the benefits of interview evidence would stress its usefulness for the empirical reconstruction of informal and otherwise unrecorded aspects of life. The presence of subjective perspectives in oral

²¹ See Appendix Three 'Biographical Details of Interview Respondents and Details of Surveys'.
²² Judith Modell, 'Stories and Strategies: The Use of Personal Statements', The International Journal of Oral History Vol. 4, No. 1, (February, 1983), p. 10.

testimony was initially regarded as a problem and scholars were advised to isolate or even exclude material which appeared to contain mythical elements.²³ However, the unique perspective of the individual social actor makes subjectivity in his or her testimony inevitable. It has been realised that since the oral history methodology is so heavily dependant on human memory, no orally derived source can be regarded as a repository of unproblematic empirical data. Further, the subjective dimension of oral testimony is now recognised as offering the investigator ~~the~~ opportunity to attempt a fuller description of past historical milieux, one which can incorporate an account of the subjective reality apparent to historical actors. Access to this dimension of experience does not diminish but rather increases the validity of oral sources.

Noting that the individual's identity is defined by his or her memory, Paul Thompson and Raphael Samuel professed, in the introduction to a collection of papers considering mythical material in oral testimony,²⁴ an interest in the use of psycho-analytic techniques to realise the full potential of oral history methodology in laying bare the psychological dimensions of oral testimonies as statements of identity. Psycho-analysis²⁵ has indeed provided important conceptual tools for scholars who have sought to examine silences in the oral record as evidence of the repression of uncomfortable memories²⁶ and fallacious accounts as instances of

²³ Ron Grele describes the first edition of Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past: Oral History (Oxford, 1978) as carrying 'a very traditional vision of the historical enterprise' and being 'almost apologetic' in tone: Ron Grele, Review of the Second Edition of The Voice of the Past (Oxford, 1988) in Oral History Journal Vol. 17, No. 2 (Autumn, 1989), p. 69.

²⁴ Paul Thompson and Raphael Samuel (eds.), The Myths We Live By (London, 1990), pp. 1 - 22.

²⁵ The second edition of The Voice of the Past contains an extensive discussion of the relationship between 'Memory and the Self' which links problems about memory and self-presentation to the literature on psychoanalysis, Thompson, ~~op. cit.~~, pp. 150 - 165.

²⁶ Luisa Passerini, 'Work, Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism', History Workshop Journal Vol. 8 (1979), pp. 91 - 92.

wish-fulfilling fantasy.²⁷ However, the presence of mythical material in *9/1* testimony also has a social dimension, one which is as yet *^*insufficiently considered by British oral history studies.

~/ Social groups, whether they be congregations, workgroups, neighbourhoods or linguistic communities, are defined by their interactions with other *1 agg. v. jans.* groups which constitute the outside world. These relationships might take the form of rivalry, opposition or simply be based on mutual exclusivity.

1 While respondents may well be self-conscious partisans on *the* behalf of the group of which they have been members, their membership of the group may have more profound consequences on the testimony that they provide.

5/ 1/ Social groups have no existence outside the consciousness of their members. Even a group assembled for a specific purpose will not be able to function unless it is capable of communicating its common interests or goals to its members.²⁸ Membership of a group, particularly a small primary group, therefore implies membership of an oral community which will, to a greater or lesser extent, possess its own oral culture. Aspects of the *^*culture of the groups of which *^*respondents has been a member are likely to be an important constituent element of his or her testimony.

C/9
cap.
≡ Historians interested in many themes and periods have come to realise that myths are not simply barriers to the truth which must be cleared away to provide a true perspective, but that they are a part of the world as historical actors understood it. Such myths may in the past have served to encapsulate a group's awareness of its own identity, express its attitude to outsiders or serve ideological purposes in mobilising the group *and that* *^*as such, they merit serious consideration.

²⁷ Alessandro Portelli, 'Uchronic Dreams: Working Class Memory and Possible Worlds', Oral History Journal Vol. 16, No. 2 (Autumn 1988), pp. 46 - 56.

²⁸ Howard Becker, 'Culture - A Sociological View', The Yale Review Vol. 71 (1982), pp. 513 - 527.

Myths are not immemorial features of local discourses, rather they have emerged from real historical contexts. The issue is how successfully the relationship between the myth and the circumstances which shaped it can be described. It might be considered that a participant observer would enjoy a decisive advantage in being able to hear respondents' testimony and see the real situation with his or her own eyes. However, the division between participant observation and the retrospective investigation implied by the classic oral history methodology is probably not as sharp as the disciplinary boundaries that co-incide with it sometimes make it seem. Even when students have the privilege of studying local cultures in situ, most of the information they will assimilate will actually be gained from interviews or from observing oral performances which provide retrospective accounts of local life. Even though the oral historian is removed in time and space from the events respondents are describing, he or she is as much a participant in a cultural production as the anthropologist. The oral history interview is clearly not a neutral context for the mediation of past experience. It could itself be considered to be the product of contemporary oral culture. The interview is ~~a~~ itself a specific dialogic narrative form about which, despite its increasing ubiquity in academic and popular discourses, we know relatively little.²⁹

Despite these qualifications it will be assumed that, for the purposes of this study, the significance of oral culture in past historical mileux may be studied through direct reports of the situations in which oral interaction occurred and through the recovery of material apparently shaped by such discussions. Since material shaped in such contexts may be considered likely to constitute a part of the narratives offered by individuals, it will be assumed that narratives are to some extent representative of past communal discourses. Respondents described the

²⁹ The influence exercised upon narrative presentation by respondents' experience of other genres and other media is a theme which requires further study: Alessandro Portelli, 'Narrative Genres and the Form of Oral History', paper delivered at Conference on 'Methodology and Methods of Oral History and Life Stories in Social Research', L'viv, Ukraine, 5 Sept 1994, forthcoming in the International Journal of Oral History.

influence of gossip on village life, local visiting practices and oral interaction in informal contexts such as street corner parliaments, and they attributed great significance to the practice of informal pay bargaining in the workplace.

If an investigator intends to apply different criteria of assessment to different genres of narrative which may be found within a single interview, it is reasonable to ask how the different elements of the narrative can be distinguished. Though these are skills which have to be cultivated, they are skills with which we are all endowed, to a greater or lesser extent, as sociable beings deeply involved in oral interactions in our own day-to-day existence. Even the most incompetent raconteur is steeped in the conventions of oral culture. He or she will usually observe them and interpret them unconsciously. It is possible, with practise, to detect the cues we habitually insert into our verbal communications when we shift between different themes and narrative genres. Changes in tone and style ~~should~~ alert the auditor to the status which elements of a narrative should be accorded. Even the most tone-deaf auditor can detect the difference between situations when testimony is being offered in all seriousness and the raconteur is making a claim on his or her credibility and situations when he or she is being invited to suspend disbelief or to laugh along with the joker. Though this internal evidence is valuable for the task of distinguishing between different genres of narrative, the job is made easier when narratives are not being considered in isolation. The presence of stereotypical testimony or the use of particular repeated themes or motifs in a narrative is, at the very least, evidence that a theme has merited extensive discussion in the community.

Where respondents offer convergent accounts it is reasonable to assume that the consensual view they represent was forged somewhere and for some communal end. Convergent accounts are most obvious when they contain mythical elements which appear to be at odds with other available descriptions of the situation but they can simply represent a common perspective which defined the group's awareness of itself. Examples of what we might describe as 'oral literature', more self-consciously deployed examples of oral culture whose purpose was to divert, admonish or

entertain, are easily spotted since they are expressed through strongly constructed conventions.³⁰ Some of these genres, such as the tall tale and the joke, may be familiar, others, like tales about how individuals came by their nicknames, might be unfamiliar, but their presence is usually made apparent by the respondent's treatment of the material. At least two of the interview surveys consulted in this study set out with the explicit intention of collecting material generated by the occupational sub-culture of the miners. The fact that such forms are often a celebration of the circumstances in which the group found itself may provide an oblique perspective on those circumstances as well as giving us an indication of the group's response.

The 'oral histories' of communities in remote and exotic areas are often described as socially constructed entities.³¹ Jan Vansina defines an 'oral tradition' as the passage of an oral message over at least one generation.³² The transmission of oral traditions is frequently accomplished through the use of oral formulae and mnemonic devices which aid accurate repetition. In orally attuned societies, communal control over past is asserted through regular recitations in formal circumstances. These easily observable conventions are apparent only by their absence from modern societies. Nevertheless, all oral histories are to some extent socially constructed. Oral interaction remains an important aspect of our ability to communicate even in a highly literate and information saturated industrial society.³³ Oral communication usually has a much smaller degree of prestige in societies where its role has been usurped by other media. It

³⁰ Alan Dundes, 'Oral Literature', in James A. Clifton (ed.), An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (New York, 1968), pp. 117 - 129.

³¹ Rosaleen Howard-Malverde, The Speaking of History - 'Willapaakushaykii' or Quechua Ways of Telling the Past (London, 1990), Elizabeth Tonkin's discussion of the general applicability of the analysis of shaping genres in the assessment of oral accounts begins on familiar ground with the oral traditions of West Africa. E. Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts - The Social Construction of Oral History (Cambridge, 1992).

³² Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition as History (London, 1985), p. 3.

³³ Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts, p. 13.

may be marginal or even be stigmatised by elites. In a modern society there is unlikely to be a caste of specialists like praise singers in whom society vests responsibility for the maintainance and transmission of the body of lore. There may not even be acknowledged contexts for formal oral performances. Nevertheless, even societies where other, less elusive sources occupy the attention of historians, members of a community are still likely to have a vernacular understanding of its past, and that version of the past will be a communal possession.

In the case of most of the narratives garnered by oral history interviews is it more appropriate to talk about narratives in terms of oral reminiscences rather than as oral traditions. Though the accounts offered by respondents have apparently come to exercise some influence over views of the past offered by others and though respondents may cite vicarious experiences, these narratives are not being transmitted over the generations. The genres which structure such reminiscences may be less explicit and discussion of the past may not be part self-conscious cultural tradition. Nevertheless there are still likely to be local institutions we might describe as 'schools of reminiscences', these being contexts where inhabitants have habitually met to discuss the past. We might expect that these would be the contexts where people routinely met to socialise and that 'the days' events were assimilated, along with event of previous days and previous years, into the communal store of experiences. Samuel Schragger heard tales about the early days of agricultural communities in Idaho and was:

... struck by a sense that somehow these people were drawing their recollections from one another, that, even though it would never be possible to recover the actual paths by which the stories had developed, they had grown out of a conversation that has been going on since the very beginnings of settlement and that continues whenever there is talk about the memorable past.³⁴

³⁴ Samuel Schragger, 'What Is Social in Oral History?', International Journal of Oral History Vol. 4, No. 2 (1983), p. 76.

The distinction between the concerns of the present and discussions of the past is important to professional historians, but is probably a great deal less important to lay historical practitioners for whom the consideration of the past is very much a part of the present.

Isabel Emmett, an anthropologist looking at the ethnography of local allegiance in one small town in North Wales, echoed Schragar in regarding talk about the past as a cultural production in its own right³⁵ and viewed the 'co-operative creation of [its] oral history' as being 'one of the most important things that is going on'. The socially constructed past was the agent responsible for the cohesion of the community in the present: 'the shared knowledge of a particular place and its people enables all members to participate in a continuous refashioning and telling of the story of the place'.³⁶ Emmett noted that the past was used as a strategic salient in, ^{the} struggle for, ^{the} present and discussions about, ^{the} past were used to 'include and ⁹ exclude ... to judge and constrain others; to confer and deny favours'. Historical narratives were thus denominations of 'a precious currency' whose commerce defined social relationships in the town.³⁷

Social observers have commented that consciousness of the past is especially strong in mining communities.³⁸ This is perhaps another way of saying that the experience of community is particularly acute in such settlements. This is doubtless a consequence of the fact that comradeship ^{is} was important for economic welfare and safety, and mutual support and ^{solidarity} solidarity was vital in the industrial struggles of the miners. A community's past may come to be an ideological resource which may sustain it in its present and future struggles. One of the aims of this study is to

³⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁶ Isabel Emmett, 'Place, Community and Bilingualism in Blaenau Ffestiniog', in Cohen (ed.), Belonging, p. 208.

³⁷ Loc. cit..

³⁸ Ferdynand Zweig, Men in the Pits (London, 1948), pp. 10 - 13; Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, Coal Is Our Life, 2nd edn. (London, 1969), pp. 56 - 63.

illustrate how the past was perceived, how it was constructed and how it was used by historical actors in the villages of the North Wales coalfield. Local people viewed the past as a guide for future conduct and evocations of the past frequently served ideological purposes for the groups that articulated them. The chapter on religion will consider the importance of orally published precedents of born-again experiences in evangelical activities and the chapter on workplace culture will consider how a loaded description of old style of pit life was deployed in resisting some of the consequences of modernisation. Outside these specific case studies, it may be observed that, in a broader sense, a community's awareness of its past serves an ideological purpose for that community in expressing the consciousness of shared experience.

History is a reflexive discipline. Good historians know that they cannot isolate themselves from the trends they presume to study. Historiographical studies show that historians' interests in specific themes can actually be a very sensitive index of the contemporary concerns of a society. However, when accounts of the past are directly solicited from the historical actors as they are in oral history interviews, it is fair to ask whether subsequent reflection and subsequent discussion, which might overlie their original experiences, represent an unacceptable level of contamination from the present. Paul Thompson observed that many of the sources routinely consulted by historians are marred by similar characteristics, but that, when treated with due caution, ~~they~~ they are still regarded as valid sources.³⁹ Despite this, the validity of oral sources is still contested. However, ethically, and methodologically, these issues cannot be ducked. From the humanistic perspective adopted by many oral historians the attempt to view interviews with respondents in the same way as documentary sources, to quarry these accounts of experience for hard historical data and to disregard the rest, would be intolerably arrogant. Such practice would also be methodologically naive.

If we find that the find primary characteristics of oral sources are

³⁹ Thompson, Voice of the Past, pp. 102 - 109.

compromised by respondents' awareness of the historicity of their own experiences, it is worth observing that historians do look at prior accounts when constructing their own analyses of events and situations. The ability to sift and evaluate historiographical material is part of the complement of skills required ~~of~~ any practicing historian. Respondents not only have memories of their experiences but, through the benefit of those experiences, they usually have the skills and the authority to evaluate their significance in the way an outsider cannot. The oral historian is as dependent on these prior constructions as he or she is on the power of recall. Respondents' credentials as historians do not diminish the importance of the academic researcher since the perspective of the outsider and the rigour provided by disciplined study are vital to throw the testimony of respondents into relief. Nevertheless, perhaps it might be felt that the term 'oral history' is a misnomer, and perhaps the term 'oral historiography' might be considered to be a more appropriate one.

This study considers two of the communities of the North-East Wales coalfield. One, though technically a village, was a town in its size and its opinion of itself. The other community was a village, in consideration of both its size and the modesty apparent in the profession of its self image. Coal mining and fishing communities are often preferred by social scientists since they are frequently self-contained communities of residence and work and their relative isolation seems to promise the elimination of many other factors which affect community formation. The two communities chosen for study were both self-contained, one by the accidents of its organic development and the other by deliberate design. Their evolution will be considered in more detail in the first chapter. The other features of these communities make them a useful basis for comparison.

Rhosllanerchrugog or 'Rhos', as it was colloquially known in the district, was an open village. It sprang up in the late eighteenth century as a community which housed people who came to work the local pits and foundries. Inhabitants squatted on the moorland edge, or having paid rent to a ground landlord, they threw up rude shanties. The village was self-sufficient and had a tradition of self-government long before it was

provided with a Parish Council in 1894. The immigrants who populated the village came from the declining upland agricultural communities to the West and were Welsh speaking.

Llay, or as it was known in the early years of its existence, 'Llay Main Model Village', was constructed to serve a new pit. Deliberation in its design was apparent in virtually every feature of its architecture. The colliery company was omnipresent in the social life of the new village. The migration which filled the village was heterogenous in composition and the language of the new village was, for the most part, English.

During the period of study the populations of Rhos and Llay were both distinguished by their relationship with one pit above the others of the locality. The progressive elimination of smaller collieries had forced the workmen of Rhos into a close relationship with Hafod Colliery and Llay Main Colliery was the pit the village had been built to serve. The two pits are also comparable entities, though they had different geological characteristics both were relatively large, and both became extensively mechanised at quite an early date. After the middle thirties both the pits were owned by same combine and after 1947 both were administered as part of the same Area by the National Coal Board.

This study will consider local social life from basis of face to face interaction but will also look at how various features of local life, from social stratification to the role of voluntary organisations were incorporated within the respective communal self-images current among the inhabitants of Rhos and Llay.

The aspect of local life which was most ostensibly concerned with values and with articulating a consistent world view was religion. The conventional wisdom, that the significance of religious institutions is declining in modern society, has been challenged in the last twenty years by scholars who claim that measurements of attendance and formal professions of allegiance are inept tools for the assessing the true social significance of religious institutions. These scholars have looked at the ways people actually used religious institutions and have sought the

Hafod accounts social actors have provided of their personal apprehension of the significance of religious values. They have found that there are 'surprising reserves of religiosity' in modern society.⁴⁰ This study will look at how the local chapels and churches actually interacted with village society. Local people evidently considered it possible to maintain a relationship with a local congregation without regular attendance at it and interviews recovered a widely diffused view that the community's religious institutions were the repository of communal values. However, it is also clear that the tenure of local religious institutions at the heart of the community was conditional. The evangelical creeds advocated by the Nonconformist denominations active in Wales made large demands upon the commitment of the believer. Ordinary adherents temporized when making commitments to such institutions and resisted ascetic strictures. They elaborated their own definitions of appropriate levels of religious commitment.

The workplace was an environment which forged comradeship in the face of danger and solidarity in the face of exploitation. Coal miners are one of the most intensively studied industrial groups. There is a large literature both on workplace culture and upon the industrial behaviour of colliery workmen. Two chapters will attempt, using different aspects of the same narratives, to show both how colliery workmen behaved in regard to superiors, particularly in respect of the perpetual struggle for control in workplace, and how the oral lore of the miners articulated and described the intimate culture of the workplace.

Considered comparatively, the villages of Rhos and Llay, and the Hafod and Llay Main Collieries, were very different places. This study will consider the factors which conditioned their respective paths of development. Consideration will embrace the respective origins of the two communities, including the influence of their architectural heritage and the interventions in community life made by external institutions,

⁴⁰ David Martin, The Religious and the Secular (London, 1969), p. 122.

particularly the colliery companies and the local authority. When both
- /, / functioned as providers of working class housing, they seemed to articulate
- / a fairly consistent elite attitude to the working class community which was
expressed in the design and layout of the dwellings they provided. This
9 study will consider the influence of these factors upon ~~the~~ the development
and organisation of local social culture but will also seek to explain how
these trends were apprehended in the oral lore of the community and the
workplace.

Chapter One:
The Economic and
Social Background.

The North Wales coalfield is a small one by British standards. The exposed portion of the coalfield is forty five miles long and describes the shape of a crescent which runs from the Northern-most tip of Flintshire, through East Denbighshire and into Shropshire. The exposed coalfield is part of a geological formation which is the Eastern expression of a huge syncline. The coal seams dip towards the East and geologists consider them to be continuous with the seams of Lancashire and Staffordshire.¹ Coal has been mined in North Wales since the Middle Ages. Before the Industrial Revolution coal was mined to satisfy a small local domestic demand and was traded along the coast. Under this stimulus, the Flintshire coalfield developed more quickly, since it benefited from easy access to the coast and the Dee creeks. However, it was the growth of the local iron industry in the eighteenth century that made coal mining into a prominent local industry.

The Industrial Revolution had an early start in Denbighshire. The forges at Bersham, to the South of Wrexham, were the first outside Shropshire to use coal as a reducing agent in the smelting of iron ore. This innovation was made by Charles Lloyd, a Quaker associate of Abraham Derby. Since the local wastes were largely denuded of the trees used to make charcoal, the innovation was a timely one. Despite the early start, this period of economic advance saw 'no general transformation of the country, no wholesale shifting of population, no creation of mushroom towns and villages.'²

The end of this era coincided with the passing of the lease on the Bersham forge from Isaac Wilkinson to his sons. Though prosperity of the local iron industry in the next generation owed much to the enterprise of the famous John Wilkinson, it was built upon the boom stimulated by the demand for armaments required to prosecute the wars with America and France. The demand for armaments was succeeded by the demand for iron

¹ F.J. North, Coal and the Coalfields in Wales (Cardiff, 1926), pp. 128 - 34.

² A.H. Dodd, The Industrial Revolution in North Wales 3rd edn. (Cardiff, 1971), p. 24.

created by Britain's industrial expansion. The Bersham forge was home to one of the cannon boring machines adapted to provide Watt with the cylinders he required for his steam engines.

-/ Despite its early eminence, the later growth of North East Wales was unspectacular. South Wales exploded in the latter part of the nineteenth century and sucked millions into the newly created communities in the valleys and on the coastal strip. This prosperity was based on the coal export trade. Despite supplying domestic coal to Dublin and bunkering the ships which served the coastal trade, the coal industry in North Wales was tied to the inland trade. The coal industry in North Wales was really the handmaiden of the local iron industry and, when the depression of the 1840s saw the dousing of many local furnaces, it became dependent on the increasing diversity of uses for coal which opened more markets for coal on its own doorstep. The pattern of supplying the local domestic trade and satisfying the demand of the local iron, clay and chemical industries was set in the latter part of the nineteenth century and persisted until the second half of the twentieth century.³

The different fates of the two Welsh coalfields may be attributed to geological and geographical factors. Though the North Wales coalfield was small and had thin and badly faulted seams, the juxtaposition of coal, ironstone and limestone made it an attractive proposition before the landscape had been tamed by the transport developments of the nineteenth century. Local business men were keenly aware of the benefits of easy communication and in the 1790s a group of prominent Denbighshire industrialists and landowners promoted an ambitious scheme which projected a canal which would connect the industrial district with Chester and the Dee in the North and with the developing canal network of the West Midlands in the South. Despite massive expenditure on aqueducts, tunnels and

³ See 'Reports from the Coalfields, North Wales' in the Colliery Guardian 1920 - 1950 passim.; and for a pessimistic report on the likely future development of the coalfield by a local colliery engineer, see T.H. Cockin, 'The North Wales Coalfield' in the Times Trade and Engineering Supplement, 9, / 17 Nov 1923, reprinted in the Wrexham Leader, 28 Dec 1923.

embankments, only half of the vast projected loop was completed. The canal failed to penetrate the heart of the industrial region and meandered to Chester through the rural districts of Shropshire and Cheshire.

A generation later, when the massive reserves of coal locked up in the hills of South Wales were liberated by the Valleys railways, development became unstoppable. In the estimation of A.H. Dodd, the most eminent scholar to have considered the economic development of North Wales, the railways, which were built at great expense on difficult terrain in the 1840s, merely opened the area to competition from other coalfields and exacerbated ~~the~~ its innate disadvantages. Far from stimulating feverish expansion, the dawning of the railway age helped to 'nip the industrial revolution in the bud'.⁴

The history of coalmining in Denbighshire is one of a progressive shift towards the East. Coal seams lie close to the surface on the lower slopes of the Berwyn hills and were thus easily accessible to primitive mining technology. As the shallower seams were exhausted and technological advances made deeper pits technically feasible, entrepreneurs moved to exploit the deeper measures which lay to the East. During the first stage of industrialisation the mining communities sprang up among the pits which mined the outcrops on the moorland edge, and their inhabitants constructed their own houses, either by encroaching on common land as squatters⁵ or by paying a nominal rent to a ground landlord.⁶ Rhosllanerchrugog, which expanded from being a community of 1244 in 1811 into one of 3467 by 1841,

⁴ Dodd, The Industrial Revolution in North Wales, p. 119.

⁵ CROH/DD/WY/5755, A letter from Exuperius Pickering, land steward to the Wynnstay estate, to C.W.W. Wynn esq. on the progress of the lawsuit undertaken by his brother, Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, to challenge the right of tenure claimed by squatters on land for which Sir Watkin had leased the mineral royalties, 13 Nov 1819.

⁶ Recorded as ranging from 7s to 15s per annum: Educ. Rept., p. 531.

was one such village and has indeed been described as a 'classic example' of the type.⁷

The houses of Rhos were poorly constructed and were closely packed on the sequestered moorland. Nineteenth century observers were shocked at the appalling sanitary conditions which prevailed in the village and were virtually unanimous in describing the villagers, as the architects of their own dwellings, as the authors of their own misfortunes. Henry Vaughan Johnson, a sub-commissioner for the 1847 Welsh Education Commission, condemned the dwellings and the degraded habits of the villagers who inhabited them. He beheld Rhos and declared that 'nothing could more forcibly illustrate the imperfect nature of indigenous civilisation if isolated and unaided'.⁸ A visitor to the area in 1899 found the inhabitants of Ponciau still wallowing in the two roomed 'wig-wams' favoured by their ancestors:

The working man should be taught how to spend his wages. He has the means to take himself out of the squalor and he should be told that it was indecent to rear a large family in a two-roomed tenement. He should be made aware that it was wicked to cram his wife and his children into a miserable den and make their lives one long struggle with sickness and death.⁹

There was no mitigation of sanitary problems in the mining villages until 1894 when the newly formed Wrexham Rural District Council began to adopt roads, construct sewers and eliminate the worst of the sanitary nuisances.

The population of the village originated from the upland farming communities that lay to the West. Their migration was prompted by the enclosure of common land which deprived many small farmers of their

⁷ W.T.R. Pryce, The Social and Economic Structure of North East Wales 1750 - 1890 (Ph.D. thesis, Lanchester Polytechnic, 1971), p. 101.

⁸ Educ. Rept., p. 531.

⁹ Quoted in Silin, 'Looking Back': Wrexham Leader, 6 July 1979.

livelihoods and the agricultural depression after the Napoleonic wars.¹⁰ The immigrants retained their native tongue and the early industrial villages became and remained to a large extent Welsh in speech. The exhaustion of manpower resources inside Wales made South Wales into a receiving area for migrants from England and Ireland. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the unique local cultures created by the adaptation of the Welsh language to an urban and industrial environment were obliterated successive waves of migration from England.¹¹ The North Wales coalfield had completed the recruitment of its basic population by the middle of the nineteenth century¹² and the flagging economic fortunes of the region meant that the wave of migration from England broke upon the communities of the area with much less force. Though the coalfield was pushed into the bilingual zone, a trickle of migrants from the Welsh heartlands¹³ and the observed tendency for migrants to select receiving communities on the basis of linguistic affinity¹⁴ allowed the maintenance of a viable Welsh language culture in the district.

-/ The social and sanitary havoc decried by observers may be considered to be characteristic of a young community composed of strangers sundered from their roots and left outside the pale of the parochial structure and the parish vestry oriented system of local government. Nineteenth century observers commented on the threat to public order represented by such large bodies of population living outside the supervision of a squire or master. The colliers of Rhos took a leading part in the sometimes riotous labour

¹⁰ Pryce, The Social and Economic Structure of North East Wales, 1750 - 1890, pp. 93 - 94, p. 100.

¹¹ P.N. Jones, 'Some Aspects of Immigration into the Glamorgan Coalfield Between 1881 and 1891', Trans. Cymmrodorion (1969), p. 93.

¹² Pryce, The Social and Economic Structure of North East Wales, 1750 - 1890, pp. 104 - 105.

¹³ W.T.R. Pryce, 'Industrialism, Urbanization and the Maintenance of Culture Areas: North East Wales in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', Welsh History Review Vol. 7, No. 3 (June 1975), p. 339.

¹⁴ A.H. Dodd, 'Welsh and English in East Denbighshire: A Historical Retrospect', Trans. Cymmrodorion (1940), p. 52.

struggles of the 1830s. The most famous episode in this struggle - 'the Battle of Cinder Hill', a confrontation between the striking miners and their families and the yeoman cavalry - took place within the precincts of the village.¹⁵ The district remained turbulent even in the 1870s. In 1876 Rhos colliers sacked the house of the unpopular manager of Hafod Colliery and chased him from the district with impunity.¹⁶

By the time an Anglican Church was constructed in Rhos in 1852, the village was territory which had largely been lost to local Nonconformist congregations. Apprehensive observers satisfied themselves that the evangelical protestantism preached by these sects had begun to tame the village in the early nineteenth century. The chapels had won large numbers of converts and had successfully inculcated the virtues of temperance, thrift and obedience.¹⁷ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Rhos and the other industrial villages had a vivid associational life with many organisations whose memberships were based on social networks anchored in the chapels and whose worthy aims were derived from the ethical teachings preached there.

In Rhos, the associational context was the matrix for a blossoming civic pride. The stinging criticisms of the visitors who decried the sanitary state of the district prompted the self-conscious and articulate leaders of the local community, men prominent in their workplaces and in their congregations, to canvass reform. In Rhos and several other of the large industrial villages, reformers noted that the Wrexham Rural District Council tied the fortunes of their communities to the whims of the smaller agricultural communities to the East of Wrexham/and that they generally returned representatives who were uncritically in favour of a lower rate. Some decided that since the Rural District Council was too distant and the Parish Council was too mean an instrument of government, their villages

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¹⁵ Emlyn Rogers, 'The History of Trade Unionism in the Coal Mining Industry of North Wales to 1914. Chapter III "The Awakening (1830 - 1831)"', Trans. Denbighshire Historical Society Vol. 13 (1964), pp. 226 - 227.

¹⁶ Silin, 'Looking Back': Wrexham Leader, 5 Oct 1973, 14 Sept 1979.

¹⁷ C.E.C, Vol. XVII, p. 376.

should press for independent urban powers. Agitations were set in train in Bersham, Coedpoeth and Rhos. While the County Council Inquiry which rebuffed the demand for competent urban powers for Rhos in October 1912 broke the back of the Rhos campaign, the advocacy of 'Urban Powers' remained a staple of local civic discourse. The village saw a second period of agitation on the theme of full urban responsibility in the ^{later} ~~thirties~~ ^{thirties}.

The later nineteenth century saw housing development within the parish boundaries take a very different form. Before the 1870s, the area known as Tan-Y-Clawdd, which lay at the intersection of the main Wrexham road and Gutter Hill, the thoroughfare that ran into the muddy heart of Rhos, sustained a small hamlet. Land belonging to the Ruthin Castle estate was parcelled into lots and sold for residential development.¹⁹ Much of the development which occurred between 1880 and 1910²⁰ was undertaken by a local builder, Tysilio Jones.²⁰ The houses of 'Johnstown' lay in orderly blocks and terraces and possessed adequate sanitation. Their condition provided a marked contrast to the insanitary muddle which still largely prevailed in the core of the village.

The colliery workings which lay within the boundaries of the parish were exhausted by the middle of the nineteenth century. New workings were forced to follow the line of the coal seams and industrial activity began to encroach on the Vale of Maelor. The exploitation of deeper seams meant the end of the profligate habits of the early industry. The shafts of deep-mined pits represented a considerable investment and were not abandoned lightly. Collieries developed extensive underground workings and the exploitation of coal measures was carefully planned. Work began at the Ruabon New Colliery, later known as the Hafod Colliery, to replace the Old

¹⁹ Silin, 'Looking Back': Wrexham Leader, 9 June 1978.

²⁰ R.B. Barratt, A Short History of the Village of Johnstown Ms. (1962, with additional notes 1969, 1972), p. 4.

²⁰ Profile of Tysilio Jones: Rhos Herald, 12 Mar 1938; obituary: Rhos Herald, 20 July 1946.

1.c
2/ Ruabon Colliery in 1863. The old colliery had been a nomadic entity based on a series of shafts known as the Brandie pits. The shafts of the new colliery, which began work in 1867, were located to the East of the downcast Cefn fault and reached a depth of 1,500 feet.²¹ Hafod Colliery worked a total of eleven seams in its hundred year life.²²

Hafod Colliery, and the other deep-mined pits which penetrated the Vale of Maelor, Wynnstay (opened 1856), Vauxhall (1857) and Bersham (1870), left the bulk of the mining population behind in their existing settlements. As immigration steadied from a flood to a trickle, entrepreneurs found themselves stewards of a scarce resource and pursued pragmatic policies to ensure a steady supply of labour. Even the turbulent and fiercely independent population of Rhos was caught in the thrall of such machinations.

Henry Dennis, a Cornish engineer, was rising in importance as a local industrialist in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Dennis demonstrated a rare concern for the housing of his employees but the interest he served was, in the main, his own. He built 66 houses in back-to-back terraces to attract families from the Buckley coalfield to work in the new Wrexham and Acton Colliery which opened in Rhosddu in 1870.²³ Dennis also lent his support to a building society which operated in the Rhos area.²⁴

Having taken pains to recruit a workforce, Dennis schemed to retain and direct it. In 1880, the ailing Hafod Colliery was refinanced by the Ruabon Coal and Coke Company and Dennis became the managing director. It was at this time that the Bryn-Yr-Owen Colliery closed. It was said that Dennis

(/ , / ²¹ George Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire Past and Present 2nd edn. (Wrexham, 1968), pp. 63 - 64.

²² NCB Western Area Public Relations Department, Colliery Profiles - Hafod Colliery (n.d.).

²³ Derek Pratt, 'Looking Back in Time': Wrexham Leader, 23 Oct 1992.

²⁴ Silin, 'Looking Back': Wrexham Leader, 25 June 1971.

liquidated his holdings in the colliery to shepherd workmen towards employment at his new enterprise in Hafod.²⁵ Similar tactics were used by his son Dyke Dennis when the closure of Rhosddu Colliery in 1924 solved the problem of manpower shortages at the large colliery at Gresford which was owned by the same company.²⁶

A developing transport infrastructure imparted a new degree of mobility to the local mining population. However, in some areas the colliery interest, perhaps keen to temper the mobility of labour when it operated to ^{7:15} their own detriment, opposed transport development. The people of Rhos complained that the village was being held to ransom by the Great Western Railway which, although it served local industries, seemed curiously reluctant to extend services into the heart of the village. In 1894 local tradespeople sponsored their own railway bill. This was quickly followed by a spoiling proposal from the Great Western Railway. Though the GWR proposal was preferred by a Lords Select Committee, local dissent sank it at the second reading. A later bill provided for a line which was completed, though not to the unanimous satisfaction of local worthies, in 1901.^{27, 28}

In the early years of the twentieth century the Parish Council championed the section of local opinion that wished to see the village take advantage of the electrification of the Wrexham-Johnstown tramway by pressing for its extension into the heart of Rhos. Henry Dennis owned land on the Ponciau Banks which the project required and declined to part with it. The Wrexham and District Tramway Company had to be satisfied with a truncated thoroughfare eventually completed in 1904. The tracks began the climb from Johnstown but did not attain the summit of Gutter Hill and thus

²⁵ Loc. cit.

²⁶ Ithel Kelly, The North Wales Coalfield, A Collection of Pictures (Wrexham, 1990), caption 57.

²⁷ T.W. Jones, 'The Rhos of Long Ago - Being the History of Rhos Local Government from 1881 to the Present Day', published serially in the Rhos Herald (Sept - Nov 1935); 5 Oct, 12 Oct, 19 Oct 1935.

²⁸ Silin, 'Looking Back': Wrexham Leader, 27 Jan 1928.

'never really served the main portion of the town'.²⁹ The tramway company failed in 1927, as much because of Dennis's intransigence as due to competition from the new motor buses.

The depression after the Great War underlined the tenuous hold of the smaller, old-fashioned pits which had low rates of productivity. The two Ruabon Collieries, Wynnstay and Vauxhall, closed in 1927 and 1928 respectively.³⁰ Some of their workforces moved on to employment at Hafod Colliery. Though the Wrexham area, which had a more mixed economy and was more attuned to the inland trade, did not suffer as badly as the South Wales coalfield, it remained chronically depressed until the Second World War.³¹ Depression sharpened the competition between districts and local opinion feared that underselling by neighbouring districts would mean the permanent retreat of the market for local coal.³² When, in 1931, Dyke Dennis signalled his intention of closing Hafod Colliery due to its persistent running losses, the local miners' leaders had no other option but to suggest a scheme of direct subventions from wages to support the colliery.³³ The workforce assented and in nine months had paid their employers an estimated £10,000 for the privilege of retaining their jobs. With the colliery still making a loss and with the contributions from wages being sorely missed in many homes, the workforce decided to stop the scheme in August 1933.³⁴ The company responded by closing the colliery but the pit was quickly acquired by the Carlton Group, a Yorkshire combine which had

²⁹ T.W. Jones, 'The Rhos of Long Ago': Rhos Herald, 9 Nov 1935.

³⁰ Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire, p. 159, p. 146.

³¹ Frank Holloway, 'The Interwar Depression in the Wrexham Coalfield', Trans. Denbighshire Historical Society Vol. 27 (1978), p. 61.

³² The East Denbighshire Industrial Organisation was formed in mid-1932 to lobby for the local coal industry and to attract new industry to the area: Report of a conference of North Wales Local Authorities in Llandudno: Wrexham Leader, 19 Aug 1931.

³³ Interview with Bob Ellis, former Hafod Lodge Secretary, CROH NT/789, Interview No. 6.

³⁴ North Wales Guardian, 28 June 1933.

moved into the area by taking over the new pit at Llay Main.³⁵

The directors of Llay Main saw the potential of Hafod Colliery, with its large reserves and its stable workforce. They sought to increase productivity by dispensing with the antiquated system of hand-getting in stalls and introducing the mechanised longwall system. Not all the original workforce was required to operate the streamlined production process and the Carlton Group took the closure as an opportunity to cut away dead wood. Hafod colliers presenting themselves at the pit for re-engagement were screened for health and fitness.³⁶ The pit's nominal complement decreased from 1825 men and boys employed underground to 1250.³⁷

The population of Rhos had been growing steadily since the early nineteenth century and was still advancing strongly in ~~the~~ later ~~years of~~ ~~the century~~. Even though the coalfield was small, work in the pits was still evidently an inviting prospect and the population of the village increased from 7196 in 1891 to 9414 in 1901. In the interwar period however, the depression in local trade meant that the growth of the population was checked. In Rhos, as in all the other older industrial villages of the Wrexham area, population began to decline as emigration told against the rate of natural increase.³⁸ Stagnation in the growth of the population of Rhos coincided with the beginning of attempts to alleviate the situation in the crowded core of the parish. In recognition of the extremity of the village's plight, the first Council houses in the Wrexham area were built at Bryn Gardden, Rhos in 1915. Further Council estates were developed in more peripheral areas of the parish, such as Johnstown and in the neighbouring parish of Pen-Y-Cae in the interwar period and again in the post-war period. Particularly sub-standard village dwellings were demolished on a piecemeal basis in the interwar period and

³⁵ Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire, p. 64.

³⁶ Interview with Ken Aspinall.

³⁷ Manpower figures drawn from the Colliery Yearbook and Coal Trades Directory 1930 - 1939.

³⁸ Holloway, 'The Interwar Depression in the Wrexham Coalfield', pp. 58 - 60.

then in a more concerted programme in the fifties. The centre of the village was most affected by the clearances of old housing stock. Immediate redevelopment of the area was discouraged both by the patchwork nature of the available land and by the threat of subsidence due to the collapse of early mine workings.

The Welsh language did not fare well when jolted out of the intimate and inclusive social life of the narrow streets and alleys where neighbours and kin were often indistinguishable categories. The movement of population left chapels bereft of congregations, schools of pupils and shops of customers. Though the inhabitants of the new estates were by and large local people many felt the removal was responsible for a dilution of local culture. It was a powerful nostalgia for the local society that had been lost which prompted moves for the redevelopment of the village core. In the ^{1980s} ~~eighties~~, the local authority sponsored attempts to plug gaps in the core area of the village and tried to redevelop it as a residential area.³⁹

The village of Llay lies far to the (East of the area where coal was exploited in the nineteenth century. The task of exploiting these measures was complicated by their depth and was further hampered by a generous blanket of sand and gravel drifts which impeded the construction of shafts.

Only two pits have ever worked these measures, ¹⁹¹¹ Gresford Colliery, which opened in 1911, and in which the Dennis family were ¹⁹²³ significant shareholders,⁴⁰ and Llay Main Colliery, which ¹⁹²³ opened into full production in 1923.⁴¹ Llay Main was the deepest pit in North Wales and one of the deepest pits in the country when its Number One shaft ^{reached} a depth of over 2700 feet.

The coal under Llay was only made accessible by technical advances and

³⁹ E.R. Myers (Director of Public Works) and G.C. Owen (Chief Planning Officer), District Plan for Rhos and Johnstown - Draft Written Statement Wrexham Maelor Borough Council (February 1980), pp. 76 - 77.

⁴⁰ Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire, p. 54.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 69 - 70.

by the availability of large amounts of capital. Though the North Wales coalfield was declining in competition with the Lancashire-Cheshire and Staffordshire coalfields, it was hoped that an efficient pit which was raising cheap coal could make its own market. The colliery was sunk at a capital cost of over one million pounds. Though the prospects of a new coalfield to the East were investigated and proved at the initiative of local coal owners, the size of the investment necessary to realise this potential was beyond the scope of local capitalists and Llay Hall Colliery Company disposed of its interests to a group headed by Sir Arthur Markham. Llay Main was a joint venture between the Hickleton Main Company of Yorkshire and Messrs. Rea, coal exporters from Liverpool.⁴²

Large scale production was the only way of justifying such high capital costs. The scheme's undertakers projected an estimate of future production which varied between one million tons⁴³ and one and a half million tons per annum.⁴⁴ Such a high volume of production required a large workforce. It was estimated that the workforce might eventually grow to some 4,000. Even at the more modest 2,500 eventually reached, Llay Main had the largest colliery workforce in Wales. The company imported technicians and officials from Lancashire and Yorkshire to supervise the operation of the first fully mechanised longwall pit in North Wales. Llay Main was regarded in the twenties as a showpiece of the modern coal industry.⁴⁵

Both Gresford and Llay Main were sunk in rural areas previously innocent of industrial development. Since labour was not an abundant resource, efforts had to be made to attract new workforces. Gresford Colliery

⁴² CROH NT/126, 'A Concise Log of Events Which Led to the Constitution of the Llay Main Collieries Limited', (n.d.).

⁴³ Chester Chronicle, 28 May 1921.

⁴⁴ Daily News (n.d.), reprinted in the Wrexham Leader, 12 June 1920.

⁴⁵ CROH D/DM/316/1, Illustrated Brochure: 'Llay Main Collieries Ltd., Gresford, Wrexham. "Upon the Occasion of a Joint Visit of the British Association and North Wales Branch of the National Association of Colliery Managers"', (1923).

inherited the Wrexham and Westminister colliery houses at Rhosddu and invested in another development close to the pit at Pandy.⁴⁶ The problem of housing the new workforce was partially alleviated by the construction of Garden Village on the edge of the Northern suburbs of Wrexham. Wrexham Tenants, a private syndicate, laid out an estate of 230 houses whose original purpose was to serve the needs of the colliery.⁴⁷ The Acton Park estate, which was the first large development of Council houses undertaken by the municipality of Wrexham was also developed to the North of the town. Despite this provision Gresford Colliery still remained dependent on men commuting considerable distances from the older colliery communities. At Llay, the colliery company sponsored a housing association to undertake the development of colliery village and declared its ambition of housing the greater part of the new colliery's workforce.

The directors of the Llay Main Colliery were also the principals in a scheme to provide industrial housing to the heavy industries it was anticipated would benefit from a post-war boom. The creation of the Industrial Housing Association was the initiative of a group of Yorkshire entrepreneurs associated with the Stavely and Sheepbridge Coal and Iron Combine and the Doncaster Colliery Association.⁴⁸ Despite the passing of the 1919 Act which promised 'homes for heroes', the Industrial Housing Association proclaimed a new creed of industrial social responsibility:

The underlying principal of the scheme is that an industry should undertake the housing of its own workpeople and not expect the state or local authorities to provided houses for them.⁴⁹

Subscribing to the association freed a colliery company to build houses to suit its own needs. The use of industrial capital meant not having to

⁴⁶ Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire, p. 42.

⁴⁷ A.H. Dodd, 'The Growth of Trade and Industry', in Dodd (ed.), A History of Wrexham (Wrexham, 1957), p. 231.

⁴⁸ See Appendix 1: 'Directors of Llay Main Colliery Company who were also Directors of the Industrial Housing Association'.

⁴⁹ Colliery Guardian, 25 Aug 1922.

depend on local government finance and obviated the necessity of having to lobby the local authority and then having to wait as other housing needs were met in their turn.⁵⁰

-/ The interwar period is recognised as one of great militancy in the coal industry, but it also saw the rise of a new age of industrial paternalism. Entrepreneurs who had seen the advance of organised labour in the Edwardian period and during the war sought to bate its militancy by adjusting the social circumstances of industrial communities. In the coal industry the necessity of securing a labour supply and the consequent responsibility of 'building colliery villages was accepted as being just as much a part of mining as the sinking of the shaft'.⁵¹ While in Derbyshire, Kent and South Wales, new communities were developed under the auspices of the Industrial Housing Association, in South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, the development of entire coalfields was accompanied by thoroughgoing programmes of urban development directly under the control of the coalowners. It has been argued that in Nottinghamshire, one of the dividends of the employers' investment was the slowness of the growth of the labour movement. The collapse of the Miners' Federation and the ¹⁹¹⁹ formation of the industrial union movement was fruit that could only have been harvested from ground prepared by careful husbandry.⁵²

At Llay, the intention of the colliery company was to build a model village to complement their model pit. The company acquired Llay Place, a large Victorian house, and the adjacent grange. The housing development was located in 'Llay Park' and was planned along the lines of a garden suburb. The construction of the houses took place in two phases. The first was undertaken by the Llay Main Housing Association after April 1920 and the

⁵⁰ Sir John Tudor Walters, The Building of Ten Thousand Houses, Industrial Housing Association Report (n.d.), quoted in P.H. Whyte, 'Some Aspects of the Urban Development by Colliery Companies, 1919 - 1939', Manchester School of Social and Economic Studies Vol. 23 (1955), p. 276.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.273.

⁵² Robert J. Waller, The Dukeries Transformed: the Social and Political Development of a Twentieth Century Coalfield (Oxford, 1983).

second by the newly formed Industrial Housing Association after August 1922. Sir John Tudor-Walters was the consulting architect to the Llay scheme and the new dwellings were constructed along the lines he recommended in his influential 1918 report to the Local Government Board on the provision of dwellings for the working classes.⁵³ The new village's housing stock consisted of over 470 well constructed two storied cottages. These facilities marked out the new community in an area where the term 'mining village' was a by-word for slum housing.

By the early twentieth century technical advances in the coal industry made mining into something of a restricted craft occupation. Workforces for new mining developments therefore tended to be recruited from among existing colliery populations.⁵⁴ The colliery company intended that the village should become a real community rather than an industrial barracks housing a collection of rootless industrial nomads. Perhaps it was hoped that a more settled community would identify its continued prosperity with the interests of the company and perhaps that it would continue to generate a workforce to serve the mine in future years through its own natural increase.⁵⁵ Though officials and skilled workers were recruited from Lancashire and Yorkshire, the Llay Main Colliery Company published its intentions of giving preferential treatment to North Wales men since it 'did not desire the migration of colliers from mining centres in other parts of the Kingdom'.⁵⁶

Families with established local allegiances may have been regarded as being more likely to settle in the new village than complete strangers.

⁵³ Sir John Tudor Walters (Chairman), Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider Questions of Building Construction in Connection With the Provision of Dwellings for the Working Classes, Local Government Boards for England, Wales and Scotland, d. 9191 (London, 1918).

⁵⁴ Christopher Storm-Clark, 'The Miners - the Relevance of Oral Evidence', Oral History Journal Vol. 1, No. 4 (1973), pp. 84 - 85.

⁵⁵ Whyte, 'Some Aspects of Urban Development by Colliery Companies, 1919 - 1939', p. 278.

⁵⁶ Chester Chronicle, 28 May 1921.

However, in view of the coalfield's relatively peaceful recent history, the desire of the company's directors not to stimulate migration from industrially militant mining areas was understandable. Many of the first families to move into the village came from Gwersyllt and Broughton following the closure of local collieries.⁵⁷

First Avenue was the best appointed and most prestigious of the streets in the new village. The architects sought to enhance its appearance and Llay's reputation as a garden village by planting an avenue of trees along its wide pavements. However, thin soil and smoke from the pit stack inhibited the growth of the saplings and they were removed some years later. In a similar manner, the ideals behind Llay Main Model Village, which had been planted in the optimism of the brief post-war boom, succumbed to circumstances and withered, starved by the depression and poisoned by the acrimonious atmosphere of industrial relations. If the village had grown as it was initially planned, it would have become a small town and have been responsible for a decisive shift of population from West to East across the coalfield. The Colliery company responded to a housing survey sponsored by the Rural District Council by indicating its intention of eventually constructing up to 2,850 houses capable of accommodating a population of ten thousand.⁵⁸

However, by 1922, this estimate had been reduced to 1,500 houses.⁵⁹ By 1923 the colliery was on short time working⁶⁰ and after this reverse the prospects of a large scale development faded. The coal industry was in the grip of the world depression but local circumstances aggravated the situation at Llay Main. As a highly capitalised enterprise the Llay Main undertaking was only viable if a brisk trade offered a steady return.

Though it had been hoped that proximity to the North Western ports would ensure year-round trade for the pit, the market for steamship coal was

⁵⁷ M.O.H. 1922.

⁵⁸ M.O.H. 1919.

⁵⁹ M.O.H. 1922.

⁶⁰ Wrexham Leader, 16 July 1923.

evaporating in the face of competition from fuel oil and the disturbances in Ireland affected the shipment of domestic and industrial supplies.⁶¹ Despite a markedly higher rate of productivity than the other North Wales pits, the colliery was still losing money.

The response of the Llay Main management to the protracted depression which occurred before the colliery had scarcely even begun to make a return on its investment was to attempt price cutting. The mens' representatives received a blunt ultimatum on 25 May 1925. The company demanded that wages costs be reduced by the amalgamation of piecework rates and the flat rates paid for support and repair work into a single inclusive rate. The men refused to bend and a bitter twenty-two week dispute broke out. It was settled in late October on terms which suited neither the men nor the company. In early 1926 the Llay Main Company was taken over by the Carlton Main Company of Yorkshire.

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The Llay Main Company's new owners stopped the construction of new dwellings. Since the existing housing stock had to suffice the houses at Llay became increasingly crowded. However, since the depression meant that labour was more abundant it became possible for Llay Main to review its stated ambition of being self-sufficient in housing. The pit became dependent on men commuting considerable distances across the coalfield in motor lorries⁶² and began attempting to recruit men from coal mining communities outside the district. By 1929 the Llay Main Company clearly signalled that it did not intend to undertake the construction of any more houses and calling upon its credentials as the largest individual contributor to the rates, asked Wrexham Rural District Council to provide Council housing in the district.^{63, 64} The colliery company offered thirteen

⁶¹ Colliery Guardian, 13 July 1923.

⁶² M.O.H. 1928.

⁶³ Report of Wrexham Rural District Council Meeting: Wrexham Leader, 9 Nov 1929.

⁶⁴ The request was supported by a plea from the Parish Council: Report of Wrexham Rural District Council: Wrexham Leader, 9 Nov 1929.

acres to the South of Llay Park to the Rural District Council.⁶⁵ Between 1929 and 1931 214 Council houses were constructed at Llay.⁶⁶ The houses were smaller than the cottages erected on Llay Park, ~~they~~ were less widely spaced and were remote from the village's amenities. Despite this development, the colliery remained dependent on men commuting from all over the coalfield to feed its insatiable appetite for manpower.⁶⁷

Even though the Carlton Main group retreated from the commitments made by the Markham group, Carlton Walker, the new managing director, still intended the village to be a model community. He was not prohibited from seeking subsidies and grants by ideological scruples. The company calculated that in the year 1928 - 1929 it had paid over £ 3,500 in levies due to the Miners' Welfare Fund and therefore had no compunction in calling upon this fund. The company was instrumental in putting together two successful applications for grants to fund the development of village amenities. In August 1930, the first pithead baths in the North Wales coalfield were opened at Llay Main.⁶⁸ A children's playground was also provided. The most prestigious scheme was the opening of a large and impressive Miners' Welfare Institute in June 1931.⁶⁹

The company still sought, although in a less ambitious manner, to control ~~to control~~ the development of the community. Because of the company's decision to broaden its recruitment policy both the village and the pit became increasingly 'cosmopolitan'. The village's population was composed of families which had migrated from other regions as well as from other parts of the district. The colliery company sought to counteract the disruptive effects of the migration by acting as patron and sponsor to most of the social activities that took place in the village. It also sought to

⁶⁵ Report of Wrexham Rural District Council meeting: North Wales Guardian, 3 May 1929.

⁶⁶ M.O.H. 1929 - 1931.

⁶⁷ Even into the post-nationalization era, see: CROH D/NM/1107, Gordon Nicholls (Area Director), North Wales Area Manpower Survey (1959).

⁶⁸ Wrexham Leader, 15 Aug 1930.

⁶⁹ Wrexham Leader, 26 June 1931.

co-opt the efforts of other agencies and offered plots of land to religious congregations at a nominal rent. The village became host to a wide range of religious denominations.

2/ / The nationalization of the coal industry in 1947 had little immediate impact on Hafod and Llay Main Collieries. Both pits were already extensively mechanised and were used to being administered through a bureaucratic and hierarchical system of management. The most immediate consequence of nationalization for Llay Main was the beginning of a long deferred scheme for colliery re-organisation. The Number One shaft was deeped still further to 3 000 feet and new tunnels were driven to follow the workings to the East and thus simplify the haulage system.^{70, 71} The underground workings at Hafod were extensively remodelled in 1957.⁷² Both pits moved away from hand-getting and began working faces with the new shearer technology. In 1964 Hafod Colliery installed self-advancing supports on several faces. These innovations effectively abolished the traditional role of the face worker and meant that the miner was a machine minder and a technician rather than a labourer.

Both Hafod and Llay Main Collieries were closed in the sixties. The era of coal at any price had ended in the late fifties as cheap fuel oil challenged the supremacy of coal and coal stocks began to accumulate for the first time since before the war. The Coal Board attempted to reconstruct the industry on a smaller scale. The massive contraction, from 698 collieries in 1960 to 299 in 1970, has no peer in the history of any other industry.⁷³ In view of the scale of the slaughter the nomination of

⁷⁰ CROH CB/15/14, G. Nicholls (Area Manager) and F.G. Glossop (Divisional Production Director), Llay Main Colliery Reorganisation (December 1950).

⁷¹ N.C.B. Public Relations Department, Western Area, Colliery Profile - Llay Main (1979).

⁷² N.C.B. Public Relations Department, Western Area, Colliery Profile - Hafod (n.d.).

⁷³ Tony Hall, King Coal (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 112.

individual pits often seemed arbitrary. Llay Main was the first of the local pits to succumb to this round of closures, but was an obvious candidate. The colliery's original ^{9 potential} ~~take~~ had been limited by faults to the ^{l.c} North and ^{l.c} West and by the extent of the workings of Gresford Colliery to ^{l.c} the South. The pit's development, particularly the sinking of the shafts at the top of the West - East downward gradient of the seams, had been intended to facilitate a quick return on the large investment rather than to accommodate a coherent long term plan of exploitation.⁷⁴ The exhaustion of important seams led to the the run-down of the workforce in 1958 - 59. The ^{7/} contraction from a pit raising 600,000 tons per annum with a nominal ^{7/} complement of 2,100 men underground in the mid-fifties, to a pit employing ^{7/7/} fewer than 1,000 men raising 278,000 tons, saw no real diminution in the overheads incurred by the colliery's size and depth.⁷⁵ Llay Main closed on March 11 1966.

The news that the future of Hafod Colliery was in doubt came as a profound shock to the workforce in July 1967. Though the colliery had accumulated a large deficit since nationalization, it was not a technically difficult pit and the resources invested in its recent modernisation seemed to promise increased productivity.⁷⁶ The workforce based their campaign to save the colliery around a productivity drive and the prospects of a new development in a largely unexploited seam. The pit was included in a number reprieved by the Wilson government but was eventually closed on March 9 1968. The workforce was bewildered that despite the sincerity of their efforts, the strength of their case and what initially seemed to be a positive reception, the Coal Board was ultimately intransigent. Feelings of bitterness were compounded by the fact that what they viewed as a betrayal

⁷⁴ Nicholls and Glossop, Llay Main Colliery Reorganisation.

⁷⁵ Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire, pp. 74 - 75; N.C.B. Public Relations Department, Western Area, Colliery Profile - Llay Main (1979); Manpower and production estimates/ Coal Trades Directory and Colliery Yearbook (1951 - 65).

⁷⁶ Tom Ellis, 'Death of a Colliery', Trans. Denbighshire Historical Society Vol. 21 (1972)/ p. 96.

had happened under a Labour government.77

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Since both Rhos and Llay were unequivocally mining communities there was widespread disquiet at the disappearance of their economic raison d'etre. Miners were redeployed to surviving local collieries ~~while other~~ men went to the steelworks at Shotton and Brymbo. Others found employment in the light manufacturing industries that were first attracted to the area by government initiatives after the Second World War. The last large pit in the area was Gresford Colliery which was closed in 1974. Bersham Colliery, the last local pit, closed in 1987. Though a few Wrexham men work for Richard Budge at the privatised Point of Ayr Colliery on the coast near Prestatyn, most of the men of Rhos and Llay today commute to work in the nearby towns and on the industrial estates.

 77 Interview with Joe Williams.

Chapter Two: The Community.

outlined/ Having examinedⁱ the respective origins of the two villages in terms of the broad geographical, economic and social factors, it is worth examining how the different origins of the two communities were expressed in their respective social organisations. Unlike metropolitan areas and more prominent industrial regions, the communities of the North East Wales coalfield were not subject to intense examination by the authorities or [^]by other contemporary observers. A limited amount of evidence about the differing rates of the retention of the Welsh language in the two communities is available and differences in social organisation can be inferred from these indices. However, these differences are most apparent in the sources produced within the communities. While Rhos and Llay were both mining communities and therefore had a great deal in common, interviews with their residents revealed that they were very different places. Some of these differences can be accounted for by reference to obvious given and external factors, these being the differing lengths of time the two communities had been in existence, the radically different manner of their construction, the origins of their immigrant populations and the degree of influence exercised by the employers. To account for other differences we must consider the role the inhabitants played in shaping the communities they lived in.

Neighbourhoods and Vicinal Stratification.

Rhos was created haphazardly by a collision of economic and social circumstances at the end of the eighteenth century. Since the influence of local employers on the village was limited and the agents of the state were virtually absent, the village largely defined itself. In Llay, the colliery company created a new community and sought to extend its influence through a conscious scheme of town planning and by sponsoring the activities of local voluntary organisations. This chapter will attempt to examine the differences between Rhos and Llay in these areas of local social life. However, the determinist view that the character of communities is conditioned by political and economic circumstances and by the initiative of elites affords a limited perspective. Interviewing in the area made it clear that there were also profound subjective differences in the

perception and the representation of the two communities by their inhabitants. It is therefore important to examine how the self-images of the two communities were constructed.

Oral history is a methodology well suited to attempting an 'ethnography of locality'. It is possible to capture, in the words of ordinary local inhabitants, the means by which people 'experience[d] and express[ed] their differences from others'.¹ Inhabitants' perceptions of their own communities, each others' communities and the differences between them, were socially constructed.² Which is to say they they were constructed mutually, and to a great extent, unconsciously, as a by-product of routine social intercourse.³ The identities forged in such contexts were sometimes more self-consciously expressed and this chapter intends to examine how features of local social life such as language, social customs and participation in local voluntary organisations were perceived and used in explicit formulations of communal identity. The exploration of ~~the~~ perceptions and constructions of difference will be ~~the~~ considered in later chapters.

Even a small community may contain a large number of groups which will seek to influence ~~its~~ presentation of its identity. ~~Even in a small/~~ community, there may be many media through which these groups will seek to expedite their aims. This chapter will particularly consider oral discourses, public rituals and local journalism. It is important to realise that oral culture was not a monolithic medium - it was layered, multiform

¹ Anthony Cohen, 'Belonging - the Experience of Culture', in A. Cohen (ed.), Belonging - Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures (Manchester, 1982), p. 2, p. 12.

² Anthony Cohen, 'Of Symbols and Boundaries, or, Does Ertie's Greatcoat Hold the Key?', in A. Cohen (ed.), Symbolising Boundaries - Identity and Diversity in British Cultures (Manchester, 1986), p. 17.

³ See: Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Harmondsworth, 1967).

and it articulated the discourses of many discrete groups. John Berger remarked that 'every village's portrait of itself is constructed ... out of words, spoken and remembered: out of opinions, stories, eyewitness reports, legends, comments and hearsay.'⁴ The oral evocations of local identity considered in this chapter ranged from the proud utterances of local leaders to the kind of gossip and banter traded at street corners. We might extend Berger's observations that communities are constructed out of spoken words to say that they can also be built out of written words. The discourse about local identity can straddle the oral and written media and at least in Rhos, local journalism both reflected and extended local discussions about communal identity. Both villages were arenas for public rituals, which were self consciously invested with symbolism by their participants and sponsors, and whose significance was read and variously interpreted by their spectators. It is apparent that the process of abstracting contemporary experience into popular memory and into ideological constructs which both express and contribute to the cohesion of the local community continues to the present day. The village of Rhos particularly, continues to celebrate its past as a mining community. While historians are frequently wary of sources which appear to be tainted with nostalgia, it is apparent that, at least in this case, there is a substantial degree of continuity between the past and present functions of stories about the past of the community - Berger noted that a community's picture of itself is 'a continuous portrait, work on it never stops'.⁵

Rhosllanerchrugog.

It is often observed that communities are marked by the circumstances in which they grow. Many observers and visitors have agreed in their impressions about the appearance of Rhos - a muddled collection of closely packed houses. J.H. Jones, the editor of a Welsh language periodical, described the Rhos he found when he came to adjudicate at a village

⁴ John Berger, Pig Earth (1985), p. 9: quoted in Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past 2nd. edn (Oxford, 1989), p. 140.

⁵ Loc. cit.

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eisteddfod in July 1919:

The shapes of the houses and the streets of Rhos are strange - very strange. The village would surely look very peculiar if seen from an aeroplane! Most of the people have succeeded in building their houses where they please, having the shape they please and facing whichever direction they please. One house seems to be within spitting distance of the next and I am sure that there is not one figure in the whole of Geometry that could completely define Rhos. Rhos is the most visual living proof that the world has ever seen that man has a free will, because no laws and bye-laws imposed from outside authorities would ever have succeeded in building houses in this manner.^{6,7}

The architecture of Rhos was indelibly affected by the circumstances of its construction. In the nineteenth century, the houses were built by their occupants and village houses began to evolve a vernacular style which was initially dictated by the skills and financial circumstances of their inhabitants and the local availability of building materials.⁸ A fairly consistent official interest in these dwellings was ensured by the fact that they represented a considerable sanitary nuisance.

⁶ Y Brython, 14 July 1919, translated by Dennis W. Gilpin and quoted in D.W. Gilpin, Rhosllanerchrugog - Casgliad o Luniau/A Volume of Pictures, Cyf.2/ Vol. 2. (Wrexham, 1992), Introduction.

⁷ See Plate 1 in Appendix Four.

⁸ For a discussion of the evolution of a vernacular architectural style in the Welsh rural context see: Eurwyn Williams, Hand Made Homes - Dwellings of the Rural Poor In Wales (Cardiff, 1988), and Trefor M. Owen, 'Social Perspectives in Welsh Vernacular Architecture', in D. Moore (ed.), The Irish Sea Province in Archaeology and History (1970). Despite the obvious parallels and ~~despite~~ the fact that industrial workers in several areas of Wales often kept one foot on the land, there is no outstanding study of vernacular architecture in an industrial setting.

When the education sub-commissioner inspected Rhos in person in 1847, he discovered that many of the village's cottages consisted of a 'single room of nine to twelve feet square; others having in additions a sort of lean-to, forming a separate place to sleep in'.⁹ He was told that the houses had been built by their inhabitants. The roofs of the houses were of wattle and sometimes of straw. The walls were probably of stone.

The vernacular style used in the village probably evolved from the pattern of the hovels thrown up by the first squatters who encroached on the moors. George Borrow stumbled on a small settlement of 'grimy looking huts' on the moors in 1854¹⁰ and small single roomed huts built of river stone were still being occupied in the area at the beginning of the twentieth century.^{11, 12}

This basic design, a single storied cottage of one or two rooms, sometimes supplemented by a lean-to annexe, was reiterated in Rhos in more durable materials throughout the nineteenth century. The materials used in construction began to include the produce of the clayworks being opened in the locality in the mid-nineteenth century and cottages were constructed with brick walls and with tiled and slated roofs.¹³

-/ In the interwar period, the chamber house or 'house and chamber', a style described by the Medical Officer of Health as 'a bungalow type ... of ancient construction', was remarked upon as being particularly

⁹ Educ. Rept., p. 530.

¹⁰ George Borrow, Wild Wales (1862), p. 357.

¹¹ At Newtown, Pen-Y-Cae: Gordon Emery, Walks in Clwyd - Trevor Tower and Frozen Clock (1993).

¹² The settlement was recalled by Mrs. Ann Wilson, whose father was the water bailiff for the Wrexham and East Denbighshire Water Company in the first decade of the century: Mrs. Ann Wilson, WMP C/1984/109.

¹³ Michael Dillon, Bricks, Tiles and Terracotta (Wrexham, 1985), p. 9; see also: Ifor Edwards, 'Gazetteer of Clayworks in the Wrexham and Ruabon District', Trans. of the Denbighshire Historical Society Vol. 36 (1987).

characteristic of the Rhos area.¹⁴ The chamber house generally consisted of 'a one storied building containing a general living room and leading from it a bedroom'.¹⁵ It was estimated in 1936 that there were at least 750 examples of the type in the village.¹⁶

The Medical Officer of Health did not consider that this design was intrinsically evil but deplored the typical condition and situation of the houses and the general degree of overcrowding. He also criticised the small dimensions of some of the rooms, which scarcely exceed the dimensions of those in the hovels inspected by the Education Sub-Commissioner in 1846.¹⁷ The arrangement of the dwellings left no doubt that they had originally been constructed on any piece of land which was available.¹⁸ Older houses ^{dominated} congregated in particular parts of the village and were frequently built onto one another in arrangements of rows and courts which the Medical Officer of Health thought resembled 'the patterns of Chinese characters'.¹⁹ The insanitary nature of these courts was aggravated by the fact that the privy midden was a near universal feature of such houses and that the family pig was a staple of the domestic economy. The arrangement of the houses complicated the sewerage of the district and not least because many independent-minded householders constructed unauthorised channels attaching their properties to the municipal drains.²⁰

Though many of the village's chamber houses were indeed of 'antique construction', fresh examples of the type were still being constructed at the beginning of the century. The typical occasion for such an undertaking

¹⁴ M.O.H. 1920; M.O.H. 1925.

¹⁵ See Plate 2 in Appendix Four.

¹⁶ M.O.H. 1936.

¹⁷ M.O.H. 1920.

¹⁸ M.O.H. 1934.

¹⁹ M.O.H. 1925.

²⁰ Report of 8 Jan 1932 Meeting of the Health Committee of the Wrexham Rural District Council: Rhos Herald, 9 Jan 1932; report of 10 June Meeting of the Health Committee of Wrexham Rural District Council: Rhos Herald, 11 June 1932.

the formation of a new household:

After a few months of married life the young husband's ambition is to build himself a chamber house. He himself does most of the work.²¹

- / The fact that Rhosllanerchrugog had a very high proportion of owner occupiers can be attributed to the village's tradition of self-building.²² Local inhabitants remember that home-ownership had a considerable cachet in the village.²³ As well as bolstering respectability it gave a degree of independence and financial security which undoubtedly contributed to the resilience of the community in the big strikes of the twenties.

- / The villages of the colliery districts also contained a group of working class rentiers who invested savings, inheritances and, occasionally, compensation payments, in bricks and mortar. These petty landlords were sometimes literally the neighbours of their tenants.²⁴ While they depended heavily on the rents they derived from their houses, their limited means meant they could often not afford to maintain their properties.²⁵ The Medical Officer of Health blamed this group for a good deal of the squalor found in the village and considered that 'the poor landlord' was 'a danger to the community.'²⁶

Vernacular architecture was eventually superceded by pattern built brick villas. Many of these houses dated from the thirties, when Hafod Colliery returned to full time working after its period of closure. Between 1930 and

²¹ Manchester Evening Chronicle cited in: Rhos Herald, 3 May 1902.

²² M.O.H. 1936.

²³ John William Jones, CROH NT/789 No. 4.

²⁴ The father of one local man was disabled in an accident at Hafod Colliery and he invested the compensation money which remained after a number of failed business adventures in two houses: one was for his family and the other was eventually let for rent: Jane Pugh, A Most Expensive Prisoner - Tom Jones Rhosllanerchrugog's Biography (Denbigh, 1988), p. 25.

²⁵ M.O.H. 1931.

²⁶ M.O.H. 1921.

1937, some 162 private houses were built in the village.²⁷ Though some of these houses were erected by speculative builders, a good number of them were apparently constructed by families who decided to consolidate their fortunes in a period of relative prosperity.²⁸

Apart from the streets erected in Johnstown from the later nineteenth century, the area possesses few of the terraces characteristic of mining villages in other districts. Villas were built singly and as semi-detached houses but nevertheless stood in close ranks along the village's roads. Despite the better standards of construction these houses were still troubled by the legacy of the village's early construction. Self-building still implied narrow streets and unmetalled roads which the Rural District Council refused to adopt until householders met the expense of having them improved. These roads and alleys deteriorated into quagmires in the winter months,²⁹ and unsurprisingly 'Rhos roads' were a consistent feature of the agenda of the Parish Council and were a frequent point of difference between the village and the Rural District Council.

Since the village was an organically developed community one would intuitively expect that the population of Rhos would be balanced between the different age groups. However, from the twenties to the sixties, the birth rate of the village was consistently below the average for the Rural district - a fact which suggests that the population of the village was on average older than the norm. This would tend to confirm the claims made by respondents and other observers that the young people of the village tended to leave the area to improve their prospects.

²⁷ M.O.H. 1930 - 1937.

²⁸ John William Jones, CROH NT/789 No. 4.

²⁹ One householder complained in 1932 that Osborne Street in the moonlight resembled nothing so much as a Canaletto rendering of the Grand Canal in Venice: (Letter from T.W. Jones, a member of Rhos Parish Council, to Prof Share Jones, Chairman of the Health Committee of the Wrexham Rural District Council, reprinted in: Rhos Herald, 16 Jan 1932.

2/ The population of Rhos peaked at 11,139 in 1921 and declined thereafter as the economic prospects of the area began to decline.³⁰ Despite a small revival after the war it continued to decline and had reached approximately eight thousand by the early seventies. An important factor in this decline was the removal of population from Rhos itself to estates in neighbouring parishes. It was observed that it was the younger sections of the population which were affected most by this removal and that it was the older part of the population, particularly the pensioners, who remained faithful to their old cottages properties in the core of the village.³¹

7/7/61 The village of Rhos has been described as a warren³², a web³³ and a maze.³⁴ Local inhabitants were of course used to picking a path through the maze of yards and alleys.³⁵ Though the housing of the village was very mixed in character and situation, there was, at least to a discerning local eye, a scheme of vicinal segregation in the village. Osborne Street was, despite its unmetalled road, a very desirable address. One respondent estimated that the street must have had the highest concentration of 'deacons per square yard' in the village.³⁶ The area known as the Gornel was, on the other hand, indisputably, roughest and poorest area in the village.³⁷ The houses in the Gornel district were predominantly of the small and old fashioned type and the dwellings of the area were to suffer badly in subsequent slum clearance.³⁸ The two addresses were icons which

³⁰ Frank Holloway, 'The Interwar Depression in the Wrexham Coalfield', Trans. of the Denbighshire Historical Society Vol. 27 (1978), pp. 58 - 59.

³¹ M.O.H. 1956; M.O.H. 1959.

³² Cymric Mytton Davies, 'Where We Live': Wrexham Leader, 14 Apr 1958.

³³ The adjective is employed by the author of a romance with a Rhos setting: Vera Wynn Davies, 'Tales of a Mining Town', Wrexham Leader, 18 Dec 1920.

³⁴ Loc. cit.

³⁵ Mrs. Blodwen Whalley, WMP C/1984/45.

³⁶ Interview with Tom Ellis.

³⁷ David Williams, WMP C/1984/141.

³⁸ Interview with Ken Aspinall.

defined two poles of village society:

Some used to be called swanky because they lived in Osborne Street and others was in the Gornel - they'd go round with a scarf and whippet, where the others would go with a bowler hat and an umbrella.³⁹

Urban villages, communities which claimed the allegiance of their inhabitants as well as enclosing the greatest part of their social world, have been described in the large towns and cities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴⁰ Even in a single parish the size of Rhos there were distinct areas which were aware of their own identity as communities. As well as areas like the Gornel, there were larger entities which defined themselves as separate communities, such as Pant, Ponciau and Johnstown.⁴¹

Colloquially, Ponciau and Pant were usually subsumed within 'Rhos'. Pant lay near the heart of the village while Ponciau was located on lower ground at the North-Eastern corner of the parish. Ponciau was separated from the heart of the village by the Ponciau Banks. The inhabitants of the area were sensitive enough about its status as a community to convene a meeting in 1932 which canvassed the possibility of changing its name. It was eventually decided to change the spelling of the original name from the archaic and ugly 'Ponkey' to the more mellifluous 'Ponciau'.⁴² This change reaffirmed the Welsh identity of the area - there is no harsh 'K' in the Welsh language - but apparently also relieved the district's inhabitants of the stigma of living in a community which could, with no great expenditure of creativity, be phonetically linked with base creatures such as the

³⁹ Interview with Jack Read.

⁴⁰ Standish Meacham, A Life Apart - the English Working Class 1890 - 1914 (London, 1977), pp. 52 - 53; Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (Harmondsworth, 1958), pp. 58 - 59.

⁴¹ See the sketch map of Rhos.

⁴² Rhos Herald, Sept 17 1932; report of the meeting held on 27 Sept 1932: Wrexham Leader, 30 Sept 1932.

'donkey' and the 'monkey'.⁴³

? separate

The architecture of Ponciau had much in common with that in the core area of the village and the area shared many of Rhos's sanitary problems. Johnstown, on the other hand, which lay at the foot of Gutter Hill, was different in outward appearance and seemed like a ~~very different~~ community. Johnstown owed its existence to a very different pattern of house construction and one observer who wrote in the mid-thirties coupled the difference in character between Rhos and Johnstown with this difference in architecture. He noted that as soon as the visitor passed over the railway crossing at the foot of the hill:

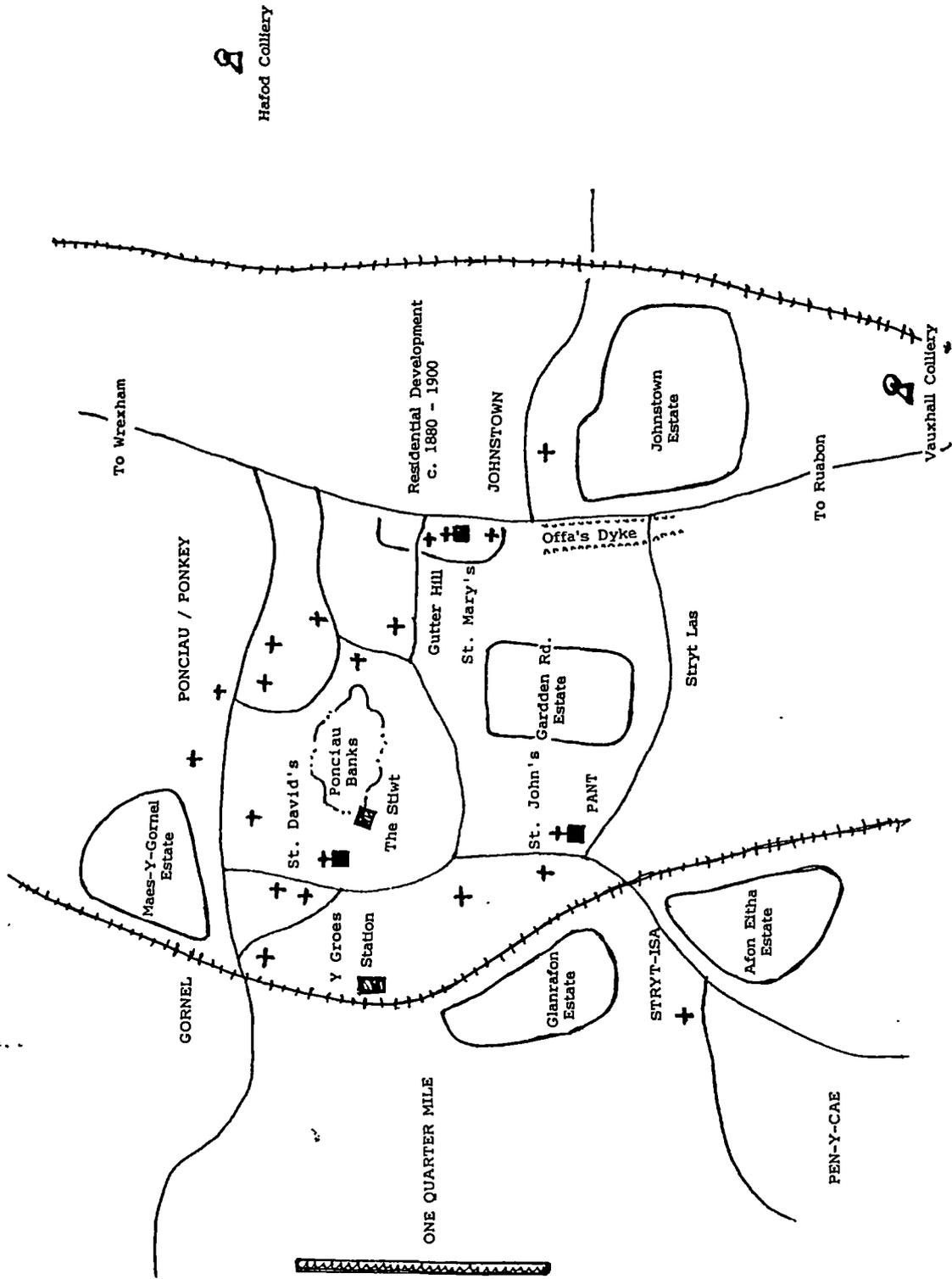
... one felt that Johnstown was a different community. The houses were more pretentious in appearance and the streets were well planned. It was more residential and more English in attitude and language.⁴⁴

? regularly

The fact that Johnstown was a well built and well sewered area encouraged a sense of grievance among its ratepayers who felt that they were being obliged, by an accident of geography, to bear the rates incurred by the needs of the more insanitary parts of the parish. Johnstown's representatives on the Parish Council and the District Council consistently lobbied for a lower rate. J. Tysilio Jones, the builder responsible for constructing many of the houses in Johnstown was, as the owner of a local timberyard, a large individual ratepayer. He ~~consistently~~ urged Rhos householders to shoulder their own responsibilities and see to the

⁴³ This was apparently a telling factor: Rhos Herald, 15 Oct 1932; Rhos Herald, 17 Sept 1932.

⁴⁴ A local newspaper correspondent quoted in Silin, 'Looking Back', Wrexham Leader, 19 Dec 1986.



SKETCH MAP OF RHOSLLANERCHRUGOG.

Showing neighbourhoods, landmarks, main thoroughfares and selected places of worship.

? improvement of their own properties.⁴⁵ Oppressed ratepayers considered secession and canvassed having Johnstown designated as a separate ward at the very least, (on several occasions during the thirties and forties)⁴⁶ In 1938, one Rhos commentator expressed both Rhos's sense of betrayal and the alienation between the two areas of village parish by topically, if tactlessly, describing Johnstown as 'Rhos's Sudetenland'.⁴⁷ It is apparent that the inhabitants of Johnstown smarted under the charges of snobbery levelled against them by the inhabitants of Rhos in this period.⁴⁸ They frequently claimed that it was they who were oppressed by the overbearing presence of their larger and more famous neighbour.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ See the Report of a Rural District Council Meeting: Rhos Herald, 21 Jan 1911.

⁴⁶ Rhos Herald, 31 Dec 1938; Rhos Herald, 19 Oct 1946.

⁴⁷ Rhos Herald, 31 Dec 1938.

⁴⁸ Loc. cit.

⁴⁹ R.B. Barratt, A Short History of the Village of Johnstown Ms. (1962, with additional notes, 1969, 1970), Foreword.

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Llay Main Model Village.

The colliery company used the architecture of the village it constructed as an armature to support the clay of the community it was attempting to model. Though the architects' original intentions undeniably shaped the experiences of community enjoyed by the inhabitants of the village, it is equally apparent that their aims were constrained by the feelings of anomie and rootlessness inevitable after the reception of a large scale migration. The village remained a turbulent community for several decades after its foundation and few felt able to discern the growth of a community spirit. Many of the villagers disliked the hierarchicial scheme of vicinal segregation imposed by the planning of the village but, equally, many accepted it and internalised the judgements it implied.

The village was laid out in a complicated series of avenues and closes: a compromise between the scope afforded by the vacant land of Llay Park and the constraints created by the existing pattern of roads which served the hamlet. The core area of the village was ^{insert} laid out on a symmetrical pattern oriented round the North West - South East axis traced by the village's main street, First Avenue. First Avenue led from the main road which passed through the area, down to the central square which contained the village's shops, the Anglican Church and the Church Institute. These roads were surrounded by the oval of streets described by Second, Third and Seventh Avenues and School Road. Most of the village's other amenities, including the schools and the two largest Nonconformist chapels lay on this circuit of roads. A further concentric semi-circular avenue lay aligned to this pattern, to the South East. Other roads laid out to the West and the East connected this core area to blocks of houses built along and in the interstices of the existing network of roads.⁵⁰

Consciously placing the amenities of the village in its centre and not associating them with a confluence of thoroughfares as would have been the case in an organically developed community gave the village an insular

⁵⁰ See the sketch map detailing the early residential development of Llay Main Model Village and Plate Three in Appendix Four.

feel. One visitor who came to the the village in the late fifties found the effect disconcerting: 'You could hardly find a more ruled-off and trimmed-up village anywhere than Llay.' He described the pattern of the village's roads as resembling 'a gigantic brick maze'.⁵¹ However, the architects were building for the needs of the colliery company rather than for the edification of the casual visitor and the scheme behind the village's design was clearly discernable to its occupants.

The architects attempted to defeat expectations about mining communities by building dwellings inspired by the styles of domestic architecture developed to suit middle-class tastes. The 1958 visitor was surprised to find a pit village composed of 'streets of discreet houses - prim, semi-detached villas, blocks of four - sedate behind their carefully trimmed hedges and little patches of lawn.'⁵² Though the village's architects wished to remove from the miner the stigma of being a slum dweller, they did not repudiate hierarchical social relationships and attempted to inscribe the social hierarchy of the pit in the architecture of the village.

l.c
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The village was situated on a Southwards facing slope. At the head of the slope, near the colliery itself, and adjacent to the land where the Welfare Institute ~~was later to stand~~, was the entrance to First Avenue - a broad road lined with large and spacious houses. The architects contrived to add variety to the vista by repeating seven basic cottage types throughout the village.⁵³ However, as the visitor progresses down the slope through the village, it is apparent that the houses become smaller and the blocks of houses become longer. Some houses are differentiated from others by their favourable situation and by minor differences in ornamental detail, such as the shallow pediments which adorn some of the front doors.

One of the most important distinctions was the incorporation of a second

⁵¹ Cymric Mytton Davies, 'Where We Live - the Garden City in the Coalfield', Wrexham Leader, 6 May 1958.

⁵² Loc. cit.

⁵³ Chester Chronicle, 28 May 1921.

living room or parlour in some of the designs. Despite conscious attempts to foster a family centred social life through their designs, the reforming architects of the Garden City movement disliked placing parlours in working class homes. They shared the attitude of the Victorian social reformers to whom the closed parlour seemed a wilful extravagance. The maintenance of an empty room as a status symbol, display case and arena for solemn family ritual offended utilitarian ideas about the appropriate use of domestic space.⁵⁴ The Womens' Housing Sub-Committee which was appointed to the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1918 faithfully represented the desires of the working class women they consulted and described a widespread aspiration to the possession of a parlour as a domestic amenity.⁵⁵ John Tudor Walters affected a more liberal attitude towards the idea of a second living room than some architects but was nevertheless adamant that the parlour should be for use rather than display.⁵⁶

The social implications of residence in a particular area of the village were widely recognised by its inhabitants. Senior management figures lived in several large houses on the periphery of the community which generally predated the construction of the colliery village. At least in the twenties, the colliery company tried to encourage junior officials to move into the village.⁵⁷ The larger houses at the top end of the village, Rackery Villas, a row of houses near the colliery, and First Avenue, were intended to accommodate officials, office staff and their families. Other important figures in village life found residences there. The village Doctor lived in 'Sefton', a large house at the top of First Avenue, and the Anglican Curate and later the Catholic Priest found accommodation on the

⁵⁴ F.M.L. Thompson, The Rise of Respectable Society - A Social History of Victorian Britain (London, 1988), pp. 194 - 195.

⁵⁵ Dierdre Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty - Women Between the Wars 1918 - 1939 (London, 1989), p. 93.

⁵⁶ John Tudor Walters, Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider Questions of Building Construction in Connection with the Provision of Dwellings for the Working Classes Local Government Boards for England, Wales and Scotland, d. 9191 (London, 1918), p. 25.

⁵⁷ Herbert Davies, WMP C/1984/101.

Avenue before the construction of the Vicarage and the Presbytery after the war. Though larger houses naturally required larger rents, there does appear to have been a conscious scheme of discrimination in the allocation of the housing stock.

While some villagers disliked the scheme of social gradation it was firmly implanted in local social culture and formed an explicit part of the basis of their judgements about their neighbours. The arrangement of the Avenues and their unimaginative nomenclature meant that a family's degree of respectability could almost be expressed in a numerical form. One woman remembered her father's decided attitude:

He said, 'We're not going below Ninth Avenue!'⁵⁸

The corollary of the respectable top end of the village was its reputedly rough and unrespectable bottom end. These streets were certainly less desirable addresses since the houses on the lower part of the slope were smaller and remote from the amenities in the core of the village. Some of these streets earned derogatory nicknames which had a wide currency in the village:

Well Beech Tree wasn't too bad but New House Avenue was! And we had a bus conductor and he lives in First Avenue and he used to say when we were coming along by the Co-op 'Sixpence in the pound!'

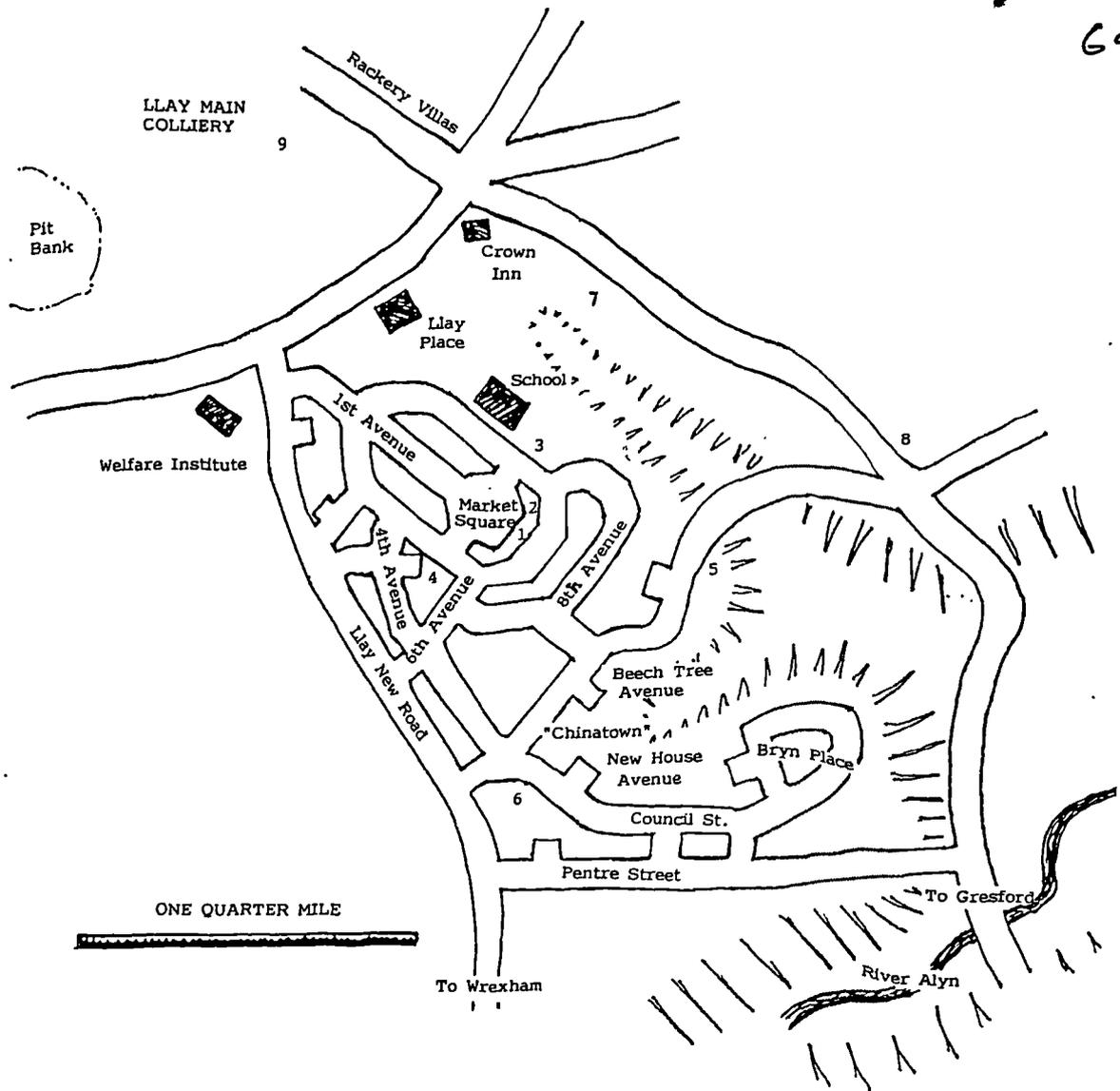
'Chinatown!' he called Beech Tree and he called New House Avenue 'Little Hell'!

And there was about twenty children there between two houses, and more than that, oh aye! more than that. I think it's quietened down a bit now though.⁵⁹

Nineteenth century observers had deep reservations about the nature of working class family and neighbourhood life. Some scholars have discerned that ostensible middle concerns about hygiene and propriety disguised a

⁵⁸ Interview with Mrs. MacNee.

⁵⁹ Interview with Mrs. Maggie Williams.



The early development of Llay Main Model Village.

The Avenues: "Llay Park" Colliery Housing Estate 1921 - 1924.

Council Street, Pentre Street, Bryn Place: Llay Council Housing Estate 1929 - 1931.

Sites of village places of worship:

1. St. Martin's, Church in Wales.
2. St. Martin's Church Institute.
3. Emmanuel, English Speaking Calvinistic Methodist.
4. Primitive Methodist.
5. Glanaber, Welsh Speaking Calvinistic Methodist.
6. Bethel, English Speaking Baptist.
7. Welsh Speaking Wesleyan.
8. Former site of Primitive Methodist Chapel.
9. Catholic Church.

-/ basic unease with working class culture. This unease was due to a simple
 -/ lack of congruence between working class culture and the mores of the
 -/ emerging middle class society which enshrined the concepts of privacy and
 domesticity.⁶⁰

-/ It was certainly true that middle class observers disliked the
 -/ orientation of working class social life towards the street and the
 neighbourhood. They often equated privacy and aloofness with
 respectability. They attributed the demoralising nature of slum life to the
 ease with which inhabitants could initiate casual social contacts and
 thought that extensive interpersonal relations between slum dwellers were
 likely to curb aspirations towards escape and could perpetuate the sullen
 culture of the slum.⁶¹ Observers also disliked dwellings which were
 characterised by extensive common areas and a lack of differentiation into
 separate spatial domains which delineated separate domestic activities.
 Roderick Lawrence detected a consistent trend in the architecture of
 European social housing in the second half of the nineteenth century which
 sought to 'generate social reform by removing promiscuity'. Apartments and
 blocks of houses were constructed with progressively fewer common areas and
 fewer common services. He argued that the trend to locate services,
 particularly sanitary facilities, inside the precincts of the home was the
 result of conscious attempts to restrict opportunities for casual social
 intercourse and to suppress collective living practices.⁶²

The inclusion of toilet facilities and a domestic water supply to the
 colliery houses eliminated what had been the most common contexts for
 casual interaction with neighbours. The houses of Llay were widely spaced
 and their interior design included ample room for family association.

⁶⁰ Jonas Frykman and Orvar Lofgren, Culture Builders - A Historical Anthropology of [Swedish] Middle Class Life (New Brunswick, 1990), pp. 160 ff., pp. 174 - 177.

⁶¹ Standish Meacham, A Life Apart - The English Working Class 1890 - 1914 (London, 1977), pp. 38 - 39.

⁶² Roderick J. Lawrence, 'Integrating Architectural, Social and Housing History', Urban History Yearbook No. 19 (1992), pp. 54 ff.

Despite being built as multiple dwellings - semi-detached houses, blocks and rows - the entrances to the dwellings were widely separated. Entrances were separated from the street by the large gardens. The 'superblock' system, characteristic of garden village designs, was used in the village.⁶³ Blocks of cottages were arranged to enclose large areas of land. Whereas in this period, most urban housing developments used backland for thoroughfares or common amenity areas, in Llay it was designated as private space and was used to create the large allotment gardens.

Space was the most significant amenity deployed in the design of the village. The Chester Chronicle correspondent was perhaps over-optimistic in expressing the view that the Llay area 'might be mistaken for a bit of Surrey', but was nevertheless sure that the new village effectively dispelled the sombre pictures of 'bleak hillside mining villages where dwellers lead cheerless lives in squalid hovels' conjured by the witnesses summoned before the Sankey Commission. He anticipated that the new village would be 'a miners' paradise'.⁶⁴

One village inhabitant previously used to cramped accommodation in Flintshire reflected on the less intimate life of his new neighbourhood in the following terms:

... with the housing being spaced out as they were, it had a cooling effect on it, emotions, to me. You see when you're in a street like Coronation Street, you're either very friendly as it shows it there or you're strangers.

And if you're strangers you're [always] under suspicion for something, but here, with the spacing you've got now, your model village, there's plenty of fresh air between the families and in between the houses. So you'd have a row, you know, the pots were flying, the windows going, but there was plenty of room for the noise to quieten

⁶³ Edward Hubbard and Michael Shippobottom, A Guide to Port Sunlight Village (Liverpool, 1988), p. 12.

⁶⁴ Chester Chronicle, 28 May 1921.

down before it got to anyone.⁶⁵

Though the size and sound construction of the cottages and the presence of the full range of domestic amenities was fully appreciated by the new tenants, the design of some of the houses was disliked by their occupants, and most particularly by the housewives. In 1920 there was a protracted correspondence about the design of the new houses in the Wrexham Leader, after a column composed ~~from~~ contributions from 'duly accredited members and representatives of the Labour Party'⁶⁷ criticised the fact that the Rural District Council had approved designs for some of the cottages despite the fact they only provided for one door.⁶⁶ While the correspondence was based on the misconception that the colliery company's initial decision to erect 'one eyed shanties' meant that the new houses would be monuments to the pervasiveness of the view that 'any kind of shack is good enough for the working classes'⁶⁷, it is apparent that house design was a theme which possessed great symbolic resonance for local people. The Rural District Council was prompted to contact the Ministry of Health with a view to having the plans amended.⁶⁸

Despite this concession, some of the houses in the corner blocks described strange shapes and the alignment of other houses defied the intuitive expectations of their tenants. One woman remembered her mother's bemused response to a house which apparently had no front entrance: the two doors being located at the side and at the rear.⁶⁹

Though they apparently disliked promiscuous social intercourse in the local neighbourhoods, the village's architects did attempt to incorporate a natural meeting point into their design for the village. The centre of the

⁶⁵ Interview with Felix Griffiths.

⁶⁶ 'From the Standpoint of Labour', Wrexham Leader, 10 July 1920.

⁶⁷ 'From the Standpoint of Labour', Wrexham Leader, 24 July 1920.

⁶⁸ Report of a Wrexham Rural District Council meeting held on 16 July 1920: Wrexham Leader, 17 July 1920; Colliery Guardian, 31 July 1920.

⁶⁹ Beryl Baigent, "A Lovely Ugly Place" Croeso I Llay - Living There Ms. (1992), p. 99.

village was an area which had clearly been marked out for association. The area at the end of First Avenue was apparently intended to be a market square and was provided with a small stage to facilitate public meetings. However, this experiment apparently having failed, the square was laid out as a public garden at some time around 1930. The garden was maintained by the Colliery Company and later by the Coal Board.

6. 2/they The Council houses were laid out in an independent scheme of roads to the South of the model village. ~~The Council houses~~ were remote from the village amenities and the two developments were physically separated by a shallow gully known as the Dingle. This isolation meant that some of the inhabitants of the Council estate felt excluded from the mainstream of village life. The 'Council' and the 'Park' were distinct entities. The Council estate had an intimate associational and neighbourhood life of its own.⁷⁰

? 7 The new community had a raw edge and took a long time to settle. Some respondents compared the village to a gold rush town.⁷¹ After the development of the colliery village, population in the parish of Llay grew quickly. In the last decades of the twentieth century the population fluctuated around five hundred. The census survey revealed that there were 502 inhabitants in 1901 and ~~there were~~ 573 in 1911. The latter total probably included the workmen who were sinking bores to test the continuity of the new coalfield. Nevertheless in the 1921 there were 766 inhabitants and in 1931 the population had grown to [^]3672.

10 The Markham group had signalled their intention of recruiting mainly from local labour.⁷¹ Information given by respondents about the origins of their families concurs with demographic evidence and shows that many families moved from colliery communities to the West of Wrexham after the closure of local pits to take advantage of employment opportunities in the

⁷⁰ Interview with Maggie Williams.

⁷¹ Chester Chronicle, 28 May 1921.

new village.^{72,73} The population of the village seems to have been characterised by a very rapid turnover. The most dramatic illustration of the lack of commitment to the new community by the migrants was afforded by the protracted wages dispute at Llay Main in 1925. The Medical Officer of Health noted the rapid removal of the population from the village and the 'not inconsiderable' emptying of the houses.⁷⁴ Carlton Main sought to supplement the recruitment from local communities by encouraging people to migrate to the village from other colliery districts.⁷⁵ Most of the British coalfields were represented in the origins of the migrants. The colliery company apparently encouraged families to move to the village from its Yorkshire and Lancashire pits and respondents remember that some families followed relatives to the village in a pattern of chain migration.⁷⁶

One Yorkshire miner who had moved with his father to look for work in South Wales heard from a relative in Broomhill that local men were being directed to Llay Main. With no immediate prospect of work they decided to follow him, despite having received no promise of a situation, and they travelled to Llay in the first week of May 1929.⁷⁷ Despite the depressed state of the coal industry, people still migrated to colliery districts.

- #) Often they moved from declining areas into areas had better prospects.⁷⁸
- > Others, once sundered from their home communities, continued to move about. Tommy Yorkie, the miner mentioned above, travelled restlessly between the coalfields. He left jobs when his sense of fair play was offended and, one might suspect, when he became bored. He followed pieces of economic

⁷² M.O.H. 1925.

⁷³ Frank Holloway, 'The Interwar Depression in the Wrexham Coalfield', pp. 58 - 59.

⁷⁴ M.O.H. 1925.

⁷⁵ Report of a meeting of Wrexham Rural District Council: Wrexham Leader, 20 Oct 1929.

⁷⁶ Interview with Bob Adams.

⁷⁷ T.H. Jones, Fingers in the Sky - A Miner's Life Story (Wembley, 1949), p. 50.

⁷⁸ Gina Harkell, 'The Migration of Mining Families to the Kent Coalfield Between the Wars', Oral History Journal Vol. 6 No. 1 (1978).

intelligence gathered from friends and acquaintances and travelled hopefully in search of better prospects. Though he found a wife in the Wrexham area, he moved from Llay to work in a small and primitive Flintshire pit after a period of unemployment in the early thirties. A return to Yorkshire and a succession of jobs at different collieries was followed, after a degradation in pay and status, by a return to Llay before 1938.⁷³ Llay saw a great deal of this commerce, and those who remained in the village observed the fluidity of the population:

... there were very few people here then in those days and they were moving constantly, people were coming and going ... Moonlight flits! They'd owe so much rent then they'd beggar off!

They were coming in from all over, Irish, Geordies, even South Walians. Loads of Yorkshire, lots of Nottinghamshire people.⁸⁰

Village houses were extremely overcrowded. Workers migrating to the pit frequently sought lodgings in the houses of the model village. The Parish Council stated that some of the houses sheltered as many as three families.⁸¹ The colliery company, for its part, claimed that the rapid turnover of the labour force was a serious problem which was impairing the pit's prospects. Between October 1928 and September 1929 the colliery had signed on 995 men but found that 440 men had left employment at the pit in the same period.⁸² The colliery company based its claim for municipal housing on the problem of men moving to the area in search of jobs but being forced to leave again after failing to secure accommodation for their families.

This fluidity of population continued long after the colliery opened into full production and continued into the thirties. It seems that the

⁷³ T.H. Jones, Fingers in the Sky, pp. 57 -63.

⁸⁰ Interview with Bob Adams.

⁸¹ Report of a meeting of Wrexham Rural District Council: Wrexham Leader, 9 Nov 1928.

⁸² Report of a meeting of Wrexham Rural District Council: Wrexham Leader, 20 Oct 1929.

families which had originated locally were the likeliest to remain in the village. Nevertheless, one man reflected that - 'You didn't know who your neighbour was some mornings.'⁸³ Many of the removals were apparently covert as families left owing rent on the colliery houses.⁸⁴

Once the Council estate was erected there was a regular commerce of tenants between the Council Houses and Llay Park. The colliery houses were intended for colliery employees while the Council houses had open tenancies. Though respondents did not describe the systematic eviction of discharged workers, the chequered state of trade at the pit apparently pushed many towards the Council houses. Respondents alleged that some families shuttled between the two housing estates to avoid arrears of rent. Since there was no strong neighbourhood spirit, families moved around the village looking for a change of scene or an improvement in status. Wilmott and Young described a characteristic preoccupation with the house and with consumer durables among the families moved from Bethnal Green to the 'Greenleigh' estate. They considered that these interests were something in the nature of a displacement activity which compensated for the sudden and unaccustomed loss of the intense social life based on the family and neighbourhood networks.⁸⁵ One woman thought that the motive behind her Birkenhead-born mother's insistence on frequent moves around the village was her attempt to assuage her disappointment with what she felt to be the slow pace of village life.⁸⁶

The new village was far from the ideal of a settled community. Despite the efforts of the colliery company to provide facilities for respectable and sober recreations and to restrict the sale of alcohol, respondents remembering the twenties and thirties describe leisure time, particularly

⁸³ Interview with Eddie Evans.

⁸⁴ Interview with Felix Griffiths.

⁸⁵ Peter Wilmott and Michael Young, Family and Kinship in East London 2nd edn. (Harmondsworth, 1962), pp. 153 - 155.

⁸⁶ Beryl Baigent, A Lovely Ugly Place, p. 89.

the weekends, as the occasion for drunkenness, violence and disorder.⁸⁷

Hopes that the provision of model housing might lift the mining population out of the habits of slum life were not initially realised. In 1923, 114 of Llay's ratepayers - 'practically the whole of the tenants of the new houses' - were summoned for non-payment of rates.⁸⁸ The Court proceedings give no hint of an organised campaign of resistance among the tenants. The abject submission made by the tenant's hastily retained solicitor claimed that a lack of familiarity with the responsibilities of ratepayers, since most of the tenants had previously lived in compounded houses, along with high rents and low wages, were the several causes of the trouble.^{89, 90} The erring ratepayers canvassed the organisation of a club into which contributions could be paid in respect of the rates. However, despite an indication from the colliery company in 1923 that it did not intend to collect rates in the village, by 1941 the company was collecting property rates and water rates, along with the charges it levied for electricity, out of the wages of the colliery workmen.⁹¹

Llay was a young village in more senses than one. The families inspired to move to the new village were men and women in their early prime who were seeking to improve their prospects so as to be able to afford to raise a family. Llay had a very high birth rate which was consistently above the national average, the mean rate in the Rural District as a whole and the rates of the other industrial villages of the area. The birth rate peaked

⁸⁷ Interviews with Herbert Gaskin and Edgar Sides.

⁸⁸ Colliery Guardian, 11 May 1923.

⁸⁹ Wrexham Leader, 4 May 1923, 18 May 1923.

⁹⁰ The Industrial Housing Association intended that the rates should routinely be paid by the tenants: P.H. Whyte, 'Some Aspects of the Urban Development by Colliery Companies' 1919 - 1939', Manchester School of Social and Economic Studies Vol. 23 (1955), p. 276.

⁹¹ CROH CB/11/15, Llay Main Light Book, 1934 - 35; Water, Light and Rates 1941 - 45.

in 1925 at 77.8 births per thousand of the population.⁹² We may speculate that the unbalanced age structure of the population had its impacts on the culture of the village. The active intervention of the older generation in the life of the nuclear family, particularly in the business of child rearing and at times of crisis, was a near universal feature of working class life. Wilmott and Young recorded how the people who moved from the East End to the new Essex Council estates after the Second World War experienced a period of depression after being separated from networks of kinship and sociability which resembled grief after sudden and devastating bereavement. The loss was felt more strongly by the women isolated in their new houses than by the men whose workplaces provided ready made social networks.⁹³

The response of the first generation that settled in the village of Llay was recalled by their children. One man, the first of the family to be born in the new village, remembered frequent visits to ~~the family~~ left behind in Pentre Broughton:

But in those days ... it was like going abroad wasn't it, you see? I know my Mum didn't like coming down here. She hated it. She used to tell me, she used to say she used to cry and oh dear! And every time she could go back there she would do, no money as such, but every time she could go back there [she would]!⁹⁴

The regime of paternalism in operation at Llay did not seem to be as severe as those operated in colliery villages in some other coalfields. In the model village of Oakdale in South Wales, workmen were cowed by the behavior of the agent who ran the colliery housing stock. His infamous conduct earned him the soubriquet of 'Dai Back Rent'.⁹⁵ In the Derbyshire

⁹² The 1925 rate for the Rural District Council as a whole was 21.02 births per thousand of the population.

⁹³ Wilmott and Young, Family and Kinship in East London, pp. 133 - 142.

⁹⁴ Interview with Edgar Sides.

⁹⁵ Alun Burge, 'In Search of Harry Blount: Scabbing Between the Wars in One South Wales Community', Llafur Vol. 6, No.3 (1994), p. 68, n. 11.

village of Creswell, not only was the behaviour of local people regulated by stringent tenancy agreements which were policed by a system of fines but their behaviour in the village was closely observed and a system of reward and punishment was integrated with industrial discipline at the pit. Villagers were even encouraged to report on men who were malingering on benefit club payments by a system of financial rewards.⁹⁶ Robert Waller surveyed the social life of the colliery settlements of the Nottinghamshire coalfield. These were communities which were deliberately constructed and ruthlessly controlled by the owners and managers and Waller felt justified in describing the situation as a 'new industrial feudalism'.⁹⁷ The Carlton Main company does seem to have chosen to seek a different path in labour relations in its newly acquired pit. Rather than seeking to cow a defeated workforce after the disastrous confrontations of the twenties, the company recognised the North Wales Miners' Federation and sought a policy of co-operation. A similar attitude of moderation seemed to mark the company's management of the social life of the village. The scheme of paternalism which operated at Llay Main seemed to be a much milder regime. However, though different in its specific manifestations the means of social control were not greatly dissimilar in form to those used by other colliery companies and the shaping ambition - that of having a passive and productive workforce - was the same.

⁹⁶ J.M. Downing (ed.), 'Company Paternalism and the Butty System: Conversations With Creswell Residents', Bull. of the Society for the Study of Labour History Vol. 46 (1984), pp. 22 - 28.

⁹⁷ Robert Waller, The Dukeries Transformed: The Social and Political Development of a Twentieth Century Coalfield (Oxford, 1983), p. 98.

Social Life, Oral Culture and the Welsh Language.

The communities of the North Wales coalfield did not attract a great deal of attention from external social observers. The only official sources routinely gathered on the culture of the area were the language statistics collected through the census after 1891. Other observers recorded patterns of social interaction such as visiting practices, albeit in a less systematic manner.

These observations and measurements do yield information which affords a broader perspective than that given in the accounts of individual respondents and autobiographers. This evidence allows sometimes anecdotal evidence to be placed in a wider context. It is possible to argue that a consistent pattern emerges from the study of this evidence. Though this study is not primarily concerned with the fate of the Welsh language in the Wrexham area, it is possible to see the incidence of language retention as an index of other social trends. Milroy's study of linguistic communities in Belfast describes how the community functions as an enforcement mechanism for linguistic norms.²² Vernacular dialects and minority languages tend to persist in working class areas where the influence of education in socialisation is typically limited and where communities are built upon densely structured social networks. These areas are likely to be further distinguished by distinctive social customs and by strong conceptions of their own corporate identity.²³ If social changes manage to loosen these bonds which secure the community, they could lead to a decline in the language community. Thus a decline in the index of the rate of retention of the Welsh language could be regarded as an indication of shifting patterns of familial and social interaction.

The Wrexham Rural District Medical Officer of Health's general description of the area observed that the Welsh speaking communities were

²² Lesley Milroy, Language and Social Networks 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1987), pp. 11 ff.
²³ Ibid., 95.

located to the West of Offa's Dyke.¹⁰⁰ The validity of this generalisation had less to do with the ancient extent of the English Kingdom of Mercia than with the enduring influence of topography. The dyke skirted the lower slopes of the Berwyn hills and it was on these barren heaths that the new industrial communities had mushroomed with their populations of Welsh speaking immigrants in the nineteenth century. The circumstances of their common origin meant that the villages which retained their vernacular Welsh culture conformed to a particular architectural type. Houses were small and the districts were congested, factors which meant that opportunities for withdrawal and privacy were few. These architectural features undoubtedly contributed further to the development of a strong social culture in these communities.

By the first decade of the twentieth century a majority of the inhabitants of Wales did not have any knowledge of Welsh and even in the Welsh speaking strongholds in rural areas, the greatest proportion of Welsh speaker were functionally bilingual. Rhos was one of the most Welsh speaking parishes in the Wrexham area and, as the most populous parish, contained the largest community of Welsh speakers in the district. In 1921¹⁰¹ 69.1 per cent of the population of Rhos were recorded as being bilingual and 9.6 per cent of the population were declared to be Welsh monoglots.¹⁰² English monoglots were thus substantially outnumbered by the Welsh speakers.

Compared to other Welsh speaking industrial communities, the speech community of Rhos proved to be remarkably resilient. The depressions of the interwar period saw a greatly accelerated rate of linguistic decline in the industrial communities of South Wales. /The depressions of the interwar period saw a greatly accelerated rate of linguistic decline in the

100 M.O.H. 1924.

101 Children above three years were included in the linguistic census; in 1921 children aged between 3 and 15 years in respect of whom no declaration was made were assumed to share the linguistic characteristics of the head of the household.

102 3.3 per cent of the population made no declaration in 1921.

9 ~~industrial communities of South Wales~~. The depression encouraged emigration, a factor which compounded the already low status of the language among vernacular speakers. Since migration to England or beyond seemed virtually the only option for the younger generation there seemed little point in ensuring that they had a command of Welsh.¹⁰³ Despite a consistent decline in the Welsh speaking population in the Rural District and in Wales as a whole, over 70 per cent of the population of Rhos remained Welsh speaking in the years 1921 to 1961. Anecdotal evidence derived from interviews and autobiographical material agrees with
 -/ emigration in the interwar period. Nevertheless, the Welsh speaking community only fell into serious decline after the Second World War. This trend coincided with attempts by the local authority to remove the slums in the congested heart of the village. People were removed to Council estates on the periphery of the village and in neighbouring parishes. The
 2/2/ population of Rhos declined from 10,690 in 1951 to 8,160 in 1971. The decline of the language can be attributed in great part to the disruption of local communities which this removal implied. However, even in 1971 the bilingual part of the population was still dominant: 59 per
 able cent were declared as being able to speak English and Welsh.¹⁰⁴

The tenaciousness of the Welsh language in Rhos testifies to a degree of isolation between the linguistic culture of the village and the linguistic culture of the prevailing district. Other observations about the village's linguistic community support this supposition. The Welsh spoken in Rhos has

¹⁰³ Janet Davies, The Welsh Language (Cardiff, 1993), p. 60.

¹⁰⁴ In 1971 2.8 per cent of the population claimed to be monoglot Welsh speakers. While the existence of a large monoglot Welsh speaking community is broadly credible in the early years of the century and a large part of the total may be assumed to be accounted for by children old enough to be included in the linguistic census but who have not yet started school, scholars regard later totals with suspicion. Absolute numbers of declared monoglots are small and it is thought that totals are contaminated by bilinguals claiming monoglot status to assert the importance of language rights.

its own peculiarities and to this day is widely recognised as a distinct local dialect.^{105, 106} The rise of such variant features is characteristic of the relative isolation of a language community over a long period of time. The cultural separation between Rhos and the surrounding communities may indeed have been a long-standing one. W.T.R. Pryce argued that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the mixed linguistic composition of the Ruabon district expressed itself in a marked tendency towards sharp linguistic contrasts between neighbouring communities.¹⁰⁷

Respondents were able to describe the spatial dimensions of the speech community, as they encountered them, very precisely. As well as being descriptions of the physical extent of Welsh language culture these narratives were also an emotional map of the boundaries of the social entity which respondents felt themselves to be a part of. Rhos people described a linguistic transition between Rhos and Pen-Y-Cae, the village immediately to the ~~South~~ ~~West~~. The population of Pen-Y-Cae was largely Welsh speaking in the interwar period, however respondents recalled that English was becoming more common in social intercourse in the community, particularly among the children.¹⁰⁸ While this shift coincided with parish boundaries, the parish of Rhos itself contained two distinct linguistic communities. Respondents could describe the location of the linguistic boundary between Rhos and Johnstown within yards:

It came to a demarcation line, which was strange but true, there used to be railway line crossing the road at the bottom of Gutter Hill, as you lead off the Wrexham - Llangollen road, now. There used to be a railway line across the bottom and that was virtually a demarcation line! In

¹⁰⁵ Y Parch William Phillips, Rhos-llanerch-rugog (Wrexham, 1955), p. 19.

¹⁰⁶ Dennis W. Gilpin, Rhosllanerchrugog - Casgliad o Luniau/A Collection of Pictures Cyf. 2/Vol. 2 (Wrexham, 1991), Introduction.

¹⁰⁷ W.T.R. Pryce, The Social and Economic Structure of North East Wales 1750 - 1890 (Ph.D. thesis, Lanchester Polytechnic, 1976), p. 135, p. 158.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Tom Ellis.

other words, you were in England if you lived in Johnstown.¹⁰⁹

Welsh was not an incidental part of local life but was an intimate aspect of local culture. The tenacious commitment of the village to the language was reflected in its strong sense of its own communal identity. One local author chose emotive symbols to describe the geographical and linguistic situation of the village in 1942:

While the valley in front, and the districts on the left and right, have become anglicised, Rhos is as strongly Welsh in speech and characteristics today as of old. Its celtic peculiarity, temperament and the massiveness of its nonconformity - with its score of chapels - is as tangible as Snowdon.¹¹⁰

/ In the early part of the twentieth century, Llay was simply another of the
/ anglicised agricultural parishes to the West of Wrexham. In 1921, a bare 5.7
/ per cent of the population of the village claimed some knowledge of the
/ language. The development of the district meant that the Welsh speaking
/ population of the district actually increased. In 1931, 20.6 per cent of the
/ population were recorded as speaking English and Welsh, the absolute
/ numbers of Welsh speakers having climbed from a sparse forty to a much more
/ substantial 716. Respondents who lived in the area before its development
/ remembered that some of the immigrants brought with them what was virtually
-/ an alien tongue. It is probable that more Welsh was being spoken in Llay in
/ the early interwar period than at any time since the eighteenth century.¹¹¹
/ This was the peak of the eminence of the Welsh language in Llay in the
/ twentieth century: after 1931 the Welsh speaking community in Llay declined
/ despite the growth of the village's population. By 1961 there were only 371

¹⁰⁹ Reuben Whalley, WMP C/1984/42.

¹¹⁰ John Evans, History of Rhos - Rhos as it was, As it is, and As it should be (Rhos, 1942), p. 3.

¹¹¹ W.T.R. Pryce, The Social and Economic Structure of North East Wales 1750 - 1890, p. 140 and fig. 53 a.

Welsh speakers declared in the community: some 10.3 per cent of the population. Since the village was a young one and it had a very high birth rate, the falling numbers of Welsh speakers, from 716 in 1931 to 438 in 1951, suggests that the Welsh language was not being effectively transmitted to the younger generation.

The decision whether or not to remain loyal to the Welsh language was a personal and familial choice, but it was a choice exercised in a communal context. The very existence of a bilingual situation implies the refusal of a subordinate social group to assimilate to the culture of a hegemonic group.¹¹² In a situation where two tongues co-exist side by side throughout a community, definite social purposes are usually assigned to each.¹¹³ Sociolinguists frequently describe the compartmentalization of social life in bilingual societies into discrete linguistic domains.¹¹⁴

The fate of these domains was crucial for the future of the subordinate tongue. The contexts in which the Welsh language was usually used included the family, the workplace and religious worship. In Rhos, the Welsh linguistic domain extended to include certain aspects of leisure and voluntary association. Despite the high status of the Welsh language in a number of contexts, particularly in religious worship and in cultural pursuits, in broader society, Welsh remained a low status language. Local Welsh speakers were keenly aware that English was the more prestigious tongue:

Mrs. Whalley: So Johnstown in itself, going back to our youth was what they call a snobbish area, eh? I don't suppose it was, but in our minds it was.

¹¹² Einar Haugen, 'The Stigmata of Bilingualism', in E. Haugen, The Ecology of Language (Stanford, 1972), p. 309.

(1, 19) ¹¹³ Peter Trudgill, Sociolinguistics 2nd edn. (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 113 - 115.

¹¹⁴ Nancy C. Dorian, Language Death - The Life Cycle of a Scottish Dialect (Philadelphia, 1981), p. 75.

Mr. Whalley: If you spoke English, you were posh. To us ... you were posh.¹¹⁵

Linguistic domains were affected by individual defections. Some respondents alleged that local people shed their affiliation to the Welsh speech community because of a wish to assimilate prompted by their social ambitions:¹¹⁶

Welshmen got the idea that to speak English ew!, it was like having a bay window put in th'ouse. And that's what's ruined the Welsh language, the Welsh people themselves. You can't ruin a language by barring it from school if they speak it in the home. But they weren't speaking it in the home, they were getting this English accent on account of jobs, and being driven out to different jobs as well.¹¹⁷

These attitudes were cultivated by the local prestige of the institutions in which English was used. English tended to be used by ~~local~~ people in their contacts with officialdom but it was also the main medium of education. Few questioned the assumption that English was the language of education and social mobility and it was this consideration which determined parents not pass the Welsh language on to their children:

I am told that when at the age of three I first attended one of the village schools I was a monoglot Welsh speaker. My school, one of four in the village and one of the nearest to my home, was a Church school. Its language was English ... My parents were asked by the headmistress to speak English to me at home so that even at the age of three I could learn that language and benefit from the education the school provided.

At the age of eleven I passed my scholarship examination and began to

¹¹⁵ Mr. Reuben and Mrs. Blodwen Whalley, WMP C/1984/42.

¹¹⁶ Gaelic speakers in the fishing communities of Sutherland also identified the use of English by local vernacular speakers with 'pride' or snobbery: Dorian, Language Death, pp. 102 - 103.

¹¹⁷ Sidney Roberts, CLS Tape No. 74.

attend the grammar school three miles away at Ruabon. I had now become a monoglot English speaker conversing with my parents on our own hearth in that language. I felt no resentment at the loss of my Welsh and no gratification at gaining English - it seemed the order of things.¹¹⁸

As well as being affected by the choice made by individuals, domains were affected by broader social factors which acted to erode existing domains and determined the linguistic character of new ones. A dynamic linguistic community has the ability to reproduce itself through the creation of new associational contexts. In Wales the wholesale shift from a rural society to an industrial society was marked by the creation of a wide variety of new associational contexts which remained Welsh in speech.¹¹⁹ However, after the later nineteenth century new associational contexts tended to be Anglophone. In Llay, a stream of Welsh speaking migrants met a larger stream of English speaking migrants. Though the failure of the Welsh language to establish itself may have been predictable, it was by no means inevitable and it is worth considering the specific circumstances of this failure.

The failure of Welsh speaking migrants to create Welsh linguistic domains meant that the village was deprived of social contexts through which younger people could be socialised in the use of Welsh. This was very important since Welsh was still largely transmitted as a vernacular tongue with the little support from educational institutions.^{120, 121} In the older

¹¹⁸ Tom Ellis, 'From Labour to Social Democrat', in John Osmond (ed.), The National Question Again (Llandysul, 1985), p. 256.

¹¹⁹ Trefor M. Owen, Customs and Traditions of Wales (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 98 ff..

¹²⁰ The 1927 Board of Education report on Welsh in Education and Life noted that despite a general consensus in favour of the preservation of the language, resources were limited, the policies of local authorities were imprecise and the range of approaches in individual schools was diverse: Janet Davies, The Welsh Language, pp. 61 - 62.

¹²¹ Welsh apparently had no place on the syllabus of the Llay schools in the forties and fifties: Beryl Baigent, A Lovely Ugly Place, p. 18.

industrial communities the deliberate determination of bilinguals to use Welsh was a potent means of expressing solidarity with the speech community. In Llay, the lack of identifiable contexts to which local people could express their allegiance by the use of Welsh effectively deprived the use of Welsh of its social meaning.

-/ The postwar decline of Welsh in the South Wales village of Pont-Rhyd-Y-Fen has been linked to the dissolution of the linguistic link between the community and local workplaces. The closure of the Afon Valley Collieries meant that men were forced to transfer to the English speaking atmosphere of the Dulais Valley pits and the coastal steelworks.¹²² Many of the officials and key workmen who came to work at Llay Main were imported from English mining districts and their position enabled them to define the linguistic standard. Welsh speakers were often isolated in the large workforce. Respondents recalled that the main language used underground at Llay Main was English and even recalled hostility being expressed towards the use of the Welsh language in the pit:

There was never an objection to talking Welsh [from me], if you were Welsh, you were Welsh, you get on with your talking. And others would say 'What are yo' on about now? What's he nattering at now?'

'Well, they're talking about Rhos.'

'Well, if that's interesting to you, why can't we hear it?'¹²³

Some of the inhabitants of the new village allowed their concern that a second tongue could be used for hostile purposes, such as excluding them from social intercourse, to inform a more general hostility towards its use:

I was not taught Welsh at home as my father spoke little and my mother, coming from Birkenhead, spoke none and was suffering from the

¹²² Beth Thomas, 'Accounting for Language Shift in a South Wales Mining Community', Cardiff Working Papers in Welsh Linguistics No. 5 (Cardiff, 1981), pp. 63 - 64.

¹²³ Interview with Felix Griffiths.

misapprehension that when people spoke Welsh around her in the shops they were talking about her and that they were 'rude and nasty people'!¹²⁴

Welsh speaking children were in a linguistic minority and found that their use of the Welsh language was sometimes stigmatised by their schoolmates. One woman who came from a Welsh speaking home was forced to accommodate her patterns of speech at school:

They used to make fun of me ... And from then on after, I wouldn't speak it. They used to call me 'the Welsh girl'.

There wasn't very many as you might say were Welsh speaking then, just here and there. I think I lost a lot of my Welsh through that.¹²⁵

Few village children retained their Welsh. A 1948 survey of Denbighshire schoolchildren recorded that 27.5 per cent of the village's 503 schoolchildren came from homes with at least one Welsh speaking parent and that 9.7 per cent had two Welsh speaking parents. Despite this, there was no child in any of the village's schools who was recorded as having any degree of facility in the Welsh language.¹²⁶

< >/ Despite this ominous finding, there was/in the village a Sunday school attached to the Welsh speaking congregation of Glanaber, which was attended by/village/ children. This apparent contradiction suggests that teachers reporting to the survey only regarded a high degree of facility in the Welsh language as worthy of note and perhaps also indicates the extent to which the language was forced to retreat into the domestic and religious spheres. The chapels were the only institutions in Llay where the Welsh language gained a foothold. Even here there was a limited degree of success. Three village congregations worshipped in Welsh at various times.

¹²⁴ Beryl Baigent, A Lovely Ugly Place, p. 18.

¹²⁵ Interview with Mrs. Catherine Williams.

¹²⁶ Llywarch P. Dodd, A Report on a Language and Cultural Survey of Schools in Denbighshire, Denbighshire Education Committee Minutes, Vol. 843, (Ruthin, 1950), p. 73, p. 76.

The Baptist congregation began as a Welsh language cause. However, in 1928, a trial period of worship through the medium of English was reported to have been a success and the members voted that the society should continue as an English language cause.¹²⁷ A Wesleyan congregation founded in 1924 also worshipped in Welsh, however, this church closed in 1939.¹²⁸ The only Welsh speaking congregation which remained in the village was the Calvinistic Methodist congregation which worshipped at Glanaber. Glanaber remained a small congregation but was sustained by its connection with the larger English speaking congregation which worshipped at Emmanuel.

Large numbers of Welsh speakers came to Llay in search of better economic prospects but they failed to establish associational contexts in which the Welsh language could thrive. The failure of the early migrants to establish Welsh language domains in Llay seems to have exacerbated the subsequent decline of the language. In the early years of the village its population was characterised by a great deal of flux as colliery workers and their families came and departed. In 1931 the number of men in the village greatly exceeded the number of women. It is evident that unaccompanied men were blazing a trail by moving to Llay in search of work and that while some of them remained and either summoned their families to join them or married and formed households of their own, a great many drifted away. Welsh speakers were well represented in the male population of the village in 1931; indeed the 417 Welsh speaking men present substantially outnumbered the 299 Welsh speaking women. The fall in the Welsh speaking population between 1931 and 1951 was much greater than the rate of natural decrease one would expect, particularly in such a young community. Observations made by respondents suggest that this trend could be accounted for by the failure of Welsh speakers to settle permanently in the village.

We may speculate that while committed Welsh speakers found work, they

¹²⁷ The congregation remained affiliated to the Welsh Baptist Union: Anon., The Story of Our Church - Bethel Baptist Church, Llay (n.d. - 1986?), pp. 2

¹²⁸ Interview with Mr. Prichard and notes held by Mr. Prichard.

probably found life in the Anglophone environment of the village uncongenial and returned to their communities of origin as soon as economic circumstances permitted. In the early stages of the economic development of the North Wales coalfield migrants seem to have been sensitive to the linguistic character of the communities they were removing to.^{129, 130} This factor helped to reinforce the Welshness of Rhos in the nineteenth century. It seems to have continued to be a factor which still exercised considerable influence on the behaviour of migrants and one which accounted, to some extent, for the failure of the Welsh language to establish itself in Llay.

From the accounts of local customs and social practices it seems apparent that the inhabitants of the older industrial villages participated in a distinctive way of life. Many local inhabitants relished informal social interaction and most communities had areas which were acknowledged as points where people could gather to exchange intelligence and enjoy social contact. In October 1947, the *Rhos Herald* noted the dispersal of the 'Parliament' which convened on the Gornel Bridge after a strenuous summer sitting:

This out of doors Parliament, which has been in existence for so many years, held its final session on Saturday night, but will assemble again for another long session next summer. The subjects discussed included politics, sport, public affairs, personalities, the National Coal Board, the Grimethorpe stint strike, and many other questions of local and national importance. The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Chancellor thanked the rank and file for their faithful attendance and

¹²⁹ A.H. Dodd, 'Welsh and English in East Denbighshire - A Historical Retrospect', *Trans. Cymmrodorion* (1940), p. 52.

¹³⁰ Pryce, *The Social and Economic Structure of North Wales 1750 - 1890*, pp. 157 - 158.

for their valuable contributions to the discussions.¹³¹

The most celebrated gathering point in Rhos was Y Groes,¹³² a venue which had much to recommend it for casual association: it was a fork in the road which was illuminated by a streetlight and which afforded a clear view of the central shopping area and main thoroughfares of the village.¹³³ Such meeting points knitted communities together: relationships were forged and furthered and information about the words and deeds of others were passed on. These 'parliaments' were evidently the crucibles of local oral culture. It was generally mature men who gathered at such meeting places but youths on the cusp of manhood were welcomed and were often initiated in the oral culture of pit life.¹³⁴ Such gatherings were generally male pursuits,¹³⁵ and women were likelier to interact socially in their own neighbourhoods or in particular social contexts such as the chapel.

The older communities had other distinctive social customs which prescribed expectations about fellowship and mutual aid. Local people tended to look to kin and neighbours rather than to outside agencies when faced by a crisis. Oral accounts of local social life routinely stress the extent to which it was characterised by ethics of comradeship and reciprocity.

Practical and emotional support in medical crises was one of the most important services offered by neighbours and kin in working class communities. Since nursing was viewed as a routine aspect of the nurture of the family it was a distinctively female sphere of activity. The existence of this popular medical culture demonstrated the self-sufficiency of the

¹³¹ Rhos Herald, 11 Oct 1947.

¹³² 'Y Groes' - the Cross.

¹³³ Report of the temporary removal of the streetlight: Rhos Herald, 20 Sept 1947.

¹³⁴ Colin Reese, CLWBC 451.10.

¹³⁵ R.B. Barratt, A Short History of the Village of Johnstown, p. 11.

community¹³⁶ and the practice defined the tracery of alliances and allegiances which bound individuals into families and the families into a community.¹³⁷

In her study of working class communities in Belfast, Lesley Milroy noted that elites often stigmatize the communicative norms of cohesive working class communities and that visiting habits in particular attracted a great deal of criticism.¹³⁸ In the Wrexham area such practices were only described at all when, at least in the opinion of local municipal officials, they jeopardised the health of the community. In the older industrial villages of the Wrexham area, home nursing persisted well into the twentieth century despite the intrusion of other agencies and official attempts to regulate the activities of informal practitioners. While the Medical Officer of Health considered that the small and insanitary houses were culpable for much of the disease that was endemic in the village of Rhos he also blamed the social habits of the villagers. He was concerned that the people of Rhos tended to nurse fever patients at home rather than trusting them to the care of the fever hospital.¹³⁹ He attributed the higher incidence of disease in the village to 'the intercommunal mingling of the population' and particularly deprecated the practice of the 'promiscuous' visiting of other households by local children. The officer despaired of repairing the situation finding it 'difficult to change the conservative habits of an area such as Rhos'.¹⁴⁰ Notwithstanding the strictly sanitary nature of his brief, it is possible to detect in the observations of the Medical Officer of Health a tone of pervasive disapproval of the affable lifestyles of the inhabitants of the industrial villages.

¹³⁶ Mary Chamberlain and Ruth Richardson, 'Life and Death', Oral History Journal Vol. 11, No. 1 (1983), p. 41.

¹³⁷ Wilmott and Young, Family and Kinship in East London, p. 55.

¹³⁸ Milroy, Language and Social Networks, p. 94.

¹³⁹ M.O.H. 1925, 1928.

¹⁴⁰ M.O.H. 1932.

-/ Llay was a community which was still struggling to establish stable social networks in the interwar period. The social institutions of the village were similar in kind to those found in the older villages but were less pervasive in their influence. The village had not been in existence long enough for these relationships to deepen and for these conventions to be strengthened by precedent. In spite of the disruption of the migrants' social networks, implied by their removal to the village, interviews seem to support the contention that the inhabitants were actively seeking to re-establish such networks. J.M. Mogeey described the early years of the Burton estate outside Oxford as 'a period of great mutual friendliness'.¹⁴¹ Wilmott claimed that his study of the Dagenham estate, which was constructed and settled in the twenties and thirties, demonstrated that despite the disruption of a distinctive pattern of family life the 'fundamental regularities of working class life' were reasserting themselves.¹⁴² He was struck at how similar Dagenham's mores were to those the Bethnal Green society described in earlier studies.

, / 67 / It was certainly true that some of the customs familiar in old neighbourhoods reasserted themselves in Llay. Despite the more hygienic environment of the new houses, the privacy dictated by the architecture of the village and the presence of a health visitor paid for the Nursing Association, some of the villagers still nursed their own sick. Where there were no nearby relatives, some villagers turned to strangers for aid. One local woman remembered that in the interwar period she was frequently called upon to attend confinements and other medical emergencies as well as being called upon to lay out the dead.¹⁴³

In Rhos the post-war decline of the Welsh language coincided with the programme of slum clearance and resettlement which pushed the village's population to peripheral Council estates. It was also associated with other shifts in the patterns of social life which were remarked upon by

141 J.M. Mogeey, Family and Neighbourhood (London, 1956), p. 87.

142 Peter Wilmott, The Evolution of a Community (London, 1963), p. 111.

143 Interview with Mrs. Hilda Davies.

respondents. People all over Britain were aware that removal from slums to new estates meant the end of a particular way of life. Mass Observers described the reluctance of people they interviewed for the 'Worktown' study to consider sundering themselves from the social networks they had built up in their old neighbourhoods.¹⁴⁴ The 1948 survey of Denbighshire schools noted that removal to new estates was a significant anglicising influence. The report remarked that the new estates were frequently not very far from the areas in which their Welsh speaking tenants originated but noted that the removal seemed to adversely affect the loyalty of the moved population to all things Welsh. This was not because new estates were in Anglophone districts but rather seemed to be related to the shock of the sudden alienation of the population from 'that society in which they have been nurtured'.¹⁴⁵ Families were separated from chapels with which they had enjoyed associations for generations and, since households with children had a greater claim on new housing, from their own older generations.¹⁴⁶ The influence of older generations in the community can be an important factor in promoting linguistic and social conservatism¹⁴⁷ and without the presence of that older generation the ability of the community to act as a norm-enforcement mechanism appears to have been compromised.

While the residents of the new estates were homesick for the social culture of the old village they apparently failed to resurrect it on the new estates and the rate of language retention declined steeply. The population of the neighbouring parish of Pen-Y-Cae was increased substantially by the building of new Council estates in the fifties and sixties. Several of these estates, and particularly the Afon Eitha estate, built hard upon the parish boundary, were colonised by Rhos families.

¹⁴⁴ Mass Observation Archive, Worktown, Box 39A E/89 quoted in: Deirdre Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty, p. 95.

¹⁴⁵ L.P. Dodd, Language and Cultural Survey, p. 43.

¹⁴⁶ The population remaining in the village core was made up of disproportionately high numbers of old people: M.O.H. 1956, 1959.

¹⁴⁷ Social investigators and generations of exasperated husbands noted that in East London mothers represented and enforced family traditions: Wilmott and Young, Family and Kinship in East London, pp. 56 - 57.

Despite an influx of some 520 Welsh speakers into Pen-Y-Cae between 1951 and 1961, the speech community began to decline rapidly in the aftermath of this reception. Though the population was stable between 1961 and 1971,¹⁴⁸ the proportion of Welsh speakers declined from 54.2 per cent to 41.3 per cent of the population.¹⁴⁹

This decline could be accounted for by the failure of the younger generation to acquire Welsh. While older people experienced nostalgia for the old village, the rising generations, ^{9 who:} ~~which~~ had never had any experience of village life, adjusted to the circumstances they found themselves in and became purely English in speech.¹⁵⁰ One correspondent for a local newspaper noted that while in the past, strangers visiting Rhos had always been able to comment that the language of play in the village was Welsh, the youth of the area were becoming increasingly Anglophone. Older residents were reported as feeling that Rhos was becoming 'increasingly cosmopolitan at the expense of its long tradition of independence'.¹⁵¹

This drift towards linguistic cosmopolitanism was associated with other social trends. Low density housing did not encourage sociability and people reported a decline in casual visiting and even a decline in local oral culture. The Rhos Herald set down a fictional dialogue between a barber and his customer, which encapsulated the discontents of the displaced population. Despite gaining such eminently desirable amenities as an indoor toilet and a coal house, the customer felt that he had lost 'those things that make life worth living':

Barber: What are those?

Customer: Take good neighbourliness to begin with. All that is lost in a

¹⁴⁸ The population of Pen-Y-Cae over three years of age was 2886 in 1961 and 2860 in 1971.

¹⁴⁹ There were 1537 and 31 monoglot Welsh speakers declared on the 1961 census and 1110 and 75 monoglot Welsh speakers declared on the 1971 census.

¹⁵⁰ L.P. Dodd, Language and Cultural Survey, p. 44.

¹⁵¹ Wrexham Leader, 5 Dec 1952.

new housing estate. In the street where I was bred we were like one family. No sooner did they see the doctor calling at your door than all the neighbours would call to offer any assistance. You can be in bed for a month where I live now without a soul coming in.

Barber: The housing estate creates a town environment then?

Customer: Don't talk! You ought to hear the way they greet one another. It's all Mister and Misses. You know Dai Substantial? Well he's Mr. Edwards yonder.

Fancy calling Jane Cream Crackers Mrs. Hawkins. It isn't natural man.¹⁵²

It is interesting that for the columnist, the ultimate index of the decline of village life was the decline of nicknaming practices.¹⁵³

The dislocation caused by the removal of an established population to the peripheral Council estates in Rhos in the fifties and sixties was more keenly felt, or was at least more eloquently described, than the turmoil occasioned by the reception of a more heterogeneous migration in Llay in the twenties and thirties. This disjuncture could be attributed to the respective times of the removals and thus to the experiences of the generational cohorts available for interview. The disjuncture could also be accounted for by other factors. By the fifties, the dislocation of the resettlement was likely to have been amplified by other trends: the increasing availability of transport meant that communities of residence were no longer necessarily communities of work. Employment patterns were diversifying and as the coal industry contracted, the workforces of increasingly cosmopolitan collieries were claiming a smaller proportion of

¹⁵² 'In the Barber's Chair', Rhos Herald, 25 Nov 1961.

¹⁵³ See Chapter Five for a discussion of nicknames as an expression of local allegiance.

the men of the district. While the sentiments of surprise and shock expressed by the people of Rhos were genuine enough, such expressions were part of an already established discourse about local identity. Rhos's concerns about its future were more eloquently expressed than Llay's anxiety about its anomie because in Rhos the Council estates were extensions of an existing community whereas in Llay the Colliery's houses and the Council estate constituted an entirely new community: one which had yet to define itself.

Voluntary Organisations and Social Leisure Activities.

It is often said that people used to make their amusements themselves. It is more strictly accurate to say that they made amusement for each other; participation in a variety of voluntary organisations was an important part of local social life in the interwar period. Because of their often informal nature and chequered histories the records of such organisations seldom survive. However, their activities and ~~their~~ distinctive culture are frequently recalled in interviews and the pages of the local newspapers of the time are bursting with advertisements for and notices of their many and varied activities.

The voluntary organisations in the two villages differed in character and ethos. In Rhos, organisations were created and moved by the inclinations of their members whereas in Llay the initiative behind many of the voluntary organisations was supplied by the colliery company. Despite this, any form of organized association would have been impossible had not large numbers of villagers taken the opportunity to invest their time and enthusiasm in these associations. Nevertheless, the manipulation of the social life of the village was a part of the company's scheme to cultivate community life and influence the direction of its development.

While the decline of voluntary organisations is often attributed to the rise of commercialised leisure and the mass media during the period under study voluntary organisations thrived despite high rates of participation in commercially provided leisure activities. There were several cinemas in Rhos and there was one in the Church Institute in Llay. In the 1948 cultural survey of the Denbighshire schools ^{is} was discovered that Rhos was in a school district where 80 per cent of the children attended the cinema one a week or more.¹⁵⁴ Rhos itself was remarked upon as a locality where the incidence of juvenile cinema-going was particularly high.¹⁵⁵ The survey

¹⁵⁴ 1691 of the 2477 children in the Ruabon school district: L.P. Dodd, Language and Cultural Survey, p. 30.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

revealed that 93 per cent of the schoolchildren lived in homes with a wireless set and noted with some concern that their tastes inclined them towards light and popular programmes. The most popular radio programme among Denbighshire schoolchildren was 'Dick Barton - Special Agent'.¹⁵⁶

Commentators who described working class life in the fifties generally blamed the increasing influence of commercial leisure and domestic television viewing¹⁵⁷ for the decline of socially oriented leisure activities.¹⁵⁸ However, commentators who expressed opinions on the social effects of commercial leisure and the mass media on community life tended to do no more than articulate latent fears about their assumed demoralising or subversive effects.¹⁵⁹ Even investigators whose opinions were informed by direct observation¹⁶⁰ often recapitulated the pessimistic thesis

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁵⁷ The viewing audience of the Coronation in 1953 is often cited as an index of the progress of the new popular medium: 20 million viewed the event on 2½ million sets. It was estimated that in 1953 the BBC could reach 85 per cent of the population: B. Paulu, British Broadcasting (Minneapolis, 1956), quoted in: Stuart Laing, Representations of Working Class Life 1957 - 1964 (London, 1986), p. 141.

¹⁵⁸ See for instance, Denys Thompson, 'Introduction', p. 16 in: D. Thompson (ed.), Discrimination and Popular Culture (Harmondsworth, 1964).

¹⁵⁹ For a discussion of the continuity of elite criticisms of the popular media, from the penny dreadful and the music hall to television, see: Geoffrey Pearson, Hooligan - A History of Respectable Fears (London, 1983), pp. 31 - 33.

¹⁶⁰ Clancy Sigal, Weekend In Dinlock (Harmondsworth, 1962), p. 20.

elaborated by the cultural commentators.¹⁶¹

The advent of cheap public transport and later popular motoring did far more real damage to this associational scene than the mass media. This was not so much due to families taking the opportunity to opt out of community activities as to the explosion in settlement patterns which eventually followed the greater degree of personal mobility.¹⁶² Communities where inhabitants were united by common residence and the common experience of labour in a few local industries were breaking down all over Britain. While competition from the media and rival leisure pursuits had some effect, it was the changing patterns of residence which caused voluntary organisations to suffer most.

The coincidence in Rhos of a strong ethos of participation in voluntary organisations with a community characterised by dense social networks is not surprising. Frankenberg's study of the village of 'Pentreddiwaith' indicated that the basic building blocks of organized associations tended

¹⁶¹ The classic text of this critical onslaught on the threats of mass culture both to 'high' culture and to 'traditional' popular culture was: Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (Harmondsworth, 1958). For discussion of its significance see: Stuart Laing, 'The Production of Literature', in Alan Sinfield (ed.), Society and Literature 1945 - 1970 (New York, 1983). While Hoggart's critique did not contain any assessment of the impact of television other critics did elaborate similar concerns in connection with the new medium. See: Raymond Williams, Communications revised edn., (Harmondsworth, 1962), pp. 99 ff. and Thompson (ed.), Discrimination and Popular Culture, and the discussion in Laing, Representations of Working Class Life 1957 - 1964, pp. 193 - 217.

¹⁶² Peter Wilmott found that despite considerable opportunities for personal mobility a sample of East End adolescents spent most of their leisure time locally: Peter Wilmott, Adolescent Boys of East London (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 23 - 24. A decisive shift in leisure patterns only occurred with a change of residence, classically, relocation to new estates in the manner described in: Young and Wilmott, Family and Kinship in East London, pp. 131 ff., pp. 146 ff.

not to be individuals but informal associations of three to six villagers who joined, participated and withdrew from voluntary organisations as groups.¹⁶³ Apart from being composed of these units, which were based on friendship and kinship, voluntary organisations were affected by other formal and informal associations.

Particular neighbourhoods which enjoyed their own social life sponsored their own voluntary organisations. Communities frequently saw the duplication of similar organisations over a small area. Johnstown, though part of the parish of Rhos, considered itself to be an independent community and evolved a separate social life based on its own complement of voluntary organisations. Existing social institutions often gave birth to others as people known to each other through these contexts mobilised using existing social networks to organise other activities.¹⁶⁴ These bodies were often explicitly associated with their parent body and regarded its members as being under an obligation to support the new enterprise. Many of the Rhos chapels supported choirs, concert parties, drama societies, debating societies and sports teams.¹⁶⁵ The Ford Gron Concert Party, which enjoyed some eminence in the area in the fifties, grew out of a literary and cultural appreciation society which had itself begun life as an auxiliary society of the Capel Mawr congregation.¹⁶⁶ In a similar way, the village's pubs, which had a vigorous social life of their own, mobilised their supporters into sports teams. The football clubs of Rhos enjoyed a

¹⁶³ Ronald Frankenberg, The Village on the Border - A Social Study of Religion, Politics and Football in a North Wales Village (London, 1957), p. 117.

¹⁶⁴ Dave Russell found that by the late nineteenth century English choral societies came from 'every conceivable organisational background' as the 'recreational penumbra of voluntary organisations increased massively': Dave Russell, Popular Music in England 1840 - 1914 - A Social History (Manchester, 1987), p. 200.

¹⁶⁵ The Anglican Church sponsored a team in Rhos: John E. Matthews, From Pit to Pitch - A Pictorial History of Football in Rhos (Wrexham, 1991), caption 13.

¹⁶⁶ Wrexham Leader, 22 Feb 1957.

particularly close association with the village's pubs.¹⁶⁷ While landlords doubtless had a pecuniary interest in centring leisure opportunities around their own premises such activities were based on genuine associations and for a team, a relationship with a public house could provide access to funds and amenities that local people would otherwise have found hard to obtain. Bert Coombes, a South Wales miner, described how a cricket team originated in Resolven in 1921 when a landlord's son, who confessed that he had no love of the game, provided the capital for cricket equipment to colliers idle during the stoppage.¹⁶⁸

The internal dynamics of voluntary organisations meant that even the most consistent local interest in a particular activity was often expressed in the intermittent existence of the societies formed to promote it. Despite claims that the village's most celebrated voluntary organisation, the Rhos Male Voice Choir, has enjoyed 'a continuous and illustrious history' since its foundation in 1913,¹⁶⁹ the choir experienced periods of hiatus and was, on at least one occasion, this being recorded in 1951, disbanded 'due to lack of support'.¹⁷⁰

Teams, dramatic societies and musical ensembles were often defined by external challenges ~~and were often~~ initially formed to play or perform in a particular league or competition. The fortunes of the choirs of Rhos often fluctuated with the proximity of the next eisteddfod. The insecurity of the existence of many societies meant that as they ran down, the debts they had incurred discouraged others from becoming involved with them. Killing a society and restarting it under another guise was an acknowledged means of evading such responsibilities.¹⁷¹ The Llanerch Celts Football Club, one of

¹⁶⁷ Rhos Rangers were formed after a meeting in the Nag's Head in 1903 and used the premises as a headquarters and changing room until they moved in 1911 to the Coach and Horses: Matthews, From Pit to Pitch, caption 8, caption 10.

¹⁶⁸ Bert Lewis Coombes, These Poor Hands (London, 1939), pp. 145 - 147.

¹⁶⁹ CROR DD/DM/652/117 Leaflet 'Rhos Male Voice Choir' (n.d.)

¹⁷⁰ Wrexham Leader, 6 Apr 1951.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Felix Griffiths.

the most successful teams to play from Rhos was so named in 1931, deliberately omitting mention of the full name of the village¹⁷² to avoid the debts of a team which had foundered in 1928.¹⁷³

As well as uniting local society, voluntary organisations often divided it. Intense association, shared ambitions and, in the case of the musical association, familiarity with an arcane terminology, meant that voluntary organisations could constitute an exclusive society even in the heart of the densest working class community. One local author observed that 'If there was ever a mafia in Wales they would surely consist of ... Male Voice Choristers'.¹⁷⁴ Frankenberg's participant observation of 'Pentreddiwaith' noted that the composition of overt and latent factions in voluntary organisations were often predetermined by rivalries incurred in other areas of local social life.¹⁷⁵ As well as this, the competition of personalities within voluntary organisations endowed them with fissiparous tendencies. Associations frequently depended on the enthusiasm and charisma of particular individuals. These individuals often expected that their commitment should be respected¹⁷⁶ in their status in the society. The withdrawal of these key figures was an important factor in the collapse of organisations and in the foundation of new ones.

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The Rhos Herald noted in 1938 that obtaining 'complete unity in any Rhos movement is extremely difficult' and referred to the long history of splits and secessions in the village's chapels and choirs.¹⁷⁶ Voluntary organisations, like single-celled organisms¹⁷⁷ often reproduce by fission. The post-war rivalry which defined the history of choral music in Rhos, the competition between the Rhos Male Voice Choir and the Rhos Orpheus Choir, dated from a defection which occurred soon after the Rhos MVC appointed a -----

¹⁷² 'Llanerch' - 'a glade', and locally recognised contraction of the village's name.

¹⁷³ Matthews, From Pit to Fitch, caption 33.

¹⁷⁴ Bill Portmadoc Jones, Through These Windows - A Place and Its People (Denbigh, 1981), p. 38.

¹⁷⁵ Frankenberg, The Village on the Border, pp. 102 - 103.

¹⁷⁶ Rhos Herald, 30 Apr 1938.

new conductor in 1957.^{177, 178}

The occasion for the Herald's observation about splits was a period of extreme agitation in the village's political organisations. One week in April 1938 had seen the formation in the village of a branch of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement which set up in competition with the local branch of the Wrexham and District Unemployed Association, a large secession from the Rhos Liberal Association and further controversies between the Labour Party and the local Communists.¹⁷⁹ The interwar political life of the village has quite properly been described as a 'ferment'¹⁸⁰ and the fervent political culture of the village is a topic richly deserving of study in its own right.¹⁸¹

Though these themes cannot be fully addressed here it is possible to offer a brief summary of the village's political development. It was apparent from the late nineteenth century that Rhos was determinedly radical in its politics. In the early years of this century the inhabitants of the village supported the cause of liberalism and only gradually during the twenties and thirties did they come to transfer their allegiance to the socialist cause. There were spirited interventions from the Communist Party, Plaid Cymru and even a flying visit from representatives of the British Union of Fascists. While many commentators would have viewed the splits that opened in Rhos's political organisations as a local expression of the pressure imposed on the national political scene by the depression, the perspective taken by the Rhos Herald is perhaps salutary. In the absence of extensive local studies of political organisation, we are still

177 Bill Portmadoc Jones, Through These Windows, p. 50.

178 CROR DD/DM/652/117, Leaflet 'Rhos Male Voice Choir' (n.d.).

179 The formation of a National Unemployed Workers' Movement branch in the village is not surprise since the NUWM was a Communist front organisation.

180 Pugh, Tom Jones's Biography, p. 43.

181 Not least because the village was one of the few places where the Labour Party, the Communists and Plaid Cymru were all represented: R. Merfyn Jones, 'The History of the Labour Movement in North Wales', a lecture at a Llafur dayschool held in Rhos, 4 July 1992.

largely ignorant about the influence of local factors in the development of political organisations.¹⁸² Perhaps the Herald spoke with some insight when it attributed the fissile nature of local political organisations to the headstrong village character and described it as 'a tendency which does more credit to our tempers than our reason.'¹⁸³

The sponsorship by companies of voluntary organisation active in the communities that supplied their workforces was a well known phenomenon in most of Britain. Although the voluntary organisations of Rhos were predominantly self-organised the village did sometimes benefit from employer patronage. Dyke Dennis, the managing director of Hafod Colliery, supported the village's application for funds to build a Welfare Institute and Carlton Walker, managing director after the 1932 takeover, was president of the Rhos and Pen-Y-Cae Ambulance appeal. Many industrial communities accepted patronage from their employers not out of respect for them but on the rather more pragmatic grounds of securing access to funds and opportunities that their own efforts could not guarantee.¹⁸⁴ Colliery companies were best known for sponsoring bands, organisations which required many expensive prerequisites: instruments, music and uniforms.¹⁸⁵ Sports teams have also been the recipients of such patronage, and colliery companies have ~~also~~ sought to promote knowledge of first aid skills useful underground by sponsoring the activities of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade and by encouraging teams to be entered on behalf of the colliery at

¹⁸² John Marshall, 'The Sense of Place, Past Society and the Oral Historian', Oral History Journal Vol. 3, No. 1 (1975), p. 23.

¹⁸³ Rhos Herald, 20 Apr 1932.

¹⁸⁴ Dave Russell notes that despite sometimes very generous levels of support from employers, the strength of the brass band movement came from its players: Dave Russell, Popular Music in England 1840 - 1914, p. 173.

¹⁸⁵ Brian Jackson with Dennis Marsden, 'Brass Bands', in Brian Jackson, Working Class Community - Studies in Northern England (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 25; Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, Coal Is Our Life 2nd. edn. (London, 1969), pp. 119 - 120.

local and regional competitions.¹⁰⁶ While Rhos Silver Band¹⁰⁷ and Llay Main Band¹⁰⁸ were not directly dependent on the Carlton Main Company, their members enjoyed concessions: these often included deployment to easier jobs and more convenient shifts which afforded greater opportunity to go absent to attend band events and competitions.¹⁰⁹

In Llay, company sponsorship supplied the initiative behind many of the village's voluntary organisations. Taken as a piece with the scheme of residential segregation apparent in the architecture of the village, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that both were the outworkings of a conscious policy to assert the hierarchical nature of village society and to assert social control over the workforce. This policy originated under the pit's first owners, the Markham group, but continued under the Carlton group after 1925.

The names of senior company officials were associated with the formation of a number of the village's voluntary organisations. E.A. Hughes, the agent and manager of Llay Main from 1922 to 1928 was president of the Welfare Institute and held positions in the bowling and gardening societies, ~~he~~ was a member of the village Welfare Committee and sat on the -----

¹⁰⁶ Dennis et al., Coal Is Our Life, pp. 121 - 122.

¹⁰⁷ An account of the history of the Rhos Silver Band by Ifor Jervis, a former secretary, traced its development from its foundation in 1883. The Band accepted grants from the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation and eventually became the Hafod Colliery Welfare Band: Rhos Herald, 28 Feb 1959.

¹⁰⁸ The Band was founded in 1928: Wrexham Leader, June 1928; it became Llay Welfare Band after the closure of the Colliery: Horace Davies, WMP C/1984/101.

¹⁰⁹ PRO COAL 6/27 NCB North West Division, Minutes of Divisional Board Meetings, 11 Mar 1947: the Board [✓] withdrew concessions previously extended to Llay and Rhos bandsmen with the exception of those given to the Llay Bandmaster.

Parish Council.¹⁹⁰ Harry Ball, who was the company secretary after 1927, was involved with the Welfare Institute and the Parish Council. Respondents identified Ball as a key figure in the company's oversight and control of village life. Ball was head of the office staff and co-ordinated the clerks in a comprehensive scheme of administrative support to the village's organisations. One of his underlings recalled that 'he was the head of the village, and was therefore involved with whatever went'. The clerks supervised the finances of the cinema and provided secretarial support to the village garden society. It was noted that the degree of responsibility with which a clerk was entrusted generally reflected his status in the office.¹⁹¹

The owners of model villages were generally concerned that the trim appearance of their estates should be maintained.¹⁹² Some companies policed the tidiness of gardens through a system of inspections and fines but at Llay the use of the carrot was preferred to that of the stick and the company sponsored a garden society. Where companies sponsor voluntary organisations they generally convert events into rituals which frame the company's munificence and symbolise the paternal relationship. The Garden Society show and competition, which was staged annually after 1927, seemed to fulfil this role in Llay. The company contributed generously so that the flower and produce show could offer large prizes: in 1938 a total of £120 was offered in prize money.¹⁹³ While the competition was open, there were special categories for the gardens in the colliery village itself. In one way and another, the Garden Society touched the leisure time of a large proportion of the inhabitants of the village. As well as encouraging the male part of the population to toil in their gardens and providing the village with its principal annual show, the society also staged revues and pantomimes which absorbed the energies of the village's children and their

¹⁹⁰ Report of a presentation to E.A. Hughes, upon the occasion of his departure: Wrexham Leader, 21 Sept 1928.

¹⁹¹ Percy Davies, WMP C/1984/39.

¹⁹² Waller, The Dukeries Transformed, p. 200.

¹⁹³ Wrexham Leader, 4 Aug 1937.

proud parents.^{194, 195}

Colliery officials used their influence at the pit to enhance the reputation of the sports teams they were associated with. Jobs at the colliery were offered for particularly talented sportsmen.¹⁹⁶ The cricket team was particularly close to the sympathies of several of the senior officials and was an early beneficiary of such patronage. Thomas Davies, one of the pit's undermanagers, who took the initiative in founding the village's choral society, was also in 1923, the founding president of the village cricket team. Mr. S. Cridall, a Yorkshireman, who was manager of the colliery between 1925 and 1926, became its captain. One man who was associated with the cricket team in later years remembered its exclusivity in the twenties:

... you had to be a Yorkshireman and a deputy to get into the cricket team!¹⁹⁷

However, the lacklustre performance of the team apparently led the officials to recruit talented players from outside the village to stiffen the batting averages. Llay Welfare F.C. was formed in 1932 and was also an imported side. Players were recruited from the colliery's workforce rather than from the village. One interviewee recalled that he obtained work at the pit in 1934, at a time when prospects were otherwise bleak, for playing football for 'em.'¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Wrexham Leader, Dec 1938.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Hilda Davies.

¹⁹⁶ The Morris Motors Cowley Plant offered employment to talented brass players in the interwar period, apparently at the insistence of William Morris himself: Greg Lanning, Christine Peaker, Caro Webb, Richard White (eds.), Making Cars - A History of Car Making in Cowley (London, 1985), pp. 50 - 51.

¹⁹⁷ Horace Davies, WMP C/1984/101.

¹⁹⁸ Mr. Williams senior, WMP C/1984/66.

Company patronage had the effect of distancing social activities from village life. Frankenberg noted of the sports teams of 'Pentreddiwaith', that while success was an important factor in securing a following, support was jeopardised if the local identity of teams was compromised.¹⁹⁹ Villagers felt excluded by the cliqueishness of the organisations in which colliery officials played a major role and disliked the recruitment of outsiders since it denied opportunities to local talent. By 1938, another team had been created which, although it could not draw upon the resources of the Welfare or the sympathies of the colliery officials, could claim the loyalty of the population of Llay by recruiting players exclusively from the village. This team was named, ironically, Llay United, and it served the lower end of the village and the Council estate. Respondents recalled that the team illustrated the divided nature of the community:

Nobody ever supported the two teams, it was one or the other. It was the top end, Llay Welfare, the bottom end Llay United ... we used to go the Llay Welfare because we lived at the top end.²⁰⁰

The pattern of leisure being corporately provided rather than spontaneously organised persisted after nationalization. Even though the Coal Board rationalised its commitment to supporting village activities, the Welfare Institute assumed the role of sponsor. The Institute admitted voluntary organisations into its membership as sub-sections. This status gave organisations the right to call on the Institute's resources and use its amenities and meant that the Institute was represented on their management committees.^{201, 202}

Robert Waller described how the comprehensive scheme of social control asserted by the colliery companies in the model mining communities of the 'Dukeries' was one of the most important factors which inhibited the growth

199 Frankenberg, The Village on the Border, p. 113.

200 Interview with Neville Rogers.

201 R.L. Goss, Llay Miners' Welfare Institute (n.d.).

202 Herbert Davies, WMP C/1984/101.

of the Labour movement in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.²⁰³ In Llay, Harry Ball, the company secretary was not shy about advertising his allegiance to the Conservative Party and was the Chairman of the Llay Conservative Association. Despite his optimistic hope in 1928 that 'it would not be long before they could prove ... that ... Conservatism was not what it was thought to be by many people in the district'²⁰⁴ his cause appears to have made little headway in the district. The village Labour Party branch was organised in the mid-twenties²⁰⁵ and was the only political party which organised on the basis of a popular membership. The village party was soon able to mount an effective challenge to the Conservative incumbent of the Llay District Council seat.

The contrast between the differing ethos of voluntary association in the two villages is nowhere more clearly marked than in the architecture of their respective Welfare Institutes. Both buildings were constructed with monies drawn from the same fund and both were intended to serve the needs of ordinary local people. Though the two buildings were outwardly similar in appearance, it was their architects' and sponsors' respective interpretations of this mission of service and the manner of their realisation in bricks and mortar which reflected the differing characters of the two communities.

²⁰³ Waller, The Dukeries Transformed.
²⁰⁴ Report of the Annual Conservative Social: Wrexham Leader, 27 Apr 1928.
²⁰⁵ Deian Hopkin, 'Labour and Politics in North East Wales, 1900 - 1939', Lecture given at a Llafur dayschool in Wrexham, 22 Oct 1984.

The Rhos Miners' Institute was opened in 1926. The idea of a large central public hall had long been nursed by the respectable leaders of village opinion. The project was funded by a grant from the District Welfare Committee, which disbursed the funds raised from a levy on every ton of coal raised in Britain, but also from a fund raised by the workers at the three local collieries. The men of Hafod, Vauxhall and Bersham Collieries agreed at a January 1925 mass meeting to subscribe a levy of 2d. per week from their wages.²⁰⁶

Though the building was constructed with funds raised by the community at large it was the active and respectable elements of the community which determined that the Welfare Institute should represent the highest aspirations of the village rather than seeking to provide for baser tastes.

Situated in Broad Street, the building was faced with the finest Ruabon brick and was adorned with stone decorations. The building affected a neo-classical symmetry. Stone steps ran up to a central main entrance which was sheltered by a porch created by the pillars supporting the ornamental balcony which united the two protruding wings of the building. The institute was topped by a four faced clock and ~~was~~ surmounted by a golden dome.²⁰⁷ The Institute's impressive top knot was visible throughout the village and remains to this day the only obvious visual point of reference in the heterogeneous mass of roofs which is the village's aspect from the Vale of Maelor.

²⁰⁶ Rhos Public Library, Notes on the Miners' Institute based on local press coverage, (n.d.).

²⁰⁷ See Plate 5 in Appendix Four.

The rather pompous frontage of the building addressed Rhosllanerchrugog's aspiration to break out of the cultural poverty of provincial life. The neo-classical style aped that used in official buildings and the Institute clock marked the hours with the Westminster chimes. The Institute was originally named 'Plas Mwnwyr' - an unlikely coupling of the local word for 'miner' with the term usually used for aristocratic houses. However, the building was known colloquially as 'the Stiwt' - a Welsh transliteration of the diminutive of the word 'institute'.

The amenities offered inside the Institute were designed to help make good the promise of its external features. The promoters of the project determined to make available to the local population facilities and opportunities they had previously been denied. F.A. Roberts, one of the building's architects, said that:

He had often been asked why such a big building was required for Rhos. The people who asked the question ... did not know Rhos. The larger part of the life blood of Rhos was music and art and that institution would be the means of improving social work.²⁰⁸

His colleague, John Owen expressed himself more succinctly. He thought that the purpose of the Institute was: 'to make life worth living'.²⁰⁹

Respondents explicitly identified the Stiwt with the village's aspiration towards the good things of life. One local author un-selfconsciously described it as 'Rhos's Cathedral of Culture'.²¹⁰

The main auditorium was the most unusual feature of the Stiwt. It was very large for a community which was, despite its size and bustle, still only a village. There was seating for 800 and accommodation in the gallery for an additional 350. The inclined stage was large enough for a medium sized theatre, there were gantries capable of handling copious amounts of scenery and lighting and dressing rooms sufficient for the needs of a full

²⁰⁸ Wrexham Leader, 1 Oct 1926.

²⁰⁹ Loc. cit..

²¹⁰ Bill Portmadoc Jones, Through These Windows, p. 47.

company. The intention was indeed to attract nationally renowned performers and to put Rhos on the map. The Institute also featured a billiards room, a games room and numerous committee rooms to satisfy the associational needs of the community. The Institute also housed a library and became the proud seat of the Parish Council.

The Stiwt was opened on September 25th 1926. The autumn of 1926 was not an auspicious time for the mining community. The great strike was coming to its bitter end as miners were drifting back to work. Hopes of eventual victory were receding quickly. The miners of Rhos were more tenacious than their colleagues in other local communities. Large numbers of local men had still not returned to work in late November.²¹¹ The opening of the Institute was an island of harmony in this sea of strident discord. The opening ceremony was performed by the wife of Dyke Dennis, the managing director of Hafod Colliery. Even the bitterness of the dispute did not cloud over Dennis's support for the endeavour. The spectacle of a coalowners' wife sharing a platform with local miners' leaders perhaps expressed another communal aspiration - the hope of a more peaceful industrial future.

The Institute fulfilled the optimistic hopes of its sponsors in that it did become the centre of the community: not only as a social centre but also in terms of its self image. The first Welsh language community broadcast came from Rhos in 1927 and was transmitted by landline to Liverpool and thence to its exiled sons and daughters in the furthest reaches of the empire. The Stiwt was used as an air raid shelter during the war and many took shelter there while aerial raiders pounded the hapless moors, perhaps mistaking them for a blazing town, in several fraught weeks in 1941. Though the building was more solidly built than many of the surrounding cottages it made little sense for large numbers to crowd into a single building. However, what local people lost in safety from the bombs was made up for in the strength they drew from what was in fact a

²¹¹ Wrexham Leader, 26 Nov 1926.

spontaneous communal gathering in the face of a crisis:

That's why Rhos people can all tell you they all know everything about the Wizard of Oz; you paid your money to go to the pictures and then you wouldn't come from there, you would stay there. And then you'd sing hymns.²¹²

The intention that the Stiwt should be a palace of culture expressed itself in the determination that it should not become a den of iniquity. A licensed bar was conspicuously lacking from the Stiwt's otherwise comprehensive facilities. Bars were a prominent feature of many other Miners' Institutes including the one opened in Llay in 1931. While a bar was not considered for fear of driving away the respectable part of the community which would be expected to patronise the public rooms and uphold cultural endeavours, the decision also arose from the sincere convictions of the Institute's trustees. Though the trustees saw their mission as providing access to high culture for the local population they had to negotiate a difficult compromise between with more remunerative popular media. Notwithstanding the high aspirations of the Stiwt's originators, the introduction of films in 1929 signalled something of a change of direction.

Though films were undoubtedly popular, local elites had misgivings about the cinema. Iairus Jones, the proprietor of the Pavillion,²¹³ which screened silent films in the late 1910s and 1920s, employed someone to translate the captions into Welsh for the benefit of older villagers and to maintain order among the younger members of the audience. Who else could have been better qualified to perform these tasks and allay anxieties about the respectability of the new medium than the Sunday school superintendant of the Hill Street Chapel?²¹⁴

The introduction of screenings in the Institute approximately coincided with the birth of the 'talkies'. Moral entrepreneurs all over Britain noted

²¹² Mrs. Blodwen Whalley, WMP C/1984/42.

²¹³ Dennis W. Gilpin, Rhosllanerchrugog ... Vol. 1, caption 18.

²¹⁴ George Clifton Hughes, Shut the Mountain Gate Ms. (n.d. - 1987?), p. 6.

profound concerns about the social and cultural effects of the cinema. The leaders of Rhos opinion concurred with their pessimistic analysis²¹⁵ and noted the additional concern that English language films were damaging the hold of the Welsh language on the young.²¹⁶ The malign effect of 'Hollywood rubbish' was condemned on the Eisteddfod field by a member of the Gorsedd at the Rhos Chair Eisteddfod in May 1954.²¹⁷ The Denbighshire teachers whose views were canvassed in the late forties considered that children acquired a 'distorted view of life that is alien to them, they become over-sophisticated and ... fail to appreciate the simpler enjoyments in life',
 (i) *required!* and that the nervous excitement caused by over-exposure to the silver beams led to fractiousness in the classroom.²¹⁸

Despite these concerns, the Institute quickly became heavily dependent on its cinema receipts. It was receipts from the cinema which funded many of the Institute's more earnest endeavours.²¹⁹ Nevertheless there were still occasions when the grasp of the Institute's aspirations exceeded the reach of its resources. A visitor in the late forties was told of a recent occasion when the takings on two performances of Verdi's requiem, which had required the presence of four professional singers and a section of the Halle orchestra, had failed to clear the deficit. The locally recruited
 ? chorus had undertaken to subscribe /a' sixpence a week each to clear the debt.²²⁰

The first public rooms in Llay Main Model Village were in a workman's club which was established by 1920 in Llay Place, the large private house

²¹⁵ Geoffrey Pearson, Hooligan - A History of Respectable Fears (London, 1983), pp. 31 - 33.

²¹⁶ The Herald's 'Commentator' hailed attempts to preserve the Welsh language but considered that the cinema 'nullifies every effort': Rhos Herald, 12 Mar 1938.

²¹⁷ Wrexham Leader, 28 May 1954.

²¹⁸ L.P. Dodd, Language and Cultural Survey, p. 31.

²¹⁹ R.G. Lloyd-Thomas, A Welsh Odyssey (Llandebie, n.d.), p. 64.

²²⁰ Ibid, p. 62.

attached to the grange which the company bought as a site for the village. The club was paid for by deductions from the wages of the colliery workmen.²²¹ The colliery company was also very heavily involved in the shaping of plans for a purpose-built institute. Llay Miner's Welfare Institute was constructed with funds from the Welfare levy and was opened, with some pomp, in June 1931.²²²

The architect for the Llay scheme was the same F.A. Roberts who had worked on the Rhos Miner's Institute. Outwardly, and particularly in *detail* respect of ornamental ~~detail~~, the two buildings were similar. However, due to the greater availability of space, the Llay Welfare had a greater breadth of front which contrasted with the depth of the Stiwt.²²³ The Llay Institute contained a similar range of facilities, which included a billiards hall, reading room, lending library and committee rooms. However, anticipated differences in the use of the two Institutes by their respective communities were reflected in the different relative emphases given to the amenities.

The stage at the Llay Institute was merely a raised platform at the end of an assembly room. Though capable of accommodating a very respectable 550 persons, the auditorium at Llay Welfare was clearly much less grand than the auditorium at the Stiwt. The Llay Welfare was intended to be an altogether more frivolous institution. A childrens' recreation ground opened in July 1930 and a bowling green, tennis courts and bandstand were opened along with the Institute in July 1931.²²⁴

From the first, the Welfare Institute was a licensed premises. However, the arrangement of its amenities and particularly the segregation of the licensed premises from the rest of the building indicated that its

²²¹ Wrexham Leader, 6 Feb 1925.
²²² Wrexham Leader, 26 June 1931.
²²³ See Plate 6 in Appendix Four.
²²⁴ Wrexham Leader, 26 June 1931.

architects were aware that the liquor issue defined a split in local society. There were two sets of stairs in the building. One set communicated directly with the assembly room and committee rooms on the first floor. This meant that those whose business was on the first floor did not have to pass through the licensed part of the building.²²⁵ This expedient protected scruples but proclaimed, in bricks and mortar, that while the Institute was intended to provide a service to all sections of the community, it intended no particular mission of moral improvement.

²²⁵ R.L. Goss, Llay Miners' Welfare Institute (n.d.).

Communal Self Image - Rhos.

The self-image of the village of Rhos was closely bound up with its perception of the role played in its social life by its voluntary organisations. The most numerous class of village voluntary organisations was the chapels and their auxiliary organisations, most prominently, the 9th Sunday schools. ~~While~~ the role these organisations actually played in village life is discussed elsewhere,²²⁶ their role in the village's construction of its own identity will be considered here. While oral testimony can, in conjunction with other sources, allow us to attempt an empirical reconstruction of the activities of voluntary organisations, it can also allow us to describe the structures of social organisation as it was perceived by local inhabitants.

Rhos respondents considered that voluntary organisations were an important part of local life. These organisations certainly enjoyed a great deal of prestige and participation was viewed by some as a moral imperative. Personal motives for participating in such activities are many and various. Social scientists have sought to account for participation in voluntary organisations by looking at them as a means for the individual to gain status and prestige. Isabel Emmett has noted that in provincial Wales offices in voluntary organisations and other voluntary positions of service to the community enjoyed a high degree of prestige. She linked this cachet to the political and economic characteristics of the society she was studying. Since this was a provincial society remote from the centres of political power where there were few opportunities for social mobility, voluntary organisations gave many the opportunity to distinguish themselves and to accumulate and enjoy a social status which they were denied in other spheres.²²⁷

²²⁶ See Chapter Three.

²²⁷ Isabel Emmett, 'Fe Godwn Ni Eto: Stasis and Change in a Welsh Industrial Town', in Anthony Cohen (ed.), Belonging, p. 188.

The affirmation of individual identity and the search for personal status was not the only dimension to participation in voluntary organisations. Social activities which take place in a communal context are ultimately an affirmation of communal identity. Many voluntary organisations, particularly those involved in competitive activities, are fiercely loyal to a particular locality and openly conceive of themselves as the champions of that locality. Even where it is not an explicit part of the activities of a society it may often be ~~that~~ the case that, as E.D.K. Young noted of the voluntary organisations of a Northern suburb studied in the seventies, ~~the~~ statement of communal identity may be an implicit part of the activities of many local social organisations.²²⁸

Testimony from Rhos respondents about the activities of local voluntary organisations tends to converge and often articulates a few consistent motifs. Such a convergence in oral testimony may indicate that a theme has merited extensive discussion within the community. It may also indicate that a particular view of events has become part of the framework of common assumptions that constitute local culture. The existence of an ideology usually implies the presence of commissars. Jan Vansina noted that hegemonic perspectives were disproportionately represented in African oral traditions and concluded that dominant groups were able to use their prestige to create official versions of the past.²²⁹

When interviewing in Rhos it was hard to avoid the impression that respondents were sometimes using the interview to pass on a particular interpretation which amounted to an 'official version' of the village's past. The contents of these narratives offered some clue as to where in local society this 'official version' might have originated. These

²²⁸ E.D.K. Young, 'Where the Daffodils Blow: Elements of Communal Imagery in a Northern Suburb', in Anthony Cohen (ed.), Symbolising Boundaries, p. 128.

²²⁹ Jan Vansina, Oral History As Tradition (Madison, 1985), pp. 98 - 99, cited in John Bodnar, 'Power and Memory in Oral History: Workers and Managers at Studebaker', Journal of American History Vol. 75, No. 4 (1989), p. 1203.

narratives emphasised the respectable aspects of village life and focussed on a narrow range of village institutions. These narratives appear to represent a continuation of a genre of eulogaic evocations of local identity which began upon the lips of the community's social leaders: local councillors, ministers, deacons and the principal officers of local voluntary organisations.²³⁰ The narratives gathered in interviews can be compared with the utterances of these individuals as they were recorded in the local press. However, it is important to realise that local journalists were not simply recorders of local opinion but were themselves important players in the construction of village identity.

The growth of the provincial press in the later nineteenth century contributed to a deepening sense of political and cultural self-awareness in Wales.²³¹ Journals flourished even in small communities and local people depended of them not only for a view of the world outside but for a new perspective on the narrower worlds they themselves inhabited. The press was closer to the people of Wales in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than at any time until the growth of the community newspaper movement in the 1970s and 1980s.²³²

Rhos's principal journal was the Rhos Herald which circulated in Rhos, Pen-Y-Cae and Ruabon. The journalists who wrote for the Herald at once amplified and extended the oral expression of the village's ideology of place and people. The author of one 1961 testimonial stated that the Herald had for over sixty years 'helped to knit the people of this large village into a conscious community'.²³³ The Herald was established in 1894 by

²³⁰ The voice of the unrespectable elements of local society may have been suppressed but it was not silent: see the discussion of the lore about unrepentant sinners and sinning ascetics in Chapter Three.

²³¹ K.O. Morgan, Wales 1880 - 1980 - The Rebirth of a Nation (Oxford, 1982), pp. 49 - 50.

²³² Gwilym Huws, 'Papurau Bro ... the Welsh Community Newspaper Movement', Planet Vol. 83 (Oct/Nov 1990), pp. 55 - 56.

²³³ A testimonial from James Idwal Jones, Rhos born MP for Wrexham, on the occasion of the paper's relaunch: Rhos Herald, 27 May 1961.

Richard Mills. Mills had married a local woman, and opened a print-shop first in Johnstown and later in Rhos. He began publishing the newspaper to supplement his earnings as a printer and musical compositor. Mills himself was a product of the earnest cultural and associational scene typical of Welsh villages and towns in the later part of the nineteenth century. He was a composer in his own right and conducted a celebrated Wrexham choir.^{234, 235} Mills died in 1903 and left the Herald to his sons Arthur and Harry. While the Herald was a thin journal which relied heavily on syndicated columns, the Mills family provided much of the rest of the copy and supplemented their efforts with contributions from local stringers.²³⁶

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One local journalist who contributed to the Herald remembered that the articles, advertisements and notices served up a rich slice of local life: 'deaths, marriages, the seiat, Band of Hope, cymdeithas diwylliadol, 'steddfod, cyfarfod pregethu - nothing escaped the eye of the Herald'.²³⁷ One local woman remembered a village saying:

It was a bit like a joke, you know, if anything unusual happened, or something comical happened, they'd say, 'It'll be in the Rhos Herald tomorrow!²³⁸

The Mills family was not content to report the news but often sought to influence it. Richard Mills and later Harry, as editor, and Arthur, as reporter, provided a piercing commentary on local life through editorials and in various guises as columnists. Welsh copy was edited by a local minister who apparently did not hesitate to screen material through the

²³⁴ Dennis Gilpin, Rhosllanerchrugog ... Vol. 1, caption 52.
²³⁵ Emrys Cleaver, Musicians of Wales, (Ruthin, 1968), p. 43.
²³⁶ Feature on David Williams, b. 1904, one of the Herald's former contributors: Wrexham Leader, 16 Nov 1984.
²³⁷ '... the chapel fellowship ... the cultural society ... the preaching festival.': CROR NTD/456, Gordon Ellis, [Memoir of the Rhos Herald], Ms. (1971).
²³⁸ Mrs. J. Ellis, WMP C/1984/26.

filter of his own stern moralistic convictions.²³⁹ The Herald did not seek to disguise its partiality in local issues and the newspaper had a character as idiosyncratic as those as some of the citizens it reported on. In 1961 however, Harry Mills died and the title was sold to a Bala publisher. Once the local connection was severed, competition from other journals and other media began to tell. The last editions of the Herald were produced in 1968.²⁴⁰

Beyond the Rhos Herald and the Wrexham Leader, the most important title which served the town and the urban villages of the surrounding district, there was the regional press which also offered reflections of Welshness and which, with the various other media, sponsored and furthered discussions about Welsh national identity. It is certain that the self-image of Rhos owes much to national discussions about Welsh identity. The eisteddfod, an assembly summoned to encourage the bardic arts, was a ritual of exceptional importance in a national community that was not a political state. The parade of the symbols and insignia of Welshness evolved by romantic intellectuals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries enabled the Welsh people to visualize their own country.²⁴¹ Rhos participated whole-heartedly in the eisteddfod tradition and appropriated aspects of the ritual to bolster its sense of community.

The earliest recorded eisteddfod at Rhos was in held in 1829²⁴² and during the period bounded by this study the village hosted many local and regional contests and, on one occasion, the National Eisteddfod. Staging the National Eisteddfod was a large undertaking for a village. Materials were begged and borrowed to construct the pavillions of the 1945 'austerity eisteddfod' on the Ponciau Banks. A stone circle, the backdrop for the central ceremony of the eisteddfod, the convocation where the Gorsedd,

²³⁹ Gordon Ellis, [Memoir of the Rhos Herald].

²⁴⁰ Ibid..

²⁴¹ Prys Morgan, 'From a Death to a View - the Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 91 - 92.

²⁴² Dodd, 'Welsh and English in East Denbighshire', p. 64.

>/ picturesquely attired in druidic robes, solemnly call for peace was constructed on the Banks and remains a local landmark. The call for peace was leant a special poignance in 1945 when the end of the war with Japan was announced on the Eisteddfod field.

The Eisteddfod is a democratic festival and the conviction that the most meritorious candidate will win regardless of their social origins is a cherished part of the eisteddfod ideal. Impartiality is ensured in the literary events by the use of bardic pseudonyms. The famously plebian backgrounds of some chaired bards are a part of the mystique of the eisteddfod. It became almost customary for the local and invited dignitaries who officiated and spectated at eisteddfod ceremonies in Rhos to allude to this tradition by praising the earnest cultural endeavours of the humble mining community as the acme of the eisteddfod ideal.

>/ In 1912, E.T. John, the Liberal MP for the East Denbighshire division, alluded to the close association of the miners with the Eisteddfod and gave thanks that:

The miners of East Denbighshire obviously did not find the pursuit of the minimum wage a wholly absorbing occupation, but on the contrary devoted much time to the practise of music and the study of the literature of their native land.²⁴³

Robert Richards, Professor of Economics at Bangor, was himself the son of a miner. He later became MP for Wrexham. He was an honoured guest at the second County Eisteddfod which Rhos hosted in 1920. He declared that:

While Rhos existed the eisteddfod would live, and while Welsh was spoken at Rhos the Welsh language would never die.²⁴⁴

The Herald not only reported the village's cultural activities and other voluntary pursuits but sought to encourage the village to improve upon its

²⁴³ Wrexham Advertiser, 1 June 1912.

²⁴⁴ Wrexham Leader, May 1920.

achievements. It assumed a role rather like that of the Eisteddfod judge, whose job was not simply to provide a verdict but to deliver a detailed adjudication. The adjudication was as much a part of the eisteddfod ritual as the competition. The Herald, like the adjudicator, sought to exhort and cajole the people of the village to redouble their efforts. Some of the events reported by the Herald were typically occasions which would prompt evocations of the peculiar genius of Rhos, while others would draw laments about declining standards and a lack of application. The Herald's journalists constructed a particular image of the community and did not hesitate to manipulate it to spur the village towards further achievements. Past triumphs were constructed as standards against which current endeavours were continually and often disparagingly compared. In 1938 the Herald's 'Commentator' proudly published a list of the 'various
 2' ' / (activities) of Rhos, as apart from its everyday work, as evinced in the different channels in which the life of Rhos flows':

1. Religion.
2. Music.
3. Politics.
4. Drama.
5. Sport and games.²⁴⁵

The most particular fault of Rhos, which detracted from its achievements, was, as the 'Commentator' described it, a 'lack of continuity of purpose'.²⁴⁶

The Herald not only evoked the schoolmasterly eye of the adjudicator but the gaze of the outside world. The Herald regularly reprinted press reports from other journals when they referred to Rhos. Reports on Rhos 'As others see us' obviously provided copy which filled space in the journal. It seems likely that Herald journalists were sometimes recycling stories of their own which they had managed to sell to other journals. The inclusion of these reports sometimes sought to promote a sense of pride in the community

²⁴⁵ Rhos Herald, 12 Mar 1938.

²⁴⁶ Loc. cit.

and others were quoted in the attempt to goad apathetic Rhosites into better performances in the future.

The village's intermittent and long running campaign for urban powers was one area of discussion which hinged upon conceptions of the village's unique identity. The first period of agitation for civic emancipation coincided with the Indian summer of liberalism in the first decade of the century, the second came during the political ferment of the thirties. 'Urban Powers' was an attempt to translate the municipal liberalism of the cities of Northern England to a smaller scale. Activists sought the power to raise and disburse a local rate and sought the municipal competence to control the village's amenities and reform its sanitation. They sought to ensure both quality of service and to guarantee fiscal prudence.

The campaign was intermittently supported by the local Ratepayer's Association and more determinedly by the Rhos Herald. The Herald continually sought to sting local electors out of their apathy. In 1932 it told its readers of:

A visitor from Manchester to Rhos, [whol was seeking local information ... [and whol expressed his surprise that an important place like Rhos had not got Urban or District Powers. "Whatever," he asked, "have your local leaders been thinking about all these years. I was given to understand that there were some able and progressive people in Rhos, but now I am disillusioned ..."²⁴⁷

In October 1912 the campaigners had pressed their case to a County Council Inquiry. While a minority report from the Committee of Inquiry's Chairman looked upon the case of the reformers with sympathy and deplored the fact that such a large community should have its affairs dictated by an outside body, the majority rejected the proposal.²⁴⁸ While it was not surprising that the County Council should have supported the status quo

²⁴⁷ Rhos Herald, 27 Aug 1932.

²⁴⁸ Report of a Denbighshire County Council Meeting: Rhos Herald, 16 Nov 1932.

this stance received considerable report in the parish itself. The ratepayers of Johnstown, which did not suffer from the same sanitary problems as the rest of the parish, were particularly vociferous in their opposition.²⁴⁹ The early thirties saw a revival of the Ratepayer's Association after a long hiatus and in March 1937, a report commissioned by the Parish Council to consider the feasibility of self-government was delivered. The report concluded that while 'Urban Powers' probably would mean an improvement in amenities, the figures produced by the reformers were over-optimistic and ~~that~~ self-government would bring a higher rate.²⁵⁰ This verdict seems to have been widely anticipated and was probably a significant factor in the defeat of the slate of 'Urban Powers' candidates in the County Council elections of that year.²⁵¹ Further consideration of the matter was deferred indefinitely during the war-time emergency²⁵² and the campaign was dissipated as local minds turned to wider affairs.

John Evans, a prominent local Nonconformist, was the village's chief prophet of 'Urban Powers' and he demanded the emancipation of the people of Rhos from the Egyptian thrall of the Wrexham Rural District Council in a thundery succession of pamphlets and letters to local journals. As John Evans conceived them, the reasons for seeking municipal powers were partly pragmatic but largely ethical. ~~Evans~~ argued that:

... we cannot call ourselves 'free citizens' or 'free subjects', and we shall never be until we have Urban Powers and be in a position to govern ourselves.²⁵³

Despite his evocations of freedom and progress, Evans based his campaign on the unashamedly parochial principal of 'Less of Wrexham, and more of

249 Report of a meeting of Johnstown rate-payers: Rhos Herald, 5 Oct 1912.

250 Report of a special meeting of Rhos Parish Council: Wrexham Leader, 12 Mar 1937.

251 Wrexham Leader, 5 Mar 1937.

252 Report of a Parish Council Meeting: Rhos Herald, 9 Dec 1939.

253 John Evans, Rhos and Self Government, (Rhos, 1914), p. 18.

Rhos'.²⁵⁴

Some of the squibs fired in the 'Urban Powers' campaign had a considerably longer life and wider currency than the flimsy pamphlets that launched them. Rhos is widely known as the 'largest village in Wales'. The term was and is still frequently used in descriptions of the community offered by local inhabitants and the visitors who have interviewed them. The epithet is often cited in interviews and is an important part of the local ideology of place. 'The largest village' is usually a shorthand for an assertion of the unique atmosphere of the community and an evocation of its warm and friendly atmosphere. Most people who use the phrase are quite unaware of Evans's campaign and his more prosaic intentions. Evans blazed at the indignity that one of the largest communities in North Wales should be administered by the meanest instrument of local government,²⁵⁵ the Parish Council, and based his claim of right on hard statistical facts. In 1914 he claimed that:

Of the 63 Urban Districts in Wales, 50 have a smaller rateable value [than Rhos]. In North Wales only one has a larger population than Rhos, and that is Colwyn Bay, while of the 29 Urban Districts 21 have a lower assessable value.²⁵⁶

Another epithet coined by Evans also still enjoys wide currency. The idea of Rhos as the 'village of all the talents' is a very important part of the evocation of local identity. In his 1942 history of the village, in fact a retrospect on urban development and an exhortation to further progress, Evans described the 'notable and triumphal achievements reached in the various scholastic spheres' by the people of the village and instanced:

Doctors of Music, Professors of Music, Schoolmasters - Elementary,

²⁵⁴ John Evans, 'An Open Letter to the Citizens of Rhos ...': Rhos Herald, 25 Aug 1945.

²⁵⁵ John Evans, The Town of Rhos With Urban Authority (Rhos, 1936), p. 3.

²⁵⁶ John Evans, Rhos and Self-Government, p. 17.

Secondary and Technical, Director of Education, Justices of the Peace, Platform Orators, Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Doctors of Divinity, Official Receiver, ... Medical Doctors, Specialists at Rodney Street, Medical Officers of Health, Architects and Surveyors, Parliamentary Candidates, Civil Engineers, Sanitary Inspectors, Bachelors of Divinity, Vicars and Curates ... Authors, Editors, Journalists, ... Theological Professors, ... Chemists, Colliery Managers, Opera Singers, ... High Commissioner of South Africa (Samuel Evans), Relieving Officers (Denbighshire County), Canon (J.F. Hughes of Sudbury Exhibitioner at Oxford College, Oxford [sic]), Pathologist (Dr. E.R. Jones).²⁵⁷

Despite a brief post-war revival, hopes for the granting of 'Urban Powers' faded after the 1937 report. The campaign died with Evans in 1951. However, the tradition of eulogy for the overgrown village which was, at least in its own estimation, the Athens of North Wales, lived on.

Another endeavour at local improvement, and one which actually achieved realisation, also offered Rhos a reflection of its own character.

Unemployment cut a swathe through the community in the early thirties and the idleness of large numbers of its working men was a blow to its self esteem. In 1932 miners' leaders invited the peace campaigner George M. Ll. Davies to the village to canvass the possibility of launching a scheme similar to the one at Brynmawr in South Wales.²⁵⁸ Brynmawr was one of the darkest unemployment blackspots and it was there that the Quakers founded the Community Study Council, a body that undertook some notable social surveys and provided practical help to unemployed miners and steel workers besides.²⁵⁹ It was in Brynmawr that a body called the Civile Service Volontaire recruited the labour of international students to aid in the task of clearing a valley used as a rubbish dump.

In Rhos fifteen acres of wasteland, the pocked and scarred industrial

²⁵⁷ John Evans, The History of Rhos - or Rhos as it was, As it is and As it should be (Rhos, 1942), p. 15.

²⁵⁸ Dennis W. Gilpin, Rhosllanerchrugog ... Vol. 2, captions 64 - 68.

²⁵⁹ K.O. Morgan, Wales 1880 - 1980, p. 223.

landscape of the Ponciau Banks, were acquired for a similar purpose. It was hoped that the efforts of the community would turn this land into a park and gardens. Student volunteers from Lithuania, Italy, Germany, Norway, India and the West Indies came to work side by side with the part-employed and unemployed miners of Rhos in the summers of 1933 and 1935. The profits of the Stiwt were pledged to servicing the debt incurred by the scheme for a period of six months.²⁶⁰ The Park was opened by the Prince of Wales in 1934 and was adopted by the Parish Council in 1935.^{261, 262}

The organisers of the international camp were as interested in forging symbols of solidarity as they were in providing amenities. Part of the intention of the Civile Service Volontaire was that people of different classes and from different lands should mingle so that the people of Rhos should have 'personal experience of the ways of those from other countries' and the foreign students should learn something of 'the hardship of life for those following a special calling in a restricted sphere'.²⁶³ The renewal of the heart of the community, largely through its own efforts, but with sympathy and aid from the outside world, had a great symbolic resonance for Rhosites. An event prompted by the defeat of the area's industries became a triumph for the local spirit of endeavour. One Rhos correspondent crowed triumphantly from the pages of the North Wales Labour Searchlight:

Now you other villages! What are you going to do about it? Rhos has had to fight hard for her laurels, and so must you. When are you going to start?²⁶⁴

The presence of their international guests and representatives of the press afforded local leaders of opinion the opportunity to explain to the world the genius of the village. J.T. Edwards, the manager of the Welfare

²⁶⁰ Manchester Guardian, 20 Aug 1932.

²⁶¹ Dennis W. Gilpin, Rhosllanerchrugog ... Vol. 2, captions 69 - 70.

²⁶² Rhos Herald, 14 Sept 1935.

²⁶³ CROR D/C/60, Pamphlet: Work Camps and Voluntary Service (n.d. - 1933?).

²⁶⁴ North Wales Labour Searchlight No. 8 (August 1932).

or Institute, closed the first International Camp with ~~his~~ account of the unique attributes of the village:

His own theory was that the people were endowed with the spirit of their Rhos forefathers who were a deeply religious people. It was the play of this deeply religious feeling in the lives of Rhos people in its various forms that made Rhos Rhos. It was true that they had their intellectuals and talent abounded in the place, but after all it was not these things that impressed most. It was that "something" common to all of the people that generated the Rhos atmosphere.²⁶⁵

The complements paid to the village by the departing students echoed similar sentiments. It is hard to believe that the young people who left the village with warm testaments to its friendliness, classlessness, religiosity, abiding love of culture and talent for music on their lips had not been influenced to some degree by a very intensive exposure to the village's ideological account of its own social life.²⁶⁶

Several scholars have described how evocations of community identity called forth in specific circumstances have been retained as integrative ideologies uniting the community, even where they conflicted with the actual experiences of local inhabitants. E.D.K. Young studied the communal imagery deployed by the residents of a suburb in Northern England. The use of communal and pastoral imagery was a conscious part of the strategy followed by a local amenity society formed in the early seventies to mobilise local people in defence of the area's residential advantages. The society spoke on behalf of the inhabitants of a respectable suburb which was threatened by residential and industrial development. Young noted that the movement had inherited its rhetoric from an earlier campaign organised by local gentleman farmers whose lands and homes shared the districts with the garden villas of wealthy manufacturers. The communal rhetoric had first been deployed in the late nineteenth century by this group of 'magnates' as they sought to oppose the residential development which subsequently

²⁶⁵ Rhos Herald, 24 Sept 1932.

²⁶⁶ Loc. cit..

brought suburban housing to the area. Despite the fact that it had originally been deployed against the interest which the amenity society presumed to speak for, the evocation of place asserted by the magnates had not faded but still constituted the statement of identity preferred by contemporary residents.²⁶⁷ This rhetoric of place existed as a 'traditional folklore' and its success as an ideology for mobilising local residential interests depended on the success of its appeal to a 'conscience collective'. In Rhos the tradition of eulogising local social life had a similar durability but whereas in 'Woodland' this rhetoric was intermittently used in times of local crisis,²⁶⁸ in Rhos it was a routine part of the evocation of the past.

John Bodnar described how a symbolic picture of a workplace community survived beyond the 1963 closure of the Studebaker plant at South Bend, Indiana in the reminiscences of former carworkers. The image of a friendly factory had been abstracted from workplace discourses and had been crystallized in propagandistic company magazines produced in the thirties and forties. The image was later presented in national advertising campaigns. The 'friendly factory' image stressed the uniqueness of the situation at South Bend, where it was alleged that kinship networks spread throughout the plant and where it was claimed that generations of proud and related craftsmen made cars of unique quality. The pattern of father-son employment was not unique to Studebaker and the image of the craftsman was far from the reality of the production line. However, even where such claims contrasted with their own experiences, respondents still tended to evoke and defend the image in the narratives they offered in interviews.²⁶⁹

A similar tendency may be noted in Rhos narratives. While such accounts may be fallacious they are an eloquent testament to the hegemony of the groups and institutions which originally propagated them. However, local

²⁶⁷ Young, 'Where the Daffodils Blow', p. 128.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 137.

²⁶⁹ John Bodnar, 'Power and Memory in Oral History: Workers and Managers at Studebaker', Journal of American History Vol. 75, No. 4 (1989), pp. 1204 - 1206.

residents were not simply parroting lines in which they had been schooled by the Rhos Herald and the village's deacons. It is apparent that they were using the conventions of the genre to structure their own reminiscences of the past and that they have made a deep emotional investment in this ideology of local society.

Editorials in the Rhos Herald are one reflection of the local discourse about communal identity and oral narratives about local life are another. Although contemporaneously produced paper sources have persisted to posterity uncorrupted and are easily locatable in archives ~~and~~ by contrast oral evocations of place have to be mediated to posterity through the internal discussions of the community and have to be intercepted through interviews. ~~we~~ we should not a-priori attribute primacy to the paper sources. It seems likely that the relationship between printed propaganda and orally circulated ideology was a reciprocal one and that the two discourses were interdependent and mutually reinforcing. ~~However~~ the frequent discussion of themes which refer to communal identity in Rhos narratives should alert us to the fact that oral culture ultimately seems to have been the more influential medium.

What then are the themes which characterise narratives evoking the village's character? Reminiscences reiterate a number of basic themes which echo evocations of ~~of~~ the past which may be heard in working class communities in Wales and indeed in other parts of the British Isles. While these claims may seem to be hackneyed and unoriginal they do embody respondents' consciousness of their local identity. What is interesting is that the residents of Rhos have attempted to claim these evocations of the past as a specifically local tradition. First and foremost, narratives are distinguished by respondents' assertions that Rhos is a special community. Though the attributes and achievements they may instance can be different the assertion of uniqueness remains the same. Beyond this claim, few accounts of village life lack the assertion that the most important aspects of village life were the ubiquitous 'interests' cultivated by the voluntary organisations. Local people speak with pride of the endeavours and achievements of their fellow villagers.

Respondents waxed large about the achievements of their fellow villagers and insisted that the unique culture and special circumstances of the village had played a role in prompting the achievements of its sons and daughters. Many asserted that the village's achievements could be linked to its social circumstances. Parents in Rhos made many sacrifices for their children in the interwar period, as indeed did parents all over the British Isles, and sought to keep their children out of degrading manual occupations:

You see, I don't want to put Rhos on too much of a pedestal but there's no doubt about it, there was something unique about it because they had Musical Bachelors, Doctors of Music and all those type of people, if you understand me. And they've done well in all walks of life. You see, you had a Principal of Harvard University and he came from a mining family.

What was the password more or less in Rhos, in the end it was 'My son's not going down the pit!', you follow me? And this is what they were doing all the time: 'My son's not going down the pit!'. And they would make sacrifices for their children to go to college.²⁷⁰

This was the ethos which moved many of the village's voluntary organisations, several of which were explicitly dedicated towards self improvement. The Workers' Educational Association had an active following in the village between the wars. One of the earliest classes held in the village, in which miners had met to study the Greek New Testament and to discuss it in Welsh, had become for the local branch an icon of its ideals.²⁷¹ The incongruous but flattering picture of miners fresh from the pit troubling to learn Greek became an aspect of the village's ideology of place. In 1932 there were complaints that graduates from Rhos were monopolising teaching appointments in the county. One Rhos County Councillor rebutted claims of favouritism and partiality by referring his

²⁷⁰ Interview with Joe Williams.

²⁷¹ Report of the Workers' Educational Association 50th Anniversary Celebrations held at Rhos: Wrexham Leader, 24 Mar 1957.

colleagues to the patent merits of the youth of the community:

If Rhos miners took Greek in the evening and the young men of other villages played football they could not blame the Rhos members.²⁷²

The image of the self-educated working man is one of the most cherished and flattering relections of the Welsh character²⁷³ and in Rhos many respondents sought to localise this tradition by citing examples of distinguished figures who had come from humble beginnings in the village. One respondent remembered several such careers. His accounts stressed not only communal support and personal endeavour but described how, to overcome their disadvantages, determined young men had even turned the unlikeliest features of their environment to their advantage. He recalled one colleague, a pit electrician, who persevered with a correspondence course in electrical engineering and eventually went on to manage the Niagara Falls hydro-electric power station. Another, more artistically inclined colleague, stole the clay used to stem the shotholes:

He was only a young lad on the tubs, he'd steal some [clay] and he used to model. His models were all over the pit. He became a sculptor. We made a collection for him, about one hundred pounds, because he had a scholarship to go to a school for modelling. The last I heard of him he was with some archaeologist ... ²⁷⁴

Other narratives depicted Rhos as not only being sympathetic to the aspirations of its youth but claimed that the community provided them with a legacy of socialisation and early training in the fields in which they later excelled. From this perspective the two key institutions were the

²⁷² Report of a meeting of the Denbighshire Education Committee held on 6 May 1932: Wrexham Leader, 12 May 1932.

²⁷³ Frank Olding, 'The Once and Future Wales' (reviewing J. Geraint Jenkins, Getting Yesterday Right: Interpreting the Heritage of Wales (Cardiff, 1992)), Planet Vol. 99 (June - July, 1993), p. 93.

²⁷⁴ Arthur Redhouse, CROH NT/789, No. 4.

chapel and the Sunday school. Rhos viewed itself as a cradle of political talent and was proud that several Members of Parliament had first heard the Westminster chimes from the Stiwt clock. Thomas William Jones was the Labour member for Merioneth after 1951 and was ennobled as Lord Maelor in 1966.²⁷⁵ He was joined at Westminster by his brother, James Idwal Jones, who became Labour MP for Wrexham after the by-election occasioned by the death of Robert Richards in 1955.²⁷⁶ James Idwal Jones was succeeded as MP for Wrexham by another son of Rhos, Tom Ellis.²⁷⁷ The village has given Britain a number of prominent trade union officials and lawyers. John Evans included 'Platform Orators' on his roll of village achievement. Local opinion insists that these individuals received their earliest training in the dialectical arts in the local chapels:

Chapel was the centre! Every union official that I know and every man that's left Rhos village and made his way in life, MP's professors, ministers, scientists, you name it it's gone from Rhos! And their basic foundation and their seat of learning was the Chapel and the Sunday School.

I remember, I used to go to the Gospel Hall, I remember we used to have over a hundred children every Sunday. And that Bible reading class was the beginning of the education for all those people from the Rhos.²⁷⁸

-/ The time when Sunday schools were important educational institutions belonged to an earlier period of Welsh history. By the interwar period their secular educational role had largely been superceded by the institutions provided by the state.²⁷⁹ Reconstructing the Sunday school

²⁷⁵ Autobiography: Arglywydd Maelor (T.W. Jones), Fel Hyn y Bu (Denbigh, 1970);, obituary: Wrexham Leader, 23 Nov 1984.

²⁷⁶ Arnold J. James and John E. Thomas, Wales at Westminster: A History of the Parliamentary Representation of Wales 1800 - 1979 (Llandysul, 1981), p. 159.

²⁷⁷ Tom Ellis, 'From Labour to Social Democrat', p. 322.

²⁷⁸ Jack Read, CLWBC 451.6.

²⁷⁹ K.O. Morgan, Wales 1880 - 1980, p. 23.

milieu from the direct experiences of respondents reveals that they were pedagogically unchallenging institutions which depended on learning by rote rather than dialogue and intellectual hazard. Notwithstanding the warm sentiments expressed in nostalgic reverie, the scholar's actual experience of Sunday school tended to be one of boredom and confinement or of enjoyable but illicit association with fellow scholars.²⁸⁰ Tom Ellis acknowledged that his chapel upbringing secured him some marginal advantage in his political career: it was, particularly as a Welsh member, always useful to be able to delve into his memory for an appropriate Biblical allusion. However, his Sunday school experiences were like those of other respondents, largely ones of boredom and confinement.²⁸¹

The main genius of the village was assumed to be musical. Many eminent musicians have come from the village, notably including James Sauvage, who sang with the English National Opera and the Carl Rosa Opera Company, and Caradog Roberts, the eminent organist and conductor. Caradog Roberts was interred in Rhos after his death in 1935 and many villagers followed his cortege.²⁸²

>/ In describing Rhos's musical eminence villagers once more asserted the importance of early chapel training. While the chapel was undoubtedly the place where many gained their fondness for music, most people gained little more than a broad acquaintance with the rudiments of musical theory from their experience in Sunday school choirs. The mid-nineteenth century explosion in popular choral singing in the Welsh industrial communities coincided not only with the 1859 revival but with the introduction of the tonic sol-fa notation which facilitated singing by untrained congregations.²⁸³ The 'modulator', a chart representing the sol-fa notation

²⁸⁰ See the discussion of Sunday school life in Chapter Three.

²⁸¹ Interview with Tom Ellis.

²⁸² Dennis W. Gilpin, Rhosllanerchrugog ... Vol. 2, caption 38.

²⁸³ Trefor M. Owen, The Customs and Traditions of Wales (Cardiff, 1991), p.

was a feature on the walls of many vestry schoolrooms:

Mr. Whalley: Well I don't know about the other villages but Rhos is supposed to be unique that, we've had so many MP's come from there, and musicians.

Well, in chapel, if you went to Sunday school which everyone did, it wasn't just a matter of learning the Bible, you had to learn the modulator! ... You had a big huge modulator ...

Mrs. Whalley: That was ... your grounding was that, you know - the music. It was there, from when you were a tiny boy or girl. Part of your Sunday school was your 'Do-re-me, fah-so-lah-te-doh' and half notes and all that. And more often than not a small choir was formed in the Chapel, a children's choir.

[...]

I think it was a follow on from that, everybody's love of music.²⁸⁴

More revisionist opinions cut across the complacent tone of such eulogies. A fictional evocation of Rhos in the 1937 novel Deep Waters depicts in the village of 'Groes' a genuine enthusiasm for singing but a complete lack of critical awareness. The villagers loved 'loudness and length' and rated the performance far above the merits of the piece:

... they hardly listened to the concert pieces as music and a trivial song stood as much chance of appreciation as anything by Bach or Mozart ... Only half a dozen people in the village were interested in the musical content of a programme.²⁸⁵

Eminent opinion concurred with the novelist's portrayal. John Williams, a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, spoke at a Workers' Educational Association function in 1932:

There was a tradition abroad ... that Rhos is a very musical place.

²⁸⁴ Mr. Reuben and Mrs. Blodwen Whalley, WMP C/1984/42.

²⁸⁵ Ronald Elwy Mitchell, Deep Waters (London, 1937), p. 41.

Personally he was doubtful about it. There was plenty of musical talent in Rhos it was true, but nevertheless it needed guiding and training to attain its full growth.²⁶⁶

John Williams was particularly critical of the orientation of the village's choral societies towards competitive performance. It is difficult for people without a formal musical education to appreciate music according to the lights of criticism and historically working class musicians have often sought to assess musical merits through competitive performances.

Williams's comments did little more than demarcate the gulf between the elite and popular traditions. Brian Jackson discovered tension between the competitive and aesthetic aims of performance in the Brass Band movement of Huddersfield. However competition between the 'contestmen', who stressed the importance of technical proficiency, and the idealists, who were interested in the aesthetic value of the music was not because of any feeling of inferiority because due to the elite/popular split but was rather the result of natural dynamics in a vigorous sub-culture.²⁶⁷

One journalist who visited Rhos in the late forties found a native of the village with a very jaundiced view of the cultural pretensions of his fellows. He complained that events like the recent performances by a party of professional opera singers, supported by a section of the Halle orchestra and a locally recruited chorus were:

... merely demonstrations of acute conceit. The people did not appreciate what was an admittedly fine performance, but they thought it was the thing to do. The culture racket was a pose, a veneer, an absurd phenomenon which ought to be debunked because citizens did this sort of thing so that visitors and others would be loud in their praise and provide an aura of notoriety.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Wrexham Leader, 26 Mar 1932.

²⁶⁷ Brian Jackson with Dennis Marsden, 'Brass Bands', pp. 31 - 33.

²⁶⁸ R.G. Lloyd Thomas, Welsh Odyssey, pp. 63 - 64.

Despite this denunciation, the local assertion that it was voluntary associations and above all the chapels which were responsible for giving the village a unique atmosphere and which imparted a unique legacy to its most famous children should not be considered to be an idle boast prompted by parochial chauvinism. By claiming that it played a unique role in the nurture of such talents, the village staked a claim to bask in reflected glory. The insistence on the crucial agency of village institutions in the development of its children should also be viewed as an attempt to affirm the legitimacy of these institutions.

Public assertions of the uniqueness of Rhos were internally integrative but externally divisive.²⁸⁹ The claims that were made on behalf of Rhos were often viewed as an implicit criticism of the other communities of the district. There was a certain amount of local impatience with the village's boasts. A correspondent to a local newspaper in the mid-thirties noted that for every ten people who praised Rhos 'there was an equal number who condemned it'. He recounted that one native of the village felt very diffident about admitting to a stranger that he came from Rhos for 'he never knew whether it would be in his favour or not.'²⁹⁰

In 1932, the columnist of the North Wales Labour Searchlight hailed the achievement of the Ponciau Banks scheme but noted that:

I have only one grouse against [the people of Rhos], and that is, whenever they blow a trumpet, they always *make sure that it is their own.*²⁹¹

A similar degree of exasperation was apparent in some of the comments made by respondents, particularly those who had worked alongside Rhos men in the

²⁸⁹ J.D.A. Widdowson, 'Folklore and Regional Identity', in Venetia D. Newell (ed.) Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century (1980), p. 445.

²⁹⁰ Cited in 'Silin', 'Looking Back', Wrexham Leader, Dec 17 1986.

²⁹¹ Mixer, 'All Around Us', North Wales Labour Searchlight, August 1932.

local collieries:

I'm sure some of them thought Jesus come from the Rhos y'know.²⁹²

The inhabitants of other local communities responded to the moral aggression of Rhos's exposition of its own virtues with negative blason populaire.²⁹³ Hostile evocations of the Rhos character described it as simultaneously exclusive and garrulous, cliqueish and boastful. The negative stereotype of the Rhos character was widely enough known to be recognised in local humour. One anecdote retold in a 1937 newspaper column was a sour observation on Rhos's pride in its cultural achievements:

Jack Jacobus Jones²⁹⁴ condiders himself a scholar and "ighly heducated" because he attends the sike-oh-lowgy class (as he calls it) held at the unemployment club. He is fond of talking about the sike-oh-lowgical point of view of things ...

In an argument with Jimmy Twice he said that a poor memory meant a poor mind, according to a famous "sike-oh-lowgist".

What's is name?" asked J.J.

"Blest if I can remember," said Jack Jacobus Jones.²⁹⁵

Negative slurs are often in fact relished by the group they are directed

²⁹² Interview with Ithel Kelly.

²⁹³ J.D.A. Widdowson, 'Folklore and Regional Identity', p. 446.

²⁹⁴ This name may be held to bear some relation to the derogatory local nickname used to describe local people - 'Jackos'. Though the provenance and antiquity of this nickname are uncertain, the nickname was remembered as being current after the closure of the Wrexham collieries forced Rhos men to transfer to the Point of Ayr Colliery. It was assumed to refer to the gregarious habits of the village - 'I think it's because, in Rhos, instead of calling each other "mate", they called each other "Jacko" and it carried over': Rudolph Jones, CROH NT/789.

²⁹⁵ Tawelfab, 'At the Sign of the Harp': Wrexham Leader, 19 Mar 1937.

at and may be incorporated in the integrative ideology of that group.²⁹⁶ Criticisms of the inhabitants of Rhos only prompted further affirmations of their confidence in their own cultural identity. The incident in the Education Committee Meeting where members asserted that Rhos candidates were taking up too many of the County's teaching appointments evidently passed into folk memory. One local writer, who presumed to describe the genius of the village of the occasion of its playing host to the 1945

2/ National Eisteddfod recast the incident thus:

A Councillor of another village once complained that the young people of Rhos secured a larger number of the county's teaching posts than the size of the village merited. "What can you expect?" retorted a Rhos Councillor, "Rhos produces teachers and preachers; your village produces dancers and poachers."²⁹⁷

If, as historians, we are not able to gain a clear perspective on the operation of the process by which experience is abstracted into popular
2/ memory in the past, we can, as contemporary observers, note its operation in the present. Nostalgia is one of the liveliest cultural trends in contemporary Wales²⁹⁸ and Rhos has mined the seam of its own past with the same enthusiasm as larger and more prominent communities. The oral lore describing Rhos as a distinctive place with a unique people has been rediscovered as a rich store of symbols with the power to evoke the past. This vein of rhetoric was a prominent feature of the Wrexham Maelor Museum

²⁹⁶ J.D.A. Widdowson, 'Language, Traditions and Regional Identity: Blason Populaire and Social Control', in J.D.A. Widdowson and A.E. Green (eds.), Language, Culture and Tradition (Leeds and Sheffield, 1981), pp. 37 - 38.

²⁹⁷ CROR DD/DM/652/11, [Gordon Ellis?], Draft article on Rhos as the host community for the 1945 National Eisteddfod, (n.d.).

²⁹⁸ J. Geraint Jenkins, Getting Yesterday Right - Interpreting the Heritage of Wales (Cardiff, 1992), pp. 2 - 4.

Service exhibition on 'Coal Mining in Rhos' which was staged in 1985²⁹⁹ and in the 'Clatter of Clogs' service of commemoration and thanksgiving mounted in Pen-Y-Cae Parish Church in April 1989.³⁰⁰

5/ The Rhos Miners' Institute closed in 1977. In 1978 a 'Save the Stiwt' Action Committee was formed and campaigned to save the building from demolition and to reopen it as a community centre. One of the high points of the campaign was a community play, inspired by a number of actors and theatre people who originated from Rhos, and who were anxious to support the efforts of the campaign. Over 300 local people were involved in staging seven performances of Half Year End³⁰¹ in March and April of 1990. The play was based on themes suggested by reminiscences of local life. Some characters spoke Welsh, some English and some both, in an attempt to reflect the bilingual nature of the village.³⁰² Bethan Jones, one of the instigators of the project, considering both the village's account of its past and the effort committed to representing it, said that 'The people of Rhos have every right to be very proud of themselves.'³⁰³ Rhos continues to exercise this right and most recent occasion upon which the inhabitants of the village were publicly quoted upon the characteristics of their community was in a 1992 edition of the popular religious programme Songs of Praise.³⁰⁴

299 Wrexham Museum Office Archive, Exhibitions file, October 1985.
300 Recording of the service loaned by Mr. Jack Read.
301 The title alludes to the payment of the local Co-operative Society dividend.
302 Rhos Branch Library Local History Collection, 'Half Year End' Sioe Gymuned/Rhosllanerchrugog, Pen-Y-Cae, Ponciau, Johnstown/Community Play Ms. (1990).
303 Newlines - Arts Supplement, Wrexham Leader, 12 Feb 1990.
304 Village Praise - Rhosllanerchrugog from Penuel Baptist Church, Rhosllanerchrugog. Recorded on 12 Mar 1992 and broadcast on 15 Mar 1992.

Communal Self Image - Llay.

-/ ,/ Measured by the standard of the robustly constructed self image of Rhos it could be said that the village of Llay was scarcely aware of itself as a social entity. One student of the village's past believed that 'As the model village of Llay was only constructed during the interwar period, the history of the area as a community is non-existent.'³⁰⁵ While in Rhos there are an abundance of sources testifying to the importance of discussions on the nature of local identity there are few written depositions framing Llay's sense of itself. Interviews with villagers reveal that despite this gap, villagers did have a strong sense of place. This is not surprising: ^{with} despite the fact that Llay had not grown organically but had been constructed in an organised scheme of urban development and in spite of the fact that in the first decades of its existence many of its social institutions were dominated by the colliery company, the connection of local inhabitants with their community was no less real. People worked, raised families and cultivated relationships with their neighbours and colleagues. As well as being a community in the etiolated sense of being a collection of individuals sharing a common residence, Llay was a community in that it was a collective entity distinguished by the concert of interests and commonality of experiences among its members.

It is worth considering how and why Llay's conception of itself differed from that of Rhos. The origins of the village meant that its inhabitants could not call upon a long memory of common experiences as a community. While the first villagers had a great deal in common, since they virtually all came from mining area and a great number came from communities in the Wrexham area, they came to Llay shorn of the social networks which had been their most immediate experience of community. The village was affected by the rawness which other young mining communities experienced in the interwar period and some villagers were acutely aware of the dislocation.

³⁰⁵ Local history collection, Llay Branch Library - anonymous and undated village study.

-/ The village came to maturity, having seen several generations of children rise to maturity, in the early post-war period. This was not a propitious time for a community to define itself as the habit of communal association was beginning to decline. The increasing privatisation of social life took its toll on the village's churches and voluntary organisations. This increasing separation between families was undoubtedly exacerbated by the original design of the village's architects. The village's size and social composition also detracted from its ability to assert itself. Despite its carefully engineered social gradations Llay was actually a more homogeneous community than Rhos: the village was dedicated to serving the mine and there were few representatives from other classes and other occupations. Thus there were fewer individuals who might have had the time and the education to contribute to the definition of the village's parochial culture. Above all, the village lacked an agent like the ubiquitous Rhos Herald which presented Rhos with an image of itself in all its moments of life.

Llay's lack of a strongly articulated communal identity may be attributed to a lack of cultural confidence. Despite its tenuous situation, Rhos revelled in its status as a bastion of Welsh culture. But then, awareness of a local identity does not necessarily become weaker as the position of the community becomes more precarious. Indeed, the maintainance of a distinctive local culture can become the *raison d'etre* of the community.³⁰⁶ While Rhos forged its own identity by domesticating and localizing many of the traditions and motifs which were used to define Welsh identity, Llay was more typical of the other communities of the locality in that it was more ambivalent about its Welsh identity.³⁰⁷ As inhabitants of an English speaking community which lay within a few miles

³⁰⁶ Anthony Cohen, 'Belonging - The Experience of Culture', in A. Cohen (ed.), Belonging, p. 7.

³⁰⁷ Dennis Balsom describes the border regions as being part of 'British Wales', a region characterised by low indices for the identification of its inhabitants with Wales as a political and cultural entity: D. Balsom, 'The Three Wales Model', in John Osborne (ed.), The National Question Again, p. 6.

of the English border, and at that a community very different from the traditional pattern of a mining community, the villagers of Llay did not feel qualified to participate in the definition of Welshness. The Welsh speaking congregations held their own cultural events and the Welfare Institute hosted a few eisteddfods but they were remembered as listless affairs.³⁰⁸

Despite this and despite the opinion of the Vicar of St. Martin's, canvassed by a visiting journalist in the late fifties, that the village hadn't yet 'become a community',³⁰⁹ the village constructed a sense of identity on the basis of its own experiences. Pride in the new mine was not only felt by its owners but also by the men who worked in it. Respondents recited records for production and recalled what they regarded to be the mine's smooth record in industrial relations.³¹⁰ The comradeship of the mine was felt to be a source of strength and to provide a core to the relationships of the new and disparate community. Cohen noted that membership of a community can be experienced in the most mundane of circumstances. When asked about their awareness of the new village as a community, several respondents specifically mentioned the activity in the village as the shifts changed over at the pit:

In those days they used to work three shifts, they broke that up eventually and they used to work some very funny shifts. You'd have people coming up and down from the pit all day long. But originally they used to work the three shifts and you could hear all the clogs going up the road, clicking and clacking and banging.

But there was a very good, what do you call it? ... comradey? a good spirit at that pit and I haven't come across it since. I worked at Gresford after Llay. It was nothing like Llay. Llay was one of the best though it was such a mixed set of fellows.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Horace Davies, WMP C/1984/101.

³⁰⁹ Cymric Mytton Davies, 'Where We Live': Wrexham Leader, 6 May 1958.

³¹⁰ See however Chapter Four on Vertical Relationships in the Workplace.

³¹¹ Interview with Herbert Gaskin.

Mick MacGahey described the mining families displaced and scattered by the changing fortunes of the coal industry as 'industrial gypsies'.³¹² However, in Llay the adaptability of the mining population and the cosmopolitan origins of many of the villages were sources of pride:

Miners can settle anywhere ... Miners are very, very adaptable.³¹³

Some villagers invested a great deal of significance in the term 'model village'. Many felt pride in and later, nostalgia for, the neat disciplined village kept trim and orderly by a solicitous mining company. The most vivid memories of village life recalled the activities of the local voluntary organisations. Respondents describing communal activities stressed the general participation of villagers and genuine enjoyment:

... things that used to happen in those days, I can remember them vividly. There was a Rose Show and I can remember it being on a field by the Crown Inn, directly opposite in that field there, used to be called the Chain. I think they played football on that. And eventually it moved onto the Welfare ground but the other thing was the Carnival. They'd have a Carnival every year and fantastic! there was always these jazz bands and things going round then, you know. They're going now aren't they? Those days, very little money about, but everybody used to enjoy themselves.³¹⁴

With the colliery company's sponsorship of many local voluntary organisations and with the Welfare Institute providing amenities and resources to several more, it is possible to concur with the opinion of one local man who considered - 'A better village, [than] Llay, there's never been! A cheaper village for entertainment, never been!'³¹⁵ In retrospect, it could be seen that the attempt of the colliery company to focus village life on local voluntary organisations was successful. Nevertheless, this

³¹² Quoted in: Tony Hall, King Coal (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 115.

³¹³ Interview with Neville Griffiths.

³¹⁴ Interview with Edgar Sides.

³¹⁵ Horace Davies, WMP C/1984/101.

patent enjoyment of village life was frequently hedged by ambivalence. While many of the people of Rhos owned their own houses and therefore felt themselves to have a stake in their community, the inhabitants of Llay were aware that they were tenants, ultimately subject to the village's true owners. In Creswell, a model village created in Derbyshire, J.M. Downing discovered a similar ambivalence and sometimes found anger and admiration 'in the same voice'.³¹⁶ The aspect of village life which the inhabitants of Llay most disliked was its hierarchical arrangement:

Deputies at the top? They were the highlights of the village, the officials I mean. You had that bit of class distinction which is a load of codswallop, I think.³¹⁷

Others resented the patronising demeanour of the officials of the colliery as they oversaw the village's social life:

Like they used to say at Christmas-time, [to] the children in school. Harry Ball [the company secretary] used to give them a new shilling. It didn't come out of his pocket, it was out of the miners' pockets it came but he had the praise for it!³¹⁸

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In the interwar period Llay had an unsavoury reputation in the district. This ill-fame arose from the village's earliest years and least respectable streets. However, as in Rhos, the inhabitants of Llay were capable of incorporating these negative opinions in their own formulations of the village's identity. Villagers took a perverse pride in being a part of the village which worked hard and played hard. One resident with strongly evangelical convictions compared the village to another maligned community:

It had a dreadful reputation for many, many years. When we left Cefn Mawr to come out here people said 'You're not going to Llay?'

³¹⁶ Downing, 'Company Paternalism and the Butty System', p. 21.
³¹⁷ Interview with Bob Adams.
³¹⁸ Interview with Mrs. Maggie Williams.

You know what they said of Nazareth: 'No good thing ever came out of Nazareth'. No good thing ever came out of Llay!³¹⁹

- /
9 One villager was aggrieved by the hostile and unflattering descriptions of the miners made in the interwar period and he feared that these caricatures were still informing people's impressions of the miners after the Second World War. He set down his own experiences in an attempt to scotch these myths. He offered two pictures of the miner, the negative stereotype and a more rounded description of his own life. This description was based on the social life of Llay and he viewed it, in the optimistic atmosphere in the early years after nationalization, as a symbol of progress and hope for better things:

The first picture is that of the miner when not working, if he does [work], [it] is of a man sitting in a pub. He is wearing a cloth cap at a rakish angle. He has a knotted muffler round his neck, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his lips. In his hand is the Racing Outlook, by his elbow is a pint of beer and at his feet a whippet or greyhound and probably in his waistcoat pocket a football coupon.

not? / Now, I'll endeavour to give you some idea of what the average miner does in his leisure. One of the chief hobbies of the miner is gardening. Some of the vegetable gardens and flower gardens created by miners are often a sight for sore eyes. I know too, scores of miners who produce lovely chrysanthemums, beautiful tomatoes and luscious grapes. Other hobbies are fishing, tennis, cricket, bowls, football, singing, and I have worked with men who would spend their last bob to hear a Philharmonic concert. Do they drink? Of course they do, but miners are responsible for the beer shortage. They like a flutter too but the miner's money is only in the bucket that goes to make up the million taken by the pools, dogs and racecourse. Smoking: a miner does often not smoke for ten or twelve hours on end. I don't think the miner has made the cigs. scarce, and today the miner is as well dressed as any other workman and generally takes a great pride in his attire. Often a miner's only luxury is to take his wife to the cinema, theatre, concert or whist

³¹⁹ Interview with Percy Davies.

drive and dance. Then their sons and daughters. Well, in Llay at any rate, there are well organised youth clubs. The young men can play billiards, table tennis, chess and draughts. They can learn boxing, drama, art and handicrafts, join discussion groups or read. For the girls we cut out billiards, introduce domestic science, mothercraft and dancing classes. The outside recreations consist of soccer, hockey, cricket, net-ball, tennis, swimming, cycling, camping, hiking. Many of them go to night school, perhaps to grasp and master theoretical details or maybe to ambulance classes.

As a family man I think I am safe in saying that all the average miner is interested in outside his work, is for the betterment and uplifting of his family and social welfare, and a great desire to see his children properly fed, clothed and educated. Of course, I must be biased for I'm just a miner myself, and proud.³²⁰

-/ At the same time that social reformers, journalists and social workers were investigating the circumstances and describing the distinctive outlook of the British working class, anthropology was emerging as a separate discipline. The parallels between the opening of Darkest Africa and the exploration of unknown England were not lost on the early social explorers. However, the point being made was largely rhetorical and the two traditions quickly diverged.³²¹ The distinguishing characteristic of anthropology was its interest in exotic cultures. Another characteristic of anthropological studies, a concern with small communities, came about for pragmatic reasons. In a community small enough for all its inhabitants to know one another and which is economically self-contained, it is possible for the anthropologist to study the totality of the concerns of the average inhabitant and to discover relationships between discrete areas of local life. The reasons why, in more recent times, the insights gleaned in distant lands were brought to bear in communities nearer home were also

³²⁰ T.H. Jones, Fingers in the Sky: A Miner's Life Story (London, 1949), pp. 70 - 71.

³²¹ Peter Keating, Into Unknown England 1866 - 1913: Selections from the Social Explorers (London, 1976), pp. 13 - 15.

determined by circumstances. The increasing cost of mounting fieldwork expeditions and the changing attitudes of host communities to study by outsiders, particularly after former colonies had achieved political independence, have all conspired to limit the reach of ethnographic scholars.³²²

Methodological insights into the study of interaction in small groups and a particular stress on the importance of the symbolic dimension in community life have been a valuable contribution to the study of British communities. However, the continuing focus of anthropological studies has been small, and for the most part agricultural, communities. Though smaller communities are undoubtedly easier to observe it is easy to entertain the suspicion that anthropologists have sometimes allowed a false antithesis between the social life of the town and that of the country to inform their work. Anthony Cohen considered that the modern economy and urban life were inimical to the kind of community building he himself described in the small communities of the Western Isles.³²³

I hope that this chapter has shown that it is not only the rural fringe where the most mundane activities can be invested with communal values and where symbols are an important medium for communication. All communities, regardless of their location and their socio-economic basis, are constructed by their inhabitants. While it is true that the nature of the community will affect the way in which this commonality is expressed, no human settlement is without some conception of its own corporate identity. Large communities are frequently aggregates of smaller ones. Perhaps it is the case that the symbolic dimension of community life becomes more rather than less important as the size of the community grows: the less the individual knows of the reality of the community, the more vital allegiance to a symbolic embodiment of that community becomes.

It is easy to feel that we are familiar with urban cultures since they

³²² See, Anthony Jackson (ed.), Anthropology at Home Association of Social Anthropologists, Monograph No. 25 (London, 1987).

³²³ Cohen, 'Belonging - The Experience of Culture', p. 6.

are and have been frequently depicted in the mass media. It is worth asking whether we are truly only familiar with the reflection of urban society depicted in these media. Several scholars have looked at the reports produced by social observers as texts shaped by the conventions of a genre of writing, one which was popular with Victorian and Edwardian audiences because it sated their appetite for social reform at the same time that it pandered to their voyeurism.³²⁴ Historical scholars are long used to coping -/-/ with the prejudices expressed by middle class observers of working class life. However, since nineteenth century bourgeois culture has shaped much of the social world we live in, it is uncertain how many of the unstated assumptions we can successfully exclude.³²⁵

It is important therefore to attempt to recover, examine and engage with the real historical experiences of social actors and to consider the ways in which they constructed the communities they inhabited. It is as vital to attempt this recovery in an urban as in an industrial context. The North Wales coalfield has never been as important or as influential as its Southern counterpart. Nevertheless, the communities of the Northern coalfield are no less real for their lack of fame and, as we have seen, they were sustained at all times by a strong sense of communal identity.

Even where communities have been densely studied by contemporary social observers and by historians, they usually justify another look from the perspective of the inhabitants. The East End attracted many observers and was, as the locale for the great Booth survey, in many ways the training ground for the empirical tradition of British sociology. Jerry White viewed East End life from the parochial perspective of the Jewish inhabitants of model tenement dwellings and from the point of view of the inhabitants of a street known for the uncouthness of its casual labourers and petty criminals. While they support many of the findings of the older surveys, White's interviews provide unparalleled access to the residents' sense of

³²⁴ Keating, Into Darkest England, pp. 9 - 22; Alan Mayne, 'Representing the Slum', Urban History Yearbook (1991), pp. 66 - 84.

³²⁵ Frykman and Lofgren, Culture Builders, pp. 5 - 6.

the physical and social space of the communities they inhabited. White weaves individual and family lives into accounts of working life, policing and welfare in two small corners of the metropolis. He describes tensions
7/ within these communities as well as struggles against and accommodations
7/ with the institutions of social control in a way that Booth, who shared many of the prejudices of the clergymen, poor law officers and teachers who were the key informants for his surveys, never could have.³²⁶

Special qualities are often claimed for the communities of industrial Wales. However, these communities have scarcely yet begun to be studied from an intimate perspective. In these communities, where myths sometimes suffice for ethnography, a reappraisal is urgently required.

³²⁶ Jerry White, Rothschilds Buildings - Life in an East End Tenement Block 1887 - 1920 (London, 1980); Jerry White, The Worst Street in North London - Campbell Bunk Between the Wars (London, 1986).

Chapter Three: Religion.

This chapter will examine the interaction between religion and industrial society. It will do so by examining the relationship between the churches, particularly the Nonconformist churches, and the populations summoned and maintained by industrial activity. It will also consider the relationship between the churches and the elites which controlled these local industrial enterprises. The chapter will examine how these relationships were first described in the 1840s and will then consider some of the ways in which these relationships evolved.

Studies of religious culture in local society have found that local religion could be an entity with emphases very different from those expressed in the official creeds of denominations. While local congregations were often indifferent to the theological concerns and professed institutional aims of their parent denominations, they were very frequently oriented towards the concerns of local society.¹ Churches functioned as networks of association for their members and to a less marked extent, for a broader category of occasional attenders. More importantly, the local churches provided a point of reference for the community and were popularly conceived to be the repository of the community's values.

The chapter will examine how the family related to local religious institutions and will particularly consider assumptions about the role of religious institutions in socializing younger members of the community. Evangelical Nonconformity is frequently described as having had a large and defining effect on the industrial communities of Wales. This chapter will consider several factors which qualified its hegemony and will assert the view that the allegiance of local society to Nonconformist mores was in fact limited and conditional. It will look at the defiance of ascetic strictures

¹ Robert Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics - the Effect of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community (1974), pp. 93 - 96; David Clark, Between Pulpit and Pew - Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 67 - 74.

and will consider a case study where local culture actually rejected the imperatives of evangelical conversionism. The chapter will also consider how impatience with the moral strictness of Nonconformist creeds and resentment with the self-righteousness of prominent local Nonconformists expressed itself in a vivid lore of fictive and apocryphal tales.

Before the Industrial Revolution, the relationship between religion and society, or at least the relationship between the hegemonic institutional and social hierarchies and the established Church, was felt to be an organic one. Since the Church depended extensively on agrarian society for its funding and for its model of parochial organisation, the advent of industrial society presented a profound challenge. The new industrial settlements which appeared on the North Wales coalfield in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century grew untended in the interstices of the existing pattern of parochial arrangements. The established Church was at its weakest in outlying provinces and was poorly endowed in *areas of low agricultural productivity*. Nonconformist denominations were well equipped to fill the vacuum. Where the Anglican Church required for church extension 'an act of parliament, a grant of money, an educated gentleman and a crop of lawyers' Nonconformist denominations required only 'a friendly barn and a zealous preacher'.²

Royal Commissions were empanelled in the mid nineteenth century to bring the new industrial society within the competence of the state. They tended to take a broad view of their charge and frequently provided general surveys of the social conditions and culture of the new industrial communities. The formal commissions ~~of the Inquiries~~ which visited North Wales were the Investigation of the Employment and Conditions of Children in the Mines and Manufactories, empanelled in 1842, and the State of Education in Wales, empanelled in 1848. Whereas the 1851 'religious census'

² An observation originally made of Sheffield but applying equally to the other industrial districts: E.R. Wickham, Church and People in an Industrial City (1957), p. 80.

concerned itself with a tally of the numbers of worshippers, the sub-commissioners who visited the North Wales in 1842 and 1848 commissions reports which frankly expressed their impressions, and spoke as eloquently of their personal prejudices.

The British state had long since conceded toleration to its religious minorities and as such did not concern itself overmuch with the particular religious confessions of its people. However, if for no other reason than that Anglicanism was still the profession of the social and political elite, the declining position of the national church as revealed through such socio-religious surveys was viewed with concern. The 'Blue Books' of the 1846 report were read by Nonconformist contemporaries as a thinly veiled attack on their denominations and as a gross slur upon the morals of the Welsh nation, indeed, it was the heat of indignation that greeted the report which warmed the crucible of nascent Welsh national consciousness.³ The report presented Anglicans with an unsettling vision of an unfamiliar society. These considerations did not render the Royal Commissioners incapable of reporting the situations they found: their reports described raw industrial communities composed of people recently forced from the land and left marooned in a landscape and an economic milieu virtually devoid of familiar associations. They were witnessing a dispossessed people reconstructing their world. The migrants formed a new society with new mores and new associations, a society moreover, which was based upon and defined by a popular religious culture

Though they were disparaging when comparing the doctrines and practices of the Nonconformist sects to those of the established Church, the sub-commissioners who produced the 1842 report gave a basically positive evaluation of the social role of Nonconformity. In 1847 praise was more grudgingly given but Nonconformity was still viewed as the principal factor steadying communities otherwise given to uncouth and riotous behaviour. The Commissioners viewed the morality promulgated from the pulpit and the self-discipline as inculcated by ascetic aspects of the Nonconformist profession as substitute to the external discipline which would ordinarily have been

³ Gwyn A. Williams, When Was Wales? (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 208 - 209.

provided by the institutions of church and state. The presence of Nonconformist congregations was crucial in deciding whether the inhabitants of communities would be 'moral, religious, and of decent conduct or brawlers, drunkards, profane and obscene'.⁴

The two reports noted that an evangelical awakening had affected the district in the last few decades. ^{C. 1840s} ~~The~~ chapels which were built by congregations at considerable sacrifice could be seen even in the smallest settlements. The sub-commissioners described a large degree of outward conformity to the religious mores and were impressed with the respectable appearance of the worshippers.⁵ Confirmation of the impression of a high level of participation in Nonconformist worship in the industrial communities was provided by the 1851 census: the highest attendances at places of worship in North East Wales were in the industrial parishes singled out for comment in the 1846 report as the most deprived and degraded: Holywell, Flint and Ruabon.⁶

9 Though the commissions of the 1840s ~~were~~ gave disproportionate weight to the testimony of witnesses of more elevated social status, Herbert Jones, 9 the sub-commissioner who visited ~~the~~ North East Wales in 1842, quoted the views of one Thomas Williams, a 59 year old Rhosllanerchrugog collier, virtually verbatim in stating his conclusions about the beneficial effects of Nonconformity:

In proof of the improved social and moral condition of the colliers, I cannot help remarking that there are two villages in the Parish of Ruabon, viz. Rhosymedre and Rhosllanerchrugog - each of which contains a

⁴ C.E.C., Vol. XVII, p. 374.

⁵ Educ. Rept., III, p. 530; C.E.C. XVII, p. 398.

⁶ The rate of seat occupancy in the Parish of Ruabon on census Sunday was 68.07 per cent, calculated as the returns of the best attended Sunday service expressed as a percentage of the available accommodation: W.T.R. Pryce, 'The 1851 Census of Religious Worship: An Introduction to the Unpublished Schedules for Denbighshire', Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society Vol. 23 (1974), p. 176.

large population, say of some thousands; they are all colliers or forgemen, or persons connected with the coal and iron works; neither a justice of the peace, a clergyman, or a gentleman or anyone in authority, except perhaps a constable live in either place, and yet these villages are by no means scenes of riot or debauchery. The inhabitants conduct themselves with order and propriety; and though their exterior is uncouth, and their manner but little refined, they are peaceable and generally inoffensive, sober and and industrious, attentive to religious duties and apparently anxious to improve their minds.⁷

This glowing endorsement represented a considerable shift in establishment attitudes. In the previous century, Nonconformity had been viewed as form of sedition. The dissenting houses of Wrexham were destroyed by Tory mobs in 1715.⁸ Sir Watkin Williams Wynne, the local magnate, was notorious for his persecution of Nonconformists. He once imprisoned Calvinistic Methodist preacher Peter Williams in his dog kennels when he had the temerity to tour the district in 1748.⁹

By the early nineteenth century social and political turbulence seemed more threatening than religious dissent and the new communities of industrial Wales were certainly turbulent places. Unrest in South Wales culminated in the 1831 Merthyr rising and the Chartist risings of 1839. North Wales had its own bathetic confrontations as insurgent miners were faced down by the local magistracy and the militia at the so called battles of Cinder Hill, ~~at~~ Rhos, and Chirk Bridge, at the turn of the year 1830 - 1831.¹⁰ The union ^{of} the insurgents were attempting to build ultimately melted

⁷ H.H. Jones, esq., Report to H.M. Commissioners, C.E.C., Vol. XVII, p. 376; compare with the testimony of Mr. Thomas Williams, C.E.C, Vol. XVII, p. 391.

⁸ A.N. Palmer, A History of the Older Nonconformity of Wrexham (Wrexham, 1888), pp. 62 - 64.

⁹ H. Ellis Hughes, Eminent Men of Denbighshire (Liverpool, 1946), p. 129.

¹⁰ Emlyn Rogers, 'The History of Trade Unionism in the Coal Mining Industry of North Wales to 1914: Chapter III - The Awakening', Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society, Vol. 13 (1964), pp. 224 ff.

in the face of disapproval from the local elites. However, the general depression of trade in the district meant that the 1840s were a time of low wages and unemployment.¹¹ The sub-commissioners toured a district still alive with murmurs of discontent and rumours of sedition.

The view that religious organisations of any stripe could act as bulwarks to the established order apparently had a wide currency in the district in the 1840s. The Anglican incumbent of one of the industrial parishes of the Wrexham area could not recommend that 'the lower orders should have any education unconnected with religion'.¹² Richard Briscoe, proprietor of several mines in the area, considered that education made the lower orders dissatisfied with their station¹³ while Mr. Ward, proprietor of collieries at Chirk and Ruabon, found that teaching colliers to write only encouraged men to become restless and to 'carry on correspondence with all parts, which is often a source of evil'.¹⁴ Both proprietors agreed that sufficient facility with letters to enable men to read the Bible and interpret a creed of patience and obedience was beneficial and found that those men blessed with such a facility were more tractable.

The hostility of Nonconformist denominations to agitation was real enough. As well as preaching contentedness with one's lot and obedience to secular authority, local connexions were actively hostile towards the nascent unions and even towards benefit societies.¹⁵ Union members were apt to be expelled from their congregations. The Calvinistic Methodist assembly which convened at Tredegar in October 1831 forbade communicants to join

¹¹ Emlyn Rogers, 'The History of Trade Unionism in the Coal Mining Industry of North Wales to 1914: Chapter V - The Later Thirties and the Hungry Forties', Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society Vol. 15 (1966), p. 143.

¹² Rev. John Davies, Brymbo: C.E.C., Vol. XVII, p. 395.

¹³ C.E.C., Vol. XVII, pp. 395 - 396.

¹⁴ C.E.C., Vol. XVII, p. 397.

¹⁵ E.T. Davies, Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales (Cardiff, 1965), pp. 77 - 82.

a union and the prohibition was reiterated at an assembly in Mold the following year.¹⁶

While the 1847 report was notorious for its sensational and salacious description of the mode of life on the new industrial communities Herbert Henry Jones, the sub-commissioner responsible for surveying North Wales in 1842 described a district entirely reformed in its morals from the low standards current formerly. The Sabbath was now well kept where previously it had been the occasion for 'barbarous amusements, trespasses and disgusting revels'.¹⁷¹⁸ While in former years one of the colliers' favourite recreations was over-indulgence in alcohol, a pastime which was gravely injurious to work discipline,¹⁹ the influence of the chapels and the temperance societies was reckoned to have tamed these irresponsible tendencies. The temperance societies spread through the colliery districts with the same speed and using many of the techniques of the Nonconformist denominations. The first temperance society to be established in Wales was inaugurated in Holywell in March 1832. Branches of the British and Foreign Temperance Society were established in Wrexham in August 1833, and in Ruabon, in January 1834²⁰ and by December 1836, 1200 of the inhabitants of Rhos and Ruabon were reckoned to have signed the pledge. The number of temperance converts in this single industrial parish easily outstripped the totals claimed for some of the most populous towns of North Wales.²¹ Instead of Blue Monday, or more properly its local variant, 'Dydd Llun

¹⁶ A.H. Dodd, The Industrial Revolution in North Wales 3rd edn. (Cardiff, 1971), p. 415.

¹⁷ C.E.C., Vol. XVII, p. 370.

¹⁸ Bull baiting and cock fighting, popular in Wrexham in late eighteenth century, were in decline by the early nineteenth century: T. Hughes Jones, 'Social Life', in A.H. Dodd (ed.), A History of Wrexham (Wrexham, 1957), p. 239 - 241.

¹⁹ Letter from Exuperius Pickering to J.J. Guest, 6 Mar 1835, quoted in W.R. Lambert, Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales, c. 1820 - c. 1895 (Cardiff, 1984), p. 44.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

²¹ Ibid., p. 62.

Pawb' (everybody's Monday)²², there were prayers before work.^{23,24}

The purpose of this chapter is to explore further the themes first probed by these socio-religious observers and to examine a later stage in the development of the institutions they described. The chapter will examine the ways in which religious institutions structured local society and maintain their influence once the initial enthusiasm of the evangelical revival had subsided and how they extended their influence over those who were not committed members of the congregations. In Llay Main a later generation of employers manifested an attitude towards the social role of religion not dissimilar from that taken by Messrs. Ward and Briscoe. They aided the activities of the religious congregations in the new village and attempted to rehabilitate the role of established church in a deliberate attempt to forestall the social disorder inevitable after the reception of a large scale migration. The way the paternalist colliery company deployed religious institutions describes its assumptions about the social nature of religion as well as underlining its determination to use the architecture of the village to assert and symbolise its authority.

²² The custom was recalled in: Rhos Herald, 4 Mar 1911.

²³ C.E.C., Vol. XVII, p. 379.

²⁴ For the political quiescence of evangelical dissent and its moral investment in the work ethic see: E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, 1980), pp. 385 ff.

The latest general quantitative survey of religious commitment available for the area was that undertaken by the Welsh Church Commission that reported in 1910. The survey tells us something about the nature of the worshipping community in Wales but unfortunately a great deal more about the problems of measuring religious allegiance in quantitative terms. The incoming Liberal government of 1906 instructed a Royal Commission to test the mettle of Nonconformist claims for disestablishment. The decision of the 1851 religious census simply to measure attendances had stirred up a great deal of controversy. The Welsh Church Commission eschewed the measurement of attendances and sought instead to measure the numbers of Anglican communicants on the one hand and the numbers of members of Nonconformist societies along with the dimensions of group described as 'adherents' on the other.

The statistics indicate that religious institutions had a strong hold on Rhos. Nonconformist congregations ~~had~~ claimed 3362 members (35.7 per cent of the population) and the Anglican congregations recorded 241 communicants (2.5 per cent of the population)²⁵. While there was some objective basis to these totals, the numbers of adherents recorded for the Nonconformist congregations were more problematic. The Church of England was assumed to have no adherents, being regarded as a body with pastoral responsibility towards the parish as a whole. However 'adherents' were a key group in view of the voluntaristic and congregational basis of Nonconformist worship. They were Nonconformists in sympathy and though they were not members of local societies and attended infrequently, they retained links with particular chapels and followed the Nonconformist line in theology and

²⁵ The figures cited are drawn from the appendices of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Church England in Wales and other religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire (1910), known as the Welsh Church Commission: Anglican Church, Vol. I, appendix P., p. 17; Vol I, Nonconformist Churches appendix Q., p. 339.

politics. Since the number of professing members of Nonconformist societies was actually small it was clearly the allegiance of this group which made Nonconformist hegemony in Wales a reality.

The definition of the term 'adherent' used in making estimates for the survey differed from denomination to denomination, between districts and even between different congregations in the same denomination. The levels of commitment which congregations deemed merited inclusion within the category were so limited as to make the term virtually meaningless. The Commission reported that 'the column of adherents in the [Nonconformist] County statistics became a hopeless medley of figures, which it is useless to add up even for the roughest of estimates'.²⁶ Only one denomination troubled to give official figures for the numbers of its adherents. The Calvinistic Methodists used the term in the broadest sense and counted all those who had any connection with the denomination, including members and their families as well as occasional attenders and their families. If the other Rhos congregations responding to the survey were considered to have taken the same approach as the Calvinistic Methodists,²⁷ the number of those aligning themselves with a Nonconformist congregation by communication, membership and other looser associations would have been 7407, some 78.6 per cent of the population.

Though these figures were basically impressions lightly draped with a veil of statistical veracity, a broad picture emerges. While the deficiencies of the statistical material must be admitted, Rhos appears to have been a pious community. It had a larger proportion of adherents than the urban communities of South Wales studied by Canon Davies.²⁸ It appears

²⁶ Cited in Davies, Religion in the Industrial Revolution In South Wales, p. 175.

²⁷ This seems a reasonable supposition since the total of Anglican communicants, and Nonconformist members and adherents numbered in Rhos 11010, in other words more than 116.9 per cent of the 1901 population of the parish.

²⁸ Davies, Religion in the Industrial Revolution In South Wales, pp. 178 - 184.

that despite Nonconformist theology, which drew a sharp division between the church and the world, the actual relationship between the local congregations and the community was a much more subtle one. This study uses the testimony of respondents to explore the nuances of this relationship and to describe the actual uses which local inhabitants made of these institutions.

In the middle of the twentieth century Rhos was host to a large number of congregations. The limited survival of records and the waxing and waning fortunes of individual congregations makes it difficult to number them precisely. In 1851, the religious census recorded the existence of five Nonconformist congregations which can be confidently asserted to have met in the Rhos area.²⁹ The district had supported a licensed room for Anglican worship since 1844. The Anglican Church began the construction of a permanent church building, St. John's, in 1852. The Church sought to broaden its appeal by sponsoring a Welsh speaking congregation which met in a separate building, an iron chapel, after 1878. The construction of a permanent home for the congregation, consecrated as 'St. David's', began in 1890. The iron church was removed to house a new congregation founded to meet the needs of the developing Johnstown area.³⁰

The Welsh Church Commission which reported in 1910 conducted its survey in 1905. It discovered 21 Nonconformist congregations in Rhos. The conventional count of places of worship in the district in the interwar period gave a total of 28.³¹ However, local pride tended to count mission halls as separate congregations and often added congregations from the Pen-Y-Cae district to the

²⁹ W.T.R. Pryce, 'The 1851 Census of Religious Worship: An Introduction to the Unpublished Schedules for Denbighshire', appendix, p. 190.

³⁰ John Evans, A History of Rhos (the author, 1942), p. 4.

³¹ Bob Ellis quoted in The Unquiet Grave [BBC Radio Documentary on the Gresford disaster] (Manchester, 1982).

total. The conventional count had thinned to 22 by the late forties³² and a 1988 survey counted 20 churches which still opened their doors for public worship.³³

- / , / All the main Nonconformist denominations were represented in Rhos in the interwar period. The Calvinistic Methodists, the Welsh Presbyterian Church, ^λ / ^λ / with the Baptists for local hegemony. In 1934 there were five Calvinistic Methodist Congregations and six Baptist congregations. Jerusalem (Capel Mawr), the largest of the Calvinistic Methodist Chapels, still vies with Penuel, the largest Baptist chapel, in the size of its congregation and in its degree of architectural splendour. The Independents were also strongly represented - there were four congregations in 1934.³⁴ The various Methodist denominations were also represented and the Salvation Army had a Corps Headquarters in Rhos. The duplication of congregations allowed denominations to minister to Rhos in Welsh and English and to serve the different areas of the village. Some of the duplications marked secessions prompted by internecine jealousies and long forgotten doctrinal disputes. The village's most exotic congregations, the three Scotch Baptist churches, professed an extreme formulation of the Calvinist creed and owed their existence to the exactitude characteristic of theological debate in the last decade of the eighteenth century.³⁵

³² As told to a visitor: R.G. Lloyd Thomas, Welsh Odyssey (Llandebie, 1949), p. 62.

³³ CROR NTD/783, A. F. Mortimer, Chapels of North Montgomeryshire Ms (1988), p. xi: the author extended his research to include Rhos because of the numbers and eminence of its chapels.

³⁴ These totals are tentatively reconstructed from the Wrexham Commercial Directory (1934) and from notices of services in the Wrexham Leader.

³⁵ Arglwydd Maelor (T.W. Jones), Fel Hyn y Bu (Denbigh, 1970), pp. 120 - 122.

The Collieries and the Churches.

92/ Since the new society was structured around religious association ^{and} it was inevitable that the chapels would have their effect on the industrial enterprises that created the new communities. By the early twentieth century the lower echelons of local industry were largely composed of chapel men and the 'colliery-manager chapel-deacon man'³⁶ became an influential figure, a leader of the local community in industrial Wales, North and South. Even where co-religionists were not blatantly favoured in the workplace there was likely to be a selection based on affinity and familiarity created by association in the chapel. The brickyards of the Ruabon area were small enterprises which were located within the precincts of the villages themselves. Inevitably workers and managers brought village concerns through the gates of the yards as they came to work. One man who worked in the yards in the interwar period remembered:

Now if you were going to Bethl'em Chapel the same as the manager, your job would be there, straight - 'Start in the morning!'. But if you were going to Capel Mawr. No chance! [laughs]³⁷

The local collieries were larger enterprises but since their workforces were largely composed of local men the networks that threaded through local communities still exercised considerable influence:

Well to have a good job, a good job in the Hafod Colliery you'd have to be belonging to Ben Fritchard, the manager! [laughs]

Y'know, that's another one, the same chapel y'know. And he was the underground manager in the Hafod. So you could say it was generally so in the Rhos.³⁸

³⁶ E.T. Davies, Religion and the Industrial Revolution in South Wales (Cardiff, 1965), pp. 149 - 150.

³⁷ John Hughes, WMP C/1984/125.

³⁸ Loc. cit..

In some areas such as the Nottinghamshire coalfield³⁹ and more locally, at the Point of Ayr colliery in Flintshire, management sought to control workforces by asserting the hierarchical relationships implicit in local society. Men who followed their officials to church or chapel got rewards in the pit which anticipated their rewards in the world to come. While co-religionists received favourable consideration, 'rebels' were cast out and forced to labour in the poor places where 'you could slog your insides out and not make any money'.⁴⁰

While nineteenth century observers committed their opinion that religion was a socially cohesive force to paper, twentieth century paternalists set out their convictions in bricks and mortar. Where urban development was sponsored by employers the use of religious institutions as instruments of social control was usually more deliberate.⁴¹ In his 1918 report on industrial housing, Tudor Walters, the consulting architect in the Llay Main model village development, recommended that spaces should be left for churches and other social facilities in the plans for new communities.⁴² The bland recommendations made in his report do not begin to describe the ambitious attempt to co-opt religious provision as a part of the scheme of paternalism employed at Llay Main.

The principals of the new colliery were glad that the worthies of the ancient parish of Gresford recognised their pastoral responsibility to the new village and the necessity of a constructing a new church 'where men

³⁹ J.M. Downing (ed.), 'Company Paternalism and the Butty System: Conversations with Creswell Residents', Bulletin of the Labour History Society No. 46 (1984), pp. 21 - 29.

⁴⁰ Jack Griffiths, CROH NT/789, No. 2.

⁴¹ Robert Waller, The Dukeries Transformed - The Social and Political Development of a Twentieth Century Coalfield (Oxford, 1983), pp. 177 ff.

⁴² Sir John Tudor Walters, Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider Questions of Building Construction in Connection with the Provision of Dwellings for the Working Classes Local Government Boards for England, Wales and Scotland, d. 9191 (London, 1918), p. 12.

were concentrated together in such large numbers'.⁴³ The foundation stone of the Anglican St. Martin's was laid in November 1923, the church eventually being consecrated in 1925. St. Martin's was a daughter church of the parish of Gresford and was initially superintended by a curate.

In 1923 a Primitive Methodist congregation which met in a tiny chapel on the periphery of the old hamlet of Llay, its numbers swollen by the influx of mining families, moved to a new building in the village. The Presbyterian Forward Movement planted two congregations, one English speaking and one Welsh speaking, in the village. They were accommodated in substantial brick built chapels constructed by the colliery works department. All these denominations and others which came to the village in later years were offered sites by the colliery company, at a nominal rent.

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Llay was a smaller community than Rhos and thus required fewer places of worship/_h however, even in the less impassioned circumstances which accompanied the planting of the village's main congregations, there were still duplications. Emmanuel and Glanaber were planted as sister congregations, intended to serve the English and Welsh speaking parts of the Calvinistic Methodist community respectively. The village contained a Welsh Wesleyan congregation as well as an English speaking Primitive Methodist congregation. Despite their smaller numbers, the congregations of Llay represented a much greater degree of theological diversity than those of Rhos. Llay not only contained a Roman Catholic Church but, for a period in the thirties, a small Spiritualist congregation.^{44.45} The Welsh Wesleyan congregation disbanded in 1939. A new congregation, representing the evangelical Calvary Holiness Church, was founded in 1940. Llay has been host to a total of six mainstream Nonconformist congregations. The village today contains three Nonconformist congregations as well as the Anglican

⁴³ Speech at a bazaar in support of the cause of a new church at Llay: Wrexham Leader 13 May 1923.

⁴⁴ The congregation was recalled by villagers, see the interview with Herbert Gaskin and its presence was recorded in the Wrexham Commercial Directory (1931 - 32, 1934).

and Catholic parish churches.

Behind a formal equality of treatment between congregations lay implicit support for the established Church. Although the Methodist and Presbyterian chapels both lay in the central area of the village, St. Martin's was marked out by its size and by the eminence of its position. The Anglican Church lay physically and symbolically at the heart of the village. St. Martin's was situated next to an octagonal plot of land originally intended to serve as a market place. The church was aligned with First Avenue which ended on the other side of the octagon. First Avenue was the village's most impressive thoroughfare, a wide tree-lined road which provided accommodation for the colliery's officials. Entering the village, as it architects clearly intended, along this Avenue, the spire of St. Martin's bisects the vista seen by the visitor.⁴⁵ The square tower of All Saints, Gresford, the mother Church, was visible looming through the trees behind.

The colliery company showed its favour in other ways and sponsored the development of St. Martin's as a social centre for the new community. A Church Institute was established in a wooden hut next to the church at the instigation of one of the parish's lady philanthropists.⁴⁶ The colliery company itself contributed handsomely to the building of a new centre with meeting rooms, billiard rooms and a 400 seat cinema which opened in 1928.⁴⁷ It apparently sponsored the Institute and underwrote the employment of a youth worker to direct the energies of the village's youth.^{48, 49} Membership

⁴⁵ See Plate Seven in Appendix Four.

⁴⁶ Anonymous Souvenir Brochure, Church of St Martin, Parish of Llay 1925 - 1975 (1975).

⁴⁷ Wrexham Leader, 9 Nov 1928.

⁴⁸ PRO COAL 6 - 28, NCB North West Divisional Board Minutes, 21 Dec 1948: the Board requested the Church Institute to place itself on a self-funded basis.

⁴⁹ Company sponsorship of the Boy's Brigade appears to have served a similar purpose in Creswell: Downing (ed.), 'Company Paternalism and the Butty System', pp. 21 - 29.

of the club was limited, at least until 1942, to the boys of the village. Membership continued after the transition from school to work: young men could remain members of the organisation until the age of 21.⁵⁰

The position of the St. Martin's at the centre of the community was emphasised by the use of other symbols. Coal was the foundation of the village, and coal lay in footings of the church. A sealed lead case was placed inside the foundation stone containing copies of the Times, the local papers, the Ruredecanal magazine, a current coin, a picture of St. Martin's accompanied by a list of its benefactors and a lump of coal inscribed 'God's good gift to Llay'.⁵¹ The Harvest Festival was the church's usual annual celebration of God's munificence in creating the earth's bounty. In Llay, the agricultural symbolism of the service was adjusted to local circumstances:

I can always remember, way back, at every Harvest Festival there were always two massive lumps of coal on either side of the chancel with half a dozen miners' lamps.⁵²

The congregation of St. Martin's led the village in the celebration of 'Industrial Sunday'. The village's first curate, Bransby-Jones, was an active pastor, a moderately high churchman and a muscular Christian remembered as a leading light of the village cricket team. He was intensely concerned with the welfare of his flock and he instigated the organisation of village branch of the Industrial Christian Fellowship.⁵³ This organization sought to substitute brotherhood in Christ for the factiousness of class based industrial strife. Industrial Sunday fell in mid-April/_^ it was apparently observed for the first time in the village in 1928 and was regarded as 'an established institution' by the early thirties.⁵⁴ The day featured a procession when managers and men and other

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⁵⁰ 'Memory Lane' Wrexham Leader, Aug 18, Aug 25, Sept 3 1993.
⁵¹ Anon. Church of St Martin.
⁵² Interview with David Griffiths.
⁵³ Interviews with Herbert Gaskin and Eddie Evans.
⁵⁴ Wrexham Leader, 22 Apr 1932.

representatives from local society marched in harmony through the village. The symbolic significance of the event was not lost on witnesses and participants:

It followed from the industrial set-up of the village. And the church choir and the band and all that used to meet with all the notabilities of the village, the J.P. Charlie Williams, he was a farmer, I'm just thinking of the front row. There was Billy Waite the engineer from the colliery, there was the manager from the colliery ... Mr. E.A. Hughes. There was Jim Hughes who was the rent collector, he represented the Council and the choir used to meet them at the top of First Avenue and they used to parade down the village and Woodbine Willie⁵⁵ was one of the speakers. He preached it one of the Industrial Sundays ... He was a wonderful speaker.⁵⁶

Industrial Sunday was marked in the years up to the Second World War. It was remembered that some villagers hankered after the lost holiday in later years.⁵⁷ Notwithstanding this nostalgia, the impact of the ideals of the Industrial Christian Fellowship on the life in the village and on the state of relations between management and union may be doubted. One man wryly remembered Industrial Sunday as 'a day when they stopped arguing'.⁵⁸

Noting!

Notwithstanding this scepticism, the rest of this chapter will address the proposition that religion was a socially cohesive force in the communities of the coalfield.

⁵⁵ E. Studdert Kennedy, the popular pastor whose humility and generosity endeared him to British troops in the trenches.

⁵⁶ Interview with Herbert Gaskin.

⁵⁷ Interview with David Griffiths.

⁵⁸ Unrecorded interview, Felix Griffiths.

The Family and Religious Observance.

Regular attendance at a place of worship by members of a family cemented a bond between the family and the congregation. This relationship had less to do with religious conviction than with familiarity and the bonds attaching the individuals to the family, the neighbourhood and local religious associations were strongly intertwined. Alwyn Rees's observations on rural Welsh Nonconformity hold true for congregations in the urban villages: he discerned 'an emotional link between the individual and a particular chapel which is also attended by many of his kinsmen and by neighbours whom he has learnt to know better than others through meeting them there.'⁵⁹

Even where a family did not manage regular attendances, their relationship with a local congregation was no less real for being more attenuated. This was the category of 'adherents' the 1910 Welsh Church Commission sought unsuccessfully to measure. Adherents were an elusive group. ^{Adh. ch/} ^{lucy/} ~~Coining~~ a term used to describe the area of half light found at the margin between light and shadow, Robert Moore noted that a Methodist congregation in the Erewash valley would typically have a 'penumbra' of less committed individuals.⁶⁰ Though composed of people who were not members of the chapel society and who were frequently not even regular attenders, this penumbra represented a constituency of sympathetic supporters who could, in certain specific circumstances, be mobilised in support of the congregation.

A congregation was likely to be swollen by the presence of sympathisers and adherents at key dates in the liturgical calendar. Easter and Christmas saw heavy attendances. However, there were sometimes discrepancies between the denomination's account of significant occasions and those dates reckoned to be important by the broader category of adherents. Though the Harvest Thanksgiving service was not liturgically important in terms of Christian theology it was of great significance to the congregation. In an industrial area it might be

⁵⁹ Alwyn Rees in E. Davies and A. Rees (eds.), Welsh Rural Communities (1966), p. 115.

⁶⁰ Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics, p. 69.

that/ considered that this was probably due to the general communal involvement the celebration demanded rather than to any incipient fertility cult. Produce was contributed by the congregations, and was typically displayed in the church. Sometimes these offerings were made during the service itself. The distribution of harvest offerings to the needy coincided with the community's interpretation of practical Christianity as a creed of good neighbourliness.

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mult Social occasions and fundraising events were the other main category of events that could mobilise a congregation's latent support within the community. Canon Davies's observation about the social attractions of the chapels is as valid of the earlier part of the twentieth century as it was of the situation in the nineteenth century: 'It would be uncharitable to say that thousands went to chapel because there was nowhere else to go, but such a statement is not devoid of all truth.'⁶¹ Congregations sponsored many other social activities. Larger congregations might have auxiliary organisations dedicated to drama, debate or musical endeavour. While it is true that chapel vestries and church halls were often the only available public spaces, the fact that many of these activities took place under church or chapel auspices can be attributed to the availability of human rather than material resources. A congregation brought together individuals already committed to voluntary association in a religious context: it was perhaps natural local people should utilise these connections to pursue other aims.

The other occasions on which families of irregular attenders were likely to participate in church and chapel based activities were rites of passage. Families considered their support of the congregation to be part of a reciprocal arrangement. Part of the bargain, from their point of view, was that the congregation, and more particularly the minister, should provide access to religiously sanctioned rites of passage. A 'nice wedding' or a 'good funeral' were expected as a recognition of a family's association with a particular congregation. Religious rites of passage were a means of marking significant family events with what was felt to be appropriate ritual rather than events valued for their sacramental significance. Local people could become impatient

⁶¹ E.T. Davies, Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales (Cardiff, 1965), p. 49.

with clergy who insisted on underlining the religious implications of such rituals. Disagreement could prompt a family to seek another place of worship for a ceremony, though typically this would be a temporary defection rather than a permanent alienation.⁶²

In the first part of the century there was a very high degree of participation in religious rites of passage. The people of England and Wales preferred the Anglican Church for these rites out of proportion to the size of the body of regular attenders.⁶³ The parochial organisation of the Church and its established status conferred upon the Anglican ministry a nominal pastoral responsibility towards all the souls within the parish boundaries. The Church was used as a religious resource by those who felt that they did not have sufficient links with any other religious body to establish a claim on its services. However, some of the people who felt themselves to have a definite association with another denomination might deliberately choose to identify with the local Anglican church on these occasions. This might be due to popular identification with the rites provided or to social prestige of the church. The Anglican rite of infant baptism - the Christening service - was sometimes preferred to the services of infant dedication provided by Nonconformist denominations which stressed that church membership was the result of conscious determination in maturer years.⁶⁴ Not every Nonconformist place of worship was licensed for marriages but the predominance of the Anglican churches in providing the rite was perhaps due less its more general availability than to a preference for grander, more historic and prestigious

⁶² Phillip Williams, Memories of a Life (a biography of Mrs. Maggie Williams) Ms. (1991).

⁶³ Bryan Wilson, Religion in a Secular Society - a Sociological Comment, first published 1966, (Harmondsworth, 1969), Table 1, 'Infant baptism related to live births in the Church of England', p. 26. ; Table 9, 'Marriage in England and Wales, Manner of solemnization.', p. 36.

⁶⁴ Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers - Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700 (Oxford, 1977), figure 3.1, 'Births in England and Wales and Church of England Baptisms'; and table B1, 'Other membership series of British and Irish Churches', pp. 167 - 168.

surroundings.

-/-/ When a family participated in a church or chapel provided rite it was their understanding of its meaning which defined the conditions of their participation. Though the rite remained under the control of a cleric and the order of service remained unchanged, it is apposite to talk in terms of the appropriation of the rite by the family. As Sarah Williams noted, though a single event could have a variety of meanings within the separate discourses of official religion and folk religion, these definitions were not exclusive and the discourses could overlap. Participants could appreciate both the folk religious and officially sanctioned symbolism of a ritual: the appreciation that a child being christened was being welcomed into the family of the church did not vitiate the conviction that a christening could ensure that a sickly child would thrive.⁶⁵

The rite whose meaning was most disputed by clerical authorities and ordinary church goers was the ritual of churaching: the service of thanksgiving or rite of cleansing offered to women after childbirth. Most denominations have dispensed with the rite. Scholars have reported a widespread conviction that contact with an unchurched woman, or with a woman who had not baptised her child, was unlucky.⁶⁶ Clark speculated about its persistence as an attenuated observance accomplished by private attendance at a place of worship. North East Wales does not seem to have been characterised by a superstitious attitude to childbirth, nevertheless, one local woman remembered that 'it would happen that women would go to church and give thanks to God for a good delivery'.⁶⁷ As late as 1938, one woman remembered her mother-in-law insisting she go to church before being allowed through the garden gate. How sincere her mother-in-law's objections were and how important a factor her original hostility to the marriage was is difficult to assess: 'she could be an awkward old cuss when she

⁶⁵ Sarah Williams, Religious Belief and Popular Culture: Southwark 1880 - 1939 (D. Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1993), p. 40.

⁶⁶ Clark, Between Pulpit and Pew, pp. 124 - 125; Williams, Religious Belief and Popular Culture, pp. 169 - 172.

⁶⁷ Interview with May Jones.

wanted to be.⁶⁸

The other main interaction between the family and the local religious milieu did not take place at its margins but at its heart. Certain families were likely to be identified as the most prominent upholders of a particular cause. Families could take over the lay leadership of Nonconformist congregations, filling the offices of the society and have more real sway than the minister.⁶⁹ Some chapels in Rhos and Llay were commonly known not by their Biblically derived names, nor by the names of their denominations, but by the surname of the leading family in the congregation.

Isabel Emmett has noted that there were few opportunities to gain status in Welsh society.⁷⁰ The fact that Wales was remote from the centres of political power and had an economy characterised by outside investment limited local opportunity and invested positions of leadership in civil society with a special cachet. The possession of chapel offices satisfied the social ambitions of many local people. The hegemony of these pre-eminent families could endure over generations. Even the mundane tasks of maintaining and cleaning places of worship could become jealously defended roles. Though lay leadership was more effectively catered for in the chapels, lay members of the Anglican Church supported the clergy in a variety of roles, and in the celebration of the Anglo-Catholic liturgy favoured in St. Martin's, members of the congregation also took roles in public worship.

Though generally benevolent, control of a Nonconformist congregation by a closed oligarchy could sometimes prove to be oppressive. Control by members of one family could mean virtual exclusion from positions of responsibility for other members of the congregation. One woman who played the organ in the Llay

⁶⁸ Williams, Memories of a Life.

⁶⁹ David B. Clark, 'Local and Cosmopolitan Aspects of Religious Activity in a Northern Suburb', A Sociological Yearbook of Religion No. 3 (1970), pp. 50 - 51.

⁷⁰ Isabell Emmett, A North Wales Village (1964), p. 98.

Methodist church left the congregation in the fifties:

I know we shouldn't fall out in chapel [but] you couldn't do anything, it got to the extent they were saying 'the Crewe's chapel'. Mr. Frank Crewe sort of took over ... he didn't play the music, he played from the tonic solfa. We couldn't agree and it got me down so much ... we went to Bryn Y Ffynon Methodists ... we transferred our membership there, we had a car then; years ago we hadn't and couldn't go to these places.⁷¹

Church officers were typically older people. Their long incumbency meant that the younger members of congregations had little chance to gain experience of administration. In 1937 the retiring moderator of the East Denbighshire Presbytery of Welsh Presbyterian churches decried this trend and called for the appointment of younger people who, he hoped, 'would have a clearer vision to meet the future'.⁷² Older officers tended to view the best interests of the church through the perspective of their own tastes and experiences. Clark, in a study of local Methodist societies in Northern England, attributed declining appeal to the tendency of younger and more progressive members of the churches to defer to older entrenched members, professing the view that the local society was really 'their church'.⁷³

The intense relationship between local society and particular places of worship could even be inimical to the wider interests of the denomination. Large numbers of derelict and converted chapels dot the Welsh landscape. Casual observers discern the passing of a spectacular high tide of faith after the end of the nineteenth century. In truth, Nonconformity, prompted by the ambitions of local connexions, greatly overbuilt, particularly in the urban areas in the last century.⁷⁴ Nineteenth century over-extension left a difficult legacy for denominations. Villages a good deal smaller than Rhos were left with more than one chapel of the same denomination. Small, scattered congregations hampered the

⁷¹ Interview with Mrs. Helen Williams.

⁷² North Wales Guardian, 28 July 1937.

⁷³ D.B. Clark, 'Religious Activity in a Northern Suburb', p. 62.

⁷⁴ Davies, Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales, pp. 54 - 55.

efficient deployment of pastoral resources and the maintenance of old buildings taxed the resources of the congregations themselves.⁷⁵ While denominations were keen to consolidate their forces in retreat, congregations themselves resisted change. Despite the decline in the active worshipping community in Rhos (in 1982 it was estimated that approximately 800 attended a place of worship on an average Sunday)⁷⁶ the fall in the number of sittings provided in the village's places of worship was remarkably small. In 1905, 23 places of worship provided 8404 sittings⁷⁷ while in 1988, 20 establishments provided an estimated 8304 sittings.⁷⁸

9 The loyalty of worshippers to a particular building, was not so much to the bricks and mortar but to its unique associations with continuous family worship. Loyalty to these associations tested loyalty to the denomination itself. Congregations were reluctant to merge and dilute these ~~local~~ associations and the closure of a local chapel risked alienating its worshippers.⁷⁹ Fears about the loss of local identity were compounded for holders of congregational offices by concern that their long reign would be challenged. Committed members of the local congregation might take affront at what they perceived to be high-handed treatment by the denomination. More insidious was the severing of connections between less committed individuals and a particular place of worship. For such adherents the bonds of allegiance were forged from nostalgic memories:

... Noddfa Chapel, three times on a Sunday, twice a week - Band of Hope. I used to enjoy it too. I must say, I used to enjoy it.

I dunno. You get married and one chapel shuts and you don't fancy going

⁷⁵ Gwilym Jones, 'Day To Day in Wales': Liverpool Daily Post, Nov 7 1962.

⁷⁶ Report of an emergency meeting of the Rhos Council of Churches: Wrexham Leader, Nov 26 1982.

⁷⁷ Welsh Church Commission, Vol. I, Appendix P., p.17; Vol. I Appendix Q., p. 339; the total excludes seating accommodation in the building used by the Baptist Sect, Disgyblion Crist.

⁷⁸ CROR NTD/783, A. F. Mortimer Chapels of North Montgomeryshire unpublished research (1988), p. xii.

⁷⁹ Clark, Between Pulpit and Pew, pp. 84 - 88.

to another one. I'd like to go to chapel here, now around here. But I dunno. I don't know what it is ...^{e0}

David Martin found that where the religious allegiance had acquired a degree of particularity in respect of local structures of kin and neighbourhood, that it was 'very easily corroded by extensive and continuous geographical mobility'.^{e1} In Rhos, much smaller shifts were also capable of straining the bonds between the churches and people. The clearance of slum property in the central areas of Rhos and Ponciau removed a substantial part of the parish's population from the centre to the Council estates which had been constructed on the periphery. Considerable concern was voiced by ministers, planners and local men of affairs about the impact that such movements were having on the social life of the older industrial villages. Whereas accommodation in the chapels had once reflected local population density it was mismatched to the new distribution of the population. It was reported in 1952 that chapels in Rhos and Ponciau were virtually denuded of their Sunday schools whilst 'one small chapel in Johnstown [had] eighty to one hundred children in its Sunday School with insufficient adults to look after them'.^{e2}

By the fifties public and personal transport were increasingly available and physical alienation between the members of congregations and their places of worship was not an insurmountable barrier. The real danger to local religious societies came through a loss of immediacy in local association. By the middle of the twentieth century the Free Churches had lost the flexibility which had enabled them respond so effectively to the wholesale removal of populations in the nineteenth century. Even by the end of the nineteenth century a barn and a

^{e0} Wilf Lloyd, WMP C/1984/55.

^{e1} David Martin, A Sociology of English Religion (London, 1973), p. 93.

^{e2} CROH D/JO/128, Tom Jones, Draft statement, 'The Parish Council of Rhosllanerchrugog - Statement of Case Relating to an Application to the Denbighshire County Council for an Extension of Our Parish Boundaries' (n.d.); adapted as 'Rhos Wants More Elbow Room': Wrexham Leader, 5 Mar 1952.

warm welcome for a tramping preacher no longer seemed an appropriate response to an unchurched population. In 1895 collaboration between the Welsh and English speaking Presbyterian congregations at Capel Mawr and Hill Street
60/ planted a church ~~for~~ serve the new housing developments at Johnstown. No new churches were constructed in response to the extension of the district towards the East with the construction of the new Council estates in the mid-twentieth century. However, there were other attempts rekindle the interest of the local population in attending church.

The churches were aware that they were not engaged in primary evangelism but were attempting to recover the support of lapsed attenders. Accordingly their appeal was not phrased in strident conversionist terms but stressed the familiar aspects of local religion. In 1961 the Rhos Free Church Council sponsored a series of evangelical meetings on the street corners of the new Council housing estates. Members were conveyed from the core of the village to the new estates in buses:

The form of the meetings was usually prayer followed by a word of exhortation and the singing of a few well known hymns.^{e3}

Local concerns about the decline of village life were not substantially addressed until the eighties when the local council development plan canvassed moving /population/ back towards the village core by redeveloping derelict sites in the village centre.^{e4} By this time the composition of local congregations was heavily biased towards the older part of the population^{e5} and by the early eighties, it seemed to the planners more appropriate to discuss the churches and chapels as monuments to the village's past than as vital elements in its

^{e3} CROR BPD/697, Glyn S. Hughes, The Presbyterian Church of Wales, Hill Street, Rhos ... 1872 - 1972 (1972).

^{e4} Report of a Parish Council meeting: Rhos Herald, 14 Oct 1950.

^{e5} Rev. Arwen J. Phillips, reporting the results of a survey on the local worshipping community to Rhos Council of Churches: Wrexham Leader, 26 Nov 1982.

present culture:

The social evolution of Rhos gave rise to the proliferation of Churches and Chapels, each of a particular design and identity, but being most characteristic in that they dominate the vicinity. This is achieved either through their height, strength of frontal decoration or a combination of elements. Although the social significance of these building has declined they are still important in the streetscape in that they punctuate the scene both vertically and horizontally.^{e6}

Though religious institutions have been viewed so far as a cohesive force they can also make for separation in the local community. Paradoxically, these lines of cleavage can afford insights into the nature of religion as a cohesive force.

7/ As well as retaining links with congregations, families aligned themselves with the parent denominations. In nineteenth century Wales there was an active tradition of hostility between the Anglican Church and the Nonconformist denominations and ~~maintain~~ a sectarian allegiance. The passing of the Act granting Welsh Disestablishment in 1914 was celebrated with a spontaneous rendition of 'Yr Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau' from the triumphant Welsh legislators in the lobby of the Commons.^{e7} However, the passing of the suspended legislation into law in 1920 could hardly be said to mark an epoch in popular memory. Some attribute this hiatus to the Great War but it is easy to suspect that the issue was always the prerogative of articulate and committed Nonconformists.^{e8} Many respondents were confused about the precise status of Church within Wales and it seems that awareness of the cleavage between the Church and the Chapels was largely based on local social distinctions. It was ~~on~~ these parochial terms that sectarian allegiance was another means of establishing identity in local culture.

^{e6} E.R. Myers (Director of Public Works) and G.C. Owen (Chief Planning Officer), District Plan for Rhos and Johnstown draft written statement (Wrexham Maelor Borough Council, February 1980). p. 75.

^{e7} K.O. Morgan, Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880 - 1980 (Oxford, 1981), p. 142.

^{e8} Ibid., p. 183.

In 1842 the Anglican incumbent of Rhosymedre told the Childrens' Employment Commissioner that he considered that the local labouring population chose the sects to which they adhered 'by mere chance' and that, 'having made a selection they are taught by the preacher and the elders the points of doctrine of the sect and they often become pretty well versed in Scripture, especially on doctrinal points.'⁸⁹ By the interwar period the fire of religious controversy burned much less fiercely and doctrinal disputes were largely alien to local religious experience. Separation between the denominations was due to a unfamiliarity with other cultures of worship rather than a rejection of formal liturgical principles. One local woman always found attendance at Anglican worship an uncomfortable experience:

I could never find the pages for the prayers or whatever ... they give these responses ... they'd finished before I had found them ... and going up and down on your knees, we're not used to it are we?⁹⁰

Unease about other traditions was due as much to ignorance as to hostility cultivated by instruction from the pulpit. An incident from the 1937 novel Deep Waters by Ronald Elwy Mitchell, which describes local life in the interwar period, captures this ambivalence. Mrs. Price, a stalwart of one of the Nonconformist congregations of 'Groes'⁹¹, upsets the routine of her morning shopping and, with some trepidation, visits Wrexham Parish Church for the first time in her life. The author elaborately spells out her failure to recognise the main features of this nationally famous local landmark - the fifteenth century tower and Elihu Yale's tomb.

Clutching her daffodils, she entered, and her feet whispered. How unlike the chapel it was - not friendly at all, but frightening somehow and terribly big. She looked up, the air was thick, like smoke. It wasn't the same air you breathed outside. Her tongue moved around her mouth and she tasted coffee. She chided herself. It was wicked to taste Phillips's coffee when you stood in the parish church looking towards a shining altar and the

⁸⁹ C.E.C., Vol. XVII, p. 421.

⁹⁰ Interview with Mrs. Catherine Williams.

⁹¹ The village of 'Groes' / 'the Cross', may be identified with Rhos.

glowing windows that frowned their sober colours inwards from the radiant seeming world outside. It was like enjoying communion wine and thinking how good it tasted. Mrs. Price grew hot all over. Suppose someone in Groes, someone she knew, ever suspected that she had sometime had thoughts like that, and standing in a church too, the house of God! Oh!, she was wicked! She chided herself and enjoyed it. Presently she felt oppressed. The hollow gloom did not move her with its mysterious beauty. It made her long for the familiar hardness of the Groes chapel seats, for the loud ticking of the clock, for the splash of safe colour on the pulpit, for the kicking boots of the boys who took the collection, and for the comforting and sanctimonious clank of the naked offertory.⁹²

The separation between the Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations was more noticeable. The Wrexham area had been host to a small population of recusant Catholics⁹³ but was neglected by the Roman hierarchy until the economic development of the area drew migrants from Ireland and Lancashire. Wrexham, as the largest town in North Wales, was of considerable importance as the hierarchy re-established itself in the area. The town became an episcopal seat in 1898.⁹⁴ Catholicism came to the village of Llay from Lancashire with the migration of miners from the other Hickleton Main pits. The first Catholic place of worship in the village was one of the hutments on the colliery yard and the congregation was first served by priests from St. Mary's Cathedral. The Catholic church was the only major denomination to have maintained its rate of growth in the twentieth century. This was also the case in Llay. The Catholic congregation was drawn from a wider area than the other village congregations and built a new church in 1950 to accommodate its growing numbers.

There were few Catholics in Rhos, which was part of the Catholic parish of Ruabon. However, in the mid fifties the local congregation opened a shopfront in the village. This small outpost served Polish and Hungarian families as well as

⁹² Ronald Elwy Mitchell, Deep Waters (London, 1937), pp. 151 - 153.

⁹³ A.N. Palmer, A History of the Older Nonconformity of Wrexham (Wrexham, 1888), Chapter on the 'Roman Catholics of Bromfield', pp. 131 - 132.

⁹⁴ A.H. Dodd and George Vernon Price, 'Roman Catholicism Since 1688' in A.H. Dodd (ed.), A History of Wrexham (Wrexham, 1957), p. 169.

the needs of the assimilated migrant population.⁹⁵ Some hint of the beleaguered status of Catholicism in the district is apparent in the decision to name the reading room in honour of Richard Gwyn, the recusant schoolteacher martyred by the 'misplaced zeal' of Wrexham's Puritans in 1585.⁹⁶

In the nineteenth century Catholics in North Wales had faced prejudice from the Protestant denominations,⁹⁷ and a Catholic priest was still an unfamiliar and even unwelcome sight as late as the twenties. Priests serving the chapels in the villages around Wrexham were missionaries in a hostile field. One woman remembered one Priest who was not willing to accept a martyr's crown meekly.

The only time there was trouble ... was when ... Father O'Rourke used to come on his bike to do things in the church and ... by the New Inn they stoned him. Anyway, they started again and he put the bike on one side and he went in with his fists and they never did it again.⁹⁸

-/ Other respondents remembered a Catholic mission which came to the village of Llay and set up in the market square in the mid twenties. The campaign suffered deliberate harrassment from the Baptist congregation.

This travelling van came and parked where the chemist's is now, and of course Jarvis's lot ... the Baptists, who were rather a noisy lot, now they objected to the Roman Catholics and they held a meeting ... and there was the one trying to outdo the other! ... It was ideal for us kids.⁹⁹

Children are sensitive to social nuances which adults accept without question and latent tensions in a community are often most clearly expressed by children. Sectarian identity was often expressed and defended by children where

⁹⁵ Wrexham Leader, 15 Apr 1958.

⁹⁶ A.H. Dodd, 'Welsh and English In East Denbighshire: A Historical Retrospect' Trans. Cymmrodorion (1940), p. 48.

⁹⁷ Dodd and Price, 'Roman Catholicism Since 1688', pp. 169 - 170.

⁹⁸ Interview with Mrs. MacNee.

⁹⁹ Interview with Mr. Herbert Gaskin.

open hostility was disdained by adults.¹⁰⁰ In Llay separation was emphasised by fact that Catholic children did not attend the village schools but travelled to Wrexham, where they were taught at denominational schools. Perhaps for the village children this split was more important than any of the theological or liturgical differences between the denominations.

Elizabeth Roberts noted that in Preston before the Second World War 'feelings of hostility towards Roman Catholics were suspended where neighbours were concerned'. Even people who were members of the Orange Clubs which processed on Whit Monday considered that: 'They were your neighbours and your friends and that was all there was to it.'¹⁰¹ Once more the realities of local association were accorded priority over more abstract concerns. Even while acknowledging the reality of such splits local people sought to minimise their significance:

We never had any trouble did we? I mean when we was kids we used to shout 'Proddy Dog' and they'd call us 'Catholics' but that was all ... Mind you, we didn't go into one anothers' churches.

[...]

We used to call each other names but then kids do don't they? I've always had non-Catholic friends, all my life good non-Catholic friends. There was never any bother in the streets over religion.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Hugh McLeod, 'New Perspectives on Victorian Working Class Religion: the Oral Evidence', Oral History Journal Vol. 14 No. 1 (1986), p. 42.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Roberts, A Woman's Place - An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890 - 1940 (1984), p. 185.

¹⁰² Interview with Mrs. Roberts.

Sunday Schools and Juvenile Church Attendance.

Allegiance to a particular congregation usually began with attendance at its Sunday school. Despite complaints in the thirties that the Sunday schools were not attracting the same numbers that they had in previous decades,^{103, 104} a 1948 survey purported to show that attendance at a place of worship was a common experience for Denbighshire schoolchildren and commented on the number of non-attenders as the more remarkable total. Historians long habituated to studying the declining significance of religious institutions might find the 89.6 per cent who claimed to attend a place of worship, a high, if not an incredible total.¹⁰⁵ A comparable national survey conducted in England in 1955 found that 54 per cent of parents claimed to send their children to Sunday school.¹⁰⁶ Reconstructed totals based on census statistics and denominational records found that in 1951 30 per cent of the population of England and Wales under 15 years of age were enrolled in Sunday schools.¹⁰⁷

Surveys based on information derived from respondents consistently represent religious observance at higher levels than surveys based on objective measurements: a discrepancy which suggests that people accorded irregular patterns of association and declarations of allegiance a greater

¹⁰³ Report of the Presbytery meeting of the Welsh Presbyterian Churches of East Denbighshire: North Wales Guardian, 28 July 1937.

¹⁰⁴ Rhos Herald, 11 Feb 1939.

90r/ ¹⁰⁵ Figures are drawn ~~and statistics are~~ compiled from the text and appendices of the survey: Llywarch P.C. Dodd, A Report on a Language and Cultural Survey of Schools in Denbighshire, Denbighshire Education

90lcy. Committee Minutes, Volume 843 (Ruthin, 1950) ¹⁰⁶ references to the text are cited separately.

¹⁰⁶ Geoffrey Gorer, Investigating English Character (1955), p. 454.

¹⁰⁷ Information extracted from R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers and cited in Robin Gill, The Myth of the Empty Church (London, 1993), p. 301.

degree of significance than the formal commitments and enactments measured by social observers. The empirical correctness of the 1948 survey may well have been undermined by the currency of such perceptions on the part of the group surveyed. However, even if the survey does not describe an accurate total of those schoolchildren who actually attended local congregations it may be regarded as a qualitative measure: an index of those who professed some allegiance to such institutions and recognised some obligation to attend at places of worship.

In Wrexham School District Number One, which contained the 406 infants and juniors of Llay County school, 86.8 per cent of the children represented themselves as attending a place of worship. This district lay to the West of the town was extensively Anglicised. Numerically, the district was evenly split between the industrial villages near Wrexham and the rural communities of parishes which lay along the English border. The Ruabon School District contained the old industrial villages which developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1948, the Ruabon district had a higher percentage of Welsh speaking children (34.5 per cent) than any other industrial district in Denbighshire. Infants and juniors from the schools of the parish of Rhos accounted numerically for half of the pupils in the district and only 63 of them were recorded as attending no place of worship. This figure yielded an implausible but emphatic total of 97.5 per cent who claimed to attend the churches and chapels of the area.

Though these findings might be out of step with those of other surveys they agree with the situation described in the testimony of local people: according to which, attendance at Sunday school or some other auxiliary childrens' organisation, such as a junior temperance league, was a virtually universal experience. This was testimony to strong support for such institutions by the adults of the area. One local man confirmed, with unintended irony, that the voluntaristic ethos of the Sunday schools was not apparent to many of their scholars:

Q: You went to Sunday school?

Mr. Hughes: Religiously, oh religiously. You had no choice in that, it was a must whether you wanted to go or no. And it wasn't once or twice a day, it was three times a day! Yes.¹⁰⁸

Sunday school attendance was underwritten by the schools. While the relationship was explicit in denominational schools, religious education was a fixture on the syllabuses of all local schools and church attendance was viewed as a practice likely to inculcate orderly habits and a positive appreciation of moral values. Some local people used the opportunities afforded by their offices with the education authority to promote the particular cause they favoured. One man remembered that the superintendent at his Sunday school was also the district attendance officer and that he did not hesitate to upbraid Sunday school absentees as he pursued truanting children.¹⁰⁹

9 Sunday schools were typically ~~the~~ larger than the congregations they were attached to and juvenile attendance at Sunday school was probably the period of most sustained contact with organised religion for most local people. Sunday schools are particularly interesting as the only organised
 10/ means of socializing children directly under control of the community. They were generally viewed as an extension of the familial and communal discipline to which children were generally subject. As well as their formal commission of religious education Sunday schools were viewed as means of socialization in appropriate values. As universal education took up the burden of inculcating literacy and numeracy these institutions
 9 became entirely concerned with the religious and ~~with~~ the moral and social education of their charges. Cox measured the Sunday schools by the pedagogical standards of the elementary schools and considered that the uneven nature of their results indicated that their voluntaristic ethos was not compatible with their formal charge of disseminating information about the creeds of their sponsoring congregations.¹¹⁰ However, in her study of

¹⁰⁸ Mr. Hughes, WMP C/1984/56.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Owen Roberts, CROH NT/789 No. 8.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey Cox, The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870 - 1930 (1982), p. 95.

attitudes to churchgoing in Southwark, Sarah Williams described the appropriation of church based images, language and customs by local popular culture and noted that the Sunday schools were the church institutions most prone to 'conditional appropriation' by local people.¹¹¹ While Sunday schools may not have been successful in inculcating an entirely accurate knowledge of theological dogma, they were rather better in conveying the conviction that religion was part of the natural order of things and in passing on a version of religious education more in accord with the working class community's own inclinations and understandings.

Parents sent their children to Sunday school so that they could receive, what was described locally as 'a grounding' in the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Some parents claimed that they acted to provide their children with the means of making their own minds up on questions of faith and dogma once they entered adulthood. However, parents also expected that learning about Christianity should have a practical consequence and openly regarded Sunday school as a means of socialization and a course of training in moral conduct.

Lacqueur argued that the Sunday schools were not imposed to tame an unruly working class but that they were indigenous institutions. There was a basic congruence between the message of the Sunday schools and the tenets of working class respectability.¹¹² Respondents described the Sunday schools as a means of teaching the children 'respect'. This 'respect' was conceived of as applying to persons, to institutions and to the community itself. It meant a recognition that the personnel of the family chapel exercised a legitimate authority but was conceived of as implying a general deference towards older people. In a similar manner the Sunday scholar was trained not only to respect the chapel he or she attended but to have a general regard for religious institutions and religious observances. This

¹¹¹ Sarah Williams, Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark 1880 - 1939 (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1993), pp. 248 - 249.

¹¹² Thomas Laqueur, Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1789 - 1950 (1976).

education in 'respect' undoubtedly had the effect of amplifying the influence of the chapels and churches in the community at large: it ensured that the circle of those who respected their sensibilities was always larger than those who formally subscribed to their tenets and were more actively involved.

Children were regularly sent to Sunday school by parents who did not attend a place of worship themselves:

And you had to go, [if] you had a Dad like I had. He was fond of a drink of beer but he would see that you go to Sunday School on a Sunday. Aye, you wouldn't play round the roads.¹¹³

According to Sarah Williams, Cockneys viewed the attendance of a child at a place of worship as a valid expression of a religious commitment being made on behalf of the whole family. The practice was described by one Anglican clergyman as 'religion by deputy'.¹¹⁴

Hugh McLeod found that many people who were superficially indifferent to religion were actually sensitive to the choice of their childrens' Sunday school since they viewed it as an affirmation of sectarian identity: childrens' attendance at particular places of worship correlated with sectarian patterns of voting.¹¹⁵ The primary allegiance of people in the Wrexham area was to a particular congregation. One expression of this loyalty was that large numbers of children in the older industrial villagers attended Welsh speaking places of worship despite the fact that they had little knowledge of Welsh. In the Ruabon School District, 7.2 per cent of the schoolchildren apparently attended Welsh speaking places of worship without speaking Welsh and a further 6.6 per cent who had no

¹¹³ Mr. Salisbury, WMP C/1984/14.

¹¹⁴ Rev. W.J. Sommerville, St George the Martyr (Southwark), Annual Report (1902), p. 14, cited in Williams, Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, p. 232.

¹¹⁵ Hugh McLeod, 'New Perspectives On Victorian Working Class Religion', p. 43.

understanding of the language whatsoever, also claimed attendance. Some parents optimistically placed their children in Welsh speaking Sunday schools to give them a chance of acquiring the language. However, according to the 1948 report the general effect of this practice was to dilute the Welshness of the Sunday school as the medium of the lesson was changed to accommodate them.¹¹⁶ Many of the parents who sent monoglot children to Welsh speaking Sunday schools had in fact deliberately chosen not to pass on the Welsh language through instruction in the home. Welsh was still widely perceived as a bar to progress but despite their defection from Welsh language culture such parents still maintained their allegiance to a local denomination:

And the annoying part of it now when you're looking back on it, my Father and Mother were both Welsh, both Welsh speaking, you know, and my grandparents were, and whenever we visited them or they visited us it was all Welsh that was spoken in the house.

And there was five of us in our family and none of us, none of us! could speak Welsh. And yet we were, forced to go to this Welsh chapel on a Sunday.¹¹⁷

Though some parents were sensitive to their childrens' choice of Sunday school many others parents considered that the Sunday school of any denomination, at least that of any Protestant denomination, was an acceptable means for their children to find out about the Christian religion. Though strict when stipulating attendance, they were happy to leave the choice of Sunday school to their children. In Llay, a village populated by migrants, people inevitably had shallower roots. Families moving to the village had no tradition of allegiance to any particular congregation. Though a wide range of denominations were represented in the village it was not always possible for migrants to re-affirm their denominational allegiance. Indifference to childrens' choice of Sunday school was particularly apparent in the cases of children from

¹¹⁶ L.P. Dodd, Language and Cultural Survey, pp. 34 - 35.

¹¹⁷ Mr. Hughes, WMP C/1984/56.

-/ denominationally mixed marriages. Sarah Williams discovered a similarly high degree of parental indifference to denominational distinctions in Southwark, which was, in the interwar period, a society which accommodated many recently settled immigrants, where some parents did not even intervene in their childrens' choice of Sunday school 'when the Catholic/Protestant [denominational] divide was crossed'.¹¹⁸

Interviewees described many different responses to juvenile attendance at places of worship. Boredom was the lot of many, particularly those who were obliged to attend meetings of the adult congregation. Others found the doctrines they were exposed to oppressive and sometimes found the means by which they were mediated to the congregation alarming. One Rhos man recalled hearing and heeding sermons imbued with 'hwyl' which 'kept the congregation awake and scared us kids into behaving ourselves'.¹¹⁹ The ~~strongly~~ moralistic nature of much of the religious instruction reacted ^{highly} strongly with sensitive consciences. ^{Another} One Rhos man attended the Sunday school of Mynedd Seion. He ~~recalled~~ a family tradition about his youth. He was supposed to have uttered a swearword in Sunday school, and shocked at the enormity of his sin, he promptly fled. For the next few days he kept a low profile at home since he was expecting retribution from the nebulous authorities of church or state. His terror reached a crescendo when he became convinced that an official looking envelope delivered in the post contained 'a summons'. He tried to pre-empt his parents' discovery by spontaneously confessing his crime to the family.¹²⁰

Despite the child's experience of Sunday school as yet a further instance of subjection to adult authority, this did not preclude the children making their use of the opportunities created by these

¹¹⁸ Williams, Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, p. 252.
¹¹⁹ Jane Pugh, A Most Expensive Prisoner - Tom Jones, Rhosllanerchrugog's Biography (Llanrwst, 1988), p. 9.
¹²⁰ George Clifton Hughes, Shut the Mountain Gate Ms. (n.d.), p. 1.

institutions. The discipline maintained in Sunday schools and other auxiliaries was laxer than that of official schools and many children relished the opportunity presented for larking about in the company of their peers.¹²¹ Some children registered a protest at the curtailment of their leisure time by behaving in a manner which repudiated the values they were being schooled in:

... me Mother used to run us to Church didn't she? Aye. Ha'penny collection, ha'penny sweet. [laughs]

Aye, used to call in on an old woman, Nanny Clarke they call her, and she'd be serving one ha'p'orth of sweets and the other would be stealing them! [laughs] Oh aye!^{122, 123}

Other children did respond positively to their lessons. The traditional pedagogic techniques employed by teachers and their limited expectations about their charges' achievements provided easy terrain over which moderately conscientious scholars could distinguish themselves. Children could pass examinations and gain certificates and prizes and even graduate to Sunday school teaching themselves.¹²⁴ The mainstay of the Sunday school syllabus was Scripture. The Bible was a ubiquitous presence in the Sunday schools of Protestant congregations, whether ~~presented~~ in the form of texts which were learned by rote, sometimes from small cards, or as stories from Scripture. Promotion through this medium conferred considerable status on the Bible in working class culture. However, it was not necessarily venerated on its Protestant credentials as the repository of the authentic revealed word or even as an authoritative text: in the realm of diffusive Christianity, the Bible was a symbol of allegiance rather than a prop to faith. Bibles symbolically traced an allegiance between families who

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹²² Albert Williams, WMP C/1984/66.

¹²³ For other instances of juvenile resistance to religious socialization see: Steven Humphries, Hooligans or Rebels? (Oxford, 1981), p. 34.

¹²⁴ Baigent, "A Lovely Ugly Place" - Crossed i Llay - Living There Ms. (1992), p. 72.

attended worship infrequently and the churches they identified with. The family Bible often was often an heirloom and it was sometimes used to record the significant dates upon which families intersected with church culture, ~~as the dates of~~ births, deaths and marriages were transcribed on prefatory pages which were often provided for the purpose. Bibles were given to children as christening presents and for the older child a Bible was a prize that could be earned by regular attendance at the Sunday school.

0/9 c0p's

The articles of the Christian faith proclaimed by Sunday scholars were not always hollow repetitions. There is every evidence that children achieved their own understandings of the creeds presented to them. Children encountering ideologies in the course of their development frequently use them to bolster their own burgeoning sense of identity and particularly enjoy defining themselves as part of large collectivities. When hearing the message of the sinners and the saved, children were glad to be able to place themselves in the latter category. The sense of election which came from membership of a Sunday school class permitted children to enjoy a sense of moral ascendancy over those who remained caught up in the toils of the world. The roll of those who could be legitimately disparaged even included some adults:

How righteous and holy we all felt for had we not seen wretched drunkards portrayed on the screen by the magic lantern?¹²⁵

Children used the offices of the Sunday schools to advance their own social lives. Sunday schools offered the chance of meeting friends in congenial surrounding and gave access to resources for entertainment that families may have been hard pressed to provide. The evangelical imperative of conversion co-incided with the earnest desire of children to collect and consolidate tight groups of friends:

I always liked to try and get my friends to join our chapel too as that was where the action was and we could all go on the trips and take part

¹²⁵ George Clifton Hughes, Shut the Mountain Gate, p. 8.

in the nativity plays and harvest festivals together, if they brought their tuppence a week collection and went with me. Pearl Butters was never keen but then her parents had friends with cars and they often went places on Sunday afternoons. I think I did get Joan Wynne to join Emmanuel and she became one of the "chapel people" too.¹²⁶

Children can be fickle in their affections and are prone to changing their allegiances frequently. This was also the case with their relationships with the Sunday schools. Children changed their denominational allegiances to follow their friends, and to secure entitlement to the Sunday school sponsored treats and trips which were such a feature of juvenile social life.^{127, 128}

Parents monitored their childrens' activities and might sometimes restrict their choices. Stout upholders of a particular cause might require their offspring to attend the Sunday school of their own congregation while the main concern of others was that their childrens' activities should not embarrass the family. Frequent changes of allegiance which betokened too much cynicism were viewed as unrespectable. One Llay woman had ~~a church~~ ^{an Anglican} background, but moved to the Welsh Presbyterian church when her husband became the caretaker. She 'didn't believe' in allowing children to change denominational allegiances at will and set strict conditions:

The children went to church, the three older ones were christened in the church and they went to Sunday school in the church. And Allan, the eldest one said "Can we go to Glanaber to learn Welsh?" 'cos they didn't learn Welsh in school.

"Yes," I said "but remember when you've learnt Welsh you're not going back and to from one place to another. You stay in one place." And they

¹²⁶ Beryl Baigent, A Lovely Ugly Place, p. 74.

¹²⁷ For an account of such a religious odyssey in an English setting see: Linda MacCulloch Thew, The Pit Village and the Store (1985), pp. 29 - 34.

¹²⁸ Interview with Neville Rogers.

stayed in Glanaber.¹²⁹

As children matured into youth they were sometimes able to use local congregations to meet members of the opposite sex. Rather than inhibiting these encounters, the presence of chaperoning adults eased contacts which might otherwise have been problematic. However, by the age that courting had begun in earnest, young people were usually beginning to drop out of church and chapel life. The Sunday promenade was not strictly part of the Sunday school scene but was certainly a part of the Sabbath ritual. A walk after the evening service was often the only recreation permitted on that sober day. On warm summer evenings groups of young people dressed in their best set out from the church steps and drifted up and down prescribed routes. In Llay young people went along a road out of the village known as the Straight Mile to view a prospect of the Cheshire Plain; in Rhos the promenade was through the main streets.

... we used to be marching up and down Rhos in the thirties, in the Saturday and Sunday night you'd be marching up, boys and girls, looking at each other and talking and passing. And, who was the other one that went with him?¹³⁰

Few young adults graduated from the Sunday school class to become regular attenders of the adult congregation.¹³¹ This hiatus was a nationally attested phenomenon - a 1956 survey of Free Church Sunday schools found that only 14 per cent of Sunday scholars eventually joined the adult congregations of their churches.¹³² Oral testimony suggests that this marked dropping off of numbers as young people reached adolescence was

¹²⁹ Interview with Mrs. Maggie Williams.

¹³⁰ Mrs. Blodwen Whalley, WMP C/1984/42.

¹³¹ A fact which was a source of some concern to Alderman William Aston, reported addressing a Wrexham Symposium on the decline of the local churches Wrexham Leader, 6 Jan 1928.

¹³² K. E. Hyde et al., Sunday Schools Today Free Church Federal Council (London, 1956), quoted in Michael Argyle and Benjamin Beit Hallahmi, The Social Psychology of Religion 2nd edn. (1975), p. 33.

due to fact that compulsory attendance was no longer required by their parents.¹³³ The precise time when this compulsion ended varied. For some the imperative passed when they left school and entered world of work, for others it was conceded in the later teenage years. Whatever the precise occasion of the relaxation of this requirement it usually acknowledged a shift in the status of the young person from child to adult. The view that the Sunday school was primarily a means of socializing children, indoctrinating them with appropriate values and disciplining their behaviour, ensured the strong support of local adults for juvenile church attendance but ironically, it made the relationship of the churches with the adult population more problematic. The association of church going with childhood ensured it would be marginal to the concerns of most adults. As adults, young people were unwilling to continue in a subordinate status by identifying themselves too closely with/a/the churches. One of Paul Thompson's Edwardians said of her decision to stop attending church in her early teens:

I wouldn't lower me dignity. I was finished with that.¹³⁴

The lapsed Sunday scholar retained a basic familiarity with the Bible and at least enough knowledge of the rites and culture of their own denomination to be uncomfortable in the presence of those of others. Though some might discern in these modest results the failure of the Sunday school in its nominal aim of extending membership it was significant that Sunday schools were remembered by respondents with a characteristic warmth. Though nostalgia is frequently spurned by historians, the attitude of communities to their past is a subject worthy of examination. It was this positive evaluation of Sunday schools that led parents to commit their own children to them. Religious culture and symbolism, mediated through such fond memories, were part of a communal history which was very much part of the fabric of local life.¹³⁵ The Sunday school was identified with the family

¹³³ Meredith Jones, WMP C/1984/68.

¹³⁴ Paul Thompson, The Edwardians - the Remaking of British Society (1975), p. 70.

¹³⁵ Williams, Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, p. 268.

which compelled attendance, with the community which set such store by it, and even with the nation whose genius it was supposed to express. The Sunday school was evoked as a powerful symbol of identity:

Were your family religious at all?

Very chapel-y, yes born and bred. Rhos, you know, you were very, very Welsh you see. I'm Welsh, I'm Welsh you know, I speak Welsh normally.

But we all went to chapel, until the age of seventeen, we had to go. And after seventeen, sixteen-seventeen you could please yourself. We had a grounding, we had to go, every Sunday. All wash, go to chapel, clean your shoes, five or six of us to chapel every morning and afternoon.

And we'd walk from, about two miles, you know, all weathers, it was the natural way, you know. We didn't think nothing, anything of it did we? We were brought up to it.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Gwyn Thomas, WMP C/1984/97.

Conversionism and the Milieu of Local Religion.

Far from standing out against the broader culture of local life, the churches provided much of that culture on terms that did not ask for too much commitment or anxiety of conscience. Though broadly 'evangelical' in profession, most of the Nonconformist churches did not pursue particularly aggressive policies of church extension. Conversionism was not part of the ethos of local religion and evangelism was seldom undertaken by local congregations. People attended places of worship to meet familiar faces rather than to meet new ones. Daniel Jenkins discussed such introspection as being particularly characteristic of the Welsh churches. Their members often sought in them a refuge from the world where the Welsh language and culture were faring poorly and looked for an escape into the nostalgia of timeless religious observances.¹⁰³

In Rhos and in Llay this introspective pattern tended to be the norm. However, in Llay a new evangelical church with a decidedly different attitude was formed in the early forties. The new church espoused the doctrine of 'Holiness'. In America, Holiness churches have been described as a characteristic social movement among groups experiencing acute social stress. John Holt noted ^{cap} that the Holiness Churches were concentrated in areas of net immigration. he considered that migrants were trying to reconstitute ruptured social bonds and ⁹ ~~to~~ recapture their sense of security through religious revival.¹⁰⁴ The formation of the new church in Llay could be regarded as a response to the anomie state of relationships in the turbulent society of a new community. However, the new church was founded two decades after the construction of the village and did not irrupt into a scene which was particularly lacking in religious institutions. The existing local churches had established a local religious culture. Though they conceived of themselves as having a mission of primary evangelism, the founders of the new church were also reacting against the passive features of existing local societies. Their evangelical campaigns

¹⁰³ Daniel Jenkins, The British: Their Identity and Their Religion (London, 1975), pp. 46 - 47.

¹⁰⁴ John Holt, 'Holiness Religion: Cultural Shock and Social Reorganisation', American Sociological Review No. 5 (1940).

the/ amounted to a public repudiation of prevailing ethos in the other local congregations. The activities of the new church proved to be socially reconstructive for only a small minority of villagers. The disruptive effects of these campaigns prompted concern, even hostility among the other villagers. The mores of local religion are generally tacit and inexplicit, but when faced with such a challenge local people affirmed their own religious experiences and expectations in their complaints about the new church.

The Holiness Church originated in Llay after a series of campaigns organised by members of the other churches. Two local men, who were both regular chapel-goers met while working in Llay Main Colliery in the mid-thirties. They began to share their mutual interest in prayer and Bible study and began witnessing and distributing tracts in the area. In 1940 a party of evangelists from the Calvary Holiness Church were invited to come from -/ missions in North West England to conduct a revival campaign in the village. The new church was inaugurated in the autumn of 1940.¹⁰⁶ This move signalled the withdrawal of the small congregation from their original denominations.

The Llay Church was part of a wider organization, the Calvary Holiness Church, a society which dated from its 1934 secession from a layman's movement, the International Holiness Mission. Division had come over a dispute about the status of ministers in the government of the society. In 1955, after several years of debate, the Calvary Holiness Church and the Holiness Mission were reunited when both were joined in a union with the Church of the Nazarene, a body which was itself an amalgam of the Holiness Churches of America.¹⁰⁶ The Holiness churches came from America where they were formed after large scale secessions from Methodist bodies after the Civil War.¹⁰⁷

In Llay, the Church of the Nazarene began in a revival campaign and was sustained by its eagerness to spread its message and to win converts. The invited evangelists staged a series of meetings in the rented classrooms of the

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Percy Davies.

¹⁰⁶ S.M. Gregory, The Church of the Nazarene, Llay - A History 1940 - 1980 (1980).

¹⁰⁷ E.T. Clark, The Small Sects in America (1951), pp. 74 - 75.

Junior School and at the Miner's Welfare Institute. Open-air meetings were held in the village and on the pit bank, for the benefit of miners going onto the early shift. Evangelical activities were not confined to the new church's early years but were a consistent feature of the its ministry. The most typical activity was street evangelism. Members of the church took their message onto the Llay streets and into the surrounding villages and also ranged widely, distributing tracts and selling copies of The Flame, the voice of the Holiness Churches. In 1950 the church erected a tent on the park in Wrexham, but this attempt to plant a congregation there went no further.¹⁰⁸

One of the founders of the church remembered that this mission was intended as a challenge to the complacency of other local societies:

When our church started, it wasn't just to add to the numbers. Just a couple of us young fellows, we felt that there was nothing, what you might term aggressive evangelism to reach the unchurched. It was the conception, "Well the churches are here, if they want to come they can". That was not our conception, our conception was to reach the people who didn't go to church.¹⁰⁹

9. Concern to spread the message even influenced the siting of the permanent church building which was constructed in 1952. Even in this decision the church deliberately stood out against the established pattern of village religion. The architect's original decision to locate the ~~village's~~ churches along with the other amenities in the centre of village may have been an attempt to ensure ease of access from all areas. It could equally well be perceived as an attempt to identify the churches with the respectable streets that surrounded them and co-opt them into the scheme of vicinal segregation sponsored by the colliery company.

The top end of the village might be termed the West End and the bottom End might be termed the East End, that was I'm afraid, the situation.

And when we approached the mining company for a place to build the

¹⁰⁸ Gregory, The Church of the Nazarene.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Percy Davies.

church, they said "Well, the place to build it is where all the other churches are". Well, we resisted that ... we said, "No, the people don't travel from the bottom end of the village", and there was already more churches than what was needed in that area there ... Now they had the Methodist, Presbyterian and the Church of England all within a few yards of one another. And we said, "No we don't want to build there we want to come down here," where we felt there was a bigger need and a bigger challenge ...'¹⁰

The Church of the Nazarene was eventually built on Nant-Y-Gaer Lane between the abutting cul-de-sacs of New House Avenue and Beech Tree Avenue - well within the rough area of the village that other interviewees designated as 'Chinatown'.

The commitment of the church to evangelical activities was due to its belief in conversion. The doctrine of 'Holiness' reifies and celebrates conversion as a 'born again' experience with far reaching consequences for everyday life. Salvation is accomplished in two stages: justification, whereby sins are remitted upon repentance; and sanctification, the total elimination of sin in the regenerate. The Holiness churches, while openly acknowledging their debt to Wesley for their perfectionist doctrine, invest it with a greater evangelical emphasis than do many Methodist societies. The adherents of the doctrine of holiness hold that 'moral perfection in one's daily walk, spiritual holiness, the total eradication of sinful desires and deplorable psychological states' are true and attainable Christian goals.'¹¹

The contrast between the Holiness Church and the other village congregations illustrates the difference described in the standard typology between the zeal of the sect and the more lukewarm commitment of the denomination. The typology assumes that one of the most important differences lies in the means of recruitment to these respective bodies: one may be born into a church but must elect to join a sect. The Holiness Church sought to win converts from the world and from the 'unchurched' and unrespectable elements of society. However, in the initial stages of the church's development, lateral growth was a more significant means of recruitment than primary evangelism. Most of the original

¹⁰ Interview with Percy Davies.

¹¹ E.T. Clark, The Small Sects in America, pp. 51 - 52.

congregation were previously members of other churches. They were attracted by the evangelical style of worship, the satisfactions of 'lifestyle Holiness' and the companionship of like minded worshippers:

I'll tell you what happened. One Friday night we were having a social evening in the Methodist Church.

I was sitting by the pastor ... and I said, "Pastor, I know there's something more than we're getting here tonight", and I was after it! On the twentieth of December 1941 I went into the Church of the Nazarene, it was a little hut then, and from then on I'm afraid it drew me. That was what I was after! the spirit of that Church, that little place that night. I'd never felt anything like it before!''¹¹²

The idea of the conversion of the unregenerate sinner was important to members of the church. These expectations and the church's understanding of the doctrine of conversion crystallised into oral tales about conversion experiences. These tales were not sophisticated explanations of the church's theology but rather narrations of the antecedents and circumstances of conversion experiences and accounts of the differences between the old and new life. The accounts were used in meetings where spiritual exploration required the use of personal testimony and were deployed in public witness to recruit new members to the church. Such testimonies served as validating precedents for further conversionist activities. While these accounts are patently rooted in personal experiences they are used pragmatically to vindicate a personal commitment to an external ideological position. We might suspect that ideological expectations could overwhelm the experiences upon which they were imposed.''¹¹³ Though witnessing classically took the form of personal testimony, such accounts might also form a part of the folklore of the wider congregation. One tale which was encountered several times during interviewing described how a popular member of the church came to be converted. Mr Jarvis, a stalwart of

¹¹² Interview with Les Crewe.

¹¹³ William Clements, "I once was lost": Oral Narratives of Born-Again Christians', International Folklore Review No. 2 (1982), p. 105.

the Baptist congregation, was going to chapel when he saw a man digging his garden:

"Young man," he said, "you shouldn't be doing that on a Sunday you know," he said, "There's six days you should work, on the seventh", he said, "that's a day of rest, that's what the Lord said!" And he went on his way.

He went into his house and he said to his wife "Well! you know that man Mr. Jarvis, he told me I shouldn't be digging my garden".

"Take no notice of him," his wife said. Anyway he was bothered about it and about his spiritual life and he came to our church. He got converted!"¹¹⁴

Robert Moore noted the importance of such myths to local religion and described the accounts of miraculous conversions and of angry clashes between the Methodist saints who founded the Erewash valley congregations and local popular culture as a 'folk history of Methodism'.¹¹⁵ In North Wales many tales are told of the revival of 1904-5. However, such anecdotes described situations that were increasingly alien to local religious societies which had ceased to be disruptive conversionist sects and had become bodies which, though described as chapels, actually approached the sociological status of churches. In these instances such stories were not a precedent for evangelical mission but expressions of nostalgia for a time when it was imagined that the chapels were full and religion was an important part of local society.

There was obviously tension between the public conviction that becoming a Christian was an instantaneous experience with profound consequences for personal conduct and the implicit view that being a Christian was a matter of the gradual assimilation of doctrines and attitudes through instruction and socialization. Since most local people took the latter road to faith, they assumed that the experiences which had imparted their religious heritage were widely shared and should not render the individual conspicuous within the community. The reaction of the village to the arrival of the new church reveals some of the assumptions that such aggressive evangelism challenged.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Les Crewe.

¹¹⁵ Robert Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics, p. 131.

Several respondents described the new church as a 'breakaway'. The church was not created by a large split in a single existing congregation and its earliest supporters came from several local Nonconformist congregations. However, in the context of local religion the term is strongly pejorative, since solidarity is one of the principles of local religion. One woman remembered the trenchantly expressed views of her father in law:

Taid [grandfather] said to Blodwyn: "I don't know what you're thinking of going there for, they've just stolen other peoples' parishioners!"

He said, "You won't get me going!", of course he was a dyed in the wool Welsh Baptist.¹¹⁶

Many local people rated solidarity with the community, with your own church or chapel and with the family tradition of attendance at one or other, more highly than the search for doctrinal affinity or spiritual satisfaction.

The level of commitment common in the early years of the new church made extravagant demands on the time of its supporters. Morning prayers were held in the old hut every day except Friday. One woman, who worked at a local armaments factory during the war regularly arrived home from the night shift to find services already in full swing. She was unfavourably impressed by such zeal remembering that members were in the hut 'till all hours' and that this was 'too much'.¹¹⁷ This was said from the perspective of a local religion which holds that too much commitment to such activities constitute a dangerous and discomfiting enthusiasm. As far as majority local opinion was concerned, 'religious mania'¹¹⁸ was not the result of conviction but of affliction.

Another respondent pronounced a hostile opinion on the coincidence of the new church's formation and the outbreak of hostilities:

Half the people that went there at the time were trying to get out of the

¹¹⁶ Interview with Mrs. MacNee.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Mrs. Roberts.

¹¹⁸ Gwyn Thomas, WMP C/1984/97.

war ... conchies, conscientious objectors.¹¹⁹

There was cynicism in the village about the motives of adherents and many apparently thought that the new church would fade when the war ended.¹²⁰ Several members of the Church were indeed conscientious objectors and therefore worked on local farms and in the gravel quarries as an alternative to military service.¹²¹ However, standing out against broadly accepted norms was not part of the milieu of local religion. Even in Rhos, the village which was the acknowledged keeper of the area's Nonconformist conscience, the conflict between the asceticism born of strong religious faith and the demands of patriotism provoked acute local anxiety. The Rhos Branch of the Peace Pledge Union had initially been established after George Lansbury visited Penuel Chapel¹²² and was still surviving against the odds in a less sympathetic atmosphere in May 1940.¹²³ The Rhos Herald, concerned as ever about the village's reputation, but usually sympathetic to local organisations and indulgent towards tender consciences, lost patience and urged that the branch be disbanded. The paper felt constrained to publish an estimate of the numbers of Rhos men serving in the forces.¹²⁴

As well as scepticism and resentment about the institution of a new church, there was also hostility about the practice and presumption of evangelism. In a small community spreading the word was a disruptive business, both in terms of peace and social harmony. One woman summarised village's response succinctly:

Some liked it, some didn't - 'specially those that wanted an hour on a

¹¹⁹ Interview with Mrs. MacNee.

¹²⁰ Interview with Percy Davies.

¹²¹ Gregory, The Church of the Nazarene.

¹²² An account of the history of the branch is given in a report of the re-launching of the Peace Pledge Union after the hiatus caused by the departure of Tom Jones, the secretary, to fight with the Republican forces in Spain: Rhos Herald, 12 Feb 1938.

¹²³ Rhos Herald, 25 May 1940.

¹²⁴ Loc. cit..

Sunday afternoon.¹²⁵

Evangelism has two elements: it is on the one hand an attempt to win converts; it is on the other an act proclaiming faith and indicating converted status. Although undertaken in all sincerity it often had the real effect of alienating people. 'Witnessing' can easily be read as self righteousness and attempts to lead the sanctified life perceived as priggishness. Local people resented the implicit criticism of their lifestyles and existing levels of religious commitment contained in evangelical exhortation. They particularly disliked being regarded as an unconverted, unregenerate lump:

That's the only fault I had against them, they was very pointed, everybody was heathens bar them you know! and they could get up your nose couldn't they?¹²⁶

Local society retaliated against the moral aggression of strident evangelism. Whispered criticisms alleged the insincerity of the commitments made by the church's adherents. One man narrated the following incident which he supposed to have happened in a revival campaign organised by the Holiness Church:

He came to the Welfare, he was an evangelist he was, going back a few years, and he was doing this and doing that in the Welfare in the upstairs room.

[...]

And Peter Jones was in that meeting, and he was in the Nazarenes wasn't he? Well Pete come along and made his statement, something ... "I feel so glad that I've been saved!" he said, and he went in his pocket and he took his bank book out and he threw it! But he made sure that it fell on Mrs. Jones's lap!¹²⁷

The widow of one of the ministers who served the Holiness Church in the fifties did not remember open air evangelism as a particularly successful tactic for

¹²⁵ Interview with Catherine Williams.

¹²⁶ Interview with Mr. Prydderch.

¹²⁷ Interview with Moi Jones.

church extension.¹²⁸

The unsympathetic reception accorded to the new church was to some extent dictated by the new community's experience of religion. The churches of Llay were for the most part planted by parent denominations. Many of the inhabitants of the new village were not from the fervent religious atmosphere of Wales and many who were had seen their religious allegiances eroded by their removal from the places of worship they associated with childhood socialisation and family worship. Such carping comments would have seemed incongruous in Rhos. The churches of Rhos were the products of an authentic, if, in more recent years, attenuated religious enthusiasm. More than this, the community could draw on the heritage of a distinguished role in two great religious revivals. The 1859 revival touched the village¹²⁹ and it was described as one of the three 'storm centres' of the great revival of 1904 - 5.^{130, 131} The 1904-5 revival touched Llay to the extent of some revival meetings held at the old Primitive Methodist chapel, but the fragmented religious experiences of the inhabitants of the new mining community gave the village no collective memories of the event to draw upon.¹³²

To some extent, a hostile reaction was only to be expected. A conversionist creed draws rigid boundaries between the church and the world. Many evangelical congregations take as a text St. John's address to the Laodiceans: he criticized their lack of zeal, and condemned in them a lukewarm attitude which inspired neither love nor hate among the local population.¹³³

¹²⁸ Interview with Mrs. Ainscough.

¹²⁹ Eifion Evans, Revival Comes to Wales: The Story of the 1859 Revival in Wales 2nd edn. (Bryntirion, 1967), p. 105.

¹³⁰ The two other centres being the more populous Caernarfon and Rhondda: North Wales Chronicle, 7 Jan 1905.

¹³¹ Des Frost, Wonderful Is the Change: An Account of the Revival in Rhos in 1904 (the author, 1989).

¹³² William Millington, Memoirs Ms. (n.d.).

¹³³ Revelation, ch. 3, v. 14 - 19.

Being converted meant belonging to a distinct and visible category. People recoiled from identifying with such a category because it asserted its own prerogatives over those of the community. Even members of evangelical congregations were keen to acquit themselves from the charges of priggishness - one man who was a member of the evangelical Curney Mission in the Broughton area prefaced his description of his activities ^{9 in/} ~~with/~~ _h the church with the guarded comment:

I'm not trying to make myself a saint or anything you see.¹³⁴

Such hedges defined what local people latently felt to be an appropriate level of commitment. If pressed, local people maintained that a commitment to Christian values was vindicated through the reciprocity and generosity evidenced by the comradeship of the mine or the domestic creed of neighbourliness. Allegiance to religious values was affirmed by occasional attendance at a local congregation and faithfulness to the legacy of childhood instruction:

Religious? Well I'm not a ... I used to go to chapel. I used to go to chapel three times a day on a Sunday when we was living in Coedpoeth. And when we went to Yorkshire we used to go to the Welsh chapel, Welsh Weslanes, there, English. Used to go every Sunday like.

Anyhow, when I got married I go a few times to the Church, the Missis goes, every other Sunday like, to Church, in the morning, Sunday morning. Anyhow, I never go, but I'm not a bad man, like. I know how far to go. Aye.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Norman Davies, WMP C/1984/1.

¹³⁵ Caradoc Prichard, WMP C/1984/69.

Temperance and Indulgence.

Denbighshire voted to allow the opening of public houses on a Sunday in 1968. This was, in more ways than one, the end of an era. The social forces unleashed by the Industrial Revolution had taken a distinctive form in Wales and it was the view of the Welsh themselves, or at least of the most active and self reflective elements of the nation, that the most characteristic form taken by these social forces was the chapel. Temperance was widely perceived as an expression of allegiance to the Nonconformist cause. In the mid-nineteenth century Nonconformity had become the vehicle for increasing national awareness. The Sunday Closing Act of 1881 was the first piece of legislation in which the government was prepared to concede that Wales had special characteristics and should be treated as a separate unit. The Act showed that Nonconformists had progressed, in the space of a few generations, from being perceived by the establishment as interlopers and dangerous enthusiasts to being regarded as the standard bearers of the Welsh nation. Almost regardless of the desirability of the measure itself, Sunday closing had become 'an expression of the cultural separateness of Wales' and temperance had become a national characteristic.¹³⁷

99 of 1 Despite the early ~~declaration of~~ victory ~~from~~ the temperance lobby in 1881, drink was the issue on which there was the widest divergence between the chapel and wider society. The split between the chapels and the pubs described by the cliché disguises the complexities of the situation. Local society was not polarised into two camps / there was a spectrum between the ascetics and the drunkards, and one ^{moreover} which was heavily biased towards its middle ranges.¹³⁸ The clarity of the split as it was described

¹³⁷ H. Carter and J.G. Thomas, 'The Referendum on the Sunday Opening of Licensed Premises in Wales as a Criterion of a Culture Region', Regional Studies Vol. 3 (1969), p. 62.

¹³⁸ Michael Lieven drew upon local press reports, and detected from the lists of attenders at chapel functions and Police Court prosecutions, an 'intermingling of families': Michael Lieven, Senghennydd - The Universal Colliery Village (Llandysul, 1994), p. 104.

in public discourses owes much to evangelical view of the world outside the gathered community of the faithful. One Rhos born autobiographer thought that in the war of words, 'the advantage must surely have lain with the more articulate chapels'.¹³⁹ While many in Wales have subscribed to the myth of chapel hegemony, the public houses also had their adherents. There was local saying in Rhos that there were twenty two chapels and twenty two pubs.¹⁴⁰ The count was impressionistic but the sentiment was clear.

The view that Nonconformity had a defining effect on Welsh society has been frequently asserted: in fictional portrayals, in the memoirs of the most famous sons of Wales and even in academic scholarship. David Jenkins described a stratification of local society, evidenced by his observations of a Cardiganshire coastal community, which was based on values derived from Welsh Nonconformity. Other criteria were subordinate and village society was split between two groups espousing respectable and unrespectable lifestyles. The unrespectable group was alleged to be deferential towards the values of the respectable group and even to have accepted the implicit conclusion of their own moral inferiority. This deference was summed up in the attitude which declared: 'I'm not religious by any means but the least we can do is not break the Sabbath'.¹⁴¹ More revisionist views point to the complexity of the real situation. While testifying to the widespread acceptance of this model, Day and Fitton have

¹³⁹ George Clifton Hughes, Shut the Mountain Gate, p. 7.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Gilbert Parry; a visitor to Rhos in the late forties recorded this observation 'as a matter of statistical fact': R.G. Lloyd Thomas, Welsh Odyssey (Llandeby, 1949), p. 62.

¹⁴¹ David Jenkins, 'Aberporth: a Study of a Coastal Village in South Cardiganshire' in E. Davies and A.D. Rees (eds.), Welsh Rural Communities (Cardiff, 1960), p. 78.

found only slender evidence for the existence of the system of stratification Jenkins described. Day and Fitton speculated that the researcher's commitment to the culture of his own land might have predisposed him to ascribe to it unique qualities.¹⁴²

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Rhos had a multiplicity of pubs and they were not furtive ~~and~~ harrassed institutions but rather ~~they~~ played a full part in the social and industrial life of the village. The public house was, in the words of the 1943 Mass Observation study, 'the only free, non-esoteric, non-exclusive, weather-proof meeting place for the ordinary worker'.¹⁴³ D. Ben Rees noted a structural similarity between the autonomous work groups characteristic of the Welsh coal industry and the 'small independent Nonconformist chapel'.¹⁴⁴ It is equally valid to note the similarity between the society and culture of the pit and society and culture of the public houses. Here, in a largely, if not exclusively, male society, the miner met his colleagues and continued exploring the relationships forged in the workplace. The aphorism, that there was more work done in the pub than in the pit,¹⁴⁵ was known and affirmed in North Wales.¹⁴⁶ One local autobiographer considered that his local pub was 'an amicable extension of the pit to me, as well as to others'.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Graham Day and Martin Fitton, 'Religion and Social Status in Rural Wales: 'Buchedd' and its Lessons for Concepts of Stratification in Community Studies', Sociological Review 23 (1975), p. 888.

¹⁴³ Mass Observation, The Pub and the People - a Worktown Study (1943), p. 165.

¹⁴⁴ D. Ben Rees, Chapels in the Valley - A Study in the Sociology of Welsh Nonconformity (Upton, 1975), p. 27.

¹⁴⁵ Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques, Clifford Slaughter, Coal is Our Life (London, 1956), p. 73; George Korson, Minstrels of the Mine Patch (Hatboro, Penn, 1964), p. 37; the observation is enshrined in the chorus of the Anglo-American ballad 'The Celebrated Working Man': A.L. Lloyd, Folk Song in England (London, 1967), pp. 387 - 388.

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¹⁴⁶ Interview with Joe Williams.

¹⁴⁷ Bill 'Portmadoc' Jones, Through These Windows - A Place and Its People (Denbigh, 1981), p. 32.

Until the thirties and the general introduction of longwall working this relationship between pub and pit had an economic dimension. It was often the custom for sets of workers paid on a contract basis to divide their wages in a pub. The pub supplied shelter, a convenient meeting point for men employed on opposing shifts and a means of obtaining change to smooth the distribution. The practice afforded other and more dangerous opportunities. In 1912, the drowning of a young man, apparently the worse for drink, in a Rhos clay pit some hours after he had collected his wages gave the coroner cause to regret the persistence of the practice.¹⁴⁸ When a colliery stall was worked by partners of equal status the choice of venue for distribution was left to the workmen.¹⁴⁹ However, under the chalter system, a local variant of the practice of underground subcontracting, which was disliked by colliers since it led to economic clientage in the workplace, the chalter nominated the venue. When he paid out in a public house, it was natural that gratitude and deference should be expressed in appropriate terms. It was remembered that the chalter would 'expect a pint of beer, too, when he paid your wages. ... He used to make a pint of beer on each one.'¹⁵⁰

The public houses of Rhos were not a homogeneous collectivity. Public space in the pub was divided and the pubs themselves were stratified in a way which reflected the gradations of the community itself. Pub going was far from being a passive activity. The pubs were merely a context for association, albeit one where alcohol acted as a social lubricant, and customers organised their own entertainment. At weekends a bar-room chairman would be appointed in some pubs and would direct the proceedings with his bottle gavel.¹⁵¹ The pubs severally served a variety of clienteles by catering to different inclinations. The most popular recreation was singing but in the politically conscious thirties one man remembered more

¹⁴⁸ Rhos Herald, 6 July 1912.

¹⁴⁹ Arthur Redhouse, CROH NT/789 No. 4.

¹⁵⁰ Indignation at the invidious nature of this arrangement has preserved its details in public memory: Phil Jones, CLWBC 451.12.

¹⁵¹ Pub concerts were recalled as still being common in the fifties: Jones, Through These Windows, p. 31.

earnest gatherings:

I used to go for a drink at the Cross Foxes. There'd be one room for men only, you'd see nothing only men. Another place you'd play dominoes, another place there was a piano. But this particular, you'd have arguments and discussion and it would be enjoyable to go there, you were enjoying yourself by going there because you'd be talking about culture and talking about politics. Somebody would have to express themselves and have a paper read.¹⁵²

Though temperance was a creed which could unite the denominations despite their divergent theological confessions, the temperance movement found expression in a number of local associations. In the same way that the pubs provided much more than refreshment to their clientele, the temperance societies were much more than pragmatic associations for the suppression of the liquor trade. While campaigning might have benefited from a united effort, the several societies absorbed the organisational talents and social ambitions of a part of local society otherwise ill-provided for. From the sketchy evidence it is possible to gather from the notices and reports of meetings in the local press, associations seemed to consist disproportionately of womens' leagues and organisations.

The ideals and aims of the temperance movement were largely accepted by the respectable elements of society. Since deacons frequently became justices and councillors, their concern was easily translated into official action. The Denbighshire licensing sessions progressively thinned the ranks of the public houses in the older industrial villages. The recommendations of the police generally singled out small premises in rough districts and the grounds offered most frequently were those of redundancy due to over-provision. Police evidence sometimes cited the volume of sales and since some of these houses survived on a miniscule trade, it is apparent that it was not always ^{9th is /} ~~the volume of liquor sales~~ which made houses objectionable. These smaller outlets domesticated alcohol consumption in a way which worried moral reformers. Smaller houses were often located in converted

¹⁵² Interview with Joe Williams.

domestic premises and seemed to be a natural part of the life of the neighbourhood.

The number of licensed houses in Rhos fell from 37 in 1920, to 32 by 1932¹⁵³ and had reached 18 by 1961.¹⁵⁴ The ratio of 297 inhabitants to every pub in 1920 had been reduced to 526 per establishment in 1961. The falling population of the village meant that the fall of this ratio was not as precipitous as the fall in the number of licenses. Local breweries actually connived at this trend and reduced their overheads by consolidating the numbers of their tied houses by eliminating the houses with small turnovers.¹⁵⁵

The Rhos Miners' Institute has been described as an embodiment of the village's image of itself, at least as defined by the local leaders of opinion. The determination that the Stiwt should be a temple to culture expressed itself in the fact that a bar was conspicuously lacking from the Stiwt's otherwise comprehensive facilities. While the presence of a bar might well have alienated the respectable part of community which would be expected to patronise the public rooms and serious cultural endeavours, it seems clear that the decision also represented the sincere convictions of the Institute's trustees. In renouncing the world the Institute renounced a potentially lucrative source of revenue. In the late fifties cinema receipts began to fall as domestic television viewing ~~began to~~ challenge the supremacy of the silver screen,¹⁵⁶ the Institute's auditors recommended that the trustees consider the problem most urgently. No new initiative was

¹⁵³ Rhos Herald, 12 Mar 1932.

¹⁵⁴ Rhos Herald, 3 June 1961.

¹⁵⁵ The large numbers of its low-turnover tied houses contributed to the difficulties of Border, the leading local brewer, in the 1960s: Brian Glover, Prince of Ales - the History of Brewing in Wales (Stroud, 1993), p. 179.

¹⁵⁶ Nationally, cinema audiences peaked at 1635 million attendances in 1946, ~~between~~ 1955 and 1959 cinema audiences declined by a half to 581 million: collated from the appendices of J. Curran and V. Porter (eds.), British Cinema History (London, 1983).

forthcoming to stem the decline¹⁵⁷ and the use of the auditorium as a
 -/ cinema finally ended in the mid seventies.¹⁵⁸

960/ One solution ~~for~~[^] the problem of the Institute's declining income which
 was canvassed in the late sixties was that the Institute should accommodate
 the tastes of a broader section of the community and open a bar. An
 approach was made by members of the Hafod Colliery Social Welfare
 Committee¹⁵⁹ but respondents remembered that the influence of the members
 of a few prominent families made the rebuff inevitable.

⊙/caps One local man who served on the committee despaired of the 'narrow
 minded' attitude of some of his fellow committee members¹⁶⁰ nevertheless,
 another remembered that their stance received considerable support in the
 parish.¹⁶¹ Some of the Hafod miners canvassed the organisation of a
 separate social club and sought funds from the Coal Industry Social Welfare
 Organisation. By the late sixties there was a tangible monument to the
 split between those of temperate convictions and those of less ascetic
 inclinations as the village was witness to the novelty of two social
 institutes, both built with grants from the same welfare fund, standing
 within a few yards of one another on Broad Street: one wet and one dry.

However, faced by a declining rate of participation in voluntary
 organisations, the guardians of the village's cultural conscience were
 forced into a further compromise with baser local inclinations: the
 Institute opened a bar and cabaret room in the late sixties. The decision
 prompted resignations from members of the committee who remained true to

¹⁵⁷ CROH D/MM/1107, Accountant's Report to the Committee of the Rhos
 Miner's Institute for the year ending 31 Dec 1958.

¹⁵⁸ Interview in the Miner's Institute, Mr. Hughes, WMP C/1984/111.

¹⁵⁹ Jones, Through These Windows, p. 60.

¹⁶⁰ Joe Williams, CLWBC 451.4.

¹⁶¹ George Thomas, WMP C/1984/9.

their temperance convictions.¹⁶² Even this move came too late to save the Institute: it succumbed to its high running costs and closed in 1977.

and Temperance convictions were not simply an aspect of the world view of local elites, which they sought and often succeeded in foisting on the rest of the population, drink-related issues were capable of mobilising larger sections of the community.

The most bizarre episode in the village's history occurred in 1923 when two temperance bodies clashed 'and something approaching a free fight ensued'. The incident was another chapter in the continuing struggle of Rhos against the outside world, with the village uniting around temperance as the local orthodoxy to meet the ideological challenge presented by an outside group. The visiting body, the Fellowship of Freedom and Reform, expressed the heretical conviction that the key to the drink question was not prohibitory legislation so much as 'the inculcation of the desire to secure sobriety by self-control'. The ideologues of Rhos immediately identified the group with the liquor interest and alleged its supporters were paid agitators.¹⁶³ A crowd of two thousand gathered in the White Lion Yard. The visiting speakers were drowned out by the singing of Welsh Hymns and the crowd demanded that the platform should be opened to local speakers. Elements of the crowd seized the Fellowship's banner and the police were obliged to secure order. The chief defendant pursued an appeal against his subsequent summons at a King's Bench Divisional Court. Their Lordships wondered publicly, amid much laughter, at the passions which ran so high in the little town 'with the unpronounceable name'. The summons was dismissed but the court ordered the defendant to pay costs.¹⁶⁴

Even after the Second World War the flame still burned on the altar of temperance and Rhos reacted against the decision of the local Territorial Drill Hall to have a bar and ~~to~~ open it on Sundays. As a military institution, the Drill Hall was exempted from the jurisdiction of the

¹⁶² Mr. Hughes jun., WMP C/1984/111.

¹⁶³ Silin, 'Looking Back': Wrexham Leader, 22 Nov 1974.

¹⁶⁴ Wrexham Leader, 20 Apr 1923.

licensing magistrates. The advent of the first Sunday drinking club in Rhos roused latent conviction into active opposition. Though the Drill Hall was the specific issue, the controversy acted as a conduit for a more general anxiety about the erosion of Welsh culture.

not/with/ All over Britain local and regional identities had been submerged during the war as government propaganda attempted ~~project~~ to Britons an image of their nation as a united land. In Wales and Scotland, the association of the political nationalist movements with conscientious objection had ensured that political nationalism was further marginalised.¹⁶⁵ The large movements of population implied by evacuation and relocation were widely assumed to have further eroded native vernacular culture¹⁶⁶, though in the absence of the 1941 census little is actually known of the influence of the war effort on patterns of inter-regional migration.¹⁶⁷ And as the world had come to Wales, Wales had travelled in the world. Large numbers of Welsh men and women had travelled extensively, frequently for the first time, during the war. There were anxieties that their adventures in England and beyond were loosening their loyalties to home and hearth.

In 1945 John Evans (Urban Powers) earned the congratulations of the North Wales Baptist Union for sending a letter to the Prime Minister complaining that the brewers had been extended facilities to send 100 million bottles of beer to the troops the previous Christmas since the Union agreed that 'thousands of young men from Wales who had joined the forces were Church members and had never tasted intoxicating drink, and [that] it was wrong to place such temptation before them'.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Angus Calder, The Myth of the Blitz (London, 1991), pp. 67 - 69.

>/ ¹⁶⁶ L.P. Dodd, Language and Cultural Survey, pp. 42 - 43.

¹⁶⁷ Colin H. Williams, 'Language Contact and Language Change in Wales, 1901 - 1971: A Study in Historical Geolinguistics', Welsh History Review Vol. 10 (1980), pp. 220 - 221.

¹⁶⁸ Rhos Herald, 7 Apr 1945.

After the war, Sunday drinking at the Drill Hall became a symbol of the encroachment of the outside world. It was not the fact of Sunday drinking, or its presumed consequences, so much as the harm threatened to Rhos's view of itself which stimulated the campaign, but as a local journalist
 7/ considering the prospect of the 1961 referendum remarked, 'fact notoriously is never quite as real in Welsh life as the power of the symbol'.¹⁶⁹ It was Rhos's determination to remain a distinctively Welsh community which influenced activists to take a stand and declare that it was not local custom in Rhos for 'the public house or drinking club to be the centre of local life. Rather this was to be found in places of Christian worship ...'.¹⁷⁰

Membership of the local Territorial forces was common among younger miners in the twenties and thirties and Territorial units saw distinguished service in the war. The Territorials offered young men a paid holiday, albeit one under canvass and under military discipline, a luxury that most would not enjoy until after the war, and also indulged those who hoped of adventure and dreamed of escape from the mines.¹⁷¹ However, the issue of Sunday drinking put the Territorials decidedly at odds with the local community.

A committee was formed in mid-1950, apparently under the aegis of the local Temperance Association, to express the concern of local people ~~in mid~~
 9 1950. When an interview with the representatives of the Denbighshire and Flintshire Territorial and Auxiliary Forces Association did not yield the desired result, the committee solicited signatures for a petition.¹⁷² In October 1951 two demonstrations were held outside the Drill Hall. These demonstrations took the form of religious services at which the ministers

¹⁶⁹ Rhos Herald, 18 Nov 1961.

¹⁷⁰ Letter from the Rhos Branch of Undeb Cymru Fydd to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for War: Rhos Herald, 7 Oct 1950.

¹⁷¹ A.H. Dodd, 'The Royal Welch Fusileers', in A.H. Dodd (ed.), A History of Wrexham (Wrexham, 1957), pp. 308 - 309.

¹⁷² An account of the history of the campaign given by Rev. John Evans, Chairman of the Committee: Wrexham Leader, 12 Oct 1951.

of local Nonconformist congregations officiated.¹⁷³ For the most part, however, the campaign was conducted by eliciting the support of the churches and other sympathetic organisations. Pledges of support were also sought from the different tiers of local government.¹⁷⁴ The matter eventually had a hearing in the highest precincts of the land when the petition was presented to the House of Commons by Robert Richards, the MP for Wrexham, in February 1951.¹⁷⁵

Despite the complaint of Tom Jones, a Labour Parish Councillor, that the Welsh Nationalist Party was using the situation to provide 'propaganda for a political issue', little explicitly nationalist sentiment was expressed during the controversy.¹⁷⁶ The local branch of Undeb Cymru Fydd, a pressure group founded in 1941 with the aim of promoting the interests of the Welsh language and culture,¹⁷⁷ supported the campaign.¹⁷⁸ However, in view of the declared aims of the organisation, the failure of Undeb Cymru Fydd to endorse the campaign would have been a much more remarkable eventuality. The rhetoric employed by supporters of the campaign alluded to communal solidarity rather than explicitly nationalist ideas. In the early fifties celtic nationalism was a long way from the mainstream of British politics and it was difficult to articulate a public defence of Welsh culture without seeming to strike a nationalist stance.¹⁷⁹ Carter and Thompson considered that the espousal of causes such as Sunday closing was a way of

¹⁷³ Wrexham Leader, 12 Oct 1951, 19 Oct 1951.

¹⁷⁴ Report of a meeting of Rhos Parish Council: Wrexham Leader 11 May 1951; report of a meeting of Denbighshire County Council: Wrexham Leader June 8th 1951.

¹⁷⁵ Wrexham Leader, 23 Feb 1951.

¹⁷⁶ Wrexham Leader, 11 May 1951.

¹⁷⁷ K.O. Morgan, Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880 - 1980, p. 361, 383.

¹⁷⁸ Wrexham Leader, 7 Oct 1950.

¹⁷⁹ For a discussion of the incongruity of Nationalist ideas in the mainstream in the sixties see: Ned Thomas, The Welsh Extremist - a Culture in Crisis (1971), pp. 11 ff.

expressing the cultural separateness of Wales without inviting the label 'extremist'.¹⁸⁰

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The rhetoric of the campaign stressed the unity of home and hearth with the religious sentiments of the community and the debate settled particularly upon the wishes of the mothers of the village. The campaign was apparently prompted by the concern of one mother, Mrs. Jane Roberts, and the petition she organised was ~~composed~~ exclusively ~~of the signatures~~ of the mothers of Rhos. In the mythology of Wales 'Mam' was the rock on which family stood. The emotional bond was supposed to be particularly strong since it was the mother who exclusively ministered to the wants of her children. Mam was also the keeper of the respectability of the family and the sentinel of the Sabbath who taught her family respect for religion and sent her children faithfully to Sunday School.¹⁸¹ Mrs. Roberts told the Wrexham Branch of the Lord's Day Observance Society that 'Our duty as mothers is to protect our children'.¹⁸² According to Mrs. Roberts, the mothers of Rhos viewed the young men of the community as being, in the matter of intoxicating liquor, children yet, and thus as ~~being~~ of 'insufficiently strong character to resist its temptations'.¹⁸³

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The campaigners described the army in terms which recalled the text of some eighteenth century ballad. The army, like a villainous recruiting officer, was an alien intruder debauching and then abducting innocent young men. The Rev. John Evans accused the Territorial Association of using liquor as a blandishment to aid a stalled recruitment campaign.¹⁸⁴

The opponents of Sunday Drinking at the Drill Hall claimed a large

¹⁸⁰ Carter and Thompson, 'Referendum on Sunday Opening', p. 62.
¹⁸¹ For a discussion of this stereotype as an historically locateable phenomenon see: Deirdre Beddoe, 'Images of Welsh Women', in Tony Curtis (ed.), Wales: the Imagined Nation (Bridgend, 1986), pp. 229 - 232.
¹⁸² Wrexham Leader, 13 Oct 1950.
¹⁸³ Wrexham Leader, 23 Feb 1951.
¹⁸⁴ Addressing the Wrexham Branch of the Lord's Day Observance Society: Wrexham Leader, Oct 13 1951.

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degree of local support. While the claim of Rev. John Evans that 'Rhos was unanimous in its objections' may be doubted, there does seem have been a ~~large degree of support~~ for the campaign. The mothers' petition garnered some two thousand signatures, while those present at the first Drill Hall demonstration numbered some three hundred men, women and children. Possibly more important than the degree of mobilisation was the absence of local opposition. Few local people questioned the presumption of the activists promoting the campaign in speaking for the area and the local press gathered little from out-and-out opponents of the temperance cause. Most opposition was moderately phrased and generally criticised tactics or expressed concern that the stand that had been taken was opening the area to ~~general~~ ridicule.¹⁸⁵

outside/

Judging from the press coverage, the campaigners seemed to relish slights and sneers. Accusations of parochiality became affirmations of local identity. The presentation of the mothers' petition was alleged to have provoked laughter in the House. The response of the temperance campaigners was to urge local people to rally round the scorned symbols of Welshness. Mrs. Roberts responded:

Those people in the House of Commons would think it was of no significance, but it is of vital importance to every right minded person in Rhos, who will resent that laughter in the House. The idea is sacred to us.¹⁸⁶

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There was, however, some concern to deflect possible criticisms of the campaign. Conscientious objection, a stance which had also received support from Nonconformist activists, had received a hostile reception in the district. The campaigners sought to demonstrate that the attack on drinking in the Territorial Drill Hall was an attack on liquor rather than the military spirit. Mrs. Roberts listed among her credentials for mounting the campaign not only the fact that she was a mother, but also the fact that

¹⁸⁵ Cllr. George Griffiths at a meeting of Rhos Parish Council: Wrexham Leader, 11 May 1951.

¹⁸⁶ Wrexham Leader, 23 Feb 1951.

she had lost two sons in the war.¹⁸⁷ The campaigners were keen to point out that the regard for the Welsh Sunday was apparent in all parts of the community. Mrs. Roberts confided to the Leader that 'Several of the 2,000 mothers who signed it, did, in fact, take a drink themselves.'¹⁸⁸

Though the campaign addressed itself in the main to the authorities, the effect of campaign in the community itself is worth considering. While the Sunday demonstrations were actually scheduled to avoid clashes with the club-goers,¹⁸⁹ the claims of the organisers that they were not stating or implying any criticism of the drinkers may be regarded as disingenuous. The use of hymns and the presence of children from the Sunday schools was shrewdly calculated to evoke the legacy of a virtually universal local experience of religious socialization.¹⁹⁰ The columnist of the Wrexham Leader felt he spoke for the manhood of principality, torn between thirst and the vestigial twinges of the hunger for righteousness cultivated by Bands of Hope, when he remarked a few years later that 'The shadows of little grey Bethels lie heavily upon our consciences.'¹⁹¹

The Drill Hall campaign did not ultimately achieve its purpose nor did the extortions of the temperance lobby ultimately forestall the more general advent of Sunday drinking. In 1967, after a low turnout at the second Sunday drinking referendum, Denbighshire went wet. In the fifties the temperance lobby was one of the last vestiges of the turmoil created in Welsh society by the great evangelical awakening and the subsequent revivals. Since temperance campaigners were members of a group which considered that its ascendancy was based on moral advantage and social hegemony, they saw no contradiction ~~between~~ between proclaiming the defence of a common culture and in seeking to impose their views on a population

¹⁸⁷ Wrexham Leader, 13 Oct 1950, 23 Feb 1951.

¹⁸⁸ Wrexham Leader, 23 Feb 1951.

¹⁸⁹ Wrexham Leader, 12 Oct 1951.

¹⁹⁰ One participant spoke explicitly of the anticipated effects of the emotional resonances of the demonstrations: Mrs. Blodwen Whalley, WMP C/1984/42.

¹⁹¹ Glyn Griffiths, 'Welshman's Notebook': Wrexham Leader, 10 Sept 1954.

whose views on the matter were more equivocal. As the tide turned against temperance, perhaps the latent purpose of such campaigns was consolatory, and the Rhos Drill Hall ~~campaign~~^{episode} was an attempt to kindle nostalgia to supply the warmth found by people of like convictions in banding together in the face of difficult, if not impossible circumstances.

In Llay, concerns about the moral and social effects of alcohol were articulated by the colliery company. While the company attempted to mediate between the interests of local drinkers and temperance opinion, its own interests were the prime consideration: it decided that as well as being industrious, its workforce should be sober, and determined that alcohol should only be available in strictly regulated circumstances.

New mining communities could have a very unsavoury reputation for intemperance. Public drunkenness was, for several decades, one of the chief vices in Senghennydd, a village which was developed in the late 1890s to serve a new colliery in Monmouthshire.¹⁹² Despite his paternalist convictions Sir William Lewis (Lord Merthyr) took no great part in the residential development of the village. However, the regulation of licensed premises was common in model villages where proprietors were more actively involved. At least in the early stages of their development the only licensed premises⁹ in the village of Port Sunlight¹⁹³, ~~and~~ in the mining village of Oakdale in Monmouth¹⁹⁴, and in the mining communities of the Nottinghamshire Dukeries¹⁹⁵, were ones directly under the control of the company. Apart from generally promoting sobriety, the restriction of licences also answered to the particular circumstances of the new communities which contained large numbers of single men ~~and which~~^{yet}

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¹⁹² Michael Lieven, Senghennydd - The Universal Colliery Village (Llandysul, 1994), pp. 99 - 104.
¹⁹³ Edward Hubbard and Michael Shippobottom, A Guide to Port Sunlight Village (Liverpool, 1988), p. 35.
¹⁹⁴ Ralph Thomas, Oakdale - The Model Colliery Village (Cwmbran, 1986), p. 34.
¹⁹⁵ Waller, The Dukeries Transformed, p. 200.

lacked the social networks which regulated the excesses of their behaviour in more settled communities.

Before the colliery came to Llay, the area contained one licensed house, the Mount Pleasant. This pub had been the resort of the farm hands of the scattered hamlet¹⁹⁶ and it eventually lay just over half a mile outside the precincts of the colliery village. There were several other pubs just over the valley in Gresford. The first licensed premises in the new village was a workmen's club which was established by 1920 in Llay Place, the large private house attached to the grange which the company bought as a site for the village. The club was evidently supported by the colliery since it was paid for by deductions from the wages of the colliery workmen. Those who objected had the opportunity to reclaim their deductions.¹⁹⁷

From the first, the Welfare Institute built in 1931 was licensed to sell liquor. However, the conditions of access to alcohol reveal much about the concerns of the building's sponsors. There were two sets of stairs in the building. One set communicated directly with the assembly room and committee rooms on the first floor. This meant that those whose business was on the first floor did not have to pass through licensed part of building. This expedient protected scruples and proclaimed, in bricks and mortar, that the Institute provided a service to all sections of the community.

The Company used its influence on the Institute Committee to defend family life and the traditional Welsh Sabbath. The Institute's rules determined that the licensed part of the Institute should not open on Sundays and should not on any day of the week admit women, save for the purposes of administration and cleaning. It was remembered in the village that these decisions caused considerable unrest among the general membership of the Institute and that they were regularly challenged at annual general meetings. It was recalled that while the company secretary, Harry Ball, was the Chairman of the Institute Committee, he shored up

¹⁹⁶ William Millington, Memoirs, Ms. (n.d.).

¹⁹⁷ Wrexham Leader, 6 Feb 1925.

company hegemony by mobilising the colliery staff. It was recalled that the clerks 'were virtually ordered to attend Annual General Meetings to ensure that a vote amongst the members present would ensure what he considered to be a decision correct in the interests of the Institute'.¹⁹⁹

The company was not opposed to the sale of liquor as such but clearly wished to have its say on the conditions and circumstances of its sale. Despite the burgeoning village population, the number of licensed houses and clubs to be found within its precincts was remarkably low and, with only one exception, all the licensed premises were clubs rather than public houses. Soames's the Wrexham brewers secured the co-operation of the company before applying for a licence. Edward Hughes, the colliery's Agent and General Manager spoke at the hearing and affirmed that the company welcomed the project, most particularly since the dearth of accommodation in the district inconvenienced those visiting the colliery on business. The magistrates heard the brewery's application with sympathy but deferred its decision for a year.¹⁹⁹ The application was finally approved and the Crown Inn was built on the Vadog crossroads near the colliery and it was not indeed a sordid drinkers' den but a large and well appointed commercial hotel.

By 1931 colliery company had evidently bowed to a plea from the pit's officials that they should be permitted to enjoy their leisure in a more exclusive atmosphere away from the other colliery workmen.²⁰⁰ The Officials' Club was located in one of the old sinkers' huts on the colliery yard. Officials could apparently be trusted to regulate their own consumption of alcohol in a way that the men could not, and from the first the club could offer its members the privilege of a Sunday drink. The prodigy of a licensed premises standing on the curtilage of the colliery did not impress men from the older colliery areas. Some respondents voiced suspicions, garnished with dark allegations of exclusivity and treating,

¹⁹⁹ R.L. Goss, Llay Miner's Welfare Institute (n.d.).

¹⁹⁹ Wrexham Leader, 6 Feb 1925.

²⁰⁰ Wrexham Commercial Directory (1931).

that the club was the nerve centre from which lower echelons of the colliery administration were organised.²⁰¹

9 The licensed premises were concentrated in the part of the village nearest the colliery. Without knowing more we may guess that this was due to conscious intent. Perhaps the colliery company was trying to set the tone by locating the drinking establishments in the most self-consciously respectable areas of the community. Remote from these amenities, men from the Council estate often sought refreshment in nearby Gresford. However, in the thirties the Llay Working Men's Social Club^y was set up near the Council houses, evidently to serve local need.²⁰²

Notwithstanding the company's efforts to ensure its respectability, there was frequently trouble at the Welfare in the early thirties. Social events at the Welfare, which were patronised by young people who came to the village from neighbouring communities, were frequently the occasion of clashes between local factions.²⁰³ The Welfare gained a bad reputation: at the courtroom sequel to one incident in 1933 the Chairman of the Bench mentioned that there had been a 'lot of talk about rows at the club'. The committee had supported an assaulted employee in going to law and asked the bench to consider a deterrent sentence. The bench acknowledged their concern and acceded to the request.²⁰⁴

While the village churches opposed the granting of a licence to the Crown Inn at the County Licensing Sessions they evidently took a broader view of alcohol than the chapels of Rhos. The Crown's application was deferred for a year at the request of counsel retained by the People's Refreshment House Association. The Association believed in moderation rather than prohibition and its houses sold a wide range of liquid refreshments but offered their managers no commission on the sale of alcohol. While the village was not ultimately to have a temperance hotel,

²⁰¹ Interview with Ken Aspinall.

²⁰² Wrexham Commercial Directory (1931).

²⁰³ Interview with Percy Davies.

²⁰⁴ Wrexham Leader, 10 March 1933.

the separate entrances to the licensed and unlicensed parts of the Welfare building proved to be an effective sop to conscience and several of the village congregations sometimes used the building as a venue. Interviewing in the village revealed that there were many men and women who did not drink and many more who took the ethic of moderation seriously. Temperance prohibitionists were present in some numbers but were not as prominent in village life as they were in Rhos. The more cosmopolitan population of Llay was evidently not so affected by the shadows cast across the soul by 'little grey Bethels'. Temperance organisations found themselves on thinner soil in Llay and their part in the local associational scene was accordingly less vigorous. In 1923 the English speaking Calvinistic Methodist congregation was host to 'an enthusiastic Temperance meeting' at which speakers from Rhos and Wrexham warmly recommended the North Wales Women's Temperance Association. Speakers described the seeding of this new organisation as a 'precedent, however, their hopes for a village band of 'sons of temperance' were never fulfilled.²⁰⁵ The temperance scene in Llay seemed to remain biased towards association among women and children.

The temperance lobby was not successful in extinguishing the drink trade nor in eliminating the craving for alcohol but it did succeed in attaching a stigma to public drinking. Evidence from other parts of Wales may be cited to show that many still indulged their tastes while taking measures to hide from the censure of the community. This double standard was celebrated in the fictive lore of the mining villages (see below), but was a real aspect of local behaviour. The existence of a double standard is an inevitable consequence where the observance of any ascetic stricture is accepted as a social norm since social groups can influence activities that are publicly observable more easily than they can police personal beliefs and private behaviour.²⁰⁶ Young Welsh men from devout chapel-going

²⁰⁵ Wrexham Leader, 20 Sept 1923.

²⁰⁶ Schanck described a private vice and public virtue in an American Methodist community: R.C. Schank, A Study of a Community and Its Groups and Institutions Conceived of as the Behaviour of Individuals Psychological Monographs, No. 195 (1932), cited in Agyle and Beit-Hallahmi, The Social Psychology of Religion, p. 39.

communities affected to conceal their developing tastes from their parents, often walking to the next village to avoid surveillance.²⁰⁷ 'Back door people' were a type described to a sociologist by the wife of a Monmouthshire valley publican in 1940: she claimed that some of the pub's best customers were apparently 'chapel folk who come round by the back so they can't be seen, bolt a quick one and run off'.²⁰⁸ A researcher studying a rural Flintshire community in the seventies reported that there were some who publicly identified themselves with a norm of temperance within the precincts of the community but who took a drink when travel afforded them the opportunity to do so unobserved.²⁰⁹

As well as resistance to the spirit of the ascetic ideal, there was defiance of the letter of the law. Like prohibition in America the victory for temperance was symbolic rather than real, since the Sunday Closing Act sponsored a criminal culture widely supported by the public. Whereas in America the strain imposed by the effort of law enforcement ensured that the eighteenth amendment had a short but dramatic career, in Wales the prohibitory legislation remained on the statute book despite widespread defiance. Though the evasion of licensing laws was a necessarily covert activity it seems that drinkers were willing to concede the public fight to the temperance lobby on the condition that a level of discrete defiance was tolerated. Many felt that the legislation which permitted member's clubs to apply for Sunday licences institutionalised this hypocrisy. However, it was the large numbers of drinkers and publicans willing to break the law which led a local columnist to pronounce a verdict of failure on eighty years of

²⁰⁷ South Wales Miners' Library Interviews, 1974 - 75. Octavius Morgan, p. 8; Tom Davies, p. 5; Interview with Joe Williams.

²⁰⁸ G.H. Armbruster, The Social Determination of Ideologies (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1940), p. 127 quoted in W.R. Lambert, Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales c. 1820 - c. 1895 (Cardiff, 1983), p. 121.

²⁰⁹ Gwynifer Claire Wenger, Ethnic Identity, Social Organisation and Language in North East Wales (Ph.D. thesis, University of Berkley Ca., 1976), p. 64.

Sunday prohibition: 'No one in Wales seriously in search of a drink on a Sunday ever had much trouble getting one'.²¹⁰

Some areas of Wales, particularly the urban areas of the South, met the strictures of the new licensing laws by setting up illegal drinking clubs.²¹¹ In the Wrexham area defiance usually revolved around licensed premises. The 1890 Royal Commission, empanelled to investigate the working of the Act, discovered widespread abuse of the 'bona fide travellers' clause. Travellers were allowed by the terms of the Sunday Closing Act to seek refreshment; however, the niceties in the definition of a bona fide traveller were quickly discarded in favour of a crude test of whether or not the customer had travelled the requisite three miles.^{212, 213}

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One response to the Sunday Closing Act was to relocate Sunday consumption to the domestic sphere. Some premises made 'gifts' of beer to their regular customers²¹⁴ and many Welsh breweries invested resources in the production of more stable bottled beers and the introduction of flagon bottles designed to their carry customers through the Sabbath drought.²¹⁵

The most characteristic defiance of the licensing law was the out of hours use of licensed premises. These infringements usually took the form of lock-ins, occasions when the taps still flowed after licensed hours had

²¹⁰ Rhos Herald, 18 Nov 1961.

²¹¹ Brian Glover, Prince of Ales, p. 38.

²¹² Frederic Soames, the Wrexham brewer told the Commission he had noticed an increase in the Sunday trade of his own houses, cited in: Brian Glover The Prince of Ales, p. 42.

²¹³ In the early decades of the century trippers from Liverpool who came to Caergwre to sample the pure waters of its famous Spa regularly leant their railway excursion tickets, for a small consideration, to those who travelled in search of other vital liquids: William Millington, Memoirs (Ms, n.d.).

²¹⁴ According to the 1892 complaint of the Rhos Vigilance Committee: Silin 'Looking Back' Wrexham Leader, 31 Dec 1976.

²¹⁵ Brian Glover, Prince of Ales, pp. 41 - 42.

expired. Though most of these instances occurred in the evening,²¹⁶ some publicans risked clandestine opening on Sundays. The favour of being included in such gatherings was offered only to regular and trusted customers. Sunday morning seems to have been a favoured time: during the day no lights could be seen at the windows and the traffic of pedestrians offered the drinkers some opportunity to disperse unnoticed.²¹⁷ One Rhos man remembered the elaborate charades which protected the drinkers and their host from Police attention:

It was possibly more than a coincidence that it was mostly on Saturday nights that one would forgetfully and habitually leave a cloth cap or overcoat, or an umbrella behind to be picked up on a Sunday morning ...²¹⁸

Attempts to legislate virtue were bedevilled by the strictly territorial nature of the licensing laws.²¹⁹ The English border not only allowed greater commerce with cosmopolitan ideas but also allowed the convenience of living with the saints while supping with the devil. People in the eastern districts of Wales instituted the regular practice of travelling into Monmouth (which did not adopt the Act until 1921) or crossing the border to England for Sunday refreshment.²²⁰ In 1929 the Chief Constable's report to the Denbighshire Police Committee remarked upon the Wrexham district as an area responsible for a good deal of the county's public drunkenness. This was a particular problem on supposedly dry Sundays as

²¹⁶ Report of the prosecution of the licensee of a Rhos Club at the Ruabon petty Sessions: Wrexham Leader, 10 June 1932.

²¹⁷ Walter Swinnerton, WMP C/1984/31.

²¹⁸ Bill 'Portmadoc' Jones, Through These Windows, p. 31.

²¹⁹ In 1903, the intentions of the Ruabon justices, who had declared that their division was not a 'populous place' within the meaning of the Licensing Act and accordingly ordered stop tap an hour earlier, were thwarted by the electric tramway which encouraged an exodus to Wrexham in time for last orders: CROR NCD/200, Silin, 'Looking Back': Wrexham Leader (n.d.).

²²⁰ Brian Glover, Prince of Ales, p. 38.

people travelled to Cheshire 'for the purposes of drink ... and came back drunk', ²²¹, ²²²

Local transport companies were alive to the possibilities of this trade and laid on comprehensive services. Flintshire became a wet county in 1961 and since Flintshire had several detached enclaves, scattered throughout East Denbighshire, this gave the thirsty men of Denbighshire more borders to aim for. The public bar of the Red Lion in Marford lay in Flintshire and the licensee remembered ruefully that the Sunday clientele was so different to that seen on other nights 'that we had to take the precaution of removing the flowers and even the lounge carpet before we opened the doors on a Sunday'. ²²³

The practice of drinking in neighbouring jurisdictions was still hedged about with a certain coyness. In his novel Border Country, Raymond Williams noted that the public account of the Sunday pleasure of the men of a mid-Wales border village was one of travelling to see the fish rise in a pool on the river which marked the border. ²²⁴ Similar obfuscations were employed in the Wrexham area. Local social clubs organised 'mystery trips': and while there was a certain amount of uncertainty as to the destination there was usually little doubt as to the nature of the venue that would be visited. ²²⁵ One local man remembered that in the fifties, one of the

²²¹ Wrexham Leader, 11 Jan 1929.

²²² In 1950, the licensee of the Crown Inn reported the local observance of the practice and bemoaned the money spent in Cheshire, which could, under more liberal licensing laws, have been spent in his premises: J.E.

^{9 and /} Hughes to the North Wales Licensed Victuallers Association 22 Nov/₁ response by Edward Jones, the Miners' agent reported in: Wrexham Leader, 1 Dec 1950.

²²³ R.D. Hutchinson, Marford - A Present from the Past (the Author, 1994), pp. 71 - 72.

²²⁴ Raymond Williams, Border Country (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 207.

²²⁵ Bill Williams, WMP C/1984/18.

conditions of the Sunday driving lessons given by an older neighbour was a visit to England:

... and then I'd be sitting in the van and Charlie would be sitting in the pub.²²⁶

-/ By the post-war period the practice of passing the border in order to take a drink was widespread enough to have gained the status of an axiomatic observation on the Welsh character. Glyn Griffiths, the Leader columnist, recalled a conversation with a friend who regarded support for the Sunday Closing legislation as 'an outrageous piece of hypocrisy':

"Take Rhos now," he expostulated, offering me the whole place lock, stock, Stiw and Ponkey Banks. "They make all this fuss about soldiers drinking on a Sunday but they don't say a word about the 'bus-loads of boys who go down every Sunday to have fine old sprees across the border."²²⁷

ii/ Sunday Closing legislation failed as an attempt to encourage temperance. And, as the law fell into contempt, failed even as a symbol of higher hopes and better intentions. /

²²⁶ Interview with David Griffiths.

²²⁷ Welshman's Notebook: Wrexham Leader, 20 July 1951.

Unrepentant Sinners and Sinning Deacons.

Virtually all the respondents consulted assented to the strength of chapel values in the district. However, it is difficult to estimate the degree to which this consensus was due to disinterested observation and how much to the wish of respondents to be identified as the supporters of Nonconformist values. While reservations about the social pressures exerted by the chapels were typically expressed in guarded terms, inchoate impatience with the puritan morality espoused by the local congregations expressed itself more freely in a vivid oral lore. This lore had two facets: a genre of apocryphal stories about instances of venality and hypocrisy among local people strongly identified with the support of puritanical ethics; and a genre of tales at once more humorous and less judgemental which detailed the exploits of amoral individuals described as 'characters'.

Though this lore was doubtless based on real incidents and certainly referred to real individuals, its historical accuracy could not easily be vouched for. However, consideration of the functions of this lore within the community reveals rather more about local mores than a reading at face value. Similar genres of tales have been noticed in other areas. E.P. Thompson cited personal observations made as a neighbour and occasional participant in the Nonconformist traditions of North Wales, Wester Ross and the West Riding as evidence of a pervasive 'folk lore of humour'²²⁸ whose existence indicated tensions in religious communities superficially united in worship and which singled out the principal supporters of local causes. The lore captured by retrospective interviews in the nineteen eighties and nineties was observed, in-situ, by the columnist of one local newspaper in the fifties. Glyn Griffiths noted that 'the myth that a deacon is a slightly comic figure who sings hymns in public and sins wholeheartedly in

²²⁸ E.P. Thompson, 'On History and Sociology and Historical Relevance' [Review of Robert Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics.], Journal of British Sociology Vol. 27 (1976), p. 395.

private is one that is taking a long time to die.'²²⁹

Thompson considered that the tales were a 'defence [mounted] by uncommitted members of the community' against the moral aggression of the ascetics.²³⁰ Stories laid bare the hypocrisy of those who preached to the rest of the community and offended local opinion with the ostentatious moderation of their lifestyles. Tales depicted moral offences which were only reprehensible when measured against the strict code professed by the ascetics. The insistent circulation of these tales undermined the credentials of those who saw themselves as moral exemplars: both as named individuals discovered in their sin and as an identifiable group which *that* could be accused of promulgating a double standard. The incidents the tales described were depicted as inevitable concessions to a human nature that it was ultimately impossible to restrain. The moral of the stories was that it was futile to attempt to repress the man of flesh and that true hypocrisy lay in pretending otherwise.

The stories are a part of diffuse lore united by a few consistent motifs. Inappropriate verbalisations were a favourite theme. Local tale tellers subscribed to the Freudian idea that an unguarded tongue let slip deepest thoughts. One man recalled an incident alleged to have happened when a minister asked asked one of his deacons, the village Postmaster to *>/* lead the service:

Old Gareth said, "Oh Thomas Williams, will you come and start our meeting off please?"

"Alright minister, I'll come, yes."

And he comes to the front and he says "Well, we'll sing the hymn six hundred and fourpence," he says!

Instead of hymn six hundred and and twenty four, he said six hundred and fourpence.

"Well aye," the old man says, old Gareth says "We'll have to forgive

²²⁹ Glyn Griffiths, 'Welshman's Notebook': Wrexham Leader, Dec 5 1958.

²³⁰ Thompson, 'History, Sociology and Historial Relevance', p. 395.

him! Old Thomas is up to his neck in the shop book!" he says.²³¹

9 While Nonconformists strove to eliminate swearing from local discourse other local inhabitants viewed bad language as a natural means of relieving tension/ and particularly relished lapses by prominent Nonconformists. One man recalled hearing about an incident alleged to have happened in the class meeting of a Rhos Baptist congregation:

Anyway, the meeting after the service now, and he got up to say something and somebody got up to ask him a pertinent question, he didn't like this question see? so he said, he shouted out in front of everybody, minister and all, in Welsh of course, "You ask my behind!"

You know, forgot himself, he went berserk, aye!

"You ask me bloomin' behind!" he said. That's what it amounted to in English i'n' it?²³²

Predictably, many tales focussed on lapses that involved alcohol. The tales hint that the covert consumption of alcohol behind a facade of respectability was a widespread phenomenon. The pub door featured prominently in this branch of the lore. The furtive approach to the back door or deliberate concealment behind the door were potent symbols of hypocrisy. One man's autobiography detailed his reminiscences of local life and local gossip in the first two decades of the century:

I recall there was a club called the Rechabites, whose rule was total teetotalism, but it was used to be said that many of them would stand behind the door in many pubs and clubs in the hope that they would not

²³¹ Interview with Moi Jones.

²³² Interview with Ken Aspinall.

be seen.^{233, 234}

Doubtless the existence of a popular lore about the hypocrisy of religious adherents influenced the presentation of personal experiences. One woman described an incident she remembered from the forties in the following terms:

I tell you one we saw. A Church man wasn't he? Dick Hughes, he used to live down the road by us [...]. Remember the big tree by the Griffin [in Gresford]? well we [we had been for a walk and we] were sitting there on Saturday night, me and the children. Billy had gone in for a pint and he came out with crisps or something and a bottle of lemonade for them. And of course, he came up the hill and he toddled off round through the back gate, didn't he? Then he came through the front as if nothing had happened ... He nearly had a fit though, when he seen us sitting there! He thought I suppose he'd get in and out without anyone to see him, but it was too late!²³⁵

This lore was not a direct repudiation of the abstract concepts of temperance and moderation but an indirect assault on a weaker bastion: the probity of identifiable local people who advocated ascetic self-denial. Thompson observed that the lore he encountered was 'strongly personalised'.²³⁶ Setting up individuals as straw men enabled local tale tellers to countenance defiance of puritanical strictures without setting themselves against the institutions that promulgated them. Though pointed

²³³ Thomas Broadbent Taylor, 'Memories of Brymbo', in Graham Rogers, Brymbo and Its Neighbourhood (the author, 1991), p. 43.

²³⁴ Gwyn Thomas, the chronicler of Valleys life, cited the fictional example of a wastrel whose consideration for the reputation of his teetotal father meant that he always used the back door of the pub but did not stretch far enough to prevent him making this observance as often as the opportunity presented itself; Gwyn Thomas, 'Oscar' (n.d.), in G. Thomas The Sky of Our Lives (London, 1973), p. 7.

²³⁵ Interview with Mrs. Maggie Williams.

²³⁶ Thompson, 'History, Sociology and Historical Relevance', p. 395.

against individuals the lore asserted the interests of a wider category. Tale-telling defined the loyalty of the individual to groups within the local community. Claire Wenger studied ethnic stereotypes in the discourses of a post-war Flintshire community and noted that anecdotes about moral lapses were important in describing and asserting the negative stereotype of the Welsh group current among those who identified themselves with the English section of the community.²³⁷

In Llay, one individual in particular inspired many tales. He was a Rhos man who had moved to the village and had set up his own business. He was supposed to have been converted in the great revival and was a pillar of one of the local chapels. He was a self-conscious representative of the reformed life but local lore insisted that he was a whited sepulchre. One woman recalled how the armour of self-righteousness was pierced by the verbal audacity of her father:

My Dad was fetching the paper one Sunday. The people used to walk all the way from Wrexham, they used to stop on that corner, you know where Taylor's had that little shop? they used to stop by there with the papers, Sunday papers.

My Dad went down for a paper, and of course he'd got it under his arm, he was coming home. And who was coming down the field to come out on the road but John Williams?

He said "Know better on you," he said, "to have one of these under your arm," he said ... [indicating his Bible]

"Ah well," he said, "if I do go and buy the Sunday newspaper, I don't go home and thrash me wife!" He would [say that] too, me Dad!²³⁸

The existence of this lore asserted and perhaps sometimes proved that in a close community it is difficult to maintain an ascetic lifestyle, not only because of the rigours of self denial but because any gap between

²³⁷ Wenger, Ethnic Identity, Social Organisation and Language in North East Wales, pp.64 - 65.

²³⁸ Interview with Mrs. Maggie Williams.

profession and action is likely to be observed.

The counterparts of the sinnings saints were the unrepentant sinners familiar ~~to~~ local folklore as 'characters'. This term identified any individual with idiosyncratic traits but usually implied that the individual's conduct was infamous or scandalous. 'A proper character' ~~was~~ a non-conformist in the original sense of the term: one who stood out against the mores of local society.

Tales about characters were just one expression of the intense scrutiny to which the conduct of others was subjected in the close communities of the coalfield. Much amusement was afforded by the social comedy of the lives of neighbours, ~~kinsmen~~ and colleagues. One man lived in Rhostyllen in the twenties, thirties and forties and recalled what 'characters' meant to local life:

Mr. Jones: Then we had characters who would, they were honest characters, on the fringe. Some were very, very funny men. And most of the characters were big drinkers ...

Interviewer: Which made them even more characters, no doubt?

Mr. Jones: This is just it you see. But everyone knew these characters, you see there's tales told today about these characters, what they said or little incidents that happened. Some of them are a little bit coarse. But I believe this is where humour ~~was~~ was in its rightful form. There was nothing made up. ²³⁹

The genre of character tales stands astride a range of oral formats which embraces narratives of personal experience, folklorised narratives and stories which frequently draw on the motifs of folk tales familiar in other areas. Respondents make no differentiation ~~is made~~ between ~~the~~ tales drawn from direct experience and those possibly apocryphal tales drawn from

²³⁹ Winston Jones, CLS Tape No. 88.

the communal store. Local discourses contained two cycles of tales concerning the words and deeds of two celebrated characters who, though real enough, approached the status of folk heroes. Eseciel Phillips²⁴⁰, of Rhosllanerchrugog, and Jack Jones, 'Jack Mary Ann',²⁴¹ of the Moss, were local colliers. They were men who used their tongues and their wits to flout the forces of order and responsibility. Both were real individuals who apparently revelled in their status as local wits.²⁴² However, their fame escaped from their control and tales purporting to concern them have been amplified to become a durable form of local folklore. What does the popularity of tales about individuals who defied all authority, social and particularly moral, tell us about local society?

The observation of the Rhostyllen man that characters were 'on the fringe' of local society is acute. Some of those described as characters did indeed work in socially marginal and peripatetic occupations as knife-grinders, window cleaners, hawkers and the like. They pursued their trades with no thought for the morrow: 'And as soon as he'd made a shilling, well he'd go and drink it!'^{243, 244} Since most 'characters' were employed in more conventional callings as miners and brickworkers it seems likely that the

9 and/ ²⁴⁰ Eseciel worked in Hafod Colliery in the late nineteenth century // he later escaped the pit; his shop is identified in a 1908 photograph: Dennis W. Gilpin, Rhosllanerchrugog - casgliad o luniau Cyf. 2 / a collection of pictures Vol. 2 (Wrexham, 1992), Captions 21, 22.

1/ 190 ²⁴¹ Jack Mary Ann took his nickname from his wife's Christian name // respondents recalled working alongside Jack in Llay Main during the interwar period; one local historian identified the Jack's signature on a 1924 petition to Broughton Parish Council: John Bagshaw, 'Jack the Lad or Mary Ann to his friends': Wrexham and Mold Mail, 7 July 1988; see also: John Bagshaw, Broughton - Then and Now (Wrexham, 1992), pp. 176 - 180.

²⁴² Interview with Eddie Evans.

²⁴³ Winston Jones, Clwyd Library Service, Tape No. 88.

of which/ ²⁴⁴ One local folklorist collected many similar tales about the carting fraternity from the turn of the century, many were taken from the repertoire of a local man who died in 1973: James Bentley, Traditions and Folk Stories of Buckley CLS Tape 180, (n.d).

marginality of characters was a facet of public perception. The nomination of individuals as 'characters' could be considered to be one outworking of the process of identity management similar to that described by Cohen in the insular communities of the Western Isles. Anthony Cohen discovered a paradox: a homogeneous and conformist local society which supported an oral culture which revelled in the idiosyncracies and peculiarities of local individuals. He considered that the conventions of this discourse were a means of dealing with the tensions caused by the complete social visibility of island life. Though intense surveillance ensured that flamboyant individualism was effectively curbed, this same surveillance expressed itself in acute observations on supposed distinctiveness of the local inhabitants. Describing non-conformists within constructed terms of reference ensured that a restriction was placed on the attributes and persons ~~which were~~ considered worthy of comment. This process actually tended to preserve the homogeneity of the community and the integrity of its mores.²⁴⁵

Was the purpose of this lore about 'characters' to contain the danger represented by such rebels? Though it might be possible to regard such anecdotes as a series of warnings against dissipation and depravity, an oral equivalent of the Rake's Progress, the tone of respondents betrayed a certain sneaking fondness for the reprobates. Local society enjoyed a much more complex relationship with its 'characters'.

For a story to be listened to, remembered and re-told, the crises in which the hero-protagonist is engaged must in some way echo the life-circumstances of the narrator and the audience. Character tales were certainly popular in the district. Jack Mary Ann tales originated in the Broughton area and were perhaps brought to Llay by the migrants who moved from that area. In Llay, Jack Mary Ann tales were remembered as part of the repertoire of local comedians and were even incorporated in village pantomimes in the thirties and forties.²⁴⁶ One collier remembered that it

²⁴⁵ Anthony P. Cohen, '"The Same - But Different!": the Allocation of Identity in South Whalsey', Sociological Review XXVI 3 (1978), p. 451.

²⁴⁶ Interviews with Mr. Gaskin and Mrs. Owen.

was the pathos of Eseciel's situation, in which other men found a reflection of their own circumstances, that contributed to the popularity of the tales in Rhos:

There was a lot of jokes down the pit, we had a character, going back to the stalls, we had characters in those days. He weren't cut out for hard work this man and because there was nothing only mining in the area, they had to go to the pit and have a living. But it was pathetic for some people because they weren't cut out for it. And one gentleman in particular, that was called Eseciel Phillips, quite a character in Rhos he didn't follow his work ...

And there's a lot of tales about Eseciel and we used to say these things to each other in the pit.²⁴⁷

Scholars consider that fictive folklore is an important source of information on the values and attitudes of groups in particular historical contexts. Roger Abrahams considers that fictive popular heroes are particularly revealing about a group's values when they act on motives which cannot, because of circumstances, be acted upon in real life.²⁴⁸ Characters defied local mores with a freedom and impugntiy many might have envied. There is no doubt that part of the appeal of character tales was a vicarious participation in their adventures.

Characters considered that sobriety was an over-rated virtue. Despite the disapproval of respectable elements of society, public drunkenness was a form of social theatre for the community to enjoy. Another activity celebrated in the oral lore about 'characters' was their plain talking. This aspect of the lore can be considered as a counterpart to the tales told about the verbal slips made by respectable local people. Characters could be relied upon to make bold verbal sallies whose crass inappropriateness was a source of guilty pleasure to those who guarded their tongues. Their sayings evidenced a singular lack of respect for

²⁴⁷ Joe Williams, CLWBC 451.4.

²⁴⁸ Roger D. Abrahams, Deep Down in the Jungle - Negro Narrative Folklore from the Street of Philadelphia 2nd edn. (New York, 1970), pp. 61 ff.

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persons. One Rhos man remembered ~~being~~ first hearing a well-known local story from a workplace raconteur:

"Well", he said "Johnny Venables," he said, "he had a horse" and he said, "it was that thin you could read a bloody newspaper through it!" he said. [laughs]:

[...] And he used to get this coal from Llay Main [...]. And what he used to do now, when he came to Tan-Y-Fron hill, he used to tip half of the coal because the horse wasn't strong enough to take it [all] up, you see. So he tipped half of his coal on the ground. He took the other half now and the horse was having a rest on the middle [of the hill]; he dropped dead, the horse did! So now, he was looking very serious at the horse, dropped dead like that. Who came round but the Vicar of Pentre Broughton?

"Well Mr. Venables," he said, "what's happened to your horse?"

"To tell you the truth Vicar, I don't know. It's the first time he's done this bloody trick!" he said. And the horse was dead! [laughs] You got characters of this type who was so entertaining, aye.²⁴⁹

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While much of the comedy came from the inappropriateness of their utterances, characters frequently exhibited a genuine wit which could piece hypocrisy and capture the essence of a situation. Their sayings provided a commentary on the harsh contours of local life. The most famous sayings of 'characters' voiced thoughts, which, though doubtless common, rarely escaped the lips of the average inhabitant. Sharp retorts were the most treasured sayings and frequently repudiated the patronising demeanour of a superior. One man recalled the retort his colleague, an habitual absentee and noted devotee of the football pools, gave to the undermanager:

So the undermanager [...], Mr. Bob Ellis came in and he said one morning "How are you going on with John, Colin? Has he won the treble chance yet?"

"No, he hasn't won it yet Mr. Ellis," I said.

²⁴⁹ Mr. George Thomas, WMP C/1984/50.

So he turned to John, he said "John," he said, knowing he was an absentee, "What would you do if you won this twenty two thousand?" he said.

-/ "Mr. Ellis," he said, "I'd have twenty two thousand days off!"²⁵⁰

While characters accepted the power of those in authority to control their lives, their lack of deference towards authority figures undermined their hegemony. Jack Maryann was once supposed to have been a policeman but he lost his job when he was discovered, in full uniform, singing at a pub piano. He offered no apology but rather blunted the sting of authority by asserting his fate before it could be spelled out to him:

"Do you know who I am?"

"You're the new sergeant. Do you know who I am?"

"No."

"I'm the bobby that's just lost his job."²⁵¹

The demeanour of the character asserted the equality of all persons. One woman recalled hearing of an incident when Carlton Walker, the managing director of the Llay Main Colliery, wished to meet his most famous employee and was supposed to have summoned Jack Mary Ann to the V.I.P. enclosure at the Llay Rose Show. He offered Jack refreshment:

>/ So [Jack] said "I'll have a pint," and then he said, "Well no!" he said, "I'll have a double whiskey, I can see you've got a double whiskey and what's good enough for you is good enough for me!"

And the boss, it didn't matter who it was, Jack was still the same with anybody!²⁵²

The utterances of characters also swept away the barriers erected by false righteousness. Characters did not deny the fleshy nature of man. At

250 Colin Reese, CLWBC 451.10.

251 Moi Jones, unrecorded interview, 23 Jan 1992.

252 Interview with Mrs. Owen.

one stage Eseciel was supposed to have signed the pledge and become a member of the Rechabites, one of the strictest of the temperance organisations. His good intentions waned and he was seen drinking. When called to account for his actions before the Rechabites' Committee Eseciel entered the room and was confronted with the imposing sight of the Committee drawn up before the glorious banner of the Rhos Rechabites:

So the Chairman said to him "Is it true," he said, "that you were drinking in the Black Horse?"

[Eseciel owned up.]

"And what have you got to say about it?"

"If I started bloody talking", he said, "there'd be nobody here, only the bloody flag."²⁵³

Characters were battered by the demands made by the industrial economy and were not steady workers. They repudiated the work ethic and scorned the theological rhetoric which viewed labour as an uplifting activity. One Ruabon man who worked in the wharf office at a local brickyard remembered Tom Star, 'a great character with the loaders'. On one very cold day, Tom Star was urged to set to work to warm his shivering limbs and still his chattering teeth: "Well," he said, "I'd sooner freeze to death than work to death!"²⁵⁴ Jack Mary Ann returned from work one day and asked his wife what he could expect for his dinner. She was evidently unimpressed with his abilities and replied "Arseholes!". Jack's phlegmatic response made it apparent that he felt no shame at being a poor provider: "Oh well, boil one and I'll have an egg."²⁵⁵

The most frequently told story about Eseciel places him in his garden one evening, eagerly anticipating the sound of the colliery whistle. Many men would regret this sound since it meant that there would be work on the

²⁵³ Joe Williams, CLWBC 451.4.

²⁵⁴ Wilfrid Haycock, WMP C/1984/127.

²⁵⁵ Interview with Eddie Evans.

²⁵⁶ Joe Williams, CLWBC 451.4.

morrow. Eseciel's response revealed his appreciation of high culture as surely as his disdain for hard work:

? / / And Eseciel, "Listen!" he said to his wife, "Listen to that music, listen to it! Handel's composed music, nothing to compare to that!"^{256, 257}

Respondents attributed this tale variously to the slump of the early twenties and the depression of the thirties. The sentiment expressed is timeless.

Extant tellings of these tales wear evidence that they were circulated through the oral tradition. Some of the tales exist in variant forms and many feature clearly articulated folkloric motifs. The existence of the tales as part of a cycle is important to their appreciation. Some degree of context is clearly required to understand these character tales. Heard singly they have few resonances, but for a local inhabitant familiar with the genre and with the exploits of known characters, news of the latest enormity would have fitted into the character of the protagonist and been of a piece with past outrages.

/ / / Eseciel Phillips and Jack Mary Ann had distinct characters. Eseciel Phillips was a Welsh speaker and, if not respectable, he was at least rather cultured. His facility with words stretched to poetic composition and several respondents referred to him as a 'bard'. Jack Mary Ann seems to have been a denizen of the unrespectable poor. These two were appropriate champions of their own native villages, each having within his makeup, something of the self-image of that community.

> / Similar cycles of tales about legendary folk heroes have been discovered in other coalfields. 'Bob Towers', the County of Durham 'Big Hewer', and his legendary peers from the other mining regions, were famously presented in the 1961 'Radio Ballad' written, produced and performed by Charles

²⁵⁷ Similar sentiments are attributed to an anonymous miner in another version of the tale: Silin, 'Looking Back': Wrexham Leader, 4 Jan 1974.

Parker and Ewan MacColl.²⁵⁸ The heroic stature of these paragons of labour²⁵⁹ is notable when compared to the bathetic performances of North Wales's own folk heroes. The disjuncture of this comparison might owe something to the attempt of the Radio Balladeers to glorify labour and thus invest ordinary callings with a dignity which those who actually followed them often failed to perceive.

A more closely related cousin might be 'Dull Will', the hero of a cycle of 'grim jokes about the slump and the miner's life' collected in the Rhondda in the late forties. Like the Good Soldier Schweik or Till Eulenspiegel, Dull Will had rather too much cunning to be the simpleton his nickname suggested and he used his dull wits to navigate a steady course through the uncertain world he found himself in. The investigator described the strength of Will's following and surmised that he 'was already taking on folk characteristics'.²⁶⁰

and/ The figure of the trickster occurs in folklore whenever and wherever people feel their oppression. The trickster is the opponent of strict moral codes, ~~but~~ is not immoral but amoral: an enemy of boundaries. On the plantations of the antebellum South the trickster overcame the overseers and the owners.²⁶¹ In workplaces the world over, the trickster wins out over pettifogging bureaucracy and small-minded bosses.²⁶² In North-East

²⁵⁸ 'The Big Hower' broadcast on the BBC Home Service, 19 Aug 1961; Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Reference Library, Final Production Script M89; Tape Number TBM 26568.

²⁵⁹ Ian Watson, Song and Democratic Culture in Britain (London, 1983), p. 114.

²⁶⁰ Thomas McGrath, 'How Green Is That Valley?', Masses and Mainstream (Oct 1948), pp. 62 - 70.

²⁶¹ John Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1979), pp. 127 - 129.

²⁶² Yiannis Gabriel, 'On Organisational Stories and Myths: Why It Is Easier to Slay a Dragon Than Kill a Myth', International Sociology Vol. 6, No. 4 (1991), pp. 437 - 438.

Wales the trickster was employed as a scourge to castigate the narrowness of Nonconformist ascetic attitudes. Stories about characters were for their narrators and their audiences a means of conceptualising the social reality they had to cope with. Perhaps, like the tale-telling peasants of early modern France considered by Darnton, local people found their stories 'useful to think with'.²⁶³

While character lore was called into existence by the tensions in a past social milieu it has persisted because it enjoys a contemporary significance for its narrators and their audiences. Though respondents reflect on the circumstances in which they heard the tales and the social dramas that they encapsulated, the lore about characters is to some extent a facet of local discussions about the past. Many accounts of the words and deeds of 'characters' conclude with the gloomy comment that such great originals are 'not born now'. Characters are conceived of by respondents as figures from the past. While it might be considered that more settled social habits were achieved with the sacrifice of such picturesque eccentricity, the disappearance of characters could also be attributed to the decline of local oral culture. Less intensive patterns of communal life afforded fewer opportunities for the elaboration of oral lore and, deprived of the oxygen of oral culture, 'characters' have dwindled from their Dickensian proportions to become unremarked eccentrics on the margins of local society. Though lacking in contemporary examples, the lore about characters abides in local villages and 'characters' are part of the vernacular account of the history of these communities. The continuing currency of this lore is at once a link with that past and an expression of its distance.²⁶⁴

The interpretations local people impose on their own past are at least as valid as any imposed by an outsider. The communal discourses which

²⁶³ Robert Darnton, 'Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose' in R. Darnton, The Great Cat Massacre And Other Episodes in French Cultural History (London, 1985), p. 70.

²⁶⁴ Linda M. Ballard, 'The Concept of the "Character"', Lore and Language Vol. 5, No. 1 (1986), p. 72.

provided these profane figures as counterparts to the exemplars of the sanctified life provided by the sermons and Sunday school lessons of local religious culture indicate that there were limits to the triumph of evangelical religion over local society. Their very existence reveals that local people wished to note this qualification in the account of local life that they passed to posterity.

The upheavals of industrialisation saw the death of a popular culture based on the features of rural life and the rhythms of the agricultural year. The transformation of Wales into an industrial society took place at the same time as a massive religious upheaval. The coincidence of these two social revolutions meant that the new popular culture would be cast in the mould of Evangelical Revival.²⁶⁵ While ~~many~~ scholars are willing to testify to the instrumentality of Nonconformity in shaping the new society and the importance of its legacy to the twentieth century, many of the generalisations they employ are imprecise. Evangelical Christianity had a great impact on industrial society but this new society also had its effects on Evangelical Christianity.

Nonconformist congregations began as gatherings of enthusiasts set apart from the rest of society by their profession of a distinctive and exacting creed. However, it is the fate of successful sects to become churches. The extreme commitment of the first generations can seldom be maintained by their children. The absence of any effective challenge from the established church meant that in large areas of Wales, Nonconformity became the local orthodoxy. Those who have experienced a revolutionary creed as the ideology of orthodoxy cannot fully appreciate the conditions which defined it. Despite lip service to the conversionist creed, the most important unit in religious worship ceased to be the individual who had been born again, and

²⁶⁵ Trefor M. Owen, Customs and Traditions of Wales (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 98 - 99; Gwyn A. Williams, When Was Wales? (Harmondworth, 1985), pp. 188 - 190.

became the family which had been raised in the tradition because they had been born to know nothing else.

Despite initial fears that workmen moved by millenarian creeds would set aside their tools in their concern to store riches in the sky, industrialists soon realised that those who professed an evangelical creed were conscientious workmen.²⁶⁶ Many of the pioneer proprietors shared the profession of their employees and were prompted into a paternalist concern for their welfare by their interpretation of the Gospels. Many employers bent these creeds to serve their own ends: Christian theology was pressed to provide an account of their good fortune as a just reward; the sponsorship of congregations was frequently means of exacting deference from the workforce.²⁶⁷ However, the increasing distance between the employer and the individual workmen transformed paternalism and in the twentieth century, the attitude of employers towards religion became altogether more pragmatic and more calculating. Employers attempted to gazette religious institutions as part of larger policy of paternalism which was aimed at social control in the current world rather than the welfare of souls in the world to come.²⁶⁸

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If we accept the account offered by this study, which argues that religious culture was affected by the appropriation of many of its elements by local society and that religious institutions themselves were sometimes prone to appropriation by employers, then the conventional view, which stresses the conquest of Welsh society by Evangelical Nonconformity, requires some modification. While describing a large degree of outward

²⁶⁶ E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, 1980), pp. 390 ff.

²⁶⁷ Patrick Joyce, Work, Society, Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England (1984), p. 141.

²⁶⁸ Robert Waller, The Dukeries Transformed, pp. 177 ff..

conformity to religious mores in popular culture, this study stresses the conditional nature of the tenure of the evangelical creed at the heart of
1/ local society. This view explains why attempts by some activists who were aware of the original meaning of Nonconformist creeds to reassert their
2/ essentials were sometimes actually resisted. The myth of Welsh as a uniquely religious nation originated with the Nonconformist sects themselves and they can hardly be regarded as unbiased witnesses. This myth still passes as the conventional wisdom in accounts of the past as diverse in form as scholarly accounts and oral reminiscences. However, the qualifications, and the real accommodations made between the evangelical churches and the world are noted and described in the same oral culture . It is, as ever, important to listen to both sides of the story.

Chapter Four:

Vertical Relationships
in the Workplace.

Workplace Culture.

George Ewart Evans, one of the pioneers of oral history in Britain, knew that to understand the social culture of a working community it was necessary 'to know the material culture at least moderately well ... For a man's attitude to his fellows grows, at least in part, out of the terms and conditions under which he works.'¹ It may seem strange to describe the workplace as a privileged site for the generation and reproduction of culture, for time spent at work, particularly in conditions of hard physical labour and under supervision from the agents of the employer, might seem to be the time when manners, artifice and culture impinge least on daily existence. However, in so far as 'culture' is the bedrock of common understandings and responses, the store of cultural patterns and symbols which condition 'the minute and unconscious social reflexes that make us social beings', the workplace is a natural environment for the forging of such values.² The conditions in which the worker sells his or her labour are not set in abstract terms but are defined by the daily reality of the workplace. The culture of the workplace therefore exists in hard conditions which are set by others, and frequently expresses workers' responses to those conditions. While understanding these conditions is important, it is insufficient simply to describe them: to account for workplace behaviour it is vital to describe them in the terms in which they were perceived by the social actors who encountered them. In his study of industrial behaviour Richard Hyman considered that the exploration of this subjective dimension of behaviour was important since 'men are not puppets; they consciously interpret the situations in which they find themselves, and in the light of these interpretations they select their responses in accordance with the goals which they wish to achieve.'³

¹ George Ewart Evans, From the Mouths of Men (London, 1976), p. 152.

² Paul Willis, 'Shop Floor Culture, Masculinity and the Wage Form', in John Clarke, Charles Critcher and Richard Johnson (eds.), Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory (London, 1979), p. 186.

C/S/19 ³ Richard Hyman, Strikes 2nd edn. (London, 1977), p. 67.

From the interviews with North Wales miners considered for this study, it is apparent that the most important subjective experiences of the workplace were ones of struggle: these were struggles against the extreme nature of the underground environment and against the demands of the economy as they were mediated through the organisation of the work process. The elaboration of workplace culture was an attempt by workers to symbolically and actually repossess aspects of their experience.⁴ The context for the generation of this culture was the primary work group. The culture of this group was defined by vertical relationships, between the men and their superiors, the colliery officials, and by ~~the~~ horizontal relationships, between the men of the work group. The accounts gathered through interviews are supported by the testimony of contemporaneously produced sources in revealing that primary work groups were the smallest and most cohesive groups within the workforce and that this was frequently the level at which workers sought to assert themselves in industrial action. Oral testimony stresses the importance of inter-group relations and also contains elements of the narratives through which the significance of these experiences was negotiated and then disseminated within the group.

The work group was able to participate effectively in struggles with its superiors because it was cohesive. Definitions of the terms 'group' and 'culture' often seem to be circular. Groups exist because they draw on a common fund of cultural forms/⁵ however, it is claimed that these forms are created by the social interpretation of common experiences and challenging situations.⁶ There were few circumstances more challenging than the struggle for one's daily bread in a coal mine and the legendary comradeship of the miners was one expression of the intrinsic strength of these groups.

⁴ Willis, 'Shop Floor Culture', p. 188.

⁵ Roger D. Abrahams, 'Towards a Sociological Theory of Folklore' Western Folklore XXXVII, No. 3, (1978), p. 168.

⁶ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Harmondsworth, 1967).

The discussion of workgroup culture as it was defined by vertical relationships will form the bulk of this chapter. It will concentrate on the workmens' responses to mechanisation, a change in working conditions which apparently shifted the balance of control in the workplace decisively in the employers' favour. However, it will be argued that the workforce tempered the new degree of control by asserting customary practices which expressed the limited nature of their commitment to the work task. One of the most important means through which resistance was articulated was the attempt by the work group to manipulate the wage form. The discussion of the culture defined by horizontal relationships in the workgroup will form the subject of the next chapter which will concentrate on the narratives through which men described the experience of risk in the workplace environment and the narratives through which they described their experiences of interacting with their colleagues and with their superiors.

Wages are important not only because they provide the worker with a means of survival, but because the wage also has a great cultural significance as an index of status and achievement. Willis described a 'fetishism of the wage packet': he considered that the wage and the presentation of the wage packet were an essential part of shop floor culture. The arrival of the 'tight gummed brown envelope breaks up the weeks, quantifies effort and presents to consciousness the massive effort and potential of human labour power as a simple concrete equivalent'.⁷ Workers had a tremendous emotional investment in their status, particularly as it was reflected in the wage packet. The intricacies of the piece rate system through which face workers were paid meant that few industrial groups were as well versed in the lore of the pay packet as the miners. The authors of Coal Is Our Life considered the discourse about pay in a Yorkshire mining community and found that the many conflicts about the subject were not only the result of structural factors but were also inherent in any situation where a man's income did not reflect his own

⁷ Willis, 'Shop Floor Culture', p. 195.

evaluation of his status.⁹ This chapter is an attempt to describe how behaviour in informal bargaining procedures and in disputes about payment and conditions were informed by a culture of negotiation which encoded a range of expectations about legitimate rewards and a symbolic vocabulary through which the group could express its views on these matters.

The second chapter on workplace culture concentrates on narratives. Narrative performance was sometimes an aspect of day-to-day behaviour in the workplace, particularly during rest periods or at the beginning and end of the working day. Cultural expression is not unusual in such sequestered circumstances since it arises wherever people have a chance, 'or even half a chance to share what they enjoy or must endure'.⁹ However, the demands of the workplace meant that for the most part narratives were elaborated outside the immediate circumstances of the workplace.¹⁰ Wherever they were constructed and elaborated, narratives concentrated on the description of the working environment, and upon interactions with colleagues and superiors. Though interviews contain valuable descriptions of informal and otherwise unrecorded contexts it is important to take account of the plasticity of experience when translated into narrative. While the problems faced by any group will be discussed frequently, their descriptions of them may not always be realistic, they may in fact sometimes be fictive. While such accounts cannot be taken at face value they may reveal how a group viewed itself and its situation and however distorted these accounts may be they should detain anyone who would describe that group.¹¹ Yiannis Gabriel described wish fulfillment as the most characteristic distortion apparent

⁹ Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, Coal Is Our Life: An Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community 2nd edn. (London, 1969), p. 65.

⁹ Dell Hymes, 'Folklore's Nature and the Sun's Myth', Journal of American Folklore Vol. 88 (1975), p. 346.

¹⁰ Jack Santino, 'Characteristics of Occupational Narrative', Western Folklore XXXVII No. 3 (1978), p. 201.

¹¹ Alan Dundes, 'Oral Literature' in James Clifton (ed.), An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (New York, 1968), p. 128.

in workplace narratives.¹² In the narratives collected in the North Wales coalfield, this trend was most clearly apparent in the discussions of danger which stressed the circumstances in which the careful miner could avoid injury. Where oral discourses serve ideological purposes for the group which sponsors them, they are not necessarily constrained within a realistic description of the truth. Nevertheless, to elicit support, ideological accounts have to offer a plausible account of reality. This study will examine the ideological description of the conditions of membership within the workgroup, through examining narratives about nicknaming practices. It will then investigate narratives about verbal mores which purport to describe the reason for hostility to one particular out-group: incoming English officials. These tales legitimated the hostile attitude of local people to these individuals by describing a pervasive hostility on their part towards the norms of local culture.

¹² Yiannis Gabriel, 'On Organisational Stories and Myths: Why It Is Easier to Slay a Dragon Than to Kill a Myth', International Sociology Vol. 6, No. 4 (1991), p. 429.

The Social Implications of Changing Extractive Technologies.

The period of this study roughly corresponds with the adoption and duration of use of a particular extractive technology in the two pits being investigated. As Llay Main opened into full production in the early twenties, it was the most technically advanced colliery in the North Wales coalfield since its directors sought to promote productivity by declaring in favour of 'a general policy of machine mining'. In 1923 the pit was operating longwall faces which employed machines to cut the coal, and was beginning to introduce face conveyors to facilitate the clearing of the coal from the face.¹³ Hafod Colliery abandoned the old technique of stall working and adopted the same mechanised technology as Llay Main when it was taken over by the Carlton Main Group in the mid thirties.¹⁴

In historical perspective, it is clear that the mechanised longwall system represented a transitional technology. In stall working coal was hand got and hand filled. With the power loading technology developed after the Second World War coal was got and fed onto the conveyors in one single mechanised operation. In the longwall system adopted at Hafod and Llay Main between the wars, the coal was undercut along the length of the face by a cutting machine and filled onto conveyors by teams of men. The technique was predominant in the British coal industry from the twenties until the fifties, and was still extensively used in the sixties, although by this time power loaded faces accounted for a greater proportion of the coal produced. Both Hafod and Llay Main were operating shearer faces in 1954 and after these trials proved successful the new generation of machinery was

¹³ CROH D/DM/316/1, Illustrated Brochure - Llay Main Collieries Limited, Gresford, Wrexham - Upon the occasion of a joint visit of the British Association and the North Wales Branch of the National Association of Colliery Managers, 18 Sept 1923.

¹⁴ North Wales Guardian, 31 Oct 1933.

progressively adopted in the two pits.¹⁵

Daunton considered that in historical studies of mining communities, the emphasis on trade union structures, the actions of leaders and the narration of epic struggles, actually provided little sense of the day-to-day concerns of workers, and therefore said little of the context in which unionization occurred. Though the miners are one of the most intensively studied industrial groups, the social relationships of the workplace - the lines of authority, the level of autonomy of the work group - factors which influenced the social relationships of the mining communities are frequently obscure.¹⁶ The mechanised longwall system, no less than any other work process, demanded specific operations from workers and therefore implied a characteristic set of relationships between them.¹⁷ Because of the large fixed costs implied by machine mining ~~they~~ could only be employed by large organisations: the colliery combines of the interwar period and their successor, the nationalized industry. Workforce relationships therefore existed in the context of bureaucratic institutional structures. A bureaucratic institution is not a paper machine; rather a bureaucracy is a means of organising human actions which depends on defining relationships and routinising interactions. It is well known that even in the best regulated bureaucracy these defined relationships are not stable and that the formal aims and structures of the institution are frequently subverted

¹⁵ CROH D/NM/701, Hafod Colliery Lodge, correspondence, 1 June 1954; CROH D/NM/774, Minutes of Llay Main Colliery Consultative Committee, 15 Oct 1954.

¹⁶ For a comparison of the organisation of the basic work group in the South Wales and North Eastern coalfields and an assessment of the significance of the different social relationships implied by the different systems, see: M.J. Daunton, 'Down the Pit: Work in the Great Northern and South Wales Coalfields, 1870 - 1914', Economic History Review XXXIV (1981), pp. 578 - 597.

¹⁷ As discussed in: E.L. Trist and K.W. Bamforth, 'Some Social and Psychological Consequences of the Longwall Method of Coalgetting', Human Relations Vol. 4 No. 1 (1951), pp. 3 - 38.

by the initiatives and actions of the individuals who compose them.

3 move/

Oral history methodology can be used to reveal undocumented and informal aspects of human behaviour and the human relationships at the heart of the organisation of the work process. Though many inferences can be drawn from documents recording rates of pay for different tasks and from the copious minutes generated by disputes and disagreements, no contemporaneously produced document fully describes the organisation of work which lay behind the extraction of coal. ~~However~~^h, no official document could hope to capture the nuances described by interview respondents and in the autobiographical material produced by local miners.

The longwall system will be considered in terms of the technology employed, the tasks demanded of workers and the pay system which attempted harmoniously to integrate the two factors. The principal features of the longwall system will be compared to those of its immediate predecessor, the stall working system, partly to show the particularity of the mechanised longwall system and partly because this is how the mineworkers who were asked to make the transition from one to the other viewed the new situation. The bureaucratic hierarchy responsible for the supervision of the work process will be considered and examined with particular reference to the plight of the first line officials who were immediately responsible for production. The final and most extended discussion will examine the responses of the workmen to bureaucratic control.

Coal mining, whatever the technical system used, has always consisted of three broad classes of operation: the winning of the coal, roof control and underground haulage. Coal is a brittle material but in the seam, when it is clamped under the pressure exerted by accumulated geology, it is very hard. Accordingly, most extractive technologies have not taken coal directly from the coalface but have softened the coal by undercutting the face. The resulting overhang is encouraged to fall, thus detaching itself from the coalface. While the fall, whether expedited by explosives or mechanical leverage, was likely to break the coal up, the aim of the operation was to soften it by removing it from the vice-like grip of the surrounding strata. The large lumps had then to be reduced to a more manageable size dictated

by the technical requirements of the haulage system and the needs of the customer.

As coal is removed from the seam, supporting the exposed roof becomes imperative. The pit prop is always a temporary solution: it does not support the entire weight of the rocks above but only holds in place the strata immediately above the workings. The mine worker depends upon the brief struggle between gravity and the integrity of the rock strata above the workings. Gravity is ultimately implacable and so arrangements must be made to allow weight of the ground to settle over the worked-out area without interrupting work at the face. The solution chosen in this period was the packing of stone waste into the worked out area to support the weight of the descending ground.

Once removed from the face, coal has to be taken to the surface. During the early days of the Industrial Revolution, collieries were shallow pits, easily sunk and lightly abandoned. However, the shaft was the most expensive single capital asset in the deep mines which succeeded the bell pits and accordingly deep-mined collieries have extended underground workings, criss-crossed with tunnels, and coal may have to travel some distance from face to shaft. Haulage systems have been obliged to develop at the same pace as extractive technologies so that the coal could be cleared quickly enough so as not to obstruct work at the face.

Deep mines are altogether more complex entities than shallow pits and thus need more auxiliary workers: to drive and maintain the tunnels needed for transit and ventilation, to maintain the shafts and to operate whatever haulage system is used. Some of these jobs are skilled but the bulk of them are likely to be lowly offices concerned with operating the haulage system. These lowly paid jobs have generally been the place where people served their time before being promoted to more skilled and better remunerated grades of labour more directly involved in the process of extraction.

Before Hafod Colliery was taken over by the Carlton Main Company in 1933 the principal work team was composed of two colliers, who worked in a stall, a section of coalface about twelve yards long. The colliers were

partners and they employed a filler, whose primary responsibility was to load loose coal into the tubs. This team might work in conjunction with another, sharing the stall on an opposing shift. Districts were worked by numbers of such sets. Though stalls were separate, they advanced, line abreast, on a notional coal face. This small team was responsible for performing most of the subsidiary activities required for the extraction of coal described above.

One man started work at Hafod Colliery in 1924 and here describes the system of extraction he was introduced to:

The system was that you had two men in a stall, filling coal, and a filler. And they would pay [the filler's] wages. And after so many years filling, when they found that you were good enough, you'd become your own miner like, your own coal, [...] coal hewing and filling.

The system there was all stall-work, there was very little machinery available, even the drilling had to be done by hand. Drilling shotholes, they were drilled with what they called a 'worm', a worm and drill, and it was fastened onto a wooden prop and drilled by hand.

They would undercut the coal by hand, with picks, and, prop it up with short wooden props. They'd go underneath it, they'd be lying on their backs until they got as far as they could, then they put this shothole in. And that would be fired on the following shift, and there was more or less a dead shift, the afternoon was the dead shift, what they call the 'repair shift' you see.

And there'd be a fireman going around firing these shotholes, it wasn't done on their actual working shift, they just had to prepare the coal, what they call 'holing'. Cut underneath and then put the holes in and the fireman in the afternoon would come around and fire it for them.¹⁸

The loosened coal would be loaded into tubs which would be removed from the stall and taken to the mechanical haulage relays by a pony driver. As well as getting coal, the set was responsible for securing the immediate access

¹⁸ Mr. Griffiths, WMP C/1984/85.

to their working area and for supporting the descending roof:

And they had to rip their own roadways, to make room for the horses to come in, the seam was thin, about three foot thick, three foot to four foot thick depending on which seam you worked in. And the roadway had to be enlarged to allow the horses and the tubs to come in, the men had to do that themselves, and they were paid so much for the ripping that they did, like. And they used to pack the dirt all onto, on the side of the roadway, pack it up to support the roads.¹⁹

Since this compact team controlled so much of the productive cycle it could to a large degree determine its own level of output. The team could pace its own efforts and determine its own priorities. Teams might decide to perform heavier tasks earlier in the day and sometimes deployed elaborate strategies, which might unfold over days, to combat irregularities in the seam and tackle recalcitrant coal.²⁰ It was customary in stalls worked by two teams to leave some loose coal to sweeten the first hours of the shift for the oncoming set. Fillers and colliers could even swap roles since the filler was not only struggling to earn a wage but for an education in the techniques that would one day fit him to enter a partnership as a fully fledged collier.²¹

The capabilities of the filler differed radically depending on his age, strength and level of experience. Boys generally graduated to filling from haulage work in their mid-teens and could remain working for the set, waiting for a vacancy in a partnership, until their twenties. These differences were generally reflected in the amount of the wage he was paid by the partners. Sets were only obliged to pay their fillers the minimum wage and filler's wages were frequently a subject of dispute.²² While some men exploited their fillers, others were more generous or even operated an

¹⁹ Loc. cit..

²⁰ Jack Read, CLWBC 451.6.

²¹ Interview with Joe Williams.

²² Interviews with Ithel Kelly and Moi Jones.

informal sliding scale and paid fillers according to the earnings of the set.²³

>/ Though the deputy was the supervisory official responsible for the general plan of development in the district, his most important relationship to the work group was that of service provider. He was responsible for ensuring the supply of materials and empty tubs. As the official responsible for ensuring the safety of the mine, only the deputy could fire explosives. However, the set paid for the powder the deputy used and was responsible for determining how and where shots were used.²⁴ Since the official nominally in charge was so marginal to the production process, control was asserted through the wage system. Since people go to work to earn a living, a wage system is basically a system of social control and refinements of its precise form may provide a way of 'influencing the behaviour of workers [so] that the purposes of the organisation ... are efficiently served'.²⁵ The lack of opportunity for direct supervision in the mining industry led to such a degree of dependance on the motivating effects of the pay system that the situation has been described as 'management through the wages system'.²⁶

Until the Coal Board introduced the National Power Loading Agreement in 1966, and instituted a comprehensive system of day wage payments, face workers were paid by results. The employer's desire for high productivity was expressed by rewarding workmen in direct proportion to their progress with measured tasks. The two most usual measures of productivity in the mining industry were yardage and tonnage. In the North Wales coalfield yardage was generally used to measure tunnelling work while face

²³ Interview with Joe Williams.

²⁴ G.M. Stephenson and C.J. Brotherton, 'The First Line Supervisor in the British Coal Industry', Industrial Relations Journal Vol. 4, No. 3 (1973), pp. 28 - 29.

²⁵ T. Lupton and G. Gowler, Selecting a Wage Payment System (London, 1969), p. 3.

²⁶ E.L. Trist, G.W. Higgin, G.W. Murray and A.B. Pollock, Organisational Choice (London, 1963), pp. 64 - 65.

productivity was generally measured by the tonnage of coal produced. The basic piece rate was modified by the operation of 'allowances', which were additions designed to compensate workmen facing adverse conditions, such as water on the face, or a bad roof. Other tasks on the face, which were incidental to production, but which were essential to secure safety or working conditions were either paid for in the piece rate or were remunerated as 'deadwork' in flat rate payments or at rates negotiated on the spot. Most of the set's wages were produced through the measurement of the tonnage of coal, though there was also a discretionary element as the deputy was responsible for the measurement and payment of many of the auxiliary tasks and the payment of allowances.

involved/

The longwall face was worked continuously rather than as a series of short faces and ~~was worked by~~ large teams of specialists, each of which might have been composed of some tens of men, rather than by small composite workgroups. The continuous longwall face was generally hundreds of yards long. This allowed the cutting machine to traverse the length of the face undercutting the coal. Overhanging coal was then propped up and shot holes were bored, charged and fired on the preparation shift. The loose coal was then cleared away by teams of fillers over the course of the next one or two shifts. The coal was filled onto a conveyor which emptied into tubs at the 'loading end' of the face. Fillers were obliged to set such props as necessary to make their own working place safe but they were ultimately required to set the props to facilitate the passage of the cutter on its next traverse. The withdrawal of props behind the advancing face and the packing of stone waste into chocks was accomplished by another dedicated team.

9 in order/

Roads had to accommodate an efficient haulage system ~~which had~~ to cope with the veritable rivers of coal generated by mechanised longwall production. Since mechanised production liberated greater volumes of combustible gasses, properly maintained roadworks were crucial to ventilation. These roads were ripped through the stone above the coal seam by teams of rippers. Roads ran to 'gates' at either end of the face but if the face was long enough, the coal would be cleared through the 'main' or 'mother' gate at the central point of the face.

The production process was cyclical: each phase had to be completed to allow the work group on the next shift to follow their task unimpeded. This system did not contain the intrinsic flexibility of the composite work group and the cycle could easily be deranged by human frailty, by machine failure or by the caprice of geology. Since any interruption could mean the loss of a day's production, the co-ordination of effort between various shifts became very important. The deputy, as the first line supervisor, performed a much more prominent role in the direction of the work process than he had in stall working. Despite the rehabilitation of the supervisor, colliery management elected to retain the piecework system as a means of maintaining productivity.

In any industry workers are naturally averse to changes in working practices. Workers who made the transition from the stalls to the mechanised longwall face noted an abrupt change in their working conditions. The miners' unions articulated these concerns and often sought to delay mechanisation or dictate terms for the introduction of new techniques.²⁷ However, (there was) in North Wales, ^{no} determined campaign of resistance to mechanisation. This was not because the strains of mechanisation were ~~not felt~~ in the area. After the introduction of machinery, the mine became an unfamiliar environment. Edward Jones, the Agent of the North Wales Miners Association, described some of the changes in his 1940 report to the union's annual conference:

insufficient

Machines in the mines ... mean a concentration of men at one spot, it means more noise, dust, smoke, higher temperatures and many miles of electrical cables. These things together make for conditions of work which are more onerous.²⁸

Miners blamed the new machinery for causing an increased level of injuries.

²⁷ For an account of the struggle in the South Wales coalfield see: Trevor Boyns, 'Of Machines and Men in the 1920s', Llafur Vol. 5, No. 2 (1988), pp. 30 - 39.

²⁸ CROH D/NM/96, NWMA Agent's report to the Triennial Delegate Conference, 15 Apr 1940.

Many of these injuries were caused by the presence of moving machinery in the confined space on the face. Accidents which involved machinery could be very serious indeed. However, miners also claimed that there were also more injuries due to other causes, such as slippages from the face and falls from the roof, since men were effectively being robbed of their chance to hear strata working by the clatter of machinery.^{29,30} Unsurprisingly, Llay Main, the first pit in the area to be extensively mechanised, acquired a reputation as a dangerous workplace. There was a saying in the district: 'Join the Army and see the world; sign on at Llay Main and see the next!'³¹

The precise dangers presented by the machinery and the reactions of the miners to it were conditioned by the circumstances of its introduction. Since Llay Main was a new pit and was the first in the area to mechanise on a large scale, its workforce was both unused to the new technology and unfamiliar with itself. The presence of men from many disparate communities and the high rate of labour turnover³² did not initially create a good basis for the development of a work culture based on familiarity and mutual trust which, the men alleged, worked to shield individuals against danger in the older established collieries.³³ The re-organisation at Hafod Colliery which saw the introduction of machinery disrupted many long hallowed relationships and practices: returning workers found themselves obliged to come to terms with very new circumstances.³⁴

When describing their actual experiences of work in the new conditions miners recalled that they found the new rhythm of work was very different. Their degree of control over the workplace was greatly diminished: they

²⁹ Letter from a miner, Peter Collins: Wrexham Leader, 19 Oct 1934.

³⁰ Interview with Hywel Jeffries, who saw the introduction of machinery in the South Wales anthracite district: George Ewart Evans From the Mouths of Men (London, 1974), p.167.

³¹ Walter Swinnerton, WMP C/1984/31.

³² Wrexham Leader, 20 Sept 1929.

³³ Interview with Moi Jones.

³⁴ Interview with Joe Williams.

were robbed of the ability to determine their pace of work and to deploy their labour as they saw fit. Trist and Bamforth studied mechanised mining in the North of England and considered that its introduction marked a decisive shift: 'no longer is the producer a man serviced by machines, but a machine serviced by man'.³⁵ Respondents described how the introduction of machines both increased the efforts required underground and changed the nature of the tasks performed. Groups were deployed to perform a more limited range of tasks and the premium shifted from skill to stamina. The uniformity of effort and the monotony of the tasks demanded at the face by the new system was difficult for workers to sustain. Trist and Bamforth described some of the human consequences of machine mining and found that, compared to hand-getting systems, mechanised longwall subjected workmen to a much greater level of stress and a higher degree of physical attrition. This was revealed through drastically increased instances of injury and stress-induced illnesses. Even apart from the higher level of absence due to sickness and injury, the introduction of machinery led to increased levels of voluntary absenteeism.^{36, 37, 38} Edward Jones, complained in 1940 that keeping up with the machine called for a 'greater speed of labour' and that this placed a ferocious strain 'on nerve and limb'.³⁹

In the stalls, men had been able to continue working as colliers until their sixties and even into their seventies. The new conditions of work demanded that face workers, and particularly fillers, ~~were~~ much fitter and consequently required them to be younger men. When the Carlton Main Company reopened Hafod Colliery they submitted the prospective workforce to

³⁵ Trist et al., Organisational Choice, p. 49.

³⁶ E.L. Trist and K.W. Bamforth, 'Some Social and Psychological Consequences of the Longwall Method of Coal Getting', Human Relations Vol. 4 No. 1 (1951), pp. 26 - 30.

³⁷ Interview with John Williams: George Ewart Evans, From the Mouths of Men, p. 172.

³⁸ Ferdynand Zweig, Men in the Pits (London, 1948), p. 59.

³⁹ CROH D/NM/96, NWMA Agent's report to the Triennial Delegate Conference, 15 Apr 1940.

stringent medical examinations. Since mechanisation reduced the colliery's manpower requirements, the company was free to pick and choose from among the fitter and younger men and many colliers found there was no place for them in the new scheme of labour.⁴⁰

7 Fillers found that work was not only harder but that they could assert relatively little influence over the production norms. The performance of the face was dictated by the amount of coal cut down by the cutter. The colliery management had the opportunity as never before to nominate an optimum level of performance, since the depth of the cut set the target for tonnage to be cleared by the individual workman. Management attempted to set a daily task for workmen that represented a high rate of productivity but which was at the same time, a safe bet in terms of the likelihood of its consistent achievement. If substantial amounts of coal were left on the face the production cycle would be disrupted. Within these constraints workmen could exercise a very limited degree of discretion and the pit output books at Hafod and Llay Main sometimes complain about light coaling.⁴¹ However, the whip hand remained with management. One man graduated to filling at the face in his early twenties in 1938: he noted that the 'stint', the width of coal on the face which each filler was nominally expected to clear, progressively increased in size and had grown from three yards to five yards by the end of the forties. He later worked in a nine yard stint, though this was in a thinner seam.⁴²

From the miner's point of view, machines were not good comrades. The cutter and its colleague, the conveyor, had some of the attributes of the pace-egging bully, which they combined with some of the attributes of the unpredictable absentee. Keeping pace with the cutter was a hard task, but machine breakdown also threw burdens onto the coaling set. Any failure to complete a task by one of the work groups could mean a lost production cycle. The imperative need for cyclical continuity meant that teams were forced to work overtime. The filling shift was most prone to stoppages. One

⁴⁰ Interview with Ken Aspinall.

⁴¹ CROH CB/8/3, Llay Main Production Book, 8 June 1939.

⁴² Mr. Coates, WMP C/1984/44.

Hafod man who experienced the transition from stall work to longwall commented on the mixed satisfactions of machine mining:

It was bad in those days, if the [haulage] machinery broke for an hour you had to work over for an hour. You wouldn't be coming home, say you'd be working afternoons, you could be coming home in dead of night.

Everybody was glad to have a job but that was happening before we got used to it.⁴³

7/ The intermittent and unpredictable nature of work on a machine face caused a large degree of tension in the workplace. Miners in the anthracite district of South Wales, interviewed by George Ewart Evans, also recalled that the introduction of machinery seemed to increase the level of fractiousness and discontent.⁴⁴ Trist and Bamforth considered that this tension had the effect of poisoning relations between the workmen and supervisors.⁴⁵ One witness claimed to be able to detect a difference between the relations promoted by machine mining and hand getting, day by day. Sometimes, if the cutting machine failed, coaling sets tackled the face unaided, a Bevin Boy employed as a haulage worker at Gresford Colliery claimed he could detect an immediate difference in attitude:

Or

The colliers all came out more happily when they worked the face manually and when there were no machines to break down and spoil the rhythm; there were no disputes, no "going up the pit" if the weather was temptingly fine at the surface.⁴⁶

The fragmentation of the task meant that workmen had much less say about the disposition of their labour. Even though the packers who built chocks on the edge of the worked out area to support the descending roof, the men who bored the shotholes, and the men who controlled the running of the

⁴³ Interview with Joe Williams.

⁴⁴ George Ewart Evans, From the Mouths of Men, pp. 167 ff.

⁴⁵ Trist and Bamforth, 'Social and Psychological Consequences of Longwall Production', p. 23.

⁴⁶ John Wyffen, Gresford's Bevin Boys (Corwen, 1991), p. 55.

conveyor belt and supervised the loading of the coal into tubs all had their services charged to the filling set's wages, the set had no say in the nature of their deployment. Colliers were keenly aware that a shilling in ^{the} pockets of these auxiliary workers was a shilling taken from their own.⁴⁷ Naturally the inclination of the set was to minimise these expenses. While packers drew the same shares as colliers from the pay note, the set's loader was paid a flat rate, and like the filler in the stalls, depended on the generosity of the colliers. One loader who was serving a face in Llay Main fell into a dispute with the men of his set in 1931. Since the face was still developing, he found he was handling an increasing rate of tub traffic and accordingly demanded an extra shilling on top of his established seven shilling daily flat rate. Despite his appeal to the pit's management, the undermanager was unwilling to encroach on the set's prerogatives and the loader threw in his job and sought other work in the pit.⁴⁸

The records generated by several disputes reveal that sets did chafe against the prescribed disposition of labour. In Llay Main, one coaling set struck work twice in 1949, demanding a readjustment in the deployment of men, because the set considered that the tonnage rate, which was supposed to be inclusive of wastework, packing, boring and loading, was felt to be insufficient to ~~make~~ ^{make} adequate wages ~~for the set~~. In this case the manager conceded the point and agreed that four men of the original nineteen men assigned to packing should be found other work in the pit.⁴⁹ In April 1951, also at Llay Main, a grumbling dispute about the set's right to determine the deployment of labour culminated in a stoppage which led to the prosecution of the strikers. Forty four men defied the instructions of a deputy who ordered them to put six members of the set onto the task of

⁴⁷ Meredith Jones, WMP C/1984/68.

⁴⁸ Thomas Jones, Fingers in the Sky - A Miner's Life Story (London, 1949), p. 56.

⁴⁹ PRO COAL 26/94, Report by the NCB North Western Division Area Labour Officer; reports on disputes at Llay Main 4th - 5th January 1949 and 8th - 13th June 1949.

building chocks. The set only deputed four men to the task and informed the deputy that the only other alternative was the payment of compensation to cover the loss of potential earnings represented by the assignment of the extra men to non-productive tasks. When the deputy refused their request, the set struck. Impressed by the audacity of their action, and having faced fourteen similar unofficial stoppages in the previous year, the colliery prosecuted the workmen who left the pit for breaking their contracts by not giving notice of a stoppage and received ten pounds in damages from each of them.⁵⁰

The discontent generated by the circumstances in the workplace was amplified by the payment system. The system of piecework which had evolved in the stalls was somewhat corrupted by its adaption to the new circumstances of the longwall face. A piece rate works as an incentive to higher production because, in theory, the only limits on potential earnings are set by the capacity and effort of the worker. It is hoped the worker will constantly strive to improve his performance in his attempt to maximise his wage. In stall working these principles can be seen to apply precisely, since control over the rate of production was in the hands of the work group and there were no technical limits on the amount of coal which could be produced in a shift. However, the introduction of the mechanised longwall system robbed the set of its ability to alter its normal level of production. Fillers were not able to advance further into the seam than the depth of the cut made by the jib of the cutter, and potential earnings were therefore finite.⁵¹ Whereas in the stalls, management sought simply to maximize production, the importance of cyclical continuity to the longwall system meant that management needed to optimize production. Thus a wage system that was evolved to ensure that workers maximised their efforts and which complimented spurts in production and penalised low productivity was adapted to a technical system the main

⁵⁰ Report of proceedings in the Wrexham Bromfield Magistrate Court: Wrexham Leader, 15 June 1951.

⁵¹ Joel Kreiger, Undermining Capitalism - State Ownership and the Dialectic of Control in the British Coal Industry (London, 1984), pp. 76 - 77.

requirement of which was the cyclical continuity of the process.

The mismatch between the capabilities of the miner and the capacities of the machine, generated considerable tension in the workplace. These discontents were exacerbated by the bastardisation of the existing pay system. Since management employed a pay system as a means of social control intended to condition the attitude of the workforce to production it is unsurprising that many of the discontents generated by the new method of production should have manifested themselves through concerns about pay. It was through the manipulation of the same payment system that workers sought to assert some level of control in the workplace.

Scholars have paid considerable attention to the negotiation of pay rates in the coal industry, but relatively little attention has been paid to the transactions that actually defined the weekly wage. This disparity is doubtless due in part to the relative opacity of the latter class of transaction. While wage rates were enshrined in a quasi-legal document known as the 'price list' details of the weekly wage negotiations have largely been lost to posterity. The price list set down the basic tonnage rates and allowances for the different seams and also detailed the rates which obtained for other major work tasks. The negotiations which determined the contents of price lists have tended to be conspicuous occasions. Negotiations took place between bureaucratic institutions, on the one hand the colliery companies, and their successor, the National Coal Board and on the other hand the mining unions. These negotiations were typically occasions when local officers called in the expertise of permanent officials and the administrative support of the area office. Since bureaucracies are compulsive record keepers there is a large amount of evidence about these transactions. However, the price list was an artefact whose creation was dictated by specific circumstances. Formal negotiations were usually resorted to when a distinctive new set of circumstances arose. This could be due, on the one hand to internal factors such as the opening of a new seam, the introduction of new techniques or machinery or on the other, to external factors such as the price of coal. Formal negotiations were usually resorted to when one side feared that it would be substantially disadvantaged by the new arrangements.

Unsurprisingly, price list negotiations often took place in the context of acrimonious relations between the two parties.⁵² This is underlined by the fact that price list negotiations sometimes deteriorated into naked trials of industrial strength. The most striking twentieth century example of such a deterioration in negotiations afforded by the Denbighshire coalfield occurred at Llay Main in 1925. The company attempted to enforce a wage cut through a price list revision and the result was a catastrophic twenty week strike which was eventually settled on the company's terms.⁵³

Over-emphasis on these periodic negotiations may obscure how pay was actually determined at the end of the working week. No document, however comprehensive, could possibly ever have hoped to cover all eventualities likely to occur underground. The price list was rather like constitutional law: a basis for ad hoc interpretation and amendment by the men on the spot. Price lists dated quickly, and the administrative effort required to revise them and the extreme penalties threatened by the failure of deadlocked negotiations ensured that formal conferences were not convened regularly.

⁵² David Gidwell, 'Philosophy and Geology in Conflict - the Evolution of Wages Structures in the South Wales Coalfield, 1926 - 1974', Llafur Vol. 1 No. 4. (1975), pp. 45 - 47.

⁵³ George G. Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire Past and Present 2nd. edn. (Wrexham, 1968), p. 74; Wrexham Leader, 29 May 1925.

Bureaucratic Management.

Mechanised longwall mining incurred heavy fixed costs and required extraordinary efforts at co-ordination. Both requirements could only be met by large organisations with bureaucratic structures: before 1948, these roles were fulfilled by the Markham Colliery combine and its successor the Carlton Group, and after 1948, by the National Coal Board. It was the rigidity of the formal system of management which ultimately lead to easier paths being sought.

The colliery manager stood at the apex of the pyramid of responsibility in the pit. He was responsible for the overall policy of the development and exploitation of the colliery's reserves and for the sales of the coal. If the pit was a large one he was likely to be assisted in his task by various technical departments. Before nationalization, the manager operated in a context defined by the market and by the expectations of his employers, the directors of the colliery company. In the fiercely competitive economic climate of the thirties, colliery managers enjoyed as little real job security as the men they employed.⁵⁴⁵⁵ Managers were sometimes browbeaten by directors and were forced into invidious compromises in the name of economy. The Court of Inquiry which sat to consider the causes of the Gresford Colliery explosion, which took the lives of 265 men in 1934, focussed on the interface between the technical and commercial aspects of colliery organisation and drew particular attention to the dilemma in which the manager found himself caught between the pressure to make the pit run as a paying enterprise and his legal obligation to ensure its safety.⁵⁶ Sir Henry Walker, the Chief Inspector of Mines, recommended that no large colliery enterprise should be run without a technically informed superior official to mediate between the manager and

⁵⁴ Interview with Ithel Kelly.

⁵⁵ Mark Benney, Charity Main - A Coalfield Chronicle (London, 1946), pp. 65 - 66.

⁵⁶ Michael Pollard, The Hardest Work Under Heaven - the Life and Death of the British Coal Miner (London, 1984), pp. 165 - 166.

the directors. His observation that the holder of such a post needed 'to be of a strong character and able if necessary to resist those in control of the commercial side of the concern'⁵⁷ seemed to be an implicit judgement on the character of William Bonsall, the manager of the pit, as well as upon the culpability of his superiors. Even the hawkish trade gazette, the Colliery Guardian considered that the officials of the colliery were being forced to lie on the rack of criticism for omissions for which 'they could morally be held to blame',⁵⁸

The neighbouring colliery, Llay Main, was spared the trial of distant directors who preferred to do all their mining by telephone and used the instrument to foist unrealistic ideas about output and the return on capital onto the manager.⁵⁹ The company's directors were actively involved in the Carlton Main enterprises in North Wales. Carlton Walker frequently visited the area and the company secretary, Harry Ball, was permanently stationed at Llay Main Colliery as head of the office staff. When the Carlton Main company acquired Hafod Colliery an Agent was appointed to supervise the group's North Wales holdings.⁶⁰

After nationalization managers were provided with an unprecedented level of job security and a structured career pattern. The primacy of the manager's duty to preserve the safety of the pit was openly acknowledged and he was afforded a large degree of technical support from the staffs created at the pit and Area levels. However, the manager found that his actions were to some extent under supervision from all levels of the new hierarchy. Development projects that required large amounts of capital had to be presented for approval to London. Production and mining policy were also superintended by the North West Regional Coal Board and by the staff of the the Area Headquarters based in the former Carlton Main offices at the Llay Main site. Pits existed in the climate of production targets and

⁵⁷ Sir Henry Walker's Report: Reports on the Explosion at Gresford Colliery, Denbighshire, 22nd September 1934 Cmd. 5358, p. 112.

⁵⁸ Colliery Guardian, 12 Feb 1937.

⁵⁹ Mark Benney, Charity Main, pp. 140 - 141.

⁶⁰ Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire, p. 71.

costing constraints set by the National Board. The 'commercial criterion' was a relatively unimportant consideration for colliery managers in the first decade after nationalization⁶¹ as the harsh commercial environment of the interwar period succeeded to the era of 'coal at any price'. However, the publication of the 1961 White Paper 'The Economic Objectives of the Nationalized Industries' coincided with the appearance of surplus coal stocks as other fuels became more competitive. Commercial criteria became more important as Harold Wilson's government countenanced the contraction of the coal industry.

The most frequent criticism of the post-nationalization industry is that it was overmanaged.⁶² A large technical establishment was required to orchestrate the planning of large scale production and to supervise the utilisation of the abundant funds released for investment. It was the competent management of this largesse that placed British mining engineering at the forefront of technical innovation for two decades after nationalization.⁶³ While the Coal Board spawned ~~competent~~ technocrats it also produced a bureaucracy that proved to be inflexible and unresponsive to local conditions. The national orientation of the bureaucracy was responsible for isolating management from grassroots feeling in the industry and ultimately created a truculent and alienated workforce. The willing collaboration of the NUM in the project of nationalization saved the NCB from the consequences of this alienation until the collapse of consensus after the advent of a younger generation of union leaders.⁶⁴

The general point about an overmanaged industry was particularly apt in a small area like North Wales which only had eight pits on vesting day (and

⁶¹ Tom Ellis, 'Death of Colliery', Trans. of the Denbighshire Historical Society Volume XXI, (1972), p. 95.

⁶² William Ashworth, The History of the British Coal Industry - 1946 - 1982 The Nationalised Industry (London, 1986), p. 614, p. 618.

⁶³ David M. Kelly, 'The Process of Mechanisation in British Coal Mining Since 1945', in D.J. Forsyth and D.M. Kelly (eds.), Studies in the Coal Industry (Oxford, 1969), pp. 136 - 140.

⁶⁴ Tony Hall, King Coal (Harmondsworth, 1981), pp. 157 - 161.

of those, two which were destined to close shortly afterwards) and which still supported the same management infrastructure as an area that might have dozens of operational units.⁶⁵ Seventeen months' experience of the nationalized industry moved the manager of Hafod Colliery to bemoan the decline of leadership in the industry: he observed that there had been 'a decline in "personality", because decisions have to be referred to a far off authority. "Remote control" has created irritating delays and, in some cases, losses to output due to stoppages'.⁶⁶ Officials of the old school found the new situation hard to accept.⁶⁷ A Llay Main craftsman remembered David Holmes, the long-serving undermanager expressing his doubts:

'Do you know what Walt?' he said, 'We're winding coal till Wednesday, to pay for these unwanted bosses!'⁶⁸

The Coal Board was aware of the reservations of the old guard of officials and saw that to make nationalization work, revision of the structure and composition of the senior official grades would be necessary. It was thought that the retention of officials from the private industry reduced the credibility of the Board in the eyes of the workforce and at the same time inhibited the introduction of new management techniques and new technology. The Board's solution was to pick able trainees and offer them accelerated promotion. They were given a highly technical training and were exposed to all aspects of management and mining engineering by frequent redeployment and even interchange between areas.⁶⁹ By the late fifties this new breed were beginning to make their presence felt in senior management positions. However, the Board's reasoning about improved relationships untainted by the legacy of old bitterness was not necessarily correct since the new men did not always enjoy better

⁶⁵ Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire, p. 79.

⁶⁶ Report of a speech to the local branch of the National Association of Colliery Managers: Wrexham Leader, 4 June 1948.

⁶⁷ Ferdynand Zweig, Men in the Pits, pp. 159 - 160.

⁶⁸ Walter Swinnerton, WMP C/1984/30.

⁶⁹ For an autobiographical account from one of the new breed, see: Tom Ellis, Mines and Men - Mining Engineering (Reading, 1971).

relationships with the rank and file. Old style officials had built up a rapport based on their credentials as local men, or on their long establishment in the area. The nature of their training meant that the new officials were socialised with very different values: they were technocrats and sometimes lacked credibility since they were sent to run collieries that esteemed mining as a practical skill won in the school of experience.⁷⁰ These high flyers did not always inspire loyalty from the less favoured local officials when they came between them and their reasonable expectations of promotion.⁷¹

Nationalization meant great changes for rank and file miners: improvement in pay and greatly increased consideration for safety and conditions were apparent even in the best run collieries.⁷² However, the moment of these changes should not be exaggerated and outside these limited spheres some miners failed to see any difference between the old regime and the new.⁷³ Once shorn of the miners' leaders' near millenarian faith in the project of nationalization, the translation of the mines into public ownership was not nearly as significant, in terms of day-to-day experience, as had been the changes in extractive technology seen in the twenties and thirties.

and /

Undermanagers performed an executive function and were responsible for the day to day running of the pit. However, their responsibility was subdivided and they were appointed to supervise a section of the mine or a particular shift. The overman was a senior foreman who acted as a go-between ~~who~~^h stood between the undermanager and junior officials. The junior grades were those of the deputies who supervised the work of a shift team at some stage in the productive process and the shotfirers who fired the

⁷⁰ Mr. Griffiths, WMP C/1984/85, 86.

⁷¹ Gwyn Williams C/1984/97, 98; Reuben Whalley C/1984/41, 43.

⁷² Ina Zweiniger-Bargeliowska, 'South Wales Miners' Attitudes Towards Nationalization: An Essay in Oral History', Llafur Vol. 6, No. 3 (1994), p. 77.

⁷³ Interview with Stanley Warnes cited in: *Ibid.*, p. 77.

explosives that brought down the coal from the face.

The structure of the pit hierarchy was pyramidal. Problems which could not be resolved at one level were referred upwards. Most aspects of the day to day running of the pit were overseen at every level of the hierarchy. Pay was agreed with the set by the deputy. Pay and production figures were then collated by the overman and examined and possibly revised by the undermanager before being given to the manager for his approval ^{and} were subject to revision at all levels of the hierarchy. The authorship of actions were sometimes obscure and this facelessness was an aggravating factor in disputes. The top of the pyramid seemed further from the bottom than the bottom seemed to be from the top. The greatest dissatisfaction about these arrangements was generally expressed at the lowest levels. While the proliferation of officers at every level of the pyramid after 1947 might have aggravated the situation, the confusion was not created by nationalization.

9/They/

Junior officials were subject to contradictory expectations: the legal definitions of their role ^{and} their technical duties in the productive cycle ^{and} and their place in the management hierarchy all pulled the deputy in different directions. The legal definition of the official's duties bore on the safety of the pit. The gravest dangers in the mine come from the possibility of explosions caused by the dust and the combustible methane liberated by the extraction of the coal. The likeliest cause of ignitions were the detonations of the explosives used to loosen the coal. The badge of officialdom was the archaic oil lamp, which was employed as a gas detector. The single role which separated officials from workmen was their authority to detonate shots. However, the deputy's role was not only defined by legal obligations and his technical role but by his position in the management hierarchy, and the undermanager was a more frequent visitor than the Inspector of Mines.

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Officials were always promoted from the ranks of the workmen. Face experience was a necessary preliminary before training through the local technical college. Since the course depended on day release the men had effectively to be sponsored by management and accordingly, before

nationalization deputies were regarded as the bosses' men. While officials often did not earn as much as the best paid contractors, they derived some compensation from their alignment with the higher levels of management. Even junior officials were guaranteed regularity of employment and were given paid holidays. At Llay, at least in the early to mid twenties, junior officials were treated to that seasonal symbol of reward to a worthy retainer - the Christmas goose.⁷⁴ The company also expected its officials to move into the model colliery village and to exercise positions of social leadership.⁷⁵ Deputies owed loyalty to their immediate superiors as well as to the company. One man recalled that in the thirties and forties the undermanagers at Llay Main operated a informal system of clientage which denied advancement to those who owned faces that did not fit:

I put in for my deputy's certificate, I went to the Tech. I had it first go off!

But you know there was a system in Llay then, and this is where the double crossing work come in: there were two undermanagers there, well I'll name them - Arthur Folwell and Hesketh, Mr. Hesketh.

Now Arthur Folwell, he used to train his own men, the men of his choice, at two and six a time, you follow me? They had to pay him two and six for every lesson, and now after having his lessons they'd go to the Tech. and they were bound to pass, because they were his men, y'follow me d'you?

Well I didn't do that, I did it on me own bat, I went to the Tech. and I had my certificate. But d'you think I could get a job as a deputy? Not likely! Not likely.⁷⁶

He eventually gained preferment when he came to the attention of the colliery manager but only after having to resit the deputy's course.

Sometimes, from the colliery company's point of view, the most useful attribute in a junior official was a blind eye. It was alleged that

⁷⁴ Interview with Eddie Evans.

⁷⁵ Herbert Davies, WMP C/1984/101.

⁷⁶ Glyn Hopwood, WMP C/1984/83.

officials were routinely obliged to defer their responsibilities towards the safety of the pit in favour of the economic welfare of the company. One man began work as a deputy at Hafod Colliery in the early twenties but soon lost his position:

I suppose I was too strict in carrying out the law and that was not very suitable with the management, for example stopping certain places because it was breaking the law on account of the quantity of gas. In a very short time they stopped the district and they stopped me.⁷⁷

Though the management at Hafod Colliery did not appreciate this punctilious attitude others saw its merit and this respondent was shortly afterwards elected as Secretary of the Lodge Committee. The North Wales Miners' Association thought the position of the deputy in the management hierarchy compromised his ability to act responsibly when faced by danger in the workings. In 1932, ^{with/} their concern prompted by the 'appalling' number of firedamp ignitions in the area's pits in the previous year, the annual delegate conference unanimously assented to a resolution requesting the Miner's Federation to lobby for a bill that would ensure 'the payment of all deputies and firemen by the state' and thereby remove them from illegitimate demands made by their current paymasters.⁷⁸

A lax attitude towards ventilation was apparent at Llay Main in the early twenties. An explosion caused by a shot fired during the development of 17's face in the Two Yard Seam killed nine men. A gas explosion was perhaps surprising in view of the fact that no gas was mentioned in the seam in the preceding days' reports. However, workers in the district had apparently in the past resorted to uncoupling the compressed air hose and using the jet to dispel gas.⁷⁹ The Carlton Main group apparently had a more

⁷⁷ Robert Ellis, CROH NT/789 Interview 6.

⁷⁸ CROH D/NM/88, Report of the NWMA Annual Delegate Conference, March 1932.

⁷⁹ Report on the Explosion which occurred at the Llay Main Colliery, Wrexham, Denbighshire on the 5th December 1924, Cmd. 2365, p. 9.

enlightened attitude towards safety. In 1928 T.W. Mottram came to manage Llay Main,^{e0} and he ~~came to the position~~ anxious to dispel the pit's poor reputation for safety.^{e1} Mottram was remembered as a martinet who came down heavily on the slightest infringements of safety regulations.^{e2} However, he found he could not trust entirely to his own zeal and employed an officer unfamiliar in the other pits in the district in the thirties - a safety corporal.^{e3} Mottram's campaign was supported by the gradual stabilisation of the workforce. While recruitment to the colliery in the twenties had been something akin to ~~the~~ attempt to fill a leaking bucket, the economic situation in the thirties ^{slowed down} the rate of labour turnover. Even in the forties, when manpower was a rare commodity, Llay Main was maintaining a waiting list for promotion from haulage work to the face. Despite their complaints about the sluggishness of promotion, haulage workers were acclimatised to the pit by their long apprenticeship.^{e4}

Though the Carlton Main company did not expect its officials to infringe safety regulations and disciplined them if they were caught, the pressure they were under to increase production led them to take short cuts. By the thirties current legislation lagged a long way behind developments in mining techniques.^{e5} Shots were supposed to be fired singly, and due precautions were supposed to be taken before each detonation. While this stipulation was fine on a short wall face, strict observance would have been onerous, if not impossible, on a face hundreds of yards long. The Gresford inquiry heard a great deal about spotlighting practices in the pit

^{e0} Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire, p. 71.

^{e1} Interview with Eddie Evans.

^{e2} Caradoc Pritchard, WMP C/1984/69.

^{e3} Interview with Ithel Kelly.

^{e4} CROH D/NM/232, D/NM/247, Minutes of Llay Main Pit Production Committee, 1943 - 1945, passim.

^{e5} A report to the NWMA Annual Delegate Conference by the solicitor retained for the Gresford Inquiry canvassed a thorough revision of the 1911 Act in the light of lessons learned in the aftermath of the disaster: CROH D/NM/91, NWMA Solicitor's Report to the Annual Delegate Conference, March 1938.

prior to the explosion. Officials were routinely firing large numbers of shots on a shift and a great deal of scepticism was expressed about the claims that each had been attended with the care and caution required by the letter of the Act.^{e6} The hurried firing of shots not only increased the likelihood of an explosion but also carried the risk of leaving an unexploded detonator unaccounted for in the coal waiting to be worked by the oncoming shift. One Hafod man's career at the face was ended in 1940 by the injuries he sustained when his pick struck an undischarged detonator left behind in the coal.^{e7}

9 Respondents all attested that after nationalization safety became a much
 >/ higher priority. More money was available for investment χ and for safety
 equipment χ and there was a steady stream of regulations which aimed at
 improving the lot of the mine worker. But, however modified, the basic
 structure of the coal industry was maintained; if in the private industry
 the constraint was economy, after nationalization the goal was
 productivity. Officials were still under pressure to maximise production
 and while this was the case there were and always would be infringements of
 the safety codes. It was still the safety margin that was trimmed when
 circumstances were not conducive to productivity. One man recalled a
 shotfiring accident at Llay Main which, while it should have been notified
 to the Inspector of Mines, did not even reach the ears of the senior
 management at the pit:

One shotlighter had been firing shots in front of the drive of a belt
 and he come looking like death, and I was just in me cabin waiting to
 accept the men for the day, Arthur, his name was: I said - 'What's the
 matter Arthur?'

'Phwff!' Ooh Horace!' he said 'go up to 23's', I was only a fireman,
 I was and I went up there.

And I took him back with me, quite a walk. Well good gracious! I
 dunno what happened! really, I mean, and we just put everything back in

^{e6} Sir Henry Walker's Report, Explosion at Gresford Colliery, pp. 69 - 75.

^{e7} Interview with Joe Williams.

order but ooh! there must have been a minor explosion of some kind, you know gas ignited, but it blew everything to sky high, supports and everything! But luckily the roof didn't come down so you knew you just carry on, don't you? Keep that away from everybody ...^{es}

Despite the deputy's dependence on those above him in the hierarchy he was also closely aligned with the work group. All officials had to serve as face workers and junior officials found themselves in authority over men who had until recently been their colleagues. Since he was the only official permanently stationed with a particular work group some degree of identification with the group was inevitable. However, the deputy's position of authority made it difficult and inexpedient to attempt to rekindle the comradeship of the coal face. One tale /~~observed~~/ the ambivalent attitude of the man who stood on the threshold between the rank and file and the management hierarchy:

highlighted/

I remember one fireman said one day, always at the end of the shift the manager wanted to know how we've done, so this fireman Wac Cuffin by name said, when we cleared the coal "I've cleared Mr. Manager," and when we hadn't cleared he'd say, "They've left it". He wouldn't say "I've left it," he'd say, "They've left it!"^{es}

^{es} Horace Davies, WMP C/1984/102.

^{es} Jack Read, CLWBC 451.6.

The Trade Union.

Officially, the force which counterbalanced the power of the management hierarchy was the trade union. However, at Hafod and Llay there was also a culture of rank and file organisation which conducted itself largely without reference to trade union structures. The authors of Coal Is Our Life also described a crisis in the role and status of the trade union lodge at 'Ashton Colliery' in the early fifties. They detected contradictions between the policies pursued by the trade union and the inclinations of the ordinary workman and attributed the rift to the development of an increasingly centralised (and only incidentally nationalized) industry and to the strategies employed by union officials.⁹⁰ Local trade union officials were aware that their ability to secure any concessions for their members depended on good relations with the colliery management and frequently sought to compromise. This was an attitude which the colliery management ~~ought to~~ encourage, not only upholding conciliation procedures but extending concessions and favours to individual trade union officials.⁹¹ The authors of the Yorkshire study speculated that the roots of this compromise might be found to lie in the labour relations of the thirties.⁹²

The industrial confrontations of the twenties damaged employers and labour and national bargaining did not re-emerge as an effective force in the coal industry until the Second World War. The refusal of some employers to recognise the status of their vanquished foe in collective bargaining led, in areas such as South Wales, to grim recapitulations of the original struggles for recognition.⁹³ However, some companies sought a different path and ~~ought~~ instead to embrace trade union structures. This new

⁹⁰ Dennis et al., Coal Is Our Life, pp. 112 - 113.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 100.

⁹² They considered the crisis to be the result of factors established 'certainly no later than 1939': Ibid., p. 113.

⁹³ Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, The Fed - A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century (London, 1980), pp. 113 ff., pp. 277 ff.

accommodation could even be described as an attempt to integrate the union into 'the administrative structure of the enterprise'. Companies, and later // the Coal Board were able to use union offices to smooth relations with the workforce, and could even attempt to co-opt the union as an instrument of social control.⁹⁴ However, though convergence between the trade union and the company eliminated struggles over recognition it had other consequences, principally the emergence of a vivid culture of bargaining at the grassroots of the industry, an expression of workplace solidarity from which the unions largely stood aloof.⁹⁵ The consequences of retreat from national negotiation into a culture of local bargaining was one of the gravest problems faced by the Board after nationalization. Disputes // involving tens of men and hundreds of tons of coal rather than whole coalfields and lost outputs totalling millions of tons, became the most characteristic expression of discontent in the industry. The problem became visible as the Coal Board suddenly became heir to the sectional grievances previously faced by hundreds of separate companies and was able to collate statistics and discover that in the years 1947 - 1957, while its employees constituted less than 4 per cent of the country's labour force, they -/ accounted for one third of all the days lost because of strikes.⁹⁶

The Carlton Main Company was keen to seek a fresh start in its relationship with the lodge at Llay Main after the disputes of 1925 and -/ 1926. The twenty-two week wages strike of 1925 blighted the prospects of the new pit but shifted the balance of power in the employers' favour. The financial resources of Llay Main Colliery families were severely strained by the 1925 stoppage and the scattered workforce lacked the strong communal base that sustained the struggle at the other pits in the area. When the men of Llay Main marked themselves out from the rest of North Wales pits by a more equivocal attitude to the the compromise of the Bishops' proposals in the early August of 1926, the owners, not constrained by membership of the local employers' association, saw their opportunity and /offered terms/ to the workmen. On August 11th the colliery was opened on terms that

^ make an effort /

C/9

⁹⁴ Richard Hyman, Strikes, 2nd edn., (London, 1977), p. 79.
⁹⁵ Dennis et al., Coal Is Our Life, pp. 106 - 112.
⁹⁶ Tony Hall, King Coal (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 100.

retained the seven hour day but reduced the basis for the calculation of pay to the pre-1919 level. Despite the refusal of the lodge committee to consider ~~these terms~~, the first shift was worked at Llay Main on the following Friday. Local opinion was hostile to the district's first major breach in solidarity. On 15th September an angry crowd stoned the lorries bringing men back from a morning shift.⁹⁷ By the end of September 1500 men had resumed work at Llay Main and the colliery was still signing men on in late November.⁹⁸

The families of Rhos and the miners of Hafod proved to be more resilient. Although by late November it was estimated that between five and six hundred men had resumed work at the Hafod Colliery, a majority ~~of the Hafod men~~ remained on strike and the local press acknowledged that 'in the Rhos District large bodies have remained faithful to the Miners' Federation'. On 22 November the Hafod strikers decided not to ~~resume~~ until they received definite instructions from the North Wales Council.⁹⁹ Hafod eventually resumed fully on the terms offered by the North Wales Coal Owners' Association, terms considerably stiffer than those suggested by the Prime Minister: an eight hour shift and pay assessed on 122 per cent of the 1911 basis, rather than the 166 per cent enjoyed before and the 132 per cent proposed by Baldwin. At 16 per cent [^] the government-guaranteed reserved profits of the North Wales coalowners were the highest in Great Britain.¹⁰⁰

After this defeat, the latter part of the twenties was not an auspicious time for trade unions and many colliery companies used the opportunity to attempt to cow the unions permanently. Those men who had ~~deferred their~~ return to work at Hafod Colliery until the official settlement found that they were routinely victimised and were deployed on inconvenient shifts and in poor places.¹⁰¹ At most of the Wrexham collieries the NWMA continued to

⁹⁷ Report of a specially convened sitting of Wrexham County Court: Wrexham Leader, 17 Sept 1926.

⁹⁸ Wrexham Leader, 1 Oct, 26 Nov 1926.

⁹⁹ Wrexham Leader, 26 Nov 1926.

¹⁰⁰ Wrexham Leader, 3 Dec 1926.

¹⁰¹ Arthur Redhouse CROH NT/789, No. 4.

be recognised but was afforded few courtesies and union structures came under great pressure from rising numbers of non-unionists.¹⁰² Meanwhile, at the Northern-most tip of Flintshire, an area isolated from the Wrexham coalfield in all senses, the management at the Point of Ayr Colliery >/ sponsored a company union which, in spite, though quite possibly because of its diminutive size compared to the industrial unions of South Wales and the Midlands, proved to be the longest lived in Britain. Despite the claims the management made about the happy 'family like'¹⁰³ atmosphere at the pit, Point of Ayr miners had their own reckoning of the usefulness of the 9 institution under which/ 'You were not entitled to an opinion unless it agreed with theirs.' Offended by the persistence of its rival, the NWMA threatened strike action across the coalfield in April 1942. A Court of Inquiry was summoned to head off this threat and the company union ultimately foundered on the refusal of its sponsor to recognise even the consultative structures demanded by wartime control.¹⁰⁴

At Llay Main in the aftermath of the 1926 strike the owners clearly had the whip hand: not only had they forced a settlement on their own terms but 9 the lodge had seen a damaging breach of solidarity. However, /at Llay Main/ the management forebore to take the opportunities offered to humble or a/ eradicate the NWMA organisation in the pit and embarked on very different course, extending to the union facilities never before seen in the pits of North Wales. By 1928 NWMA dues were being collected through the colliery office at Llay. Despite the Colliery Agent's claim that it was not the intention of the colliery company to force men into a closed shop the company readily accepted the result of a ballot of the workforce that ratified the arrangement.¹⁰⁵

9 This was /evidently/ not a concession wrung from a reluctant company by a 9 militant organisation but an /evidently/ an accommodation reached largely at

¹⁰² Alderman Thomas, Presidential Address: CROH D/NM/89 Report of the NWMA Annual Delegate Conference, 1933.

¹⁰³ Wrexham Leader, 24 Apr 1942.

¹⁰⁴ Wrexham Leader, 17 Apr, 24 Apr 1942.

¹⁰⁵ Wrexham Leader, 28 Nov 1928.

the initiative of the company. This peaceful accommodation is striking in
 >/ the context of the general picture of retreat and retrenchment, and the
 company evidently considered that it would secure some advantage from its
 / / progressive attitude.¹⁰⁶ Only 8,846 men remained in the NWMA of the 14,508
 on the books of the North Wales Collieries in 1930 and of these some 40 per
 cent were Llay Main men.¹⁰⁷ In these lean years Llay Main workmen were, by
 the grace of the colliery company, not only supporting their own lodge but
 were to a large extent bankrolling the area union.

By the early thirties the NWMA was again strongly established at Hafod
 -/ Colliery. In 1932 approximately two thirds of the Hafod workforce were on
 the books of the NWMA.^{108, 109} Trade unionists active in this period
 attributed this trend to their own considerable exertions and to the moral
 pressure brought to bear on non-unionists by their colleagues.¹¹⁰ The
 closure of the colliery in 1933 presented an opportunity some companies
 would have taken to weed out the militant elements of the workforce.
 However, the Carlton Main Company cultivated good relations with the
 colliery lodge which promised to deliver a willing workforce to help
 liberate the unexplored potential of the pit.¹¹¹ The Carlton Main company
 allowed the NWMA to oversee the medical examinations used to vet the
 workforce and restarted men in an order agreed between the union and
 company. There was a brief stoppage as some of the men alleged that the

¹⁰⁶ Even to scholars apparently unaware of the arrangement: Deian Hopkin,
 Lecture on 'Labour and Politics in North East Wales, 1900 - 1939', Llafur
 dayschool, 22 Oct 84.

¹⁰⁷ 3082 financial members in March 1930: CROH D/NM/87, Report to the NWMA
 Annual Delegate Conference, 1930.

¹⁰⁸ 1825 men employed underground and 284 employed at the surface: The
 Colliery Yearbook (1932).

¹⁰⁹ While some other employees would, of course have belonged to officials'
 associations, craftsmens' unions and general transport unions there were
 1455 members on the lodge's books, including 1130 financial members: CROH
 D/NM/88, Report to NWMA Delegate Meeting 1932.

¹¹⁰ Robert Ellis, CROH NT/789, No. 6.

¹¹¹ Robert Ellis, CROH NT/789, No. 6.

principle of 'first out, first in' had been violated but the matter was evidently settled amicably and the restart was a generally a smooth one.¹¹²

1/ However ^hUnion officials continued to handle the collection of membership subscriptions themselves. While both the Llay Main and Hafod lodges built ^{g based} numerically strong organisations, each was ^hbuilt ^hon ^ha ^hvery different ^{s/} foundation. In 1938 the Hafod Colliery Lodge Secretary was installed as the attendant in the new colliery baths, an office funded by miners' contributions, which gave him the leisure to pursue the claims of his men and also removed him from any improper pressures which might be brought to bear by the colliery company.

The Carlton Main company apparently sought personal accommodations with trade union officials and regarded the Hafod and Llay Main lodges as a source of managerial talent. After failing to be elected to the post of Miners' Agent, the lodge secretary of Hafod Colliery said goodbye to damp towels and was appointed undermanager in 1941.¹¹³ Not surprisingly, the adroitness of his translation from union officer to senior official was somewhat dismaying to other trade union members.¹¹⁴ A post-war treasurer of the Llay Main lodge remembered being invited to join the staff of the colliery by the manager on several occasions.¹¹⁵

At Llay Main, lodge committee members were afforded every consideration, ^{g/ though this/} ~~considerations that~~ ^h were spitefully denied to their colleagues in other collieries in the area. One man remembered that senior committee members were given jobs which allowed them to leave their stations to deal with union business as the situation demanded. They were found work with small

¹¹² Rhos Herald, 4 Mar 1933.

¹¹³ Robert Ellis, CROH NT/789 No. 6.

¹¹⁴ Emlyn Jones, CLWBC 451.12.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Moi Jones.

independent sets, doing odd jobs and repairs.¹¹⁶ However, some respondents considered that such arrangements had a darker purpose. The 'Ashton' study speculated that the management found committee men more tractable when removed from the pressures of face-work. Repair work was lighter than face work and was usually performed by older men who had retired from the face. Repair sets were not under the pressure of cycle completion and accordingly their members did not identify directly with face workers.

Bye-workers were dependent on the discretion of officials for the tasks they were set and the money they were paid and it was natural that they should attempt to cultivate good relationships with them. The removal of men from the large face sets also removed them from the scrutiny of their fellows. Respondents hinted that lodge officials routinely received considerations for their co-operation. One junior official was responsible for measuring the tasks performed by bye-workers but found that his jurisdiction stopped short of ~~one~~ lodge official who worked in his district:

... He used to say, "The undermanager will put me right, don't worry about me ..."¹¹⁷

Another man who was already serving on the lodge committee at Llay Main was elected to the position of Treasurer in 1958, whereupon management insisted, that for reasons of financial propriety, he should not work as a contractor. He was deployed to a repairing set with another committee man and was surprised to find that after a few weeks the pay office divided the set's pay note. When he accidentally drew his partner's note he discovered that his colleague was being paid more than he was, and considerably more than the progress of the set merited.¹¹⁸ Similar stories, which the research team considered 'may well be apocryphal' circulated in Ashton they expressed a pervasive cynicism about the motivation of trade union officials, and were 'told and believed' because what they related was

¹¹⁶ Interview with Eddie Evans.
¹¹⁷ Interview with Bob Adams.
¹¹⁸ Interview with Moi Jones.

possible.¹¹⁹

Quite apart from the influence asserted by this sort of improper collaboration, rank and file members were alienated from the union by the tendency of officials to rate the broader interests of the union over the immediate claims made by working sets. In the thirties and forties, the Agent's reports to the annual conference of the NWMA consistently deprecated the culture of road-end bargaining and appealed for 'intelligence and reason' to replace 'stoppages and force'.¹²⁰ The union's concern to uphold its credibility as a bargaining agent caused the company to welcome its interventions in unofficial disputes. In Llay Main in the early forties a man employed as a wages clerk was persuaded by the men to stand for the office of lodge secretary, an unusual distinction for an office worker. He did~~n't~~^{not} consult the management about his candidature but found after his election to the office that they did~~n't~~^{not} seem to mind:

I was then used again, when it suited the management, when we'd have some objections on the yard, had a crowd on the yard, the [colliery] manager and [the company] secretary, a gathering of more than half a dozen men on the yard, something wrong, they'd say, "Is Percy about?" Because normally if a staff man went, he'd be either kicked or chased from there.

So they used to say, "Percy, just go and see if you can find out what's going?"

Somebody may have felt I was playing a double act but, the men, well what I would say, from all my activities, they were the ones that gained from it.¹²¹

In the period after nationalization the NUM was an eager partner in an elaborate scheme of conciliation procedures. It was galling that the structures for which the union had campaigned for so long should be consistently ignored - by the workmen themselves. The likeliest

119 Dennis et al., Coal Is Our Life, p. 103.

120 CROH D/NM/100, Agent's Report to the Delegate Conference, 1944.

121 Percy Jones, WMP C/1984/39.

intervention of a lodge official in the event of an unofficial stoppage was to advise the men to remain at work and to follow the disputes procedure. In October 1948 the Chairman of the North Western Divisional Board warned the Agent that he would take legal sanctions against striking workmen at Hafod Colliery if the current rash of illegal stoppages continued but also communicated his 'appreciation of the attitude [officials had] adopted in attempting to persuade the men to honour their obligations'.¹²²

Face-workers were generally reluctant to accept the advice of their leaders and preferred to depend on the offices of direct negotiation and to demand an immediate and unequivocal response. Workmen perceived the injunction about not ceasing work as an annoying technicality and resented what they felt to be the consistent failure of the union to support their cause. Perceived betrayal led to exasperation and hostility. One collier ^{who} worked in Llay Main in the fifties ~~and he~~ thought that the set [^] received little sympathy from Lodge officials: [^]

If a dispute came about, which they did very frequently, the men were left to their own resources to negotiate with managers etc. The union would not meet management until all men went down the pit to work, the outcome was 'My hands are tied'.¹²³

It was in these circumstances that informal bargaining flourished.

¹²² CROH D/NM/701, Letter from the Chairman of the North Western Coal Board to the Permanent Secretary of the NWMA, 20 Oct 1948.

¹²³ Personal correspondence: Ken Brown, former Llay Main collier, 12 Jan 1993.

The Work Group's Response to Mechanisation.

The Chargeman.

At the base of the management hierarchy was the work group. The individual who mediated between management and the work group was the chargeman. Though he was the mens' representative, the chargeman organised the work of the men on the face and saw that it was cleared of coal by the end of the shift. Sources describing the minutiae of the organisation of work are generally sparse and inexplicit.¹²⁴ However, the Hafod General Agreement guaranteed the right of 'workmen on any conveyor face ... to select one of their number to act as a chargeman subject to the Undermanager agreeing that the man selected has the ability and experience necessary to perform the duties of chargeman.'¹²⁵ A 1943 inquiry into the unsatisfactory performance of the 27's face at Llay Main seemed to put the unfortunate catalogue of low output, failure to salvage props from the waste, a crooked face and persistent early finishes down to the poor organising abilities of the set's chargeman.¹²⁶ As this negative testament to the importance of the chargeman's role indicates, he was not simply a conduit for the deputy's instructions but virtually fulfilled the role of first line supervisor.

The chargeman's responsibilities mirrored those of the deputy. Like the deputy, he carried a flame lamp as a gas detector and he was responsible for expressing the set's safety concerns. The chargeman's ~~concern about~~ the wages of the set counterbalanced the deputy's concern with production: he had to see that the face was running in such a manner as to ~~earn~~ a reasonable wage and pressed the deputy to secure the flow of supplies onto the face, to see that sufficient air pressure was being supplied to drive the pneumatic tools and to ensure that the supply of tubs was consistent

¹²⁴ See: Stephenson and Brotherton, 'The First Line Supervisor in the British Coal Industry', p. 28.

¹²⁵ CROH D/NM/695, Hafod Agreements, 12 June 1939.

¹²⁶ CROH D/NM/232, Minutes of Llay Main Pit Production Committee, Jan 14 1943.

and plentiful. His most important duties concerned the set's wages since the chargeman was the individual with whom the deputy negotiated when deciding which piece-rate modifying allowances were justified by conditions on the face and when agreeing on prices for deadwork.

The chargeman had very little real power, his status in the set being that of a 'first among equals', and his election was generally an informal affair. Since the chargeman's duties were onerous, and he received no extra pay for performing them many were reluctant to accept the job:

Well, a lot didn't want the job did they? They'd say to you, 'What you been doing? What's the matter? You haven't booked enough!'¹²⁷

9ammg! One respondent was ~~one of~~ a number of teenage haulage hands rapidly promoted to fill the gaps left on the face by the calling up of the Territorial reserve in the early stages of the Second World War, and remembered that he became the chargeman, despite his lack of experience, because of the reticence of the other members of the set.¹²⁸

7/ Despite the reluctance with which the office was generally assumed, respondents were adamant that the undermanager's prerogative of overseeing the appointment was never exercised. The nomination of a leading hand by the staff of the colliery was a common arrangement in the pits of Nottinghamshire ~~and~~ Derbyshire¹²⁹ and ~~in the~~ Kent coalfield, which was developed with managerial expertise from the Midlands¹³⁰ in the interwar period.¹³⁰ In these areas the nature of the chargeman's office was very different indeed. This arrangement was a vestige of the 'little butty' system and the chargeman was generally a subcontractor who contracted

¹²⁷ Interview with Gilbert Parry.

¹²⁸ George Jarvis, CLWBC 451.5.

¹²⁹ Kreiger, Undermining Capitalism - State Ownership and the Dialectic of Control, pp. 93 - 94.

¹³⁰ Robert E. Goffee, 'The Butty System and the Kent Coalfield' Bull. of the Society for the Study of Labour History No. 34 (1977), pp. 46 - 47.

directly with the manager on the tonnage rate, received the earnings of the set, which he disbursed as he saw fit, and had direct control over the appointment of men to the set. North Wales had its own experiences of the sub-contracting of labour in the collieries and locally the 'chalter system' was a by-word for exploitation. The most acrimonious strike on the Wrexham coalfield in the twentieth century occurred after what workmen interpreted as an attempt by a colliery manager to alter the crucial relationship between the chargeman and the set.

Bersham Colliery lay to the South West of Wrexham and was worked by men from the town and the surrounding industrial villages, including a sizeable number from Rhos. In February 1935 the workforce took unofficial strike action. The company's attempts to break the five week strike with blackleg labour led to riotous scenes on the picket line. Despite the consensus of local historical opinion that the strike was prompted by the extension of machine mining in the pit¹³¹ the workforce's concerns actually focussed on the introduction of men from other collieries onto the new mechanised faces in direct contravention of all standing agreements about seniority and promotion. The manager insisted that his proteges were specialists in timbering on mechanised faces¹³² but a man who was serving on the lodge committee at the time remembered it was the fact that the new men were not included on the set's pay note that made their colleagues curious about the precise nature of their status.¹³³ The Bersham colliers were convinced that the new men were being introduced as chalters: 'That [was] for them to do the work and for the two to receive the money, that way, you see. Well it didn't mature that way! But that's it, we had the strike through that.'¹³⁴

The office of chargeman was a crucial one. He was the individual responsible for the direction of effort at the point of production and efficient production depended to a large extent on his abilities; nevertheless, in the opinion of the men the office of chargeman was their

¹³¹ George Lerry, Collieries of Denbighshire, p. 45.

¹³² Wrexham Leader, 1 March 1935.

¹³³ George Thomas, WMP C/1984/9, 50.

¹³⁴ George Thomas, WMP C/1984/50.

main bulwark against exploitation.

The introduction of longwall machine mining meant a great readjustment of circumstances on the coalface. Though an individual face worker's degree of responsibility towards the completion of the production cycle was diminished, expectations about individual productivity were greatly increased. The coaling shift was the busiest in the cycle and the one most likely to see the disruption of the production cycle. It was coaling sets which saw the proliferation of customary practices which tempered the individual's commitment to the work task. The workgroup's bulwark against increasing demands from the management was the office of chargeman. Conventions about the amount of commitment required from an individual towards the task were negotiated through customs about the 'stint', which were supervised by the chargeman; and the fluctuations inherent in the piecework system were moderated through a system of informal pay negotiation which evolved between the chargeman and the deputy.

Stint Customs.

A 'stint' was the amount of coal a worker was expected to clear each day, and was generally expressed as a yardage of face. The price list, the contract between the men and the management for the extraction of the coal was contracted with the group as a collective entity and not with individuals. It was expected that the group should clear the face each day and leave it fit for the work cycle to continue. However, the organisation of the effort of extraction was left in the hands of the work-group itself and the mutuality of the group's commitment was generally expressed by the men taking an equal yardage of coal along the face. It was the chargeman's responsibility to measure and chalk out the allotments of coal.¹³⁵ Though this informal arrangement was clearly subordinate to the group's commitment to clear the face, men tended to cease work, and even left the face after they had cleared their allotted coal.

¹³⁵ Phil Jones, CLWBC 451.12.

In 1945, when the Ministry of Fuel and Power's Regional Controller urged workmen and management at Llay Main to come together to abolish the practice of maintaining a stint, Raymond Gill, the Agent at Hafod and Llay Main Collieries, responded that no stint system operated in either pit: though a clause in the general agreement stipulated that six yards of face should be allowed for each worker as a matter of technical convenience to avoid overcrowding at the face, workers were supposed to be committed to the face until it was cleared of coal.¹³⁶ The Regional Controller could be forgiven for his mistake, since colliers easily lapsed into the habit of regarding their initial allotment of coal as the limit of their commitment to the face. The concept of the stint continually reasserted itself.

Trist and Bamforth described some of the strategies workmen evolved in response to the increased burdens of longwall filling. Men in adjoining stints might enter into informal partnerships and offer aid and assistance to one another as required and could even work two stints as one.¹³⁷ However, most men retreated into a more individualistic attitude. The most extreme manifestation of this trend was expressed in withdrawal from the face through voluntary absenteeism. Bad conditions often prompted a rash of absences and aggravated the inherent problems of control of the productive cycle.¹³⁸ After the transition to longwall working, the respondents in several surveys described a decline in comradeship among the workgroup at least as it had been experienced in stall working.^{139, 140}

¹³⁶ CROH D/NM/232, Llay Main Pit Production Committee Minutes, 7 Mar 1945.

¹³⁷ Trist and Bamforth, 'The Social and Psychological Consequences of Longwall', p. 30.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 33 - 34.

¹³⁹ Interviews with Hywel Jeffries and John Williams, quoted in: George Ewart Evans, From the Mouths of Men, p. 167, p. 170.

¹⁴⁰ Trist and Bamforth, 'The Social and Psychological Consequences of Longwall', p. 10.

In the pits of North Wales the workgroup vested its responsibility to ^{9/with/}organise production in the chargeman and also left ~~to~~ ^{to} him the responsibility for seeing that the face was cleared. Some groups allowed the chargeman to measure out a smaller allotment of coal for himself or even allowed him to forego a stint entirely so that he could pursue a peripatetic mission on the face, aiding men with difficult stints by boring holes into stiff coal or by helping to clear falls.¹⁴¹ In view of the roving commission assumed by the chargeman, and the loss of income to the set that this office represented, colliers felt justified in leaving the face while there was still uncleared coal. Since he had no power to coerce the men, he had to cajole them and appeal to their sense of responsibility towards the set:

And what was happening, you'd go out, you were allowed to go out to the surface if you finished early, so some people would have luck and would go out early and the others would be behind. Me, as a chargehand, or somebody as a chargehand had to watch this and ask the men 'Don't go out, there's a lot of coal on the face yet, let's try and get it off'. And they were very good, they would co-operate and stay on for an hour, say, or two.¹⁴²

Coal getting systems differed between coalfields and even between pits and so therefore did the structural relationships between workers operating the different systems. In the unident^{ified} colliery in Northern England described by Trist and Bamforth there was an officer analagous to the North Wales chargeman. The 'number man' was responsible for claiming for deadwork, ^{/caps/, /} however ^{his} liason with the deputy was only dictated by the fact that he occupied the corner stint and in 'no sense [was he] a representative appointed by his mates'. He assumed no general responsibility towards the face and was only rarely an informal leader.¹⁴³ North Wales respondents remember that the chargeman was a key figure who

¹⁴¹ Phil Jones, CLWBC 451.12; interview with Gilbert Parry.

¹⁴² Interview with Joe Williams.

¹⁴³ Trist and Bamforth, 'Social and Psychological Consequences of Longwall', pp. 31 - 32.

stood in the vanguard of the struggle against management attempts to increase the rate of work.

Respondents recalled many attempts by pit management to abolish stint customs and just as surely, their gradual re-emergence. One Hafod man's attitude to nationalization was coloured by the fact that it was taken as a pretext by management to attempt to squeeze out stint customs by prohibiting men riding up the shaft before the end of the shift:

They would question you before you went up, you had to have a note to go up. Of course I got well in with [the onsetter]!

But they put blocks on it, like, they expected you to be on working after what you'd done. That's what happened you see, you had to stop on the top whether you'd finished or not. A collier cleared his coal had to stop! Or if you had a concession, they say that if you cleared the face, especially if it come a holiday or Bank Holiday, something like that, you finished the face you can go, soon as you finished. But you had to wait till the last man finished.¹⁴⁴

Once achieved, concessions led inevitably to further concessions, which once enjoyed were defended as customary rights. The tolerance of the system would be eventually be stretched to the limit. One collier who acted as a chargeman in Llay Main in the late forties remembered the pretext for one such campaign:

And I'll give you another instance, good one this is! there come a system in my set, 'Clear your stint and you can go home, afternoon shift!', right? 33's, it was, right.

Well they were clearing the boys that could, in good conditions, they were clearing their coal and they were in the Welfare half past eight, eight o'clock sometimes. But boys with bad conditions, they couldn't do it could they? Well what happened? They lost a turnover one ruddy shift and Holmes [the undermanager] was in the Welfare, he seen these fellers

¹⁴⁴ Mr. Coates, WMP C/1984/44.

from my set working afternoons, there swigging it up! He used to phone 'How are they on the face?' and all that. They lost a turnover, you see. And Holmes got it, he was going ruddy mad, wa'n' he? Four of 'em or five of 'em in the Welfare and the set had lost the bloody turnover!'⁴⁵

The arrangement broke down, a turnover had been lost and the colliery management sallied forth once more against the creep of customary practices.

⁴⁵ Interview with Moi Jones.

Informal Pay Negotiation.

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The pay system introduced with the longwall system ~~was~~ characterised ~~above~~ as a means of social control. While management defined the initial conditions in which the system operated ~~they were~~ powerless to prevent circumstances and the attitudes of the men from remodelling them. Set-piece negotiations about price lists were only resorted to in specific circumstances, and outside these circumstances more informal procedures were the norm. In the interwar period chargemen were considered competent to negotiate on tonnage rates in what were far from formal settings and completely without reference to trade union personnel. One man who worked at Llay Hall Colliery in the twenties and thirties recalled being summoned to meet the manager in the colliery office to settle a tonnage rate,¹⁴⁶ and one Hafod chargeman remembered an instance in the thirties where he settled a rate with the undermanager at the end of the haulage road.¹⁴⁷ Extant price lists which must have been the result of painstaking negotiations also bear the hastily pencilled records of subsequent rate revisions.¹⁴⁸

A County Court Judge called upon in 1928 to decide the case of a pay dispute occasioned by the contested verbal cancellation of a contract expressed annoyance at the casual nature of bargaining procedures:

These mine officials and men draw up agreements and never put their initials to them. They do things irregularly and expect the Court to spend a lot of time and money on them. ... With all due respect [to the Miners' Agent], everything that was done for the men should be put in writing, and had that been done there would have been none of this nonsense.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ David Roberts, WMP C/1984/52.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Joe Williams.

¹⁴⁸ CROH D/NM/695, NWMA file of price lists and associated correspondence.

¹⁴⁹ Report of a case brought at Bersham Colliery, Wrexham County Court: Wrexham Leader, 20 Jan 1928.

The second element in the weekly pay packet was the discretionary payment authorised by the first line official. On Thursday, the deputy would negotiate with the charginan, and between them they would 'book in' the agreed details of the deadwork and decide which allowances should be used to modify earnings. While some 'deadwork' jobs had rates which were specified in the price list others were decided on the spot.¹⁵⁰

Since deadwork was not under the control of senior management it had a tendency to 'creep' and was an obvious target for any campaign of cost control. In the piece rate revision that precipitated the 20 week strike at Llay Main in 1925, management had attempted to assert control of the situation by insisting that the new prices for tonnage on the conveyor faces were inclusive of deadwork.¹⁵¹ Despite the terms of the settlement, by the thirties Llay Main officials had reverted to the payment of deadwork as an addition to the earnings derived from the tonnage rate. One Hafod charginan recalled that he would meet the deputy and that they would quantify the time spent on the face performing essential non-productive tasks in the previous week. This total would be expressed in man-days and the set would be paid for this time at the prevailing minimum wage rate for day work of seven shillings and ninepence a shift.¹⁵²

The tendency of allowances, which were supposed to compensate the coaling set for difficult working conditions, such as a bad roof or a low seam, to become 'self perpetuating' and to persist long after the conditions which originally justified them had abated was a well known phenomenon.¹⁵³ The 'ratchet effect' was the term coined to describe the mechanism behind creeping piece-rates: the ratchet's teeth were provided by

¹⁵⁰ 'Any work not provided for in this Price List shall be arranged between the management and the workmen': CROH D/NM/695, Hafod Agreement, 12 June 1939.

¹⁵¹ Wrexham Leader, 29 May 1925.

¹⁵² Interview with Joe Williams.

¹⁵³ W.H. Sales and J.C. Davies, 'Introducing a New Wage Structure into Coal Mining', Bull. of the Oxford Institute of Statistics Vol. 19, No.3, (1957) p. 209.

the roadway. Then I had to assess how much other work had been done. ... One thing must be said, that the length of the road that had been repaired always differed from the amount in the costing book.¹⁵⁷

A tunnel which was actually 150 yards long should have been, according to the costing book, some 200 yards long, the 'missing' 50 yards being given to the set as an addition to its weekly wage.

Packs were constructed at the rear of a longwall face to take the weight of the roof off the face and to control 'wasting' in the worked out area as the face advanced and props were removed. One Hafod packer recalled that it was customary in the late fifties for this set to increase its wage level by claiming that extra supplies had been brought onto the face. A new manager repudiated this situation and reached an accommodation with the set by promising to pay an extra five shillings a day. However, he made it clear that this arrangement was only to apply to current members of the work group.¹⁵⁸

9 The motives for this minor fraud were not criminal. The reasons that the
-1 'pushing' of deadwork was resorted to were various but the ~~reason~~ most
2 frequently cited was the need to make the paltry earnings derived from out
of date price lists into living wages. In the interwar period, the low
demand for labour expressed itself in high levels of unemployment and low
wages.¹⁵⁹ The demand for labour increased during the war. The miners
2 9. (improved steadily ~~their~~ relative position in the pay hierarchy: mining
moved from 81st in the list of industrial earnings in 1939 to 23rd in 1942.
However, government control eliminated the free mobility of labour with the
1941 Essential Works Order and managed the inevitable aspirations for
higher pay and better conditions with a series of awards conceded by
national arbitration. Unrest in the coalfields prompted the Greene Board
Report and Award in 1942 and the Porter Award in 1944. These awards revised

¹⁵⁷ John Trematick, My Dad Was Coedpoeth Bellman (Wrexham, 1989).

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Gilbert Parry.

¹⁵⁹ Frank Holloway, 'The Interwar Depression in the Wrexham Coalfield'
Trans. Denbighshire Historical Society Vol. 12 (1978), p. 69.

-/ minimum wage rates and allowed wage rises as a percentage of basis rates,
 -/ to cover the increasing 'cost of living'.¹⁵⁰ The post-war boom did not run
 to bust, and post-war governments maintained a commitment to full
 employment: both factors that tended to put inflationary pressures on
 wages. While at the national level the unions responded loyally in the
 years 1948 - 1950 to the request of the post-war Labour government to deny
 their members advances in negotiated rates¹⁵¹ restraint built up pressure
 for improved earnings at the grass roots. After this date, while some
 industries evolved the ritual of the annual pay round,¹⁵² others,
 especially those which used piecework wages systems, saw unmanaged wage
 drift. In the car plants of Coventry, the priority management accorded to
 production lead to ~~a system of~~ management through the wage system which
 made foremen marginal figures and invested shop stewards and gang leaders
 with quasi-managerial functions.¹⁵³

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The newly consolidated Coal Board had particular reasons for wishing not
 to set off a pay round among its heterogeneous units. When Coal Board
 officials began to survey wage systems in the industry they found a
 remarkable diversity from pit to pit. Prior to nationalization wage
 structures were built up at local level. The colliery companies, as
 separate entities, had little interest in standardisation and the survey
 recorded 6500 separate occupations in the industry. While some of these
 jobs were differentiated by little more than name others represented a real
 investment in different socio-technical systems in the differing conditions
 of the British coalfields. A massive administrative effort reduced the
 number of distinct occupations to 350 descriptions. The main benefit of the

¹⁵⁰ M. W. Kirkby, The British Coalmining Industry 1870 - 1945 - A Political and Economic History (London, 1970), pp. 175 ff.

¹⁵¹ Henry Phelps Brown, The Origins of Trade Union Power 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1986), p. 148.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁵³ Stephen Tolliday, 'High Tide and After: Coventry Engineering Workers and Shopfloor Bargaining 1945 - 1980', in Bill Lancaster and Tony Mason (eds.), Life and Labour in a Twentieth Century City - the Experience of Coventry (Coventry), p. 204.

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>/into/

project was to unite day workers, hauliers, craftsmen, and repairers previously paid under the multiplicity of local rates, ^{under} 13 basic grades which were introduced in April 1955.¹⁶⁴ However, the Coal Board quailed before the task of standardising a national piecework structure and decided in 1958 that since the advance of power-loading was superceding hand-filling technologies, reform could be deferred indefinitely. No national agreement on face-work was concluded until the National Power Loading Agreement in 1966, which abolished piece-rates entirely.¹⁶⁵ The result of this decision meant that men working on hand-filled faces in the sixties were sometimes still working on price lists negotiated in the twenties.¹⁶⁶ Thus institutional sclerosis drew to the forefront the system of informal negotiations which had previously only existed at the margins of the official pay system. Deadwork and allowances became an important element of the collier's wage in the fifties¹⁶⁷, and there were some faces where, by the early sixties, 'make-up' payments ~~made up~~ ^{made up} as much as one half of the wage.¹⁶⁸

9 totalled

Had the informal system which emerged been positively dysfunctional it would doubtless have been tackled sooner, but in some respects it appeared to answer the needs of the coalface better than the formally constituted system. It suited the deputy, as the official responsible for supervising work at the face, to have within his gift funds to provide an occasional incentive payment. One deputy compared his experience of supervising contract work to that of leading men who were earning the national day wage

¹⁶⁴ Sales and Davies, 'Introducing a New Wage Structure Into Coal Mining', pp. 207 - 214.

¹⁶⁵ Geoff Brown, Sabotage: A Study in Industrial Conflict (Nottingham, 1977), pp. 331- 332.

¹⁶⁶ Tony Hall, King Coal, p. 99.

¹⁶⁷ Letter from Morris Gwilym Jones: Wrexham Leader, 27 Jan 1956.

¹⁶⁸ R.T. Ellis and D. Davies, 'Payment by Results in the Mining Industry', paper presented to North Wales Branch of the Association of Colliery Managers, October 24th 1963, Proc. of the National Association of Colliery Managers Supplement to Vol. LXI (1964), p. 46.

specified in the Power Loading Agreement:

I think in my own mind it was better for a deputy to work with men when he paid them for what they did, they thought more about [him].¹⁶⁹

One local colliery manager considered that the most important effect of informal negotiations over discretionary elements in the wage was to calm oscillations in the weekly pay packet. Geological conditions and breakdowns in cycle control could seriously compromise the productivity of the set regardless of the effort the men invested. The manager noted that deadwork payments tended to be used 'as a dampening factor to avoid excessive fluctuation in earnings'.¹⁷⁰ An informal wage system which worked largely without oversight by management and union structures and which could be flexible enough to respond to immediate conditions in the workplace without requiring sophisticated machinery to expedite its operation, had much to recommend it. Subsequent experience in many industries has shown that these effects are by no means easily attainable.¹⁷¹

The behaviour of workmen was not overtly aggressive and their demands on the informal wages system were, in their own estimation, the outworking of a defensive strategy rather than part of a policy of systematic extortion. Pay was still linked with exertion, but not through the raw index of tons extracted. Rather it was mediated through the negotiations of the deputy and the chageman. Though their respective estimations of a fair wage and a good week's work were predictably different, both were rooted directly in the experience of the situation at the point of production and the chief aim of the weekly booking-in ritual was to achieve a consensus. Men preferred a system based on informal transactions which they could observe, identify with and exercise some influence over to distant and arcane bureaucratic procedures. One man who followed a management career in local pits considered that the men preferred informal bargaining because it

¹⁶⁹ Deputy at Gresford Colliery 1947 - 1973: CROH NT/1074, Percy 'Ginger' Roberts, 'My Own Memories of Down the Mines', Mining Memories Ms. (1986).

¹⁷⁰ Ellis and Davies, 'Payment by Results in the Mining Industry', p. 47.

¹⁷¹ Tolliday, 'High Tide and After', p. 234.

appeared to produce 'more tangible results':

Such was the historical distrust, miners did not accept agreements entered into by their representatives when negotiated increases in tonnage rates and attempts to curb the necessity for allowances restricted their traditional "horse trading" with deputies and management ... ¹⁷²

Historically, for the miners, skill in bargaining was vital 'in order to avoid the sharp edge of exploitation'.¹⁷³ The chargeman was often a skilful negotiator and his persuasive talents and the force of his personality had a direct effect on the size of the set's pay packet. The manager of one local colliery testified, less sympathetically, that 'the one with the biggest mouth got the most money'.¹⁷⁴ Men were keenly aware that their economic fortunes varied with the persuasive talents of the chargeman and considered that a fearless zeal in prosecuting the welfare of the set was an essential attribute:

If you had a good chargeman he would be in that office all the while!¹⁷⁵

The deputy's position as the chaff between the upper and nether grindstones of the expectations of the manager and the men was not an enviable one. His conduct was judged by very different criteria depending on whether he was judged from above or below. Management defined a weak deputy as someone capable of being brow-beaten by the men, while from the men's point of view a weak deputy was the one who lacked sufficient character and imagination to take a broad view of his duties and occasionally defy continual management pressure on cost control in the name

¹⁷² Personal correspondence: Raymond Williams, manager of Hafod Colliery 1959 - 1962, 1 Jan 1992.

¹⁷³ George Ewart Evans, From the Mouths of Men, p. 157.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Tom Ellis.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Gilbert Parry.

of justice and goodwill.¹⁷⁶

While the men had nothing to match the calibre of the under-manager's big guns when it came to influencing the behaviour of the deputy, there were subtler techniques of persuasion. Despite his official position, the deputy was stationed with the set so his immediate colleagues were the men rather than other officials. One Llay deputy remembered that pay-day 'was a good time as far as bribes go. ... The men would offer me a 'chaw', a piece of chewing tobacco hoping I would add a little more to their wage. ... It was a recognised thing in those days that workmen offered a piece of tobacco to a fireman or overman.'¹⁷⁷ Other prizes included home laid eggs, garden produce or a pint sent to the deputy's table ~~at~~^{at} the Welfare at the weekend.¹⁷⁸ Officials recognised the significance of such transactions - one overman considered that 'they were asking for money'.¹⁷⁹ The deputy had to negotiate a difficult compromise.

Several respondents remembered that in attempt to please both parties a deputy might resort to deception.¹⁸⁰ It was alleged that some deputies worked with a 'short pencil': they might agree one set of figures with the set but eventually submit some more palatable ones to the undermanager. Since deadwork was commissioned by oral contract a breach of trust could not be proved, but was all the more bitterly resented for that.¹⁸¹

Though nominal attempts were made to conceal the practice of pushing deadwork, management turned a blind eye - 'all they were interested in was the amount of coal that was being extracted.'¹⁸² However, the new generation of colliery managers trained by the Coal Board who had no experience of the work in the pre-nationalized industry were less patient

176 Interview with Joe Williams.
177 John Trematick, My Dad Was the Coedpoeth Bellman.
178 Interview with Felix Griffiths.
179 Interview with Edgar Sides.
180 Interview with Ithel Kelly.
181 Personal correspondence: Ken Brown.
182 John Trematick, My Dad Was the Coedpoeth Bellman.

and were, by the fifties, canvassing local attempts at reform.¹⁸³ Though the workmen were familiar with the informal system they knew and understood, others recognised that its operation was based on a range of arbitrary factors such as the character and mood of the deputy and considered it inherently unfair.¹⁸⁴ In a 1956 letter to the Wrexham Leader, one Llay Main collier described how he resented having to rely on the 'charitable feelings of the deputy' to 'make our pay packets look like something decent to take home to our wives' and demanded instead a comprehensive price list revision.¹⁸⁵

The most serious consequences of the practice of informal negotiation came from its hold on the industrial world view of workmen and officials, since 'a pre-occupation with wage manipulation' weakened the determination of the workman and officials to attempt to lower production costs through 'mechanical and organisational improvements.'¹⁸⁶ Many commentators have described how the haggling which characterised the piece-rate system was responsible for bitterness and mistrust in the coal industry, and thus for its record of strikes and stoppages.¹⁸⁷ However, informal negotiations were not the source of the problem but rather they were the means adopted to make the system work. Disputes were not inherently a part of the informal

¹⁸³ Raymond Williams took the opportunity of being appointed manager at Ifton colliery in 1955 to forestall the migration of informal bargaining practices to the new shearer faces by instituting a sliding scale based on the optimum running efficiency of the unit, and conducted similar reforms at Hafod after 1959: personal correspondence, 1 Jan 1992; at Bersham Colliery Tom Ellis attempted to replace piece-rates with a modified incentive scheme based on productivity, until he was given specific instructions not to proceed by divisional management c. 1960: Tom Ellis, Mines and Men, pp. 95 - 96, Ellis and Davies, 'Payment By Results in the Mining Industry', pp. 46 - 51.

¹⁸⁴ 'The trouble was your wages then depended upon what he'd had for his breakfast or whatever!': Interview with Jack Read.

¹⁸⁵ Letter from Morris Gwilym Jones: Wrexham Leader, 27 Jan 1956.

¹⁸⁶ Ellis and Davies, 'Payment By Results in the Coal Industry', p. 51.

¹⁸⁷ David Ingham, 'Philosophy and Geology in Conflict', p. 46.

system but were rather the consequences of breakdowns in that system. Informal negotiations allowed the system a flexibility which facilitated its working. Rigorous enforcement and adherence to the letter of the contract would probably have led to more disputes and breakdowns in relations. Because it operated at the lowest possible managerial level, when a dispute arose, industrial action was usually limited to the work group most immediately affected. The National Power Loading Agreement returned the bargaining initiative to the highest levels of the NCB and NUM hierarchies and quickly saw the return to a pattern of protracted national disputes not seen in the industry since the twenties.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Hyman, Strikes, pp. 29 - 30.

Unofficial Stoppages.

Though the piecework system has frequently been directly blamed for the brittle state of industrial relations in the coal industry, it is worth bearing in mind that most commentators who described it so unfavourably ^{aid} ~~se~~ in the post-war period when it was coming under strain due to cost push inflation and the insidious effects of 'wage creep'. Financial haggling was certainly a more prominent feature in post-war disputes at Hafod and Llay Main. However, a very similar pattern of strikes and stoppages manifested itself in the interwar period. Wages were seldom cited as a factor in these disputes which appear to have been a reaction to the characteristics of the new extractive technology. Characteristically they were prompted by the refusal of sets to bear the burdens of production cycle control. Despite the differing claims made by aggrieved workers and the different interpretations imposed by managers and, at a further remove, by students of industrial relations in the industry, there appears to have been a fundamental continuity between patterns of behaviour in the two periods.

It is always difficult to say precisely what the cause of a strike might be. While there may have been a single event which workers fastened upon as their discontent crystallized into a determination to act, there are always deeper seated causes which commentators search out in the attempt to provide a fuller description of the situation. In the post-war coal industry views ranged from the opinion, canvassed from senior managers in the Lancashire, Yorkshire and North Wales coalfields in the fifties, that 'every strike is a wages strike'¹²⁹ to the increasingly influential views of the industrial psychologists, disseminated through the NCB's personnel establishment and its staff training college, that the stated grievances of strikers were merely epiphenomenal and that the causes of strikes could be found in the deficiencies in managements' communicative techniques.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Dennis et al., Coal Is Our Life, p. 64; Stanislaus Wellisz, 'Strikes In Coal Mining', British Journal of Sociology Vol 3. (1953), pp. 350 - 351.
¹³⁰ Tom Ellis, Mines and Men, pp. 91 ff.

9 Many students have treated workers' perceptions of the ~~overt~~ causes of strikes with suspicion and have described how overt demands may serve an ideological purpose, providing discontented workers with a rallying cry and an agreed symbol of sometimes inchoate aspirations.¹⁹¹

Various sources were investigated to build a picture of strikes, stoppages and other disruptions at Llay Main and Hafod Collieries.¹⁹² In this respect it was fortunate that the Carlton Main Company demonstrated considerable interest in disruptions in the productive process and was fairly consistent in noting the causes of stoppages in the Llay Main and Hafod Output Books. The National Coal Board was far more meticulous in keeping records about trade disputes, but investigation at pit and area levels is hampered by the poor survival rate of records from low levels in the Board hierarchy. The Llay Main and Hafod lodges kept records in cases where men referred disputes for arbitration, ~~however~~ lodge officials often deliberately excluded from consideration cases they thought were frivolous and fruitless.¹⁹³ The consultative structures inaugurated during the Second World War which continued under nationalization, sometimes provide detailed analyses of disputes but, again, the minutes of these meetings have in many cases, failed to survive. The local press reported industrial unrest only during disputes of considerable duration or of sufficient scale to close pits or affect large sections of the workforce. The only data set which could make any serious claim to being an inclusive survey which described all restrictions and stoppages within a given period was a Coal Board survey of disputes at all the pits in the North Wales area from vesting day until September 1955.¹⁹⁴ Despite the inconsistencies in the material, there are enough accounts to indicate roughly the incidence of such unofficial action and to attempt to describe the most prominent issues tested during

¹⁹¹ Wellisz, 'Strikes in Coal Mining', p. 346; A. W. Gouldner, Wildcat Strike (London, 1955).

¹⁹² See the Appendix Two on Unofficial Stoppages.

¹⁹³ Dennis et al., Coal Is Our Life, p. 95.

¹⁹⁴ CROH D/NM/338, NCB, North Western Division, North Wales Area, 'Stoppages and Restrictions due to Trade Disputes - 1947 to 17th September, 1955'.

stoppages.

Between 1934 and 1955 there were at least 89 unofficial stoppages at Llay Main Colliery and between 1933 and 1957 there were 61 recorded disputes at Hafod. The observation that unofficial action was overwhelmingly a feature of the behaviour of coal face grades,¹⁹⁵ and most particularly fillers[^] is supported by these figures.¹⁹⁶ The majority of those stoppages to which definite causes could be assigned involved face workers and most particularly, filling sets: 48 of the stoppages at Llay Main and 26 of the stoppages at Hafod involved these groups. These were disputes which tended to be limited in their scope to the men of the unit which expressed the grievance and the auxiliary workers who served it. Disputes were short in duration, most of them lasting for a few shifts and some only for a few hours. Losses of output were accordingly small.¹⁹⁷ Where details of the conditions of resumption ~~were~~[^] available it is apparent that few of the disputes resulted in any tangible gain and that ceasing work implied financial loss for the strikers. While it is possible that the management tacitly conceded changes in working conditions¹⁹⁸ many of these disputes do seem have been demonstration stoppages from which the men expected no immediate gain. The pit output books also record other instances of the disruption of production due to absenteeism and instances of wilfulness by sets of workmen. While the measurement of disputes tended to concentrate on cases where men downed tools and stated definite grievances some account of such expressions of disaffection is also

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¹⁹⁵ G.B. Baldwin, Beyond Nationalization - The Labour Problems of British Coal (Harvard, 1955), pp. 86 - 87.

¹⁹⁶ Brian McCormick, 'Strikes in the Yorkshire Coalfield, 1947 - 1963', in D.J. Forsyth and D.M. Kelly, Studies in the Coal Industry (Oxford, 1969), p. 175.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁹⁸ In a study of NCB records from the Yorkshire Area, McCormick assumed either that the behaviour of workmen was quixotic or that there was a hidden history of tacit concession behind the ubiquitous phrase 'Returned on Same Conditions': Ibid., p. 177.

required to understand the full implications of the phenomenon.

relatively/ The records for the other North Wales collieries are not nearly so complete as those for Hafod and Llay Main. Nevertheless, both seem to have been strike prone pits. The only period for which directly comparable statistics are available confirms this observation. There were 42 disputes in Llay Main, and 21 disputes in Hafod in the period from January 1947 to September 1955. Of the four other pits in the area only Gresford approached this record but with a much smaller total of nine disputes. Accounting for the high incidence of unofficial action in these two collieries is difficult without comparable material from the more peaceful pits. Even speculation prompted by consideration of likely factors does not provide a coherent account of the differences.

A post-war study based in the North Western Division of the Coal Board revealed that the size of a colliery was an important factor in the number of disputes it was likely to experience.¹⁹⁹ Larger and more modern pits were more anonymous institutions where there was less opportunity for personal contact and the chains of command between managers and men were longer. It was noted that 'family' pits based on cohesive communities tended to have better records in industrial relations.²⁰⁰ While these factors could account for the pronounced militancy at Llay Main, the largest colliery in the area, they do not describe the situation at Hafod, a proverbially close 'family' pit. The low incidence of unofficial action at Gresford Colliery, a cosmopolitan pit with a large workforce, would also appear to be anomalous. Technical factors can affect the working of collieries considerably. However, except for the Point of Ayr, where the fact that workings ran under the Dee estuary demanded that pillar and stall techniques were used to forestall the collapse of strata supporting the sea bed,²⁰¹ all the the North Wales pits used the same extractive technologies. Though the breakdowns and delays caused by the complicated haulage system

199 Wellisz, 'Strikes in Coal Mining', p. 361.

200 Ibid., p. 353.

201 Vivien Hughes Davies and Paul Parry, Point of Ayr - The Early Years (Denbigh, 1994), p. 9.

at Llay Main were cited by the Area Production Director as a factor which lead to truculence among the filling sets, all the North Wales pits were afflicted with similar problems to some degree because of the lack of investment in the thirties and during the war.²⁰² The 1950 reorganisation at Llay Main did not abate the stoppages. Intrinsic geological difficulties could account for the high level of stoppages there, where the coal was worked at great depths in steeply inclined seams, but not for the degree of militancy at Hafod,²⁰³ which was a technically unchallenging pit, or for the relative quiescence of Ifton Colliery, which had steep and badly faulted seams.^{204, 205}

of suggests/ The fact that the pits which had the most meticulously kept records had the highest numbers of disputes ~~is capable of~~ two possible interpretations. The first is that surveillance was part of an attempt to cope with the fractiousness of the colliery workforces. However, it could also be the case that, as with the nationalized coal industry itself, the existence of high indices of industrial discontent may simply be a testament to the administrative efforts expended in recording them.^{206, 207} Though the deficiencies of the sources do not make it possible to describe the

²⁰² CROH CB/15/14, NCB, F.G. Glossop, Divisional Production Director, Llay Main Colliery Reorganisation (December 1950).

²⁰³ Tom Ellis, 'Death of a Colliery', Trans. Denbighshire Historical Society Vol. 21 (1972), p. 96.

²⁰⁴ Ifton recorded six disputes from 1 Jan 1947 to 17 Sept 1955: CROH D/NM/338, NCB, North Western Division, North Wales Area, 'Stoppages and Restrictions due to Trade Disputes, 1947 to 17th September, 1955'.

²⁰⁵ Personal correspondence, Raymond Williams, (manager at Ifton 1955 - 1959), 1 Jan 1992.

²⁰⁶ Hyman, Strikes, p. 29.

²⁰⁷ McCormick found a wide variety of practice in recording the incidence and dimensions of disputes in Yorkshire and noted that the colliery managers, who were responsible for filling out such returns, 'might be considered to be an interested party': McCormick, 'Strikes in the Yorkshire Coalfield, 1947 - 1963', p. 172, pp. 176 - 177.

correlative factors behind the incidence of disputes in the pits of North Wales, they vividly illustrate the nuances of the confrontations.

9 The stoppages described ~~/in the pits of North Wales/~~ were similar in many respects to those described in the docks after the conclusion of the National Dock Labour Agreement. Disputes were generally small scale affairs undertaken without reference to the local trade union structures. They seem to have emerged from structural features of the working environment and from the complex of views and attitudes which defined workplace culture. They were part of a day-to-day process of informal negotiation with low-level representatives of the employers and concerned short term goals and grievances capable of immediate settlement, rather than being an expression of a determined campaign to achieve definite concessions from higher authorities or to re-define working conditions.²⁰⁸

-/ Despite the shift in overt justifications offered for unofficial stoppages between the interwar and post-war periods, stoppages remained very similar in form and appear to provide evidence of an abiding concern on the part of the workmen to assert some control over the rates at which they sold their labour to the colliery company. Ideal types of the characteristic confrontations of each era could be described. In the -/ interwar period when the demand for labour was low, stoppages were likely to arise when the workgroup was confronted with unacceptable working conditions. Men adhered to a stringent interpretation of the conditions in which they would consent to sell their labour. In the post-war period when the operation of the informal system of pay negotiation meant that men to could directly influence their rate of pay, disputes were likelier overtly /to/ identify concerns about pay and were frequently provoked not by workplace conditions but by the arrival of the set's pay-note.

Such small scale unofficial stoppages were reported as a characteristic response to the shift in working conditions from the stalls to those of the

²⁰⁸ Fred Lindop, 'Unofficial Militancy in the Royal Group of Docks 1945 - 67', Oral History Journal Vol. 11 No. 2 (1983), pp. 21 - 33.

mechanised face. The composite teams which worked in stalls were responsible for virtually all aspects of the workplace environment. The men who experienced the transition from hand-getting to machine mining in the anthracite district interviewed by George Ewart Evans described the techniques employed in stall working as virtually being a craft tradition.²⁰⁹ The time and effort which each set lavished on tidying and securing its stall was not only a testament to the workman's pride in his task but was a sound investment which made the stall easier to work.²¹⁰ Under the longwall system, though workmen remained in the same station on the face from shift to shift, the workman's degree of identification with his place was greatly diminished. This is not surprising since he was only resident in the place for a third of the productive cycle and other work teams were now responsible for preparing it to be worked. The fragmentation of the extractive process into separate jobs prevented sets from identifying with the completion of the whole task. This alienation was blamed for carelessness in the prosecution of the subsidiary tasks. Trist and Bamforth described how the interactive culture of the longwall production cycle was characterised by a habit of 'mutual scapegoating' between the different groups which led to a grudging and suspicious atmosphere which further compromised the efficiency of the sets.²¹¹

Since the company had destroyed the autonomy of the composite work teams which had performed most of the procedures required to win coal in the stalls it therefore assumed responsibility for co-ordinating the efforts of the dedicated work teams which replaced it. The pattern of disputes shows that the miners had a habit of throwing this fact back in the company's face. Any interruptions in the productive cycle which were not directly the fault of the work-group could be the flash point for an unofficial stoppage. Breakdowns in the haulage system were typical occasions for stoppages. When machinery failed, sets often refused to wait for repairs to be completed and sometimes threw up entire shifts after relatively short

²⁰⁹ George Ewart Evans, From the Mouths of Men, pp. 125 - 126.

²¹⁰ Hywel Jeffries quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²¹¹ Trist and Bamforth, 'Social and Psychological Consequences of the Longwall System', pp. 32 - 33.

interruptions. Other situations which provoked stoppages were the hiatus caused by a set having to wait for supplies and delays caused by low air pressure in the ranges which powered pneumatic tools. Llay Main and Hafod output books scarcely conceal the impatience of the officials recording the stoppages. One afternoon coaling shift was interrupted at Hafod Colliery in July 1939:

Men from 80's [facel Wall and Bench [seam] came out at 6:0 pm due to haulage engine trouble. Got it right but the men came out - did not clear.²¹²

9 caps / > /
for S. M. 12. 12. 12 /

~~While~~ at Llay Main a morning shift was interrupted in February 1936:

AM 233's [facel colliers only filled 44 tubs they came out at 4.15 due to no timber, but there was plenty in the district they would not wait for this to be brought onto the face.²¹³

As well as reacting against mechanical failures and lapses in official foresight, sets sometimes took the failure of other work teams to complete their own tasks as pretexts for stoppages. Sets regularly refused to wait for conveyors to be reassembled or, as happened at Hafod Colliery in 1937, for the cutting process to be completed:

AM 40 men from 80's [face Wall and Bench seam] went back on this shift the place was not yet ready when the set got to the fireman's cabin and on hearing this they went back to the surface.²¹⁴

~~Use~~ Sets frequently refused to depute men to work on the haulage system when ranks of the haulage hands were depleted by absenteeism.²¹⁵

Though they accepted some aspects of the new conditions of work, sets steadily refused to accept the consequences of the company's failures in

²¹² CROH CB/8/6, Hafod Output Book, 7 July 1939.
²¹³ CROH CB/8/3, Llay Main Output Book, 19 Feb 1936.
²¹⁴ CROH CB/8/6 Hafod Output Book, 6 Jan 1937.
²¹⁵ For example: CROH CB/8/3, Llay Main Output Book, 17 Mar 1936.

its attempts to secure cycle control.

Stoppages were not dictated by a pragmatic consideration of immediate financial interest and represented a much greater loss of earnings than interruptions in the work dictated by mechanical breakdowns ever threatened. Since teams were compensated for breakdowns by payments in consideration of standing time, economic rationality would have dictated that they should maximise their earnings by waiting patiently for the interruption to clear. Although these payments were of course paid at a lower rate than could have been achieved by filling coal, work teams forfeited these monies entirely by striking and therefore had nothing to gain from declaring a stoppage. The rationale for refusing to work shifts in such situations is that stoppages were intended to be demonstrations of the set's determination to refuse the burdens of cycle control. By refusing to work in conditions which would have compromised their rate of earnings sets qualified the management's degree of control over the workplace by dictating the conditions in which they would sell their labour.

-/ The type of dispute most frequently recalled by respondents describing the post-war period occurred on pay-day. The payment of the set was an intricate ritual in itself. Wages were always kept a week in hand. In the interwar period wages were paid to sets rather than to individuals. On Friday, members of the set would gather on the colliery yard and, usually squatting in a circle, would distribute the shares of the wages to their members.²¹⁶ Even when individuals were paid separately, the pay-note which detailed the breakdown of the set's earnings was subjected to intense scrutiny when it arrived on the following Friday. The discovery of a discrepancy on the note could become the trigger for a dispute. Dealing with the grievances arising from the pay note was an onerous but routine duty for the colliery manager. One manager recalled: 'there was a rumpus and a strike outside the manager's office every Friday! There would be a queue every Friday half a mile long with people with disputes about their wages.'²¹⁷ While officials used all their diplomatic skills to mollify

²¹⁶ Mr. Williams sen., WMP C/1984/66.

²¹⁷ Interview with Tom Ellis.

disgruntled sets, an unsatisfactory interview could crystallize discontent into a determination to strike.

Typical occasions for dissatisfaction were the alleged breaches of oral contracts achieved between the deputy and the set about deadwork payments or the over-ruling of such agreements by senior officials. One man who served as a chargehand in Hafod Colliery in the thirties recalled that when his set had been halted by a breakdown, the undermanager had placated them by commissioning them to perform extra support work in the district:

Well anyhow, and when I went Friday to fetch the wages this thing wasn't there. I had some awkward people "We're not going down!", you know. "We're not going in!"

I went to see the manager [in his office in] the baths. He said, "Come up, I'll have a talk to you." They was threatening to go home [...]. It was wrong for me to go and see him in the baths [alone] but I was anxious to keep the men without going home. So we were all together outside on the yard, ready to go home. He came out the office and he shouted "Bugger it! Don't go!", those were the words he used.

When I went to the office, it's as true as I'm sitting down, a red ink had been put over each man's wages for that day he had promised to put it in and another undermanager had rubbed it out. "Joe," he said, "Don't worry," and he made the wages up for us and they went down the pit. But they threatened to go home that day.²¹⁸

Sets defended deadwork and other discretionary payments which supplemented their piece-rate earnings. In January and February of 1950 Hafod Colliery saw a series of stoppages reckoned to have cost the colliery 2660 tons of coal.²¹⁹ The dispute began when the manager observed that the sums paid in compensation for standing time greatly exceeded the time actually lost by breakdowns and appointed a 'checker' to monitor the situation. Observing the checker at his station, the set refused to work for

²¹⁸ Interview with Joe Williams.

²¹⁹ PRO COAL 26/94, NCB Reports by Divisional Labour Directors - Hafod Colliery: 23 - 25 Jan, 3 - 20 Feb, 1950.

2/ three shifts and, when they resumed, adopted 'go slow' tactics. In 1947 the Coal Board introduced a five day week and attempted to compensate for lost production time by instituting a bonus system, whereby an extra shift would be credited to the set if they had worked consistently for the other five.²²⁰ The innovation was intended to improve productivity. Ironically, the suspension of this bonus could become the occasion of a dispute in itself - particularly where the set considered that its refusal to work a shift had been justified by circumstances. A coaling set of 60 men refused to descend Llay Main on 7 July 1949 disputing the loss of such a bonus payment - incurring an estimated loss of 540 tons of coal.²²¹

The stoppages occasioned by such disputes were, considered purely in terms of economic rationality, entirely irrational. The first condition of the conciliation procedures agreed between unions and employers was that men should remain at work while their claims were investigated: the Coal Board insisted that its managers should not negotiate with men involved in unofficial stoppages.²²² In leaving the pit, the men not only lost the wages they could have earned on that shift but forfeited any claim on the disputed monies. In the period under study, no recorded case was ever resolved in the favour of a striking set, even where the conciliation procedure determined that their initial grievances were just, when the set had refused to work.²²³ Once more, sets used stoppages to demonstrate that they would resist being exploited or having their goodwill taken for granted. If economic rationality is to be sought in these disputes it must be that the men considered that their sacrifices were, in the long run, a worthwhile investment.

²²⁰ William Ashworth, The History of the British Coal Industry, p. 148.

²²¹ PRO COAL 26/94, NCB Reports by Divisional Labour Directors - Llay Main Colliery: 7 - 11 July 1949.

²²² Tom Ellis, Mines and Men, p. 85.

²²³ CROH D/NM/331, Minutes of Llay Main Disputes Committee 1941 - 1957; CROH D/NM/564 Llay Main Lodge, miscellaneous correspondence c. 1934 - 1937; CROH D/NM/701 Hafod Lodge, miscellaneous correspondence c. 1942 - 1954.

Accounts of disputes reveal that there were usually some elements of the workgroup that were more militant than others but that the rest of the group would generally abide by a decision to strike taken by some of its members.²²⁴ Rather than acting as a focus for unofficial militancy, the former chagemen interviewed took a conciliatory stance in disputes and while zealous in the cause of the set, generally attempted to forestall stoppages. The decision of the set to throw in its lot with its dissident elements was doubtless conditioned by the fact that a minimum number of fillers was required for a worthwhile performance. There was also a reluctance to open a breach in solidarity which might weaken the set in future confrontations or allow men to be victimised. The tacit and acknowledged symbol that a man had decided he was not going down that day was the up-ending of his water bottle. One man recalled seeing the symbols used in disputes at Llay Main in the fifties:

It would only need one to empty his bottle upside down [...]. Outside the lamproom this would happen, 'cos you'd all be by the lamproom at Llay, it was a sheltered spot, 'cos the wind was predominantly coming from Hope Mountain way.

It just needed one who was feeling like that to just tip his bottle upside down and that'd be it! You'd lose face if you went to refill it. So two or three would start it off then the whole crowd would go, just like that.²²⁵

Industrial psychologists consider that different types of conflict may function as alternatives. Knowles concluded that figures covering the end-period of the Second World War suggest that strikes and absenteeism in coal-mining were to some extent "interchangeable"²²⁶ while Handy alleged that throughout the fifties there was a progressive tendency for discontent

²²⁴ Wellisz, 'Strikes in Coal Mining', p. 364.

²²⁵ Interview with Ithel Kelly.

²²⁶ K.G.J.C. Knowles, Strikes: a Study in Industrial Conflict (Oxford, 1952), p. 225.

in the mines to express itself in absenteeism rather than as strike action.²²⁷ Once more, the rise in recorded absenteeism may be a function of more co-ordinated record keeping, since it is certain that the phenomenon of workplace absenteeism was never more intensively studied than in the first decade of the Coal Board's existence.²²⁸

At pit and set level, it is indeed difficult to differentiate between disputes and absenteeism. In some cases, the definitions are effectively arbitrary since they depended entirely on the circumstances in which the non-attendance was recorded. An event was recorded as a dispute when a set ceased work or refused to descend and registered a grievance. If the same grievances resulted in a tacit protest, the event was regarded as an instance of absenteeism. Some grievances expressed themselves in absenteeism: bitterness about the pay note at the end of the week could prompt men to pay management back by taking a holiday early in the next week. Equally, some stoppages were apparently prompted by little more than the wish for an impromptu holiday and even occasions when protests were noted cannot be rigidly separated from involuntary absenteeism. Respondents noted that disputes were likelier to occur on fine days ~~and on~~ pay days and other occasions when leisure opportunities beckoned.²²⁹ Respondents described longwall filling as a tedious and strenuous activity. While any loss of wages defies economic rationality, if workers use a stoppage as a means of gaining relief from a work situation they find oppressive, it is perfectly rational behaviour. One man who worked at Llay in the late fifties remembered that the afternoon shift offered the greatest

²²⁷ L.J. Handy, 'Absenteeism and Attendance in the British Coal Industry - Post War Trends', British Journal of Industrial Relations Vol. 19 (1968), pp. 37 - 50.

²²⁸ See the account of the various studies in: F.D.K. Liddell, 'Attendance in the Coal-Mining Industry', British Journal of Sociology (1962), p. 78.

²²⁹ McCormick noted that in Yorkshire most strikes occurred on the afternoon shift and thought that this might represent the influence of leisure opportunities: McCormick, 'Strikes in the Yorkshire Coalfield, 1947 - 1963', p. 175.

temptation:

We'd have a row on a Friday and the day-shift would come up and say 'They haven't watered the face!' and that'd be it like! y'know. If they hadn't watered the face you were home! You had your pay packet you were down the Crown we'n' you?²³⁰

Though some disputes were bitter and protracted others seemed to be spontaneous and dramatic confrontations which seemed to have a cathartic effect. The frank and forthright exchange of views and/or a short period of absence could dispell accumulating tension. One local colliery manager recognised that even when negotiations were loud and unreasonable, they could have a functional utility²³¹ as confrontations allowed men to 'release their bottled up tensions in a shouting match with me'.²³²

Though absenteeism was a diffuse phenomenon it was particularly apparent that there were certain days which the colliers regarded as traditional holidays. Though observance of these days had little to do with confrontations between particular workgroups and the management, these holidays could themselves become the focus of conflict as management sought to quash them. The ranks of the workforce were usually depleted after the Easter, Whit and August Bank Holiday stoppages, and on New Year's Day, sometimes so badly that the pit was obliged to play. An important football match, Wrexham Carnival and the week of the Chester Cup²³³ were also occasions for general absenteeism. The decision to observe these holidays was not prompted solely by fecklessness but was informed by the determination of the men not to have every aspect of their working

²³⁰ Mr. Williams jun., WMP C/1984/66.

²³¹ Hyman, Strikes, p. 113.

²³² Tom Ellis, Mines and Men, p. 85.

²³³ In May 1934 the Llay Main output book laconically recorded an outbreak of 'Racing fever among the colliers': CROH CB/8/3, Llay Main Output Book, 10 May 1934.

environment dictated to them by the management. Miners had their own investment in these holidays and regarded them as popular rights, and even believed that it was unlucky not to observe them.²³⁴ Workmen were once more asserting their own estimation of the worth of their time and labour by trading the lost opportunity to make wages against anticipated leisure.²³⁵

regulate!

This part of the study has concerned itself with the view that the organisation of work implied particular social relationships between the workers and their superiors and among the men of the workgroup. The socio-technical system was defined and controlled by the colliery management and the management used the pay system in its attempts to ~~control~~ the behaviour of the workforce. However, the fact that the management held more cards actually seemed to encourage more skilful play on the part of the workmen. In the workplace, the definition of an appropriate level of work is not an abstract consideration but is necessary for day-to-day survival. The workgroup was not only capable of framing its own definition of an appropriate level of commitment but was actually capable of imposing it. Workers in the pits of North Wales asserted their definition through holding to customary practices and by threatening and carrying out unofficial stoppages: a complex of behaviour conditioned by a vivid culture of workplace bargaining.

If work is viewed as dead time, workplace culture can only be a residual factor, a means of consolation or escape, which may be found in breaks, in temporary stoppages and in time stolen from the company. However, 'culture', the experience of commonality between members of the workgroup threaded through all aspects of the experience of colliery workmen in Llay Main and Hafod Collieries. If colliery officials sometimes failed to understand that the commitment of their men to the industrial ethic was not unalloyed, they were very frequently reminded of it. In view of the fact that the instinctive solidarity of the primary workgroup was one of the

²³⁴ See the following chapter.

²³⁵ Wellisz, 'Strikes in Coal Mining', p. 358.

primary characteristics of life in local pits, it is worth examining how some of the links of loyalty to the workgroup were forged. The next chapter will describe some of the themes which characterise workplace narratives and examine how, through these narratives, workmen asserted symbolic possession of the workplace, affirmed their allegiance to one another and marginalised the threats represented by outsiders and by social change in the industry.

Chapter Five:

Horizontal Relationships
in the Workplace.

The most striking feature of the interviews with coal miners considered in this study is their concentration on relationships in the workplace and upon the oral culture which articulated those relationships. This concentration is a reflection of the concerns and interests of the respondents themselves since the material used has been gleaned largely -/ from open interviews which feature a great deal of self[^] volunteered information. Accounting for the prominence of this lore of comradeship should be a priority in any thoroughgoing assessment of these sources. It is hard to believe that these nostalgic testaments have emerged unbidden and unprecedented. The contrary case, that contemporaneous and subsequent discussions shaped these narratives, and that they contributed to the construction of an ethic of comradeship which codified expectations of miners' conduct and ultimately shaped the behaviour of local mineworkers, is preferred.

Reminiscences were typically presented in the form of narrative stories. While it might be considered that the intrusion of the raconteur's personality compromises their worth as objective historical accounts, it must be remembered that story-telling is a uniquely human activity:

The human being, alone among creatures of the earth is a story-telling animal: sees the present rising out of a past, heading into a future, perceives reality in narrative form.¹

Stories are symbolic reconstructions of events. Their form owes much to the art of the storyteller and the tastes of the audience. The teller takes the material presented by the chaos of everyday experience and refines it into a coherent narrative. Typically, sequences of events are strung along a

¹ M. Novak, '"Story" and "Experience"', in J.B. Wiggins (ed.), Religion As A Story (New York, 1975), pp. 175 - 6, cited in Yiannis Gabriel, 'On Organisational Stories and Myths: Why It Is Easier To Slay a Dragon Than to Kill a Myth', International Sociology Vol. 6 No. 4 (December 1991), p. 427.

thread of causality, the actions of individuals are described in terms of a consistent character and incidental facts are incorporated into the central themes of the narrative by being invested with a significance they did not originally possess. The storyteller may seek to generate an emotional response in the audience, perhaps by presenting a flattering picture of the social group to which the narrator, and perhaps, the audience belong. However, these embellishments, elaborations and distortions are not necessarily obstacles to inquiry. They may in themselves offer valuable evidence, not about the objective circumstances of the historical incidents they presume to describe, but about a matter of equal import: what the groups that tell and hear the tales choose to believe happened.²

The term 'ideology' is used to describe any situation where a system of ideas serves vested interests in society. This chapter will argue that the narratives gathered by interviews were part of the ideological system of local mine workers. The attempt to unravel these narratives and discern separate strands of objective description and prescriptive analysis would be futile since they were told and heard as part of the same communal discourse. Though the chief characteristic of an ideology is its instrumentality in achieving the cohesion of a social group, there are limits to the distortions it may countenance, since to win the support of adherents, an ideological system must embrace a reasonably coherent and plausible account of apparent social reality.

The most winning evidence for the presence of such an ideological system is the convergence in the accounts offered by respondents. Respondents offered the same tales, or recognisable variants of them, in narratives. Anecdotes featured similar motifs and the analysis offered by respondents was remarkably uniform. Samuel Schragger encountered similar convergences in the narratives of pioneer settlers and loggers in Idaho. He concluded that many of the themes visited in reminiscences had merited much discussion in

² Ibid., p. 429.

these communities and that communal discussions of the past and interviews were therefore contexts for the repetition of 'pre-existent narratives'.³

Discussions about the past served contemporary purposes for the miners. Oral culture was one of the means men used to accommodate themselves to the risks and dangers of the pit and was also an arena where the workplace community defined itself. Communal discussions were a dynamic process through which the community reproduced itself, socialising new members and asserting its prerogatives against the influence of outsiders. However, the meanings of symbols were contested and this chapter will seek to show that the accounts of the past offered by some groups had more weight than those offered by others. Some of these narratives appear to have emerged as affirmations of the identity of the working community, and particularly in response to what were perceived to be external threats.

Apart from the accounts of pit life offered by oral respondents and autobiographers we have little evidence about the nature of oral culture in the pit. However, the material presented in current discussions about the past can to a certain extent be regarded as representative of the oral culture of past historical milieux. When the historian recovers a document he or she should not only consider the social relationships which led to its creation but should also consider the circumstances of its deposition which allowed it to survive to posterity. It is important to take a similar attitude when considering the narratives, anecdotes, jokes and nicknames recovered through interviews. The vernacular account of a community's past may be richly illustrative of its concerns in past historical milieux. The oyster protects its sensitive tissues by covering an alien piece of grit with pearl: the pearl is thus evidence of crisis in the oyster's existence and of its spirited response. We could regard a genre of tales about

³ Samuel Schragger, 'What Is Social In Oral History?', International Journal of Oral History Vol. 4 (1983), pp. 76 - 78.

a particular theme circulating within a community in a similar manner. If nothing else, such tales indicate that an issue was extensively discussed and was very near the community's most intimate concerns. As the oyster neutralised the grit by making a pearl, it seems that the community often rendered troublesome experiences safe by shaping them into anecdotes.

Observers of mining culture have often remarked upon the miners' adherence to their conception of their own past.⁴ It is apparent that these narratives are invested with a powerful sense of history. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate the ways in which the past was evoked by historical actors in response to shifts from the small family pits to the large cosmopolitan pits and in the face of advancing technology and the tightening grip of bureaucratic control.

It is easy to assume the existence of an oral culture which contributes to the cohesion of the community but it is rather harder to describe in concrete terms how it influenced the community in day to day life. Narratives about the workplace seemed to play a significant role in bringing men to the pit in the first place. Workplace interactions spilled out from the confines of the pit and saturated daily life in mining villages. Vicarious participation in experiences of friends and kin meant that conditions of the mine and the mores of pit society came as no surprise to a local lad.⁵⁶ One man did not realise how inured to the realities of the pit he had been when he first descended until he witnessed the apparent culture-shock experienced by Bevin Boys drafted from outside

⁴ Ferdynand Zweig, Men In the Pits (London, 1948), p. 10 ff.; Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, Coal Is Our Life 2nd edn (London, 1969), pp. 56 - 58, pp. 80 - 81.

⁵ Tom Ellis, Mines and Men - Mining Engineering (Reading, 1971), p. 12.

⁶ Sid Chaplin, author of the novel of Durham mining life The Thin Seam made similar observations about the role of pit talk in making the pit a glamorous environment to the young men of his generation: Sid Chaplin, 'Durham Mining Villages', University of Durham, Working Papers in Sociology No. 3 (1971), pp. 23 - 24.

mining areas to work in the local pits:

... it must have been a traumatic thing for some of these people to come into this sort of environment.

With us, we'd already got a lot of it from what we'd heard from day one, sort of thing, older brothers and fathers, talking about the pit. And the terms were known, and some of the stories and all the rest of it, were already embroidered into your life.⁷

Though they did not disguise the dirt and the danger, discussions with members of the family and former schoolfriends could make the pit a glamorous place. Evocations of manly comradeship in the darkness below reinforced the conviction that mining was man's work. The appeal of these narratives apparently influenced many of the young men of the area to follow in their fathers' footsteps. Many parents, aware of the dangers and the drudgery of the mine, did not want their sons to enter the mine but found that this urge to conform to a recognised ideal of manhood was stronger than any argument they could deploy:

My Dad was a collier. He said he'd break my neck if I went down the pit.

But you wanted to be a man, with a fag in your mouth and be everybody's friend. Steal a pint when your Dad wasn't looking.⁸

The broadest definition of 'workplace culture' would describe it as non-work activity in the workplace - any deviation from the serious business of production. However, scholars recognise that even the most blatantly

⁷ Interview with Ithel Kelly.

⁸ Interview with Herbert Davies quoted in 'The Shadow of the Pit': Evening Leader, 5 Oct 1993.

unproductive of non-work activities may actually expedite the general task of production.⁹ Though horseplay and workplace humour were frequently a focus of resistance to the authority of supervisors, they also allowed workers a means of releasing destructive tension and built group cohesion.¹⁰ It was the opinion of one local colliery manager that, 'the camaraderie of the miner was no piece of sentimental humbug', but was rather a crucial part of the life of the mine, without which he doubted whether 'any coal would ever have got to the surface of the mine'.¹¹ Even if oral culture was largely elaborated outside the pit, it articulated relationships between members of the workgroup, codified expectations of conduct and formed the bedrock of common assumptions which defined the group as an entity and made it capable of acting in concert. The group's culture rendered it capable of working together effectively and, by the same token, equipped it to mobilise in its own defence.

Oral culture defined the relationships between workers in the pit and as such may be used to some extent as an index of the intensity of those relationships. Though the reminiscences gathered from former Llay Main and Hafod workmen are superficially similar, narratives about the two pits exhibit some interesting ~~differences~~[^]. The two pits differed, both in their perception and representation of their own characteristics, and in the degree of elaboration apparent in their workplace lore. It seems likely that these differences in the oral and social culture of the two pits were conditioned by historical factors.

The catchment areas the pits recruited from were quite different. Respondents recalled that Hafod was oriented towards a few local communities which supplied a large part of its workforce while the larger

⁹ Cato Wadell, 'The Hidden Work of Everyday Life', in Sandra Wallman (ed.), The Social Anthropology of Work, Association of Social Anthropologists Monographs, No. 19, (London, 1979), p. 373.

¹⁰ A. E. Green, 'Only Kidding - Joking Among Coal Miners', in A. E. Green and J. D. A. Widdowson (eds.), Language, Culture and Tradition (Leeds and Sheffield, 1981).

¹¹ Ellis, Mines and Men, pp. 64 - 65.

pits, like Llay Main and Gresford, drew men from communities spread over much larger areas. Though Llay Main had its own colliery village, it still received workers from the furthest parts of the coalfield. Hafod men were consequently likelier than Llay Main men to work alongside kinsmen, neighbours and associates. Llay Main men found that since their colleagues came from widely scattered communities, they were frequently strangers.

The testimony of respondents about the composition of the workforces of local pits can be validated with reference to a 1959 Area manpower survey.¹² Though the survey was ~~taken~~ rather late in the day to be taken as an accurate statement of the position from the twenties to the sixties, it can plausibly be accepted as a fair statement of the position for the latter part of it.¹³ No earlier surveys are available for comparison but likely trends may be guessed at. At the same time that the closure of the smaller collieries to the West of Wrexham in the twenties and thirties/ was forcing their workforces to seek employment further afield, the increasing availability of motor transport facilitated commuting. Both factors operated to weaken the relationships between particular pits and the nearby communities.¹⁴

As discussed above, the history of the two pits was also different. Hafod once worked with hand getting stalls, a technological system which gave men a greater degree of control over the labour process and put a premium on human relationships. While Hafod experienced a transition in extractive technologies and the concomitant patterns of social relations in the thirties, Llay Main was from the beginning, a mechanised pit subject to a bureaucratic management regime.

¹² CROH D/NM/1107, N.C.B. North Western Division, North Wales Area: Manpower Survey, 28th February 1959.

¹³ Fortunately the survey was taken before the progressive rundown of manpower at Llay Main which began in 1959 had taken effect: CROH D/NM/110, N.C.B. Minutes of the Meeting of the North Wales Area Executive Committee and the Area Board, 1 June 1959.

¹⁴ M.O.H., 1928, 1931.

While respondents perceived and were able to describe these differences, a more detached analysis of the oral lore they transmitted confirms the impression that Hafod was a more closely united community. Hafod men depicted their pit as an intimate and friendly place. While Llay Main men claimed no less, they did not describe the prescriptive attitudes and the claustrophobic atmosphere that frequently characterised social intercourse in Hafod Colliery. The volume of extant tales and anecdotes collected from Hafod Colliery is considerably larger than the volume of oral artefacts gleaned from Llay Main. While it would be tempting to attempt a quantitative assessment this imbalance ultimately reflects little more than the bias of the sample of available sources. Nevertheless, a subjective assessment of the narratives reveals the impression that Hafod Colliery sustained a much more elaborate workplace lore and had a much more robustly constructed sense of its own identity.

Coping With Stress and Fear.

The coal mine is a harsh physical environment which harbours many dangers. Constant watchfulness and the awareness of the real likelihood of injury, or even of death, put workmen under great psychological strain. In the same way that no miner could expect to escape injury or some degree of industrial disease during a career in the pit, ~~no miner~~ could hope to evade the psychological attrition caused by his keen awareness of the perils of that environment. Oral culture stood between the miner and this psychological attrition. However, the experience of work was not a solitary but a social one. The intense culture of comradeship and the oral culture which described and expressed it functioned as a psychological refuge and resource for mutual support. Sid Chaplin described the pit as 'a wrought place', every aspect of the underground environment was observed and named, fears were described and risks evaluated. Chaplin claimed that the pit was softened and personalised by the process.¹⁵

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Custom and tradition enshrined a range of devices and techniques for coping with stress and mobilising the sympathy and support of comrades. An accident underground was frequently marked by a symbolic period of withdrawal from work. It was accepted practice for the workgroup to leave the pit after it had been affected by a fatal accident. The Llay Main Colliery output book recorded one such withdrawal:

25th March 1936. AM Fatal accident on 243's at 11.15 am.

PM 243s did not turn in due to fatal accident, 45/50
colliers.¹⁶

Withdrawal in sympathy for a fatality could sometimes close the colliery as

¹⁵ Sid Chaplin, 'Durham Mining Villages', pp. 26 - 27.

¹⁶ CROH CB/8/3, Llay Main Output Book, 25 Mar 1936.

it did at Hafod in December 1938:

19th December 1938. PM Man injured by fall of coal on Saturday died on this day and the men played in sympathy.¹⁷

Although folklorists have frequently imputed a superstitious dread as the reason behind this widely observed custom, it is apparent that men ceased their labours mainly as a sign of respect for the deceased. However, withdrawal had a functional utility - it is evident that many miners did not wish to compromise their own safety by returning to work while they were brooding over the event.¹⁸

The tradition seems to have been more strongly established at Hafod Colliery. Seven instances of withdrawal after a fatality have been positively identified from the Llay Main and Hafod Colliery output books. There were three instances of withdrawal at Llay Main in the 35 years years between 1920 and 1955, and four instances have been identified at Hafod over the 24 years between 1933 and 1957.¹⁹

In the modern age such customs became anathema to the colliery companies. Mechanised pits had high fixed costs which made continuity of production an imperative. In South Wales, the Powell-Duffryn company which combined its aggressive expansion with a programme of mechanisation and rationalisation, opposed the customary practice of taking a half shift holiday for a comrade's funeral. In 1937, the company even prosecuted seven men for taking unauthorised leave of absence on such an occasion.²⁰

¹⁷ CROH CB/8/6, Hafod Output Book, 19 Dec 1938.

¹⁸ see Lydia Fish, The Folklore of the Miners of the North East of England (Norwood Pa., 1975), Appendix E, pp. 59 - 60.

¹⁹ CROH CB/8/3, Llay Main Output Book, 1920 - 1929, 1930 - 1931, 1933 - 1942, CROH CB/8/7 1944 - 1945; CROH CB/8/6, Hafod Output Book, 1933 -1945, CROH CB/8/7 1947.

²⁰ Kim Howells, A View From Below: Tradition, Experience and Nationalisation in the South Wales Coalfield. 1937 - 1957 (Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 1979), pp. 121 - 122.

By the time of nationalization the practice was in decline in North Wales. In 1950, an investigation by the Area Manager found that after most of the fatal accidents in the period since 1947, despite withdrawal by a few men, in practically every case the pit had worked on normally. In view of the limited effects of the practice, and perhaps recognising the sensitive nature of the subject, the Conciliation Board found it inexpedient to attempt to delineate areas from which men might withdraw after an accident.²¹ This decline could be attributed to the ~~decline~~ of the small 'family' pits of the interwar period. While it was true that a casualty was likelier to be a complete stranger than a comrade, it seems that the decline did not betoken a lack of respect so much as it described the dilution of the dense associational networks which had harboured and transmitted such practices.

While customary practice sanctioned withdrawal after an accident the oral culture of the miners was not so reticent about the dangers of pit life. Few genres of tales are so prolific as stories about accidents and typically, ~~few~~ of the grisly details are ~~spared~~. Accidents could be as varied in form as there were tasks in the pit and could occur because of simple carelessness or despite the greatest pains. Injuries varied in severity and death could come suddenly or linger agonisingly. Most miners could illustrate the grim permutations with a library of anecdotes.

Despite the fact that the individual miner was in much more danger from random accidents, the popular conception of tragedy in the mine centres on the disaster, the loss by sudden explosion or inundation of tens, even of hundreds of lives. North Wales had the misfortune to experience the reality of a serious colliery accident, in fact 'the last great pit disaster in Britain'²² during the interwar period. An explosion at Gresford Colliery

²¹ CROH D/NM/745, NWMA, Sub Committee of the District Conciliation Board, 15 Feb 1950.

²² Michael Pollard, The Hardest Work Under Heaven - the Life and Death of the British Coal Miner (London, 1984), p. 162.

on September 22 1934 took the lives of 261 workmen. The lives of three members of the local rescue brigades which were summoned to the stricken pit were extinguished by noxious gases. The six survivors from the affected section of the mine effected their own rescue. The attempts to fight the fire proved futile, with the rescuers advancing only a few yards into the inferno. Despite their heroic exertions, the would-be rescuers must have known that the chance of seeing their comrades again was a slight one. A surface worker was killed on the following Tuesday when a further explosion blew off the seal hastily erected over the shafts of the burning pit.

Many Rhos men worked in Gresford, originally driven there by the 1932 stoppage at Hafod. Some Llay men also worked at Gresford and the three rescue men who died in the disaster came from Llay Main's brigade. The disaster touched every local community and most families mourned the loss of a friend or a family member. This traumatic event tore at the heart of the community. One Bevin boy drafted to the area in 1943 found the events of September 1934 were sufficiently close in time:

... for mention of "Gresford" in the neighbourhood to cause averted or lengthened faces. The topic was treated as cancer used to be: with bated breath and a euphemism and the subject dropped as soon as possible. Sometimes it was discussed down the mine and I got used to a jerked thumb in indication and such news as "My two brothers are in there", referring to the sealed Dennis section of the pit where the accident had happened.²³

Notwithstanding the reticence reported in the forties, personal experiences of the disaster are a consistent theme in reminiscences gathered in later years. Despite its grim associations, local respondents still find it imperative to speak of the events surrounding the accident. The disaster and its sequel in the Court of Inquiry have generated a

²³ John S. Wiffen, Gresford's Bevin Boys - A Wartime Miner's Experiences Underground in North Wales (Corwen, 1991), p. 16.

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'considerable folklore'.²⁴ This lore has many facets. It embraces bitter criticism of the economic order which squandered life so profligately. It also contains testaments to belief in the action of a superempirical realm which cast some into the fire and whimsically plucked ~~some brands~~ from the burning. Whatever its other characteristics this lore certainly illustrates the dangers of the mine.

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It would be easy to infer a simple didactic purpose for stories about accidents and disasters and to regard them as being cautionary tales warning against carelessness and complacency, more immediate counterparts to the facile slogans of the Coal Board's safety campaigns.²⁵ However, no artificial stress has to be introduced into such tales for any listener to understand that blind fate and bad luck accounted for a high proportion of accidents and scrapes. These tales provided a way of explicitly facing up to the unpalatable truths. ~~These tales~~ speak about the dangerous nature of mining work and the fundamental ~~facts about the~~ fragility of life underground. Many societies places taboos on the discussion of misfortune but the miners had a robust tradition of speaking about such events. One student of workplace lore noted that such tales occurred in a rash immediately after a serious accident and suggested a cathartic function as workers sought to 'dissolve [their] fears in a comrade's tragedy or borrow courage from an heroic fellow worker'.²⁶

Tales about accidents bore other messages to the miners. Accidents were usually a spur for the most exemplary conduct on the part of their colleagues. Tales recount the skill and fearlessness of miners clearing falls, the calmness and competence of the first aiders and ambulance men, and the absolute dependability of comrades. Many of the endeavours recounted could be considered foolhardy or futile: men endangered their own safety by racing to clear a fall and carried on attempts at

²⁴ Pollard, The Hardest Work Under Heaven, pp. 170 - 171.

²⁵ Jack Santino, 'Characteristics of Occupational Narrative', Western Folklore Vol. XXXVII No. 3, (July 1978), p. 202.

²⁶ Archie Green, 'American Labor Lore: Its Meaning and Uses', Industrial Relations Vol. 4, No. 2, (1965), p. 55.

resuscitation long after any realistic hopes of recovery had passed. Kropotkin thought that the accounts of heroism which lived in the 'village epics'²⁷ sustained by the oral traditions of the mining communities created expectations of conduct which actually encouraged the extraordinary exertions of underground rescuers. The vividness of this lore and the the emotional investment clearly made in it by respondents, might lead us to concur with Kropotkin's observations. If a man knew he could expect no pity from the harsh environment, he could at least take comfort from the knowledge that he could expect compassion and consideration in abundance from his comrades, should the worst happen.

²⁷ Peter Kropotkin, Mutual Aid (Harmondsworth, 1939), pp. 218 - 219.

Occupational Belief.

Many miners' tales tell of disaster averted and many of these tales feature superstitious motifs. Towler and Chamberlain observe that superstitious belief was not usually expressed as a systematically elaborated set of codes and beliefs.²⁸ In the North Wales coalfield it certainly seems to have been the case that superstitious beliefs were largely expressed through a diffuse lore of narratives and belief legends. Respondents presented these tales as narratives about historical incidents and belief in the historicity of these tales was an important factor in establishing their authority and relevance. Local discussions about superstitious lore seem to have had the effect of localising traditions which folklorists and social observers reported as being widely diffused. Comparing surviving evidence about these incidents to their sequels in the belief legends presented by oral lore revealed that miners' stories were often not accurate reflections of events and the oral sequels of these incidents tended to stress *superstitious motifs and the expense of authentic details.*

While miners were acutely aware that the dangers of the mine could not always be avoided and generally took a fatalistic attitude to danger, the occupational beliefs that they cited with various degrees of conviction described a very different world. Superstitious beliefs focussed on 'adjustment possibilities'²⁹, the circumstances in which the miner could avoid danger. Occupational beliefs stressed the predictability of danger. Bad luck was confined to certain specific circumstances: some dates on the calendar were reckoned to be unlucky; certain agents were identified as bearers of ill luck, other agents were regarded as harbingers which provided easily intelligible warnings. This section will discuss the view that the circulation of such belief stories served a cathartic and consolatory purpose.

²⁸ R. Towler and A. Chamberlain, 'Common Religion', A Sociological Yearbook of Religion No. 6 (1973).

²⁹ A.W. Gouldner, Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy, (1955), p. 117.

The most prolific genre of superstitious beliefs seems to have concerned occasions when the miner, impressed by any one of a number of foreboding signs, might abandon his journey to work.³⁰ Accounts about turning back concerned the early morning, the period when men had to rise to be ready for the day shift. The agents which inspired dread in the superstitious miner could be human or animal. Animal harbingers of danger seemed to have a positive warning role. Birds played an important part in this lore. Crows were for North Wales miners, birds of ill omen. One local miner recalled that:

If they saw a crow they'd turn back ... If they saw a crow in the morning, it was bad.³¹

Another collier recalled that, 'A pigeon hovering anywhere near the pit head [meant] no work that day ...'^{32, 33}. Human agents seemed to be the bearers of a contagious bad luck. The group most discussed in this connection were women. One man who worked as a filler, assisting colliers in a stall, remembered an incident in the mid thirties when observance of the belief that it was unlucky to see a woman in the morning decimated attendance at a day shift:

I remember, working in Plas Power, what I'd be then? about sixteen and half, seventeen, I suppose. And walking to work, of course, like, see all these: "What's the matter?". They were all going back this morning: "What's the matter like?".

They'd seen a woman. Seen a woman in the morning, they'd all go back. And we had to go back, see?

³⁰ Lynn Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', Folklife 9 (1971), p. 83.

³¹ Interview with Mr. Prydderch.

³² CROH NT/1074, Edward H. Davies, Memories Ms. (1986).

³³ Birds were frequently regarded as harbingers of doom: Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', pp. 84 - 85; Fish, The Folklore of the Miners of the North East of England, Appendix E., pp. 65 - 69.

And me Dad said, "What's the matter with you, like?".

I said, "They've all come back, seen a woman or something.".

"Oh that's alright," he said. I was expecting to have a clobber, you know. But he accepted it like, it was accepted lad.³⁴

Such tales have sequels not only within the locality but in the lore of other British coalfields, in those of other countries and in the lore of associated industries.³⁵ Scholars have generally sought to describe the significance of such tales by regarding them as texts and by seeking to decode the various motifs and symbols that they contain. They have sought affinities between the features of the tales and the features of local society or have regarded the presence of symbolic motifs as the expressions of profound cultural assumptions. While this approach is a valid one it does not offer a satisfactory account of why any individual might choose to hold to a superstitious belief. By their own account, respondents were more interested in what they purported to be the historicity of the incidents they described than the symbolic content of the tales they purveyed.

Attempts to account for the view that animals were harbingers of danger might consider the widely believed assumption that animals are more sensitive than humans to the promptings of the supernatural realm. This ~~may~~ be a shadow of former beliefs that spiritual messengers could take animal form.³⁶ An account of the aversion of the miner to the sight of women in the morning would speculate that it may have been the incongruity of their appearance in the morning which had nurtured the conviction that their presence was malign. The advent of this superstition must have been relatively recent since women were allowed to be employed underground

³⁴ Wilf Lloyd, WMP C/1984/54.

³⁵ Aversions to women were reported in all the Welsh mining districts: Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', pp. 83 - 84, and in the English mining districts: Lydia Fish, The Folklore of the Coal Miners of the North-East of England, p. 16, and also in the American mining industry, George Korson, Minstrels of the Mine Patch - Songs and Stories of the [Pennsylvanian Anthracite Industry (Hatboro, Penn., 1964), pp. 145 - 146.

³⁶ Korson, Minstrels of the Mine Patch, p. 142.

in colliery workings until 1842 and some continued to work on the pit banks in the Wrexham area until the end of the nineteenth century.³⁷ However, after this, the mine became an all male environment and the early morning, therefore, became a peculiarly male time of day. Respondents described comradeship as their shield against danger. Perhaps it was a violation of this exclusively male ethos from which ill consequences were consciously or unconsciously presumed to flow.

For the folklorist, the existence of multiple versions of a tale betray a story's circulation and variation in the oral tradition. Local respondents did not realise that the occupational beliefs they described were part of a common and widely dispersed folk tradition. They presented them as historical incidents which had happened, for the most part, to named and to known individuals and which had occurred at identifiable spots in the locality. Some accounts described what respondents assumed to be the nascence of particular traditions.

The most important aspect of the following tale to its narrator is not the motif of warning by the bird but its temporal and spatial locatability. He was told the tale by a colleague who claimed it as part of his own experiences and asserts its verisimilitude by an elaborate evocation of context. The route taken by the protagonist to reach the colliery is picked out in terms of identifiable village landmarks. The fate the miner avoided was the 1924 explosion at Llay Main Colliery:

The colliery, that had its characters.

I remember one old ripper called Charlie Lloyd, I remember him telling me, he was working on a heading, and he was going out to work, he was going on the night shift. And as he was coming up the alley at Fourth Avenue a crow flew at him, and so he shooped it off. And as he got to the gate the crow flew at him again and he shooped it off again.

And when he went up the road just a little bit the crow flew at him

³⁷ Val Lloyd, 'Attitudes to Women at North Wales Coalmines, c. 1840 - 1901', Llafur Vol. 5. No. 2 (1988), p. 14.

again, so he said, 'Alright, if you don't want me to go, I won't go!'

And he went back and he said to his wife, and she gave him hell because he was missing a shift but he said, that night the lad who replaced him, he was killed in the explosion at Llay.³²

The following tales are two accounts of early morning encounters with a woman which attempt to tie the tradition to a specific locale in the Wrexham area. The protagonist of the first tale was identified as a friend of the collector's great grandmother. The location of the incident is strongly identified. Details of the tale's provenance could place the incident it purports to describe in the first quarter of the century:

One early morning he was walking to work along the top of Cefn, across the railway bridge over the quarry, when he saw a woman wearing a shawl over her head coming towards him. To his horror she stood up on the rail of the bridge as though she was going to jump!

He ran to stop her and as he put his hand out to catch her she disappeared! Mr. Wynn was so upset he went home and explained what had happened to his wife. One hour later they heard the hooter at the pit, and they found out that the men on the shift Mr. Wynn was supposed to have been on, had an accident and three men had been killed.³³

>/ The second story was offered in an interview. While the early morning
-/ setting and the mysterious female figure were reprised, the location, the
neighbouring community of Rhosllanerchrugog, was different. The incident
was attributed to the interwar period:

Q: You were saying about [...] the superstition of seeing women in the morning [...]. Why would that be?

³² Interview with David Griffiths.

³³ This tale is taken from the collection of local folklorist, Richard Holland and is one of the results of an assignment set at a local high school for third year pupils. The class was told to ask family members for local folk tales: Anon., A True Local Ghost Story Ms. (c.1986).

Mrs. Whalley: Why it was so clear to me, was that they were all waiting for the bus, they used to be in a row. [...] They didn't used to have bus stops did they really? So they'd all gather in different spots, the men. So they'd all be doing this special crouch they have, they can sit on one heel for hours. And this old lady passed, and they all right about turned and they all went back home again. And they dug her out, she'd gone to drown herself ... But they had all seen her in her nightie walking past, nobody stopped her, nobody touched her, they all right about turned and went off!

Whether they thought she was a ghost I don't know!⁴⁰

While the actual significance of the sighting was differently described and the mysterious female figure changed from an authentic ghost to a pathetic individual misidentified as a wraith, the evocation of local context, albeit different ~~local contexts~~, is a consistent feature of the narratives.

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Other beliefs focussed on inauspicious days for attendance at the pit. There were fixed dates in the calendar when a poor turn-up to work could be predicted. General holidays tended to inspire a poor attendance at the pit in the days which preceded and followed. Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays were the days of the working week likeliest to see a high level of absenteeism. The effect was more marked around the time of official holidays as men sought to extend or eke out their leisure time. It was precisely these days when attendance was likely to be poor that seemed to have traditions about the possible ill consequences of attendance attached to them.⁴¹

Respondents linked poor attendance to the observance of traditional holidays by their colleagues and sometimes cited cases which they imagined to be concrete historical examples of superstitions being vindicated or, in some instances, actually being inaugurated. They described unfortunate events which they imagined had caused a particular date to become infamous. Anthropologists and psychologists were once wont to discuss the origins of

⁴⁰ Mrs. Whalley, WMP C/1984/43.

⁴¹ Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', p. 83.

superstitious beliefs in terms of the accumulation of errors of observation. According to this analysis, the primitive mentality accumulated superstitious beliefs by implicating incidental factors surrounding observed events in the causal processes that moved them. These robustly rationalist observers believed that magic and superstition were the primitive equivalents of natural science and that they were fallacious principally because they were informed by mistaken notions about the causal mechanisms at work behind observed reality.⁴² In these terms, an unfortunate event on one particular day would cause that date to live in infamy as the community attributed the evil fortune to the incidental factor of the date.⁴³

Such accounts posit the existence of communities in a simple primordial world innocent of any prior assumptions. This offers little insight into the development of superstitious beliefs in any actual historical milieu. An analysis which represented tales about specific incidents as appropriations of already existing traditions would seem to be more plausible.

Extreme occupations like fishing and mining are typically the sociological contexts for highly developed subcultures. This can be accounted for by reference to the isolation of workers from mainstream society while at work and to the physically remote situation of the communities engaged in such pursuits.⁴⁴ However, in the same way that subcultures do not usually depart completely from the mores of mainstream society, the superstitious motifs of the miners bore some relation to those

⁴² For an account of the origins of sympathetic magic through the 'misapplication of the association of ideas', see: Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough - A Study in Magic and Religion author's abridgement (London, 1922), pp. 11 - 12.

⁴³ For a classic exposition on the theme of mistaken observations see Lehmann, Superstition and Magic (Stuttgart, 1898) as cited in: Gustav and Marie Jahoda, The Psychology of Superstition (London, 1969), p. 38.1

⁴⁴ David Clark, Between Pulpit and Pew - Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village (Cambridge, 1982), p. 146.

expressed in the wider society. The dates identified by my respondents as days of ill-omen were usually days loaded with other associations. Friday is widely regarded as an unlucky day in Christian culture.⁴⁵ The New Year holiday is the occasion of some of the most frequently observed calendar customs. Most of these traditions focus on the importance of a proper beginning to the year to ensure good fortune through the year.⁴⁶

In accounts of the miners' aversion to working on New Year's Day and on Fridays, recent incidents appear to have been fastened upon by the community and were cited as a way of addressing the continuing relevance of traditional observances. Sometimes, these incidents came to be regarded as the occasion which had inaugurated the observance. For respondents, proximity in space and time seemed to be important in establishing the authority of an account. Where these incidents were not completely obscured by the mists of time, the detail of some of the tales could be cross-checked against the testimony of other sources. This survey showed that these oral accounts tended to elevate details which could be connected to superstitious motifs at the expense of the historical details of the incidents.

These errors could be accounted for simply by the fallibilities of the process of oral transmission - the distortions created by the process of 'Chinese whispers'. However, these misapprehensions were not arbitrary but rather tended to make recollections into closer approximations to the ideal type described by the tradition. Popular memory recalled incidents which

⁴⁵ Davies described Welsh miners' aversion to working on Friday as an extension of a prejudice against working on Good Friday. A specific Good Friday tradition was mentioned by ~~none~~ of my informants: Davies, 'Aspects of Welsh Mining Folklore', p. 81.

⁴⁶ The tradition was strong in Staffordshire where the refusal of miners to work was apparently linked to a general superstition about fire which led local people to refuse take fire to their neighbours on New Year's Day. It was alleged that this belief discouraged the miners from kindling a flame in their lamps: Jon Raven, The Folklore and Songs of the Black Country Colliers (Wolverhampton, 1990), p. 9.

resembled the ones instanced by the superstitious lore, while false omens were not typically recalled. The points of convergence between legends and actual historical incidents were stressed and points of divergence were conveniently forgotten.

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Belief legends from other colliery areas seem to allude to a ~~belief~~ that the workplace accumulated a residue of bad luck which could be discharged on the last day of a period of work.⁴⁷ The run up to the annual holiday was called 'bull week'.⁴⁸ Informants alleged that this period was marked by unusually high numbers of accidents and injuries. Bull weeks were periods of high productivity since workmen strove to achieve a large pay note which would provide the basis for the calculation of their holiday pay.⁴⁹ Haste and carelessness inevitably meant that there would be more accidents.⁵⁰ One miner remembered that at Llay Main, the last day of work was regarded as a particularly unlucky one:

And the reason for that was, there was a very nasty shotfiring accident. On the last day, you know, on the Friday afternoon, before they finished. This feller fired and what happened I couldn't tell you. He was seriously injured, you know.

By all accounts someone shouted "It's okay to fire!", you know. He turned the handle and it was someone else that was talking, but ever after that on the Friday afternoon, everybody used to be "Eww!", and a lot wouldn't work on a Friday afternoon, they'd take it off, you know.

Like you say, suspicious [sic] of different things, you know.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', pp. 82 - 83; Korson, Minstrels of the Mine Patch, p. 146.

⁴⁸ Edgar Sides, untranscribed interview; Mr. Hughes, WMP C/1984/56.

⁴⁹ Dennis et al., Coal Is Our Life, p. 69, n. 2.

⁵⁰ In Yorkshire in the late forties the week immediately before a stoppage usually saw high levels of absenteeism as men sought to avoid injuries which might mar their leisure: Zweig, Men In the Pits, p. 70.

⁵¹ Wilf Lloyd, WMP C/1984/54.

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 This account may be tentatively identified with an incident in 1956. A Llay shotlighter failed to account for the whereabouts of his assistant, having assumed him to be the man sitting next to him, fired his charges. The explosion injured the missing man.⁵²

Records of attendance would suggest that the miners of North Wales considered that New Year's Day was a particularly desirable holiday. According to respondents, North Wales pits, though officially open for business, tended not to work on the first day of January. The Llay Main and Hafod output books recorded eight stoppages on either the morning or afternoon shifts or for the whole day on 1st January in the years 1935 - 1947.⁵³ Seven of these instances occurred at Hafod and one instance occurred at Llay Main. Attendances at work were poor from the day back after the Christmas stoppage, December 27th, until early in the New Year, as the men tended to lump the two festivals together. If the shift worked it was marked by poor attendances and poor output performances. New Year's Day was conceded in 1954, when it was given as an official holiday in lieu of the previous August Bank Holiday Monday which had been subsumed by the annual stoppage and holiday, and it was officially declared a Bank Holiday in the early seventies.⁵⁴

Notwithstanding the obvious attractions of a day's holiday after the New Year celebration, the custom of non-attendance at work on New Year's Day was hedged around with an aura of superstition. It was perhaps telling that, for the miners, a good start to the year did not feature an

⁵² The shotfirer was prosecuted by the Coal Board for his neglect of regulations and was fined nine pounds at Wrexham Bromfield Magistrate's Court on 3 Jan 1956: Wrexham Leader, 6 Jan 1956.

⁵³ CROH CB/8/6, CB/8/7 Llay Main Output Books, 1920 - 1928, 1930 - 1931, 1933 - 1942, 1944 - 1945, 1947; CROH CB/8/3, CB/8/7 Hafod Output Books, 1933 - 1945, 1947.

⁵⁴ 67 pubs in the Wrexham Bromfield division were granted an extra hour of licensed time in honour of the occasion: Wrexham Leader, 4 Dec 1954.

appearance at the pit. In the pits of the Wrexham area there was a tradition about the origin of the unofficial holiday with a cage accident at Bersham Colliery.

On Monday 2nd January 1939, in fact the first day at work after New Year's Day, the two cages in the main shaft ran out of control. The descending cage crashed into the pit bottom injuring its eleven passengers and the ascending cage travelled above the landing stage trapping its sole occupant.⁵⁵ As was sometimes the case after a serious accident, men walked out in sympathy. However, in this instance, the stoppage had resonances across the coalfield. At Hafod the colliery output book reported:

JAN 2. MON AM. Worked, no stops 120 absent [approximately].

PM. Pit played.

No work - a lot of men turned up but did not go down.

Probably the cage smash at Bersham would have had some effect.⁵⁶

A local folklorist described the superstitious tradition about attendance at the pit on New Year's Day in the mid-fifties.⁵⁷ Though this was the first concrete reference to the tradition in North East Wales, it probably substantially predated this account. However, it is certain that in post-war period, non-attendance at the pit at the New Year came to be seen as a direct sequel to the incident at Bersham in 1939. The presumed supernatural origins of the misfortune became a popular legitimation for non-attendance:

The only thing that I can recall in that respect was, they had a thing about working on New Year's Day in Bersham. And they would not work on New Year's Day! And for some reason or another come this one New Year's Day when they decided to work there was a tragedy there, they overwound, you know. Something went wrong with the winding gear and, a cage full of

⁵⁵ North Wales Guardian, 4 Jan 1939.

⁵⁶ CROH CB/8/6, Hafod Output Book, 2 Jan 1939.

⁵⁷ Y Parch William Phillips, Rhos-llanerch-rugog (1955), p. 83.

men going full speed, you know ...

And there was quite a number of people hurt in the pit bottom, you know. And after then, that put pay to it, they never considered working New Year's Day after that! And in the end it was declared as a Bank Holiday, you know!⁵⁸

The tradition was reinforced by memories of another incident at Bersham close in time to the turning of the year which occurred in 1956. One evening, as the afternoon shift was returning to the surface, the ascending carrier became fouled on one of the guide ropes halting both cages in the shaft. Twelve men were trapped in the shaft: four in the descending cage and eight in the ascending cage. The stranded men were obliged to make the best of the freezing temperatures and spent the night in the cages until a rescue operation could be mounted. This incident took place at an even further remove from the first day of the New Year as the cage jammed on the evening of December 19th 1956.^{59, 60}

The two events had clearly been conflated in the memory of one informant. This man was a strongly evangelical Nonconformist, who had little time for either superstition or slacking. While he sought to debunk the superstition, he was a passive bearer of the tradition. His account presented the detail of the second incident and attributed it to the commonly assumed date of the first:

They used to believe ... that they shouldn't work on New Year's Day, that was due to the fact that at Bersham Colliery the cage stuck in the shaft and they were there for hours before anyone could get them out.

I remember that happening, and after that everyone wanted an excuse not to work on New Year's Day, and that really in North Wales none of the pits used to work on New Year's Day. But it was only an excuse,

⁵⁸ Mr. Hughes, WMP C/1984/56.

⁵⁹ Wrexham Leader, 22 Dec 1956.

⁶⁰ Unrecorded interview with Tom Ellis.

that's all.⁶¹

The other large general category of occupational beliefs are those which stress the predictability of danger in the workplace. Such traditions must have provided some comfort, even though miners were consciously aware that many of the dangers of the pit were neither predictable nor preventable. These narratives offer evidence that a wide variety of rationalisations were deployed by historical actors. Other scholars concur that this was the most heterogeneous part of the miners' lore. Davies considered that premonitions tended to be personal experiences rather than commonly acknowledged customs which pertained to the community as a whole.⁶² Nevertheless, all these tales share the same basic motif - a warning delivered to the miner by some imperceptible means outside the usual register of his senses. Many respondents claimed personal or vicarious knowledge of incidents where premonitions had prompted sudden changes in behaviour, which it was believed helped men to evade lurking danger. Some believed these changes in the courses of action were prompted by supernatural warnings, others noted the existence of the practice, even attributing efficacy to the observance but made no judgement as to the mechanism which lay behind it.

Sensitivity to minute changes in the environment was a part of a miner's basic survival equipment and was reified as a quality described as 'pit sense'. This pit sense had its own mystique. George Orwell considered that the Lancashire miner's faith in it amounted to a superstition in itself.⁶³ Miners also trusted to the pit sense of their non-human companions in the mine, the pit ponies and the mice.⁶⁴ ^{They /} Miners assumed that their dumb companions had a greater degree of auditory acuity and could discern faint sounds which indicated a deteriorating roof. The absence of mice from a

⁶¹ Interview with Percy Davies.

⁶² Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', p. 94.

⁶³ George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (London, 1937), p. 41.

⁶⁴ Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', p. 89; Gouldner, Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy, p. 117.

section of the mine or the refusal of a pony to proceed betokened imminent danger.⁶⁵ Some local men claimed that this respect for the intuitions of the mice even stayed the hand of persecution and that mice were tolerated, despite their depredations of the mens' food.⁶⁶ Pony lore remained a vivid aspect of narratives about pit life despite their declining use in the industry. This lore was laced with a strong element of anthropomorphic identification. Men described how the ponies were brutalised by the environment and bullied by their drivers but evolved their own strategies and tricks and usually triumphed over both. Horses were capable of refusing loads they considered were too heavy and sometimes halted in narrow passages, trapping their young drivers behind them to gain a few minutes' respite. Dave Douglass noted that the pony lore of the Durham coalfield was a reflection of the miners' own image of themselves. Ponies were, like the men, hardy in adversity and subversive of authority.⁶⁷

Students of mining lore have been exercised by the question of the degree to which their informants believed the lore they purveyed. Folklorists, in particular, have been tantalised by the assumption that isolated and poorly educated communities might be repositories for vestiges of the old religion and have thus tended to produce accounts that glossed familiarity with the traditions as evidence of literal belief. Superstition is an extremely complex and layered phenomenon and serious analysis of the significance of occupational belief has to concede that many people may be familiar with a tale without necessarily subscribing to it as a declaration of faith. Trevor Lummis collected the superstitious lore of East Anglian fishermen and noted that while most of his respondents were familiar with the stories, it seemed that this acquaintance did not

⁶⁵ Fish, The Folklore of the Miners of the North East of England, Appendix E, p. 65.

⁶⁶ Meredith Jones, WMP C/1984/68.

⁶⁷ Dave Douglass and Joel Kreiger, A Miner's Life (London, 1983), pp. 53 - 54.

always betoken belief.⁶⁸

It is possible to be a passive or agnostic bearer of a superstitious tradition because, like the products of any other cultural genre, an orally transmitted belief legend may have many meanings to its audience.⁶⁹ These meanings may be manipulated by the raconteur in the context of performance and may also depend upon a tale's interaction with the personal beliefs and experiences of the auditors. There are many reasons why someone should recount elements of a belief legend, of which a personal belief in its validity as a description of the cosmos, is only one. The overt purpose of most tales is entertainment, their purpose is not to convince but to divert and perhaps, to admonish. Entertainment is not an idle or trivial social activity. Gouldner detected a strong element of tongue-in-cheek in the occupational belief narratives he collected in the gypsum mining industry.⁷⁰ His observations led him to believe that the main purpose of such horror stories was the socialisation of other workers. This was most obviously the case when they were employed to tease and test the credulity of younger workers. Such tales of the supernatural should not be regarded as an almanac offering practical advice for coping with the world's uncertainties but rather as a psychological coping technique.⁷¹

Like modern urban legends, these tales evoked emotional responses and were a means of channelling inchoate anxieties. As well as naming fears, such tales offered some degree of consolation and closure to their audience. The depiction of means of escape from danger, however implausible, offered some psychological mitigation. In this light it might make more sense to pay more regard to the psychological realism of a tale, than its evocation of the tensions of a situation, than to the formal realism

⁶⁸ Paul Thompson, Trevor Lummis, Tony Wailey, Living the Fishing (1983), p. 187.

⁶⁹ Gillian Bennett, Traditions of Belief - Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today (1987), p. 193.

⁷⁰ Gouldner, Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy, p. 119.

⁷¹ Judith Devlin, The Superstitious Mind - French Peasants and the Supernatural in the Nineteenth Century (1987), p. 715.

9 Such/

of its description of the workings of the cosmos. For the auditor, ~~this/~~ representation may have been a means of coming to terms with this reality rather than a practical guide intended to describe how to cope with it.⁷²

Notwithstanding the psychological and metaphorical functions of tales of the supernatural, this study did recover some genuine testaments of belief. However, social actors are rarely uncritically and unconditionally superstitious. Individuals tend to have a personal synthesis of beliefs chosen from the material presented by tradition.⁷³ This pragmatic selection may be further dictated by circumstances. Tales detailing appropriate reactions in circumstances of trauma and stress cannot properly be understood outside those conditions of stress. Many who would intellectually reject a superstitious belief might nevertheless allow it to influence their thinking and actions. Conditions of danger and stress are precisely those most likely to cause such 'half beliefs' to exercise more influence and to assume more of the qualities of full beliefs.⁷⁴

'C.C.S.'

It is commonplace that there are no atheists in foxholes. By the same token, beliefs which seemed appropriate and plausible, under conditions of stress, may be less easy to understand by the fireside. One collier's puzzling experiences were narrated by his wife/~~his own account/~~ ~~of his~~ ~~puzzling experiences~~ betrayed his embarrassment and surprise at his own apparent lack of rationality:

Mrs. Whalley: I'll tell you who won't go to work on a banana! [...] I've made banana sandwiches for him [Mr. Whalley] as he went to work, and he had an accident. In other words he landed up in hospital. So we didn't

⁷² Folk-tales have been used to describe the mentalities of other groups because of their instrumentality in native constructions of the world: Darnton considered that French peasants found the tales 'useful to think with': Robert Darnton, 'Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose' in The Great Cat Massacre (1984), pp. 17 - 78; see also: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Love, Death and Money in the Pays D'Oc translation (London, 1982).

⁷³ Devlin, The Superstitious Mind, p. 98.

⁷⁴ Peter McKellar, A Textbook of Human Psychology (1952), p. 320.

think nothing of it. Bananas are not the thing you put in a man's sandwiches, really, but you have to think of something moist, so I put bananas in again, in his sandwiches, and he landed in hospital.

And I said 'There's no way you're going to believe this!'

So he said 'It's your fault, that banana!'

So I said 'Don't be daft!'⁷⁵

Both husband and wife were aware that it was likely that the unusual sandwich filling had simply rendered a mundane coincidence more visible but agreed, after the third coincidence of bananas for "snappin" and hospitalisation, that bananas would not feature in the lunch box again. While such events were easy to rationalise as coincidences, their nearness to the grave issues of life and health/ made it hard even for the most robustly sceptical to disregard their implications completely.⁷⁶

The existence of a large body of informal lore stressing the usefulness and indeed, the necessity of occasional absences from the workplace is a striking coincidence in an industry in which unofficial absenteeism was a notorious labour problem. It might be imagined that such tales ~~might~~ be told by men weary of work to their credulous wives and exasperated bosses either to directly excuse themselves for their absences or to cultivate a mystique about the decision to attend the workplace. Some members of the community, particularly women,⁷⁷ voiced this scepticism:

Only people that didn't like work did that! mind you, it wasn't very pleasant.⁷⁸

This would be analysis at a very superficial level. The existence of such a

⁷⁵ Mrs. Whalley, WMP C/1984/43.

⁷⁶ Zweig, Men In The Pits, p. 69.

⁷⁷ In other areas women were sometimes described as the part of the community which adhered most strongly to these traditions: Chaplin, 'Durham Mining Villages', p. 33; Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', pp. 94 - 95.

⁷⁸ Interview with Mrs. Pritchard.

large corpus of tales, which we might regard as psychologically descriptive of the tensions and pressures men worked under, provides abundant evidence of the anxieties of the workforce about the hidden dangers of the mine.

These tales seem to have been the badge of an allegiance to the community, expressed through a complex of beliefs, customs, informal relationships and work patterns which were antithetical to the framework of bureaucratic control.⁷⁹ One Yorkshire miner discussed his observance of various superstitious traditions in terms of an habitual stubbornness which expressed a determination to concede nothing to the colliery management:

Somebody might call it being bloody-minded, but it's a matter of keeping your dignity and hanging on, because the old issues always come back.⁸⁰

1 The ~~belief~~/stories which mediated superstitious beliefs to the community were one facet of the community's awareness of its own past. Sid Chaplin described them as 'the memory of the community'.⁸¹ Many direct observers of mining life have recorded similar tales as part of the evocation of the past in other communities. These observers were told that superstitious beliefs were merely echoes of former practices and that they had the greatest contemporary currency among the old men. The view that it was unlucky to see a woman was 'not quite extinct' in Wigan in the thirties⁸², while older miners still 'believed it in their hearts' in 'Dinlock', a village in the Yorkshire coalfield, in the late fifties.⁸³ By the mid-fifties, observers of another Yorkshire mining town considered that superstition in Ashton persisted largely in the form of accounts of the enactments practised by 'the old miners'.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Gouldner, Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy, p. 147.

⁸⁰ Douglass and Kreiger, A Miner's Life, p. 16.

⁸¹ Chaplin, 'Durham Mining Villages', p. 33.

⁸² Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, p. 35.

⁸³ Clancy Sigal, Weekend In Dinlock (London, 1960), pp. 108 - 109.

⁸⁴ Dennis et al., Coal Is Our Life, pp. 219 - 220.

It is difficult for an outside observer to discern historical trends in the incidence of such beliefs in a retrospective survey. Informants appended the observation that these practices were declining to virtually every narrative. Thus by the telling of these tales respondents simultaneously characterised the mentality of the old mining communities and described a linear development towards more modern mentalities. The opinion that there was simply less room in the modern world for such habits was implicit in these narratives. However, informants usually attributed the decline in these beliefs and practices not to increasing levels of education which might have acted to undermine such irrational beliefs, but rather instanced concrete and observable shifts in social patterns. Respondents claimed that the concern that washing would weaken the spine^{e5} was lessened by the introduction of pithead baths^{e6}; and that it was women working in local factories in the Second World War which reduced qualms about seeing women in the morning.^{e7} The decline of superstition seemed to be powerful symbol of the world they had seen swept away and it is clear that the discussion of superstition was well established in the discourse intercepted by interviewing and was an important part of the respondents' conception of the history of their own communities.

^{e5} Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore', p. 102.

^{e6} Jack Read, CLWBC 451.6.

^{e7} Silas Davies, WMP C/1984/24.

Nicknames.

Literally hundreds of nicknames have been collected from the communities of the North Wales coalfield. This suggests that the giving of unofficial and familiar names to supersede or supplement formally acknowledged titles/ was a well established local practice.⁸⁸ The honoured place of nicknames in the canon of local lore makes it clear that they remain an aspect of living oral culture, very much bound up with the way respondents perceived the history and contemporary reality of their native communities and examples of local nicknames and stories about their derivation and ubiquity were spontaneously offered to me, and to other scholars, in oral testimony.

There were many sub-traditions of what might be described as 'Nick-nomenclature', but these can be resolved into two broad categories. Some local inhabitants were given nicknames which alluded to some unique aspect of their character, appearance or personal history, while others were awarded nicknames after the style already enjoyed by some other member of their family.

Thus local people wore nicknames that indicated their origins from both near and far: Bob Harlech and Will Trawsfynydd had evidently joined the migration from the West, while Brian Sealion was a scion of a Rhos family that ran a pub of that name. Other people might be known by their favourite verbalisations or habitual interjections: Dic Amen was a religious enthusiast who frequently called out his assent during chapel services and Johnny What-you-c'it? was a blacksmith who frequently found himself stuck for words. A lack of sartorial

⁸⁸ Rev. Colin Gibbs, The Clatter of Clogs - A collection of mining memories at the end of an era (Wrexham, 1990), pp. 61 - 68; Lynn Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', pp. 101 - 104; Welsh Folk Museum Manuscripts 1658/2, 1658/3, 'Llys Enwau Pobl y Rhos'/'Nicknames of Rhos People'; WFM Ms. 1309, William D. Griffiths, 'Enwau a Llysenwau Hen Gymeriadau Mostyn, Sir Fflint'/'Names and Nicknames of the Old Characters of Mostyn, Flint' (1965); Bangor University Archive, Ms. 11790, Rev. William Phillips, 'Nicknames of the Men of Rhosllanerchrugog' (n.d); Llewelyn Williams, 'Nicknames ... in common usage in Rhos', personal correspondence, (1991); Beryl Baigent, "A Lovely Ugly Place" Croeso i Llay - Living There Ms. (1992).

elegance accounted for the style enjoyed by Twm All-to-Rags, physique for that given to Dic Bol Heuan (Iron Stomach) and physiognomy for the familiar name of the unfortunate miner known in Bersham Colliery as 'Horse Face'.

(u/ Nicknames could function as auxiliary surnames as members of a family came to known by the nickname already enjoyed by one of its members. This practice certainly added novelty and variety to the nomenclature of a society largely composed of different tribes of Joneses, Hughes and Williamses. Some names descended over several generations. One Rhos man with a fondness for chewing tobacco endowed his children and grandchildren with the name 'Twisty'. The Cabbages were a dynasty in Pentre Broughton who took their name from the supposed role of one of the patriarchs of the clan in an obscure affair involving a stolen vegetable. One relatively unusual feature of nicknomenclature in the Rhos area was the existence of matronymic nicknames. Individuals and families could bear the christian names of Mothers and Grandmothers: thus Dic Marged, Bob Mair and Bill Sephora and one whole family known as the 'Las', from a contraction of Leah, the christian name of their grandmother.

Communities which use nicknames generally have several important qualities in common: they tend to be characterised by an atmosphere of watchfulness and interdependence and by dense networks of interpersonal relationships.⁸⁹ Though respondents frequently cited ease of identification as the main factor behind the local use of nicknames this is not an adequate explanation since the accurate identification of individuals was not usually a problem in small and locally oriented communities. Inhabitants are likely to know each other well enough and perhaps in several capacities, as neighbours, kin and colleagues. Rather, a nickname is one expression of this very different quality of social relationships in such societies. Though these qualities often remarked upon in the context of isolated communities, traditional cultures, and societies where the displacement of patronyms by surnames has been a relatively recent innovation, nicknames thrive in any context where social networks are dense and

⁸⁹ Susan Parman, 'General Properties of Naming, and a Specific Case of Naming in the Scottish Outer Hebrides', *Ethnos* 41 (1976), p. 102.

informal relationships are important. Contexts where the practice is indulged in include the family⁸⁰, the schoolyard clique⁸¹ and occupational groups.⁸² The construction of what might be described as 'the nicknaming community' probably owes more to its representation in popular culture than to academic monographs on the subject. The isolated mining village, depicted as an intimate community where everybody is morbidly interested in everybody else's affairs and as obsessively secretive about their own, has become a cliché in the representation of industrial Wales.

7/ The material thrown up by interviewing allows consideration of two distinct but related themes: on the one hand, the function and incidence of nicknames in the locality and on the other, the rhetorical and didactic use of narratives about nicknames by respondents in their representation of the life of the community. Though the first aspect is important, this discussion will concentrate on the latter aspect and the nicknaming lore of the North Wales pits and their associated mining communities will be viewed as part of an ideological system describing and defining local social life.

A nickname binds the individual to the community that bestowed it and provides an additional dimension to personal identity usually only accessible to fellow members of that community. The use of a nickname can be an expression of a near familial fondness signifying acceptance within a warm venacular culture of camaraderie.⁸³ Indeed, one local miner wrote that 'you felt naked without one.'⁸⁴ However, a nickname can express the censure of a community towards an individual. It may be derogatory, it could be a source of shame or embarrassment to its bearer.⁸⁵ Social scientists consider that naming systems

⁸⁰ Jane Morgan, Christopher O'Neill, Rom Harre, Nicknames - Their Origins and Social Consequences (1979), pp. 31 ff.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 46 ff.

⁸² Anna Green, 'The Double Edged Sword - Nicknaming on the New Zealand Waterfront, 1915 - 1951', Oral History Journal Vol. 19, No. 1 (1991), pp. 53 - 55.

⁸³ Morgan et al., Nicknames, pp. 47 - 48.

⁸⁴ CROH NT/1074, Jackie Read, Mining Memories Ms. (1986).

⁸⁵ Morgan et al., Nicknames, p. 46.

function as mechanisms of social control.⁹⁶

The mining villages of North Wales represent a cohesive society whose inhabitants were not afraid of passing judgement on their fellows or of censuring unacceptable behaviour. Local people recalled that the threat of hostile gossip encouraged circumspect behaviour in public conduct. The ultimate expression of this censure was the crystallisation of a poor reputation or the remembrance of some unfortunate incident in the form of a derogatory nickname:

If you said anything out of place it would stick, there was no doubt about that and it would go with you to your grave because it was unique for this area to acquire this nickname and then it would stick.⁹⁷

While the folklorists who have investigated the nicknaming phenomenon in the locality have, for the most part been content to compile lists of examples, it is important to assess the uses of a nickname made by the community. What
 91a/ people feared was the manipulation of their identity ~~by~~_κ the local community by a means over which they had no control.⁹⁸ Nicknames were generally used to express familiarity and sometimes to assert the prerogatives of a close relationship. The use of a nickname which stigmatised a particular attribute or
 9ed/ incident reminding ~~ing~~_κ its bearer not only of the incident but of the painful fact
 9episcl:/ that the recollection of some humiliating ~~fact~~_κ was at all times within the discretion of the group. Nicknames were often used in badinage that was the verbal equivalent of physical horseplay and afforded a great deal of
 9 entertainment. The use of nicknames in teasing and situational punning ~~which~~_κ

⁹⁶ Parman, 'General Properties of Naming', p. 100; Morgan et al., Nicknames, p. 69.

⁹⁷ Winston Evans, CLWBC 451.7.

⁹⁸ Troublesome nicknames resemble in many respects the social stigma discussed in: Irving Goffman, Stigma - Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (Harmondsworth, 1970).

2/ amounted to a sophisticated, almost ritualised form of word play:⁹⁹

Q: Could you tell me the story, [...] about Wil Mochyn [Pig] ...?

A: They tried to say that he had a pig, didn't he? and he put it on a wall to see the band passing. They tried to say that he was a musical pig, like. That's how the story goes, anyhow I don't know how true it is, like. 'Cos we used to plague Winston, who was in school with me, - "Who put the pig on the wall to see the band pass?" - knowing it was his grandfather, wasn't it?

[We used to ring him up] on the phones [in the pit] now, we used to have some fun with that.

Another one that was on the face with us, we used to say that his grandfather had gone abroad and that the cannibals had eaten him. And we used to ask him, "Which pot did they boil his Taid in?".

And they had another lad, Len Spitfire they called him. They used to plague him about aeroplanes down the pit.

Duw, there was no end of nicknames down there, wasn't there?¹⁰⁰

The dual aspect of the nickname meant that it could not simply be regarded as social stigma, a source of nuisance that exposed its bearer to regular verbal maulings. A nickname indicated that a family or an individual resided within the bourn of the community and could thus become a source of pride. Many respondents used nicknames/tales to recount their family history:

Well, the family nickname was 'Mona', and we had it through my grandfather who had a small colliery in the 1926 strike on the Ponciau Banks.

The rumour had it that he stole a dog off some gypsies, a greyhound, and they raced it and he used to win money with it, and the dog's name was Mona.

Ever since then the family nickname went as Mona, after the dog. He always denied it was pinched, he said he bought it off the gypsies but

⁹⁹ For ritualised word-play involving the manipulation of nomenclature and personal styles, see Roger D. Abrahams, Deep Down in the Jungle - Negro Narrative Folklore From the Streets of Philadelphia 2nd edn. (New York, 1970), p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Gilbert Parry.

everyone else told me that he did pinch it. I don't know which one to believe, like. Pinched it, I would have thought [...]! He was another character, with his own colliery.¹⁰¹

Some of the tales about how individuals came by their nicknames appear to be attempts to supply possible derivations for nicknames whose true origins have become obscure. Local people seem to have tried to fill in the gaps using a mixture of internal evidence and inspired guesses. Nicknames which alluded to occupations and places could easily be glossed as part of an assumed family history. While these possibly spurious tales are questionable as accounts of historical fact, they seem to tell us a great deal about a society where it seems to have been literally unthinkable that a nickname should have been arbitrarily awarded and should not provide a privileged insight into the character, affines or past history of its bearer. These specious nickname tales are deliberate attempts to use like, if often mythical, material to patch the worn fabric of local society. The vernacular genealogists of colliery villages are guilty of the same conceit as those at the Royal College of Heraldry who, commissioned by parvenu families, fortuitously traced hitherto unsuspected descent to some decayed ancient line and thereby shored up the ancient edifice of the aristocracy.

Notwithstanding doubts about the literal veracity of these tales, it is important to realise that most respondents believe devoutly in their historicity. They consider that they represent incidents that actually happened to named individuals in their immediate locality. Some of the nicknames in this category hinge on elaborate puns and also occur in the lore of other areas. Two punning nicknames described in tales which focussed on the celebration of physical peculiarities. One tale told in Hafod described a man who 'only had front teeth, the rest of them had been taken out, so they called him John Central Eating.¹⁰² The tale is well known in South Wales and apparently has become 'established in the repertoire of many stage comedians'.¹⁰³ Another Hafod miner had apparently lost part of an ear in a roof fall thereafter, since he

¹⁰¹ Winston Evans, CLWBC 451.7.

¹⁰² Donald Thomas, CLWBC 451.7.

¹⁰³ Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', p. 104.

only had 'half an ear', he was known as Dai Six Months.¹⁰⁴ A man in the South Wales coalfield apparently suffered a similar accident but went by the nickname of 'Eighteen Months' since it was more correctly observed that he had 'an ear and half' left.¹⁰⁵

It is possible that these tales were duplicated in the lore of different areas as people who had heard them elsewhere consciously or unconsciously attached them to the careers of known individuals. It is also possible that people awarded names to their fellows in deliberate allusion to once familiar tales and that later audiences forgot the allusion and took the new tale as the original pattern of the story. Though the truth of the matter is not recoverable, it is evident that to local people the authority of the stories related stemmed from a firm belief in their historicity.

Two other possibly apocryphal nickname tales and their variants seem to be something in the nature of an explanation of local mores and an assertion of their invincibility. The first tale glosses the inclusive functions of the nickname:

I'll tell you about a feller in Rhos and he was an insurance agent, this is quite true, there's no lies about it. There was an old feller coming down and this insurance agent wanted to know where William Henry Jones lived you see. So he said to this old man "Do you know where William Henry Jones lives? It's in Hall Street here somewhere."

"I don't know," he said, "I've really got no idea."

This insurance agent said, "I don't like to say this," he said, "he's got a nickname, a funny nickname."

And he said, "What's the nickname?"

"Is it Dai Pocsy Dan?"

"That's me!" he said. He didn't know his own name but he knew his

¹⁰⁴ Gibbs, Clatter of Clogs, p. 66.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Keen, Coalface (Cardiff, 1991), p. 47.

nickname!^{106,107}

The tale tells us that the local is so habituated to the familiarity and informality of enclosed village culture that he has forgotten the officially designated and formally expressed identity required by the external world.

Respondents discussed the workplace as the place where nicknames were likeliest to be used. Nicknaming was part of the intimidatory male culture described in many workplaces.¹⁰⁸ The tension generated by the work situation was managed in part by being directed against colleagues as playfully aggressive behaviour. Nicknaming behaviour asserted the prerogative of comrades in sanctioning and disciplining the conduct of their fellows. The ethic of comradeship was based on close interdependence in the work situation. The management of a nickname required considerable social skill.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps ~~by~~ ~~seeing~~ the ~~reaction of~~ colleagues ~~to~~ artificially induced social stress~~x~~ allowed miners an indirect means of testing and toughening the quality of their response under work related stress. It might well have been the case that a good comrade was defined as one who could take a joke.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Pete Rogers, CLWBC 451.1.

¹⁰⁷ A local variant of the tale locates a similar incident in Gwersyllt, Charlie Johnson, untranscribed interview; variants of the tale collected in other areas are cited in Lynn Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', p. 103, and in Benita Moore, Benita Moore's Lancashire Mixture (Wigan, 1993), pp. 52 - 53, and by James Bentley, Traditions and Folk Stories of Buckley Clwyd Library Service, Tape 180.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Willis, 'Shop Floor Culture: Masculinity and the Wage Form' in John Clarke, Charles Critcher and Richard Johnson (eds), Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory (London, 1979), p. 193; Green 'The Double Edged Sword', p. 55.

¹⁰⁹ Morgan et. al., Nicknames..., p. 81.

¹¹⁰ A.E. Green, 'Only Kidding: Joking Among Coalminers', p. 62.

One tale and its variants deal with the unsuccessful attempts of unsocialised individuals to evade this sanctioning of their identity by the workgroup. In both main variants the protagonist is new to the pit: he is either a young lad coming to work in the mine and unfamiliar with its ways or a stranger entirely new to the area. When the new comrades of the newcomer tell him about the local habit of giving nicknames to square pegs, the protagonist's next words are immortal and provide the nickname that will follow him for the rest of his pit career.¹¹¹.

In one version of the tale, the alien newcomer usually expresses his hostility to local mores by saying that he himself is too sophisticated or too subtle to be in any danger of being labelled by the locals:

I can give you a tale like this, you see, how a fellow had his nickname in Hafod [...]. He was called Bob Oen, not Owens and 'oen' means 'lamb'. So when Bob came here Bob was a stranger to Rhos, years many years ago. And when he came here first he was told "You be careful what you say, you understand? You be careful what you say" he said "Because" he said "if you say something that you shouldn't they'll give you a nickname."

"Don't worry" Bob said "I'll be like an oen, I'll be like a lamb" he said.^{112,113}

In other versions of the story, the protagonist assumed that he will be sly or crafty enough to escape the sanction, and is ever afterwards reminded of his boast.¹¹⁴

In the most commonly recalled variant of the tale the protagonist is a local lad. When informed of the habit of nicknaming he assents to the validity of the practice but attempts to win a concession. His nickname is a memorial to his

¹¹¹ Merfyn Jones recalled hearing versions of this tale during his own research into life and labour in the slate quarries of North West Wales.

¹¹² Joe Williams, CLWBC 451.6

¹¹³ WFM Ms. 1658/3, Bill Oen.

¹¹⁴ Jack Read, CLWBC 451.6; WFM Ms. 1658/3, Ned Slel.

impudence:

I know one chap was called Benny Special, his real name was Benny Jones. And when he started in Ifton they said to him, "What's your name?"

He said, "Benny Jones".

"We've got quite a few Benny Joneses," they said, "Well haven't you got a nickname?"

He said, "No".

They said, "Oh well, we'll have to give you a nickname."

He said, "Well give me something special". So they called him Benny Special.¹¹⁵, ¹¹⁶

Participant observation would offer the opportunity to monitor the occasions when nicknames were used and enable the investigator to map the network of relationships described by the practice. Since this study is dependent upon the reflections of respondents the uses to which these reminiscences can be put as evidence are obviously more circumscribed.

As noted above, nicknames tend to occur in communities which share certain characteristics. In the modern era communities characterised by dense social networks appear as islands in a shifting sea of more tenuous relationships. It would be odd if the people of such a community were unaware of the rare qualities exemplified by their native society. In the villages of the North Wales coalfield this awareness must have been prompted to some extent by the intensity of academic and antiquarian interest. It is within this context that the corpus of nicknames and nickname lore function as an ideology of community life. This lore was employed not only in the indoctrination of local residents but also when members of the community were called upon to characterise it for outsiders. The nickname stories told to me and to other investigators depict local society as being close and resilient in its own defence.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Ithel Kelly.

¹¹⁶ One variant of this tale, 'Dai Substantial', cited in: Lynn Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', pp. 102 - 103, another variant, 'Morgan Reasonable', is cited in: Gibbs, Clatter of Clogs, p. 64.

It is hard to venture comment on the relative incidence of nicknaming behaviour in the different pits and communities of the North Wales coalfield. One Hafod miner opined that in his experience - 'The majority of miners, would say somehow or other, would acquire a nickname.'¹¹⁷ This observation would accord with the observation that Rhos and the Hafod Colliery supported a more densely structured community than Llay Main, the cosmopolitan pit served by the model village. The names and tales collected in the Rhos area outnumber those collected in the other communities but it would be hard to say whether this is an accurate reflection of the historical incidence of the practice or an indication of the extent of a contemporary vogue for such tales. None of the surveys quoted made any pretence at sampling procedures and collectors were undoubtedly likelier to begin their searches for nickname lore in areas where the practice was already celebrated. The nature of the evidence hampers the use of quantitative techniques. However, it is certainly the case that in interviews former Hafod men were likelier to claim the phenomenon of nicknaming as typical of their own area and as a practice peculiarly their own. Since the use of nicknames made individuals aware of the role of the community in constructing their identities, it is not surprising that local inhabitants should use tales about nicknames when providing their own descriptions of that community:

Q: Another aspect of life underground [...] was the nicknames?

A: A lot of nicknames. ... Well, Rhos is noted for it isn't it?¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Winston Evans, CLWBC 451.7.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Gilbert Parry.

Workplace Swearing and the Bilingual Divide.

Language is a very important resource in the signalling of group solidarity and is thus frequently the arena of contestation when groups are drawn into conflict. Respondents discussed two closely related themes: the use of Welsh in the workplace, and the censuring of the use of profane diction. Both language and diction were potent symbols of community and cohesion, and these symbols, which were used to negotiate relations within the work group, were also an issue in relations with external authority.

Sociolinguists usually wish to study the unconscious use of the resources of a language as a means of projecting social identities and thus do not set out -/ to collect anecdotal accounts and self-conscious performances of speech and dialect. Indeed, they may adopt a variety of devices both to encourage people to use casual and natural speech styles, and to deflect attention from the actual purpose of their study.¹¹⁹ This section will attempt to investigate the language of the workplace by using interview material and will frankly acknowledge that these discussions were invested with symbolic significance by the communities that produced them.

It is apparent that to North Wales miners, questions such as 'did they swear in your colliery?' were heavily loaded. Documentary sources record that this tradition of inquiry stretches back for over 150 years, and that then, as now, local people had a considerable emotional investment in giving a negative answer to such questions.

The remit of the 1842 Royal Commission into the employment of juveniles in the mines and manufactories included the moral welfare of young workers. The sub-commissioners who visited North Wales habitually included questions on verbal profanity in the workplace in their interrogatory. While the inclusion of criteria of assessment for moral welfare could be considered to be typical of the mind-set of the time, the informal agenda of any mid-nineteenth century

(/ > ¹¹⁹ Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics* 2nd edn., (London, 1983), pp. 108 - 109.

Royal Commission visiting Wales was to test the probity of the Nonconformist majority. The working class respondents to these surveys, were often self-conscious representatives of the first generations swept up by the evangelical revival and seemed aware that their morals were on trial. The answers the Sub-Commissioner received would appear to indicate that there was rather more praying and hymn singing than swearing in the pits of the Wrexham area in the 1840s.¹²⁰

The North Wales coalfield, and particularly the village of Rhos, was one of the "storm centres" of the 1904 - 5 revival.¹²¹ Both new converts and the old adherents were keen to justify and explain themselves to the religious tourists who came to view the sometimes frenzied scenes at the revival services. They were told that the revival had banished profane language from the pits.¹²² One 'great rough collier' told the Venerable Archdeacon Madden, a Liverpool visitor to a revival service, 'We have clean mouths now'.¹²³ While evangelicals had always disliked intemperate language as an outward sign that a man had not mastered his passions, the elimination of swearing in the mine became something of a cliché in the revival of 1904 - 5. Evan Roberts, the charismatic figurehead of the great revival had, as a precocious boy preacher, rebuked his comrades at the Broad Oak Colliery in South Wales for using foul language underground.¹²⁴

Accounts of Roberts' life were disseminated through tracts, the press and the preaching of the revival. The image of the evangelist rebuking profanity was a potent one, which became entrenched in devotional popular culture. Popular accounts described how, throughout the pits of Wales, lips once addicted to foul language were suddenly circumcised. It was alleged that this reform was so abrupt that the ponies, long inured to profanity, were unaccustomed to receiving

¹²⁰ C.E.C., Vol. XVII, pp. 377 - 468 passim.

¹²¹ North Wales Chronicle, 7 Jan 1905.

¹²² Rev. Des Frost, Wonderful is the Change - The Religious Revival in Rhos (Wrexham, 1989), p. 38, p. 41.

¹²³ Wrexham Advertiser, 11 Feb 1905, cited in: *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹²⁴ H. Elvet Lewis, With Christ Among the Miners - Incidents and Impressions of the Great Revival (London, 1907), pp. 51 - 52.

commands in milder language.¹²⁵

It is suggested that this symbol was also deployed in oral testimony, recovered in North East Wales: not swearing, stopping others from swearing and talking about how little swearing there seemed to be in the locality, were all ways of demonstrating allegiance to the chapel and the values it espoused, to the community it represented and ultimately, perhaps, even to Wales. Many observers have commented on the routine obscenity common in the all-male atmosphere ^{9 of 1} ~~in~~ the mine¹²⁶ and claims that the situation was distinctively different in the pits of any locality might lead the investigator to suspect that respondents might be guilty of misrepresenting the real situation. Since this study does not command the observations of any truly disinterested observer it must reserve judgement on the actual incidence of swearing. However, it seems unlikely that such stories should be complete fabrications and accordingly it is suggested that respondents presented a selective account of their experiences and that communal ideologies were used to structure experiences into narratives. Whether true or untrue, these stories still circulate as a mythical account of the past, one which depicts a community mobilising against the challenges presented, in the first instance by the reprobate and unregenerate within its own ranks and latterly against the encroachment of outsiders.

One local man, a senior official at Hafod Colliery, offered the following account of the situation when interviewed for a radio documentary about the Gresford disaster. This narrative is characterised by a disingenuous modesty: while the respondent stressed the importance of religious teaching in the suppression of verbal obscenity, others referred to his own key role in policing verbal profanity in the workplace and setting the tone for the officials and workmen beneath him:

Now this is a queer thing, you had practically about twenty six churches in the village and they were always full during that period, you see. Anything that ...

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 99 - 100.

¹²⁶ A.E. Green, 'Only Kidding - Joking Among Coal Miners', p. 54.

We had about six or seven hundred in our church and Rhos people, all working in our colliery, at Hafod Colliery. There was an atmosphere there of a religious nature to compare with the other, Gresford and Llay Main, you see, where bad language and all the rest of it was rampant, you see. A different type of community, If a person came down our colliery and started swearing and all the rest of it, he'd had it! [laughs]¹²⁷

Chapel people disliked the use of bad language and abstained as a way of demonstrating their commitment to resisting the brutalising effects of the environment: temperance was demanded in speech as in all other habits. Men who attempted to achieve the ascetic ideal in their working lives regarded their conduct as a form of witness for the virtues of the regenerate life:

I do quite a lot of local preaching. I've never lowered my standards wherever I've gone ... on a Sunday I go to chapel wherever I am. ... I wouldn't let that go at all.

The men have said 'You won't be a Christian in the pit ...!' but I have been ... it was a hard road ...¹²⁸

People claimed that even those who did not personally accept the Nonconformist ethic demonstrated their respect for chapel mores by tempering their language in the presence of their colleagues. In demanding that workers who did have recourse to the use of vile words should respect the sensibilities of those who did not, the chapel connexion attempted to stamp the culture of the workplace with the seal of its hegemony. Adolescent culture was a particular source of concern to local opinion. Many respondents stressed that respect was cultivated among younger workers by the heavy hand of adult discipline:

If you cursed anyone then, look out when you come home! because the collier would tell your father. And you'd have a hiding off the feller [tool. Well, you wouldn't dare cheek them then, you daren't cheek a collier or someone older because you respected them. You wouldn't dare curse someone because

¹²⁷ Bob Ellis quoted in: The Unquiet Grave [Documentary on the Gresford Disaster], BBC Radio Production (Manchester, 1982).

¹²⁸ Jack Read, CROH NT/789, No. 3.

you knew it was wrong because [...] that was the influence of your Sunday School and chapel life.¹²⁹

Miners who worked in what were described as 'family pits' were the likeliest to claim that they heard little verbal profanity in their workplaces. A 'family pit' was one which drew its workforce from a limited area, and classically, this workforce would have contained men from different generations of the same family. Men were not simply colleagues, but were likelier to be known to each other in other contexts, as neighbours, co-congregationers and kinsmen. It was the multiplexity and ubiquity of these relationships which made Hafod, despite the large size of its workforce, a family pit.

Respondents considered that the proximity of family members was a decisive factor in inhibiting verbal profanity. Swearing defined the exclusively male nature of the discourses of leisure activities and the workplace but was not considered an appropriate means of expression within the family. The famous 'Ashton' study described the reaction of a miner who could 'swear as well as anybody' when he recognised his son as one of a group of colliers swearing as they waited to ascend the pit. Neither he nor his son had ever sworn in front of the other before - 'Well, I've never felt so awkward in my life before. I could feel myself blushing and managed to creep away without him seeing me. I'm glad I did because we both would have felt awkward.'¹³⁰

The existence of powerful mores about swearing at Hafod Colliery may owe something to the socio-technical system implied by the stall-working system. Young workers were in more frequent contact with the older men who worked as colliers, and were more dependent upon them since they either served them as pony drivers or assisted them as fillers. Young men frequently graduated to fill in the stall worked by their father or of some other relative and had then to learn the craft of coal getting from the older man.¹³¹ The modernisation of the

¹²⁹ Jack Read, CLWBC 451.6.

¹³⁰ Dennis et al., Coal Is Our Life, p. 219.

¹³¹ A similar system obtained in the anthracite district of South Wales: George Ewart Evans, From the Mouths of Men (1976), interview with John Williams, p. 133, interview with George Evans, p. 160.

the collieries radically altered the circumstances in which younger workers related to older men. The employment of young men as hands on the mechanical haulage relays isolated them from adult workers and grouped them together with their peers. The local colliery companies began to institute formal training, particularly for the reception of Bevin boys and mining optants¹³² during the Second World War. The National Coal Board organised an Area training centre at Gresford Colliery in 1947. Henceforth, all new entrants were directed to the training centre and received a grounding in all aspects of pit work through a formal syllabus of lectures and by working under the supervision of instructors, usually men nearing retirement, before returning to their sponsoring colliery for assignment.^{133,134} The experience of the hand getting stall system and the relationships it engendered cultivated expectations of behaviour at Hafod Colliery which had no parallel at Llay Main.

As we have noted, a cosmopolitan pit drew its workers from a wider area and from a larger number of communities than a family pit. Comrades were therefore likelier to be strangers to one another outside their work life. Respondents considered that this was the reason why swearing was more common in the larger collieries. Points such as these were not offered as detached sociological observations in oral testimony. Rhos respondents rarely failed to impute the superior virtue and moral worth of workers in family pits:

I don't think really that the fellowship in Llay Main was on a par with Hafod. For the simple reason, they were from so many different areas, people, you see. There was a clash of personalities. You see you had Rhos, Cefn, Acrefair, Pen-Y-Cae, Johnstown, Ruabon, you had Mold, Buckley, Llay, Wrexham, you had a vast area. You see, with the Hafod it was mainly Rhos and district wasn't it?

¹³² Regular reports of the work of the Llay Main Colliery Training Officer may be found in the minutes of the Llay Main Pit Production Committee: CROH D/NM/232, Minutes of the Llay Main Pit Production Committee, March 1944 onwards.

¹³³ Ellis, Mines and Men, pp. 20 - 27.

¹³⁴ The centre processed 772 new entrants between January 1947 and April 1952: Wrexham Leader, 11 Apr 1952.

Everybody knew everybody and they were the same type of people, mostly, in the early days they were Welsh speaking people weren't they? I think that made a vast difference.

Q: Hafod was a Welsh language pit?

[it], Yes. A lot of religious people in Hafod, had deacons from the various churches.¹³⁵ /

Llay Main men resented the implication that profane diction implied a debased and degraded lifestyle. They viewed bad language as being no more than the natural outlet for the tensions generated by the pressure of the work situation¹³⁶ and regarded profanity as a kind of verbal rough play which expressed the camaraderie and boisterous bonhomie of the all male atmosphere underground.¹³⁷ One Llay man specifically repudiated the moralistic account of workplace swearing offered by the Rhos man quoted in the radio documentary, when he presented his own memories about the tenor of workplace diction:

'If it relieves 'emselves,' I say, 'It's not anger really, it's fun!', which doesn't go down well with a lot of people, you know [...]'¹³⁸

Workers in the cosmopolitan pits also asserted a stereotypical image of the miners from the family pits. They considered that they were narrow in outlook, cliquish and censorious. They attested to the existence of a very different ethic of sociability in their own work groups:

There was a good spirit at Llay really. There was no cattiness. If you'd been there a couple or three days, you were one of 'em, you wasn't a stranger, same as 'appened up Rhos way or anything. They were clannish up there. But they were so cosmopolitan in Llay - Lancashire, Yorkshire, Irish. And Buckley, Coedpoeth, Wrexham. They were from all over the place.

¹³⁵ Colin Reese, CLWBC 451.10.

¹³⁶ Ashley Montagu, The Anatomy of Swearing (London, 1968), p. 67.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 87 - 88.

¹³⁸ Horace Davies, WMP C/1984/101.

No I can't remember any trouble at all there.

You'd have domestic squabbles, you know. Nothing to make a fuss about.¹³⁹

The incidence of the Welsh language in the workplace was another symbol which was used to describe the differences between the social cultures of respective collieries. Welsh was, as the language of hearth and home, likelier to be used where there were dense social networks. Respondents discussed the bilingual divide and the use of profane language in the same terms and frequently in the same breath. Both were ~~used~~^{used} to describe the consequences of social change in the coal industry. While the incidence of swearing was obviously used as a metaphor for the encroaching English tongue, the association could represent a valid observation on the sociolinguistic situation. A local columnist observed in 1924 that it seemed to be harder to swear in Welsh than in English.¹⁴⁰ Setting aside considerations about the facility of the Welsh language for expressing profane thoughts, it is the case that if social actors were inhibited from swearing by the presence of neighbours and kinsmen, it would indeed have been harder to swear where Welsh was likelier to be spoken.

Both Llay Main and Hafod Collieries were bilingual communities, but to very different extents. Hafod, drawing largely on the population of Rhos, was very Welsh in atmosphere. ~~While~~^{While} Llay Main was, notwithstanding the influx of Welsh speakers to the new colliery village, largely English in speech. No measurements about the numbers of English and Welsh speakers are available for workplaces but even if such indices ~~were available~~^{were available} they would be of little use. 'Welsh' and 'English' were not quantities which could be measured in absolute terms. The culture of local workplaces was routinely bisected by the bilingual divide and Welsh speaking bilinguals and English monoglots co-existed, routinely reaching some accommodation about the circumstances in which each language would be used.

Hafod Colliery remained distinctively Welsh in culture until its closure and the dispersal of the workforce to other collieries and industries. The hold of

¹³⁹ Walter Swinnerton, WMP C/1984/13.

¹⁴⁰ 'Strangely enough it is the English language that is used in all such cases': Tawlefab, 'At the Sign of the Harp': Wrexham Leader, 19 Nov 1924.

the Welsh language in the mining industry was badly damaged but not utterly destroyed by the pit closures of the sixties. The last Welsh speaking pit run by British Coal was the Cwmgwili Drift Mine which closed as recently as 1992.¹⁴¹ Immigration played a key role in the displacement of the Welsh language in the Wrexham area, mainly by contributing to the falling prestige of the language. English became the language of commerce, industry and economic success. The English specialists who came to Llay Main from Lancashire and Yorkshire to install and supervise the machine mining process were, in the twenties, merely the latest in a long line of skilled immigrants from other industrial regions.¹⁴² Men who were less familiar with the Welsh language, Welsh born English monoglots as well as chauvinist immigrants, might object to its use in their presence. Apart from the concern of some English monoglots that their bilingual comrades might be 'talking behind their backs', it was the uneven structure of the bilingual divide which dictated that Welsh usually did defer to English. Thus a small leaven of English speakers could have a relatively large effect in shifting the language register.

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A unit like Llay Main which collected people from a wide radius actually drew on a number of Welsh speaking communities/_h however, the dissolution of the link between the community and local workplaces contributed to the decline of the Welsh language. The postwar decline of Welsh in the South Wales village of Pont-Rhyd-Y-Fen has been attributed to the closure of the Afon Valley collieries which meant the transfer of men to the English speaking atmosphere of the Dulais Valley pits and the coastal steelworks. Men drawn into such a situation were less likely to use their Welsh, not liking to speak it when deprived of the kin and comrades with whom they shared it.¹⁴³ The Welsh language did not depend upon these physical environs of the old pits but rather upon the tightly

¹⁴¹ Meic Birtwhistle, 'Sprago, Lago a'r "Sunshine Miners"', Llafur Vol. 6 No. 1 (1992), pp. 105 - 109.

¹⁴² Borrow attributed the confusion of tongues he encountered on his famous 1854 traverse of Ruabon parish to immigration prompted by the local collieries and foundries: George Borrow, Wild Wales (1862), pp. 357 - 362.

¹⁴³ Beth Thomas, 'Accounting for Language Shift in a South Wales Mining Community', Cardiff Working Papers in Welsh Linguistics, No. 5 (1987), pp. 63 - 64.

knotted social networks which were coterminous with them.

—/ Economic pressures on the coal industry tended to make all pits increasingly cosmopolitan. Economies of scale dictated that pits should increase in size and the shrinking number of mines meant that as time went on workmen were likelier to be working among strangers than with neighbours. The accounts offered by workmen who lived through these changes are strongly reminiscent of narratives collected in communities of residence affected by social change. While the decline of the Welsh language and the alleged increase in swearing could be seen to be indices of the rupture of communal bonds, the manner in which the evidence is presented precludes its being quantified. Narratives are self-conscious reflections on events: raconteurs employ resonant symbols abstracted from concrete experiences to generalise their subjective impressions. Respondents also recalled the increasing incidence of the theft of tools and food by colleagues as colliery workforces were diluted by the influx of men from other areas.¹⁴⁴ One old 'Dinlock' man complained to Clancy Sigal about the passing of the days when a miner could leave his gold watch in the pit changing rooms and expect it to be there awaiting his return.¹⁴⁵ These terms directly parallel the ubiquitous protestations of isolated and fearful pensioners who protest that 'we never used to have to lock our doors round here'.

Though the incidents respondents described are anecdotal and might seem trivial, they asserted symbols which were used to describe and negotiate social mores. The debates about linguistic mores represent a struggle by a group in the workforce to consolidate their position of social hegemony by imposing their definition of appropriate patterns of behaviour on their fellows. This communal dialogue about the location of the boundaries of the bilingual divide and about verbal temperance also became involved in the dialectic of control, the constant struggle between management and workers to define the terms of the workplace. Many reminiscences detail clashes with officials about the issues

¹⁴⁴ The specific instance was the influx of men from the Broughton area to Bersham Colliery in the thirties: George Thomas, WMP C/1984/49.

¹⁴⁵ Sigal, Weekend in Dinlock, p. 69.

of language and swearing.

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Respondents alleged that the changed attitude of officials to verbal profanity was a decisive factor in the spread of swearing. In the old 'family pits' officials supported the mores and disciplined offenders. The situation changed with the influx of officials from English mining districts after the opening of Llay Main and later with the circulation of senior officials within the hierarchy of the Coal Board. The use of the Welsh language and the use of profane diction was the cause of tension and, apparently the occasion, or at least the overt justification, of actual conflict between management and men.

The explanatory model asserted in the accounts of local workmen described a determination not to have the conditions of their labour entirely dictated to them by their supervisors, particularly where they impinged upon the most intimate relationships of the workgroup. However, while the eruption of English officials may have been distressing, the new men came in the train of new mining techniques and management expectations which had a far more significant effect on the working lives of local miners. A similar situation was described in the South Wales coalfield in the thirties. Former miners at Bwylfa Colliery, interviewed in 1975 described a dramatically increased incidence of swearing in the workplace as one of the most significant changes after the pit was taken over by the Powell Dyffryn combine in the mid-thirties. They linked this decline to the tensions created by the new, hard driving and intimidatory style of management.¹⁴⁶

While their observations may well have been accurate, it is worth asking why local opinion should have fastened upon the incidental consequences of the change in workplace conditions rather than challenging the changes themselves. It is natural that in an attempt to evoke local solidarity, a community should employ the resources of a previously existing communal ideology to resist the new developments which affected it. Where an obvious cultural divide coincided with the split between supervisors and workers it was perhaps inevitable that

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in: Kim Howells A View From Below: Tradition, Experience and Nationalization in the South Wales Coalfield 1937 - 1957 (Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 1979), p. 52.

it would become an issue in the struggle for workplace control. Isabel Emmett noted that in the Nuclear Power Stations of North West Wales supervisory staff were frequently non-Welsh and that though they might be respected personally and individually have enjoyed good relations with the workers, that as a category they were all likely to be subsumed into the negative stereotype of the 'alien employing class'.¹⁴⁷

Sine/ This shift in linguistic mores did not simply highlight the shifting pattern of workplace relationships, linguistic mores actually became the occasion for disputes through which the implications of these changes were resisted. The bilingual frontier of Wales was not the only arena where language was co-opted in the struggle for control in the workplace. One South Yorkshire miner remembered an incident where the linguistic insensitivity of an official challenged the nexus of family relations and customary workplace practices. In the 1910s, Denaby Main colliers stood against a deputy who presumed to address them using the familiar form of the second person singular. The men resented being addressed as 'thee' or 'thou' since they considered this form of address to be overfamiliar and, in this context, patronising. They insisted that the deputy should accord them due respect by addressing them by name. The pit management recognised in this trivial incident a determination to resist the authority of officialdom. The incident was held against one of the men and he was subsequently victimised.¹⁴⁸

-/ In North East Wales, most of the reminiscences about workplace swearing concern the post-nationalization era. In the sixties, senior officials were appointed to positions in the North Wales pits from outside the immediate area. These new appointees were career miners and were zealous in the cause of increased productivity through the efficient application of machine mining and

¹⁴⁷ Isabel Emmett, 'Fe Godwn Ni Eto: Stasis and Change in a Welsh Industrial Town', in Cohen (ed.), Belonging, p. 173.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Mr. Bramley (b. 1896), in: James MacFarlane, 'Denaby Main - A South Yorkshire Mining Village', Bull. of Society for the Study of Labour History Vol. 25 (Autumn 1972), p. 90.

'drive initiative management'.¹⁴⁹ Many of these men originated from Lancashire, the largest coalfield in the North Western Division. Part of the reason that senior officials and managers were sent into the area was to challenge the culture of low achievement. Historically, the North Wales coalfield maintained a low rate of productivity. One of the new draft of senior officials considered that output lagged behind that of other areas with comparable conditions without good reason. He attributed this deficiency to the local balance of power in industrial relations and particularly to a local management culture which was ready to accept lower production efforts.¹⁵⁰ One local official considered that new men were chosen precisely because of their lack of local credentials:

... they tended to think that they wanted a stranger with a whip to bolster everyone up!¹⁵¹

One man, who came to Hafod Colliery was known for his blustering displays of temper and his punctiliousness. As he toured the pit he left comments on shoddily performed work in indelible chalk, a habit which earned him the nickname 'Chalky'¹⁵². Local men resented the brusqueness of some of the new officials in confronting established work practices. His attempts to reform work culture at Hafod Colliery were resisted by the workmen. One man described intimidatory retaliation to his officious style of supervision:

There was a feller down there, a good working feller, in the Main Coal this was - Dic Marged they called him. And he was there, this Chalky, come to the Main Coal.

[...]

And they had these T.C.R. [hydraulic] props, they call 'em. And instead of being straight, they were slanting, and he had this indelible chalk, you call it, he was writing on them: 'Drunken prop', 'Drunken prop', 'Drunken prop', 'Drunken ...'

And this Dic was there, and he was sweating and black.

¹⁴⁹ Gwyn Thomas, WMP C/1984/98.

¹⁵⁰ Raymond Williams, personal correspondence, 1 Jan 1992.

¹⁵¹ Gwyn Thomas, WMP C/1984/98.

¹⁵² Gibbs, Clatter of Clogs, p. 32.

Second row: 'Drunken prop', 'Drunken prop' ...

"Dic?"

"Hello!"

"He's in your row now".

So this Dic got up and Duw! he was sweating you know. And he got a sledgehammer. And these T.C.R.s, you're supposed to knock the lugs out [to let them down], you see.

'Only three to come, Dic'.

'He's close by here, Dic,' we're talking quiet to him, now.

He's two off him and he got this sledge and he didn't slacken it, and he hit this prop! And it passed Farrington, you know! And he was there - eeh! That Farrington went on down the pit and he was never seen in the Main Coal after that. Never come there after that!¹⁵²

It was in the context of this conflict that the use of offensive language by incoming senior officials and their objections to the use of the Welsh language was construed as hostility to local culture per se. By the standards of some coalfields North Wales miners were timid in their relations with their superiors and seemed to be uncomfortable with the idea of bucking the authority of the mine management. It is easy to suspect them of arming for the struggle by girding their loins with the armour of verbal righteousness. These motifs were used to convert a commendable zeal for harder work into a hostility towards local culture with entirely negative connotations. Narratives stress that the English officials were hostile to the use of Welsh in their presence. Concerns about the subversive potential of alien languages are common in a monoglot culture and the incoming officials seem to have been concerned by the possibility that the language might be used to conceal subversive comments or disrespectful backchat. One junior official with local origins could afford to take a more relaxed attitude:

I can pick sentences up, you know. Or I know when somebody's talking about me. [laughs] Put it that way, like!¹⁵³

¹⁵² Emllyn Jones, CLWBC 451.12.
¹⁵³ Wilf Lloyd, WMP C/1984/55.

The local man's familiarity with the Welsh language precluded its use against him in a hostile manner. At the same time, his familiarity with the vicissitudes of a bilingual society meant he was less likely to misconstrue the use of Welsh in his presence. English officials, on the other hand, blundered into a situation for which they were unprepared. Local society did not welcome their intrusion and was ready to interpret their clumsiness in an uncharitable manner. Their ignorance was seen to be a direct and deliberate challenge to local mores:

They could all speak English there but they spoke to each other, right to the very end some of them, spoke Welsh to each other, even in his presence and he'd ask - "Please don't speak Welsh."

"What's it got to do with you, because I've always spoken Welsh to my brother?" or, "I've always spoken Welsh to my uncle and I'll not speak any other language to please you because I'm not talking about you, anyway!"

Or, "I'm not talking about work! I'm talking with my brother, or my uncle, or my cousin!"¹⁵⁴

Resistance to the new demands made by managers was not determined by the opportunity for subversion offered by the Welsh language as much as through the instinctive solidarity engendered by the dense social networks that supported the linguistic community. One man who came to manage Hafod Colliery in 1959 found the 'close knit Welsh community' a formidable force: 'They were certainly more intransigent at Hafod than any other miners in North Wales'.¹⁵⁵ He was keen to make the point that attributing difficulties with industrial relations to the hold of the Welsh language on Rhos was 'a valid academic argument and not a racially prejudiced comment' and indeed, his experiences at Hafod corroborate Milroy's observation of Belfast dialect communities where speakers were able to form 'a cohesive group capable of resisting pressure, linguistic and social, from outside the group'.¹⁵⁶

The local antipathy to bad language was actually used as a weapon in confrontations between management and men. One man recalled an incident at

¹⁵⁴ Reuben Whalley, WMP C/1984/43.
¹⁵⁵ Raymond Williams, personal correspondence, 1 Jan 1992.
¹⁵⁶ Milroy, Language and Social Networks, p. 182.

Hafod Colliery where trade union representatives turned the tables in disciplinary matter. Skilful advocacy wrong footed one notoriously foul mouthed official and forced him to concede an apology to the man he had chastised roughly.¹⁵⁷ The following account describes a concrete instance of an unofficial stoppage that blew up ostensibly because an undermanager swore at his subordinates. Though the respondent acknowledges that men were evading legitimate discipline, he makes interesting decisions about the way he chooses to represent the situation. By using the device of a dialogue, the raconteur literally put words into the mouth of the senior official and effectively depicts and dissects what he regards as his flawed character: swearing is used as evidence of a lack of respect for the workmen on the part of the undermanager and profane vocabulary is actually deployed in the performance to undermine the credibility of the alien official:

I remember one [man], a, one instance of a Lancashire man he was y'know. And he was very abrupt, very. I call him a nasty man y'understand? I call him a nasty man. He had occasion to discipline, a certain section, what we call the locomotive drivers, at Hafod Colliery y'know, he had to discipline [them] for something they'd done, something wrong or something, y'know. In his opinion.

And he queried what this lad had done and this lad was trying to explain to him, there must have been a reason for it y'know.

And, "I'm not listening!" he said, "Put your bloody rags on and go home!" To this lad, you see. Y'know, just to one man like.

"Don't answer me back! put your bloody rags on and go up the bloody pit!" he said.

Well as a matter of fact I was senior overman at that time, then I was in the vicinity, this was underground, you see. And I ended up and he was at the end of a telephone. Oh, and he said, "Where's the supply of wagons?" he said, y'know. There was no supply of wagons coming in to be filled. Anyway ten locomotive drivers had gone up to the surface!

And he says, "Funny bloody pit, this!" he said, "At Lancashire when I tell the bloody man to go up the pit," he said, "y'know 'Get your rags, son!' he goes", he said. "If you tell somebody at Hafod they all bloody well go with him!" he said.

¹⁵⁷ Unrecorded interview, Ken Aspinall, 14 May 1991.

That was the difference you see, they had to modify their approach. They spoke to people like dogs you know! Just like a dog, you know. But it didn't work with Hafod people you see. They used bad language if you like, you know. It didn't work.'¹⁵⁸

The dialogue is dramatic, but obviously contrived, and though it presents the position of the alien undermanager it is constructed in such a manner as to win the sympathy of the audience for the home team.

Symbolic material is frequently offered in oral testimony, both in the situations respondents describe and in the techniques they employ to describe them. Though testimony may become objectively unreliable when skirting subjects with which the respondent is emotionally involved, the search for objectivity is a spurious goal when the historian seeks to describe the influence of informal social institutions. There can be no objective description of socially constructed entities since they can have no existence outside their continual negotiation and renegotiation within the community. Though oral sources may provide unreliable descriptions of the historical milieu they ostensibly represent, it is their very subjectivity and partiality which provides a point of departure for the analysis of the function of such stories in those settings.

If we are looking for an objective account about linguistic mores in the narratives offered by North Wales miners we will be disappointed: local discourses about bad language and the bilingual divide are hopelessly tangled and it is apparent that the ostensible discussion of language is a way of voicing other concerns. This observation is enshrined in one local anecdote:

Q: What was the main language spoken?

A: In the pit? Welsh in Hafod. I remember one function, one of the deputies was retiring and they asked him to say a few words and he got up.

When the Wynnstay [Colliery] lot came to Hafod in nineteen thirty-something ... then the N.C.B. came in and people from Lancashire came in and brought bad language.

¹⁵⁸ Gwyn Thomas, WMP C/1984/98.

So he got up and said, "Once upon a time everybody used to talk Welsh down the pit. Then our friends came from Ruabon and everybody started speaking English, and now they've come and we're speaking French!"^{159, 160}

The threats posed to local communities and local culture by outsiders and the demands of the modern industrial economy are described in the stories told by respondents. These accounts also offer a description of the community mobilising in its own defence. Narratives such as these are unreliable as objective accounts precisely because they were used as weapons in the ideological conflict. Stories entertain but good stories also inspire, educate, indoctrinate and convince. The oral culture of the workplace was, by its own testimony, one of the rallying points against the onslaught.

This chapter has discussed the view that many of the anecdotes and attitudes incorporated into narratives originated in discussions which were contemporaneous with the events they described. These discussions were not simply a reflection of these events as they were themselves an aspect of the continual struggle for control in the workplace. Though recently collected narratives can be taken as representative of historical oral cultures to a certain extent, it would be naive to assume that 'pre-existent' narratives had been preserved inviolate between the time of their construction and the time of their collection. To have survived to posterity, these narratives must have become a part of the community's discussion about its own past. These narratives are now self-consciously cited as 'history' by respondents offering an account of their communities to interested outsiders. As the relevance of these narratives was readdressed by such treatment, the form of narratives must have been affected.

¹⁵⁹ 'French' (n) - Bad language, as in "Please excuse my French", in colloquial usage from the nineteenth century: Hugh Rawson, A Dictionary of Inveective (London, 1989), p. 155.

¹⁶⁰ John Jones, CROH NT/789 No. 5.

Gramsci observed that everyone is a philosopher. He did not mean that everyone reads Aristotle but that everyone, no matter how poorly educated, is obliged to engage with rudimentary epistemological problems in their day-to-day life. By the same token, everyone is a historian. Though ordinary people are not usually versed in the skills necessary for the methodical evaluation of sources and the assessment of rival arguments, everybody entertains a vernacular conception of the past, particularly where it interacts with their own experiences. Respondents are uniquely privileged in being able to offer an account of their own past. Their authority comes not only from the benefit of their own actual experiences, but from the advantage of having been party to the discussions which shaped the community's conception of its own past. Respondents are not passive but active intermediaries between the interviewer and the past, and they are prompted to speak by their idea of fidelity to the past.

These ideas about fidelity might actually compromise the accuracy of their accounts. Everyday life is full of stories. These narratives are frequently concerned with 'being-in-the-world' rather than with any abstractly defined ideal of 'the truth'. Accounts of the past are shaped by their relevance to the present. It is possible that the narrator may impose his or her own judgements about the past and that as he or she seeks to evoke a plausible account, that 'authenticity' and truth might collide.¹⁶¹

These factors might be seen to undermine the credentials of these narratives as objective evidence. However, all historians should be aware of how the sources they presume to use were created and how they have been preserved, to avoid accepting the implicit bias of the selection made by the depredations of time. It is not possible to eliminate problems with particular sources by refusing to account for them. An awareness of how oral culture functioned in past historical milieux is necessary for an informed reading of the account of the past it offers.

¹⁶¹ Agnes Heller, A Theory of History (London, 1983) p. 51, cited in: Patrick Wright, On Living In An Old Country - the National Past in Contemporary Britain (London, 1985), pp. 14 - 15.

There are limits to the distortions narratives can encompass. Narratives about the past which have been shaped by presentation in a communal context are unlikely to be flagrantly false. Though, as we have seen, consensual accounts frequently have mythical qualities, they are rarely complete fabrications. Generally, in making selections from the available material, in generalising from the specific to the particular and in artfully incorporating material into persuasive arguments for a particular version of the past, the vernacular historian is guilty of no crime or conceit which is not also committed by professional practitioners of the historian's art.

The historian can compare the vernacular account offered by one respondent to those offered by others and can check accounts for their internal consistency. The descriptions offered by interview material may also be compared with the accounts provided by other available sources. However, the historian should be aware that he or she is not simply looking at demonstrably flawed accounts of the past but rather χ at expressions of the popular historical consciousness which have informed the conduct of the community. On this count, even if on no other, these accounts deserve our attention.

Conclusion.

When people heard that I was basing a survey of the colliery villages of North Wales on an oral history methodology, I was frequently asked whether the material I was gathering actually described the situation in the colliery villages of the North Wales coalfield between the 1930s and the 1960s or if in fact it was a more eloquent description of the contemporary reality of local life for the respondents? Some scholars retain the conviction that oral respondents - 'old men men drooling about their youth' as they were memorably described by A.J.P. Taylor' - habitually invest all their recollections of the past with regret for their declining powers and that their consciousness of the marginality of their position in modern society routinely leads them to emphasise very different qualities in the social life in the past. However, this question is particularly valid in view of the specific aims of the project, which was not simply to recover material ~~to attempt~~ an empirical reconstruction of past social circumstances, but to examine how the communities were socially constructed and legitimated by the ~~social~~ culture generated by their members. I was asked whether, in considering the subjective dimensions of narratives, I was actually examining the sinews of these historical communities or whether I was not in fact participating in the creation of a modern community of nostalgic reverie?

The history of the coal industry is well known in Britain and is often described and evoked in the popular media. During the period in which I conducted my research the British coal industry was once again plunged into an acute crisis. Media coverage of the further deprecations of the industry prior to its privatisation slid into coverage of the tenth anniversary of the great strike of 1984 - 5. Much of this coverage presented images of the former pit villages dotted throughout the coalfield districts of the United Kingdom and implied or stated that these communities which once lived on coal were now living on their memories. It is often observed that these communities are now held together, in the absence of their former economic base, by memories of past comradeship and common struggles.

1 A.J.P. Taylor cited in: Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1988), p. 70.

The commitment of these communities to their past is often presented as part of the picture of a moribund industry and a defeated workforce. Indeed, it is often asked whether it was not the industry's obsession with the troublesome legacy of its own past that ultimately led it to its doom. However, is it possible for any community to continue in existence without some conception of its own past? The fact the adjective 'nostalgic' can be applied to the memories voiced by members of these communities does not invalidate them as accounts of the past. If these communities are united by their memories after the closure of the pits, it may be considered that since these same memories were the bonds which united these communities together when the pits were open, there is no fundamental discontinuity.

The terms 'community' and 'culture' are both very hard to define. The definitions of the two terms seem to be circular since it is generally assumed that neither could exist without the other: culture is the prerequisite social memory which unites a community, and the community provides the context in which cultures are constructed and elaborated. To merit the term 'community' a group must not only have a past but consciousness of that past. Lotman considered that culture is memory - 'created, preserved, accumulated and transmitted by human society'.² Since oral communication is the most immediate recourse for the members of a group, oral culture is perhaps the primary culture of any group.

Peter Burke considered that a 'social history of remembering' should concentrate on the description of the modes of transmission of public memories and should consider the historic uses of the past and the ways these uses have changed over time.³ I hope that this study has considered both these themes and would therefore say, in answer to the question of whether this study concerns the past or the present, that it concerns both. This is not a disingenuous reply since all versions of the historical

² J.M. Lotman, Semiotica de la Cultura (Madrid, 1979) cited by Krinka Vidakovic Petrov, 'Memory and Oral Tradition' in Thomas Butler (ed.) Memory: History, Culture and the Mind (Oxford, 1989), p. 78.

³ Peter Burke, 'History as Social Memory', in Thomas Butler (ed.) Memory: History, Culture and the Mind (Oxford, 1989), p. 100.

enterprise, whether oral or written and whether produced by amateur or academic practitioners, are fundamentally present-minded.

In this study I have attempted to investigate various contexts in which village culture was elaborated. I have used oral testimony in conjunction with other sources to attempt the empirical reconstruction of past social milieux. I have examined the discourses embodied in the oral culture of these communities, considering them both as the products of oral genres and as ideological constructs shaped to serve the vested interests of local groups.

In Rhos the most widely accepted descriptions of the community appear to have originated with the respectable leaders of local opinion, and it is striking that the image of Rhos they described appears to have been the diametric opposite to the sullen slum described by some nineteenth century observers. In Llay, elites played a more deliberate role in the physical construction of the community, and the colliery company was able, through a scheme of paternalism and the conscious manipulation of symbols, to force its description of the community onto the new village. The aspect of local life most overtly concerned with values and with world views was the religious milieu. Despite the widely diffused image of pious communities united in worship in Nonconformist congregations, there was a struggle between the committed Nonconformists and the rest of the population, including more diffuse category of Nonconformist 'adherents', over appropriate levels of commitment to local congregations and religious mores. This struggle was one carried out over a largely symbolic terrain. While the committed supporters of religious congregations used symbols to define the split between the churches and the world, less committed local people used a symbolic vocabulary of their own to assert their own definition of appropriate levels of commitment. In the workplace there was a perpetual struggle between workmen and employers in which both tried to assert their own definitions of desirable levels of work and reward. The chief characteristic of the industrial conduct of workgroups was their solidarity. This behaviour was informed by the culture of workplace. Workplace culture was a multi-faceted entity but this study has considered the tales and narratives through which local workmen described the pit

environment and mores of workplace society, and which helped them to understand the features of pit life and to reach a psychological accommodation with them.

cap^s John Tosh considered that oral testimony uniquely conveys 'the essential connectedness of aspects of daily life which the historian otherwise tends to know of as discrete social facts'.⁴ in the restricted sphere of the colliery village neighbours were often kin and may also have been known as colleagues or co-congregationers. The interconnectedness of these spheres was apparent to respondents and was clearly a factor in their constructions of their social worlds. The workplace was cited as central to the construction of the community and religious culture was cited and referred to in the workplace. History is always a revisionist discipline. Its loyalty to the present means that its account of the past will change as contemporary circumstances change. Historical myths can have careers in the course of which they may serve many purposes. Many groups and parties might lay claim to national myths and seek to bind them to the chariot of their own cause. Even the local myths considered in this study might have served several purposes during their careers. The vernacular account respondents offered of swearing in the workplace apparently originated with the supporters of the chapel interest as part of an ideological attack on the unregenerate in the ranks of the colliery workforce. However stories about the local prohibition against swearing latterly became an integrative ideology which united local workmen against outsiders, most particularly the colliery officials they viewed as incoming aliens.

We might expect that most vernacular accounts of history are selective in the accounts they offer of the past but even where these accounts are objectively untrue they have many other qualities which should commend them to scholars. The Icelandic sagas may be examined for their accounts of the deeds of heroes but their circulation tells us a great deal about the concerns of the society that constructed and listened to them. It is apparent that mediaeval Icelanders lived in a world which they considered

⁴ John Tosh, The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History 2nd edn. (London, 1990), p. 210.

was controlled by a malevolent fate, and one which was preoccupied with the delineation of ancestry and prerogative and with concepts of honour. I have argued that the 'village epics' of the North Wales coalfield should be considered in a similar light. This was a society which, as it was reflected in this lore, was interested in the human dimensions of its historical experiences, and used the locateability of these experiences as an important means of establishing the validity of the testimonies of its members. It was a society concerned with accommodating the competing claims of the various communities and groups which composed it and with negotiating and describing the legitimate claims these groups had over their members.

The differences between the communities of Rhos and Llay are unsurprising and obviously owe much to their very different origins. The differences are nowhere more clearly reflected in their oral cultures. The linguistic survey in the census revealed Rhos to be the most thoroughly Welsh speaking industrial parish in the district and Llay to be one of the most anglicised. In this period the Welsh language was almost universally transmitted through vernacular socialisation and the retention of the language was seen as the expression of a commitment to the linguistic community. Welsh speaking communities can therefore be assumed to have shared certain social characteristics. The proportion of Welsh speakers in a population was not an incidental feature of local life but a fundamental characteristic of the community. The differing proportions of Welsh speakers in these two communities indicated that they were communities dissimilar both in social organisation and in outlook.

It would be rather more difficult to measure the oral culture of these communities in the terms in which it is considered in this study. Nevertheless it is observed that vernacular cultures are often preserved where social networks are relatively dense. People involved in communities woven from dense social networks tend to have more shared assumptions. We may presume that this was expressed and perpetuated in the kind of oral culture considered in this study. Unfortunately, entities as elusive as shared assumptions do not lend themselves to quantitative measurements. The attempt to measure the numbers of tales in circulation would be inept

partly because the interviews consulted were conducted with no pretence towards sampling procedures and mainly because it would be foolish to regard the repertoires of respondents as crudely comparable entities. It is possible to make a personal and subjective assessment of the sophistication and the themes expressed in the the lore of the village and the pit. On these considerations Rhos seemed to be a denser community and its inhabitants appeared to be well aware of the fact.

Aside from the scattered and superficial accounts of a few visitors, this study has not been able to draw upon contemporary accounts of life in the North Wales coalfield derived from participant observation. In an attempt to compensate for this deficiency I considered the accounts of observers who had examined analagous situations which were contemporaneous with social milieux studied here. While these accounts offered many stimulating insights I found that when comparing them with the interview material I was ultimately dissatisfied with the descriptions of working class life they offered.

Richard Hoggart examined the impact of the new media on the old manner of working class life in the post-war period. Hoggart was aware that this way of life in urban villages of large industrial towns had only existed for a few generations and yet was struck by the strength of its hold on the habits and outlooks of the urban working class and by the tremendous inertia it seemed to express. He described, with reference to his own childhood experiences, a claustrophobic and intrusive family life. Small and crowded dwellings offered little opportunity for physical withdrawal while the prevailing social culture gave the individual no authority to insist on his or her privacy. It was a society caught up in the struggle to reproduce itself, winning pay, raising children and coping with domestic crises, and which had little opportunity for, or inclination towards, self-reflection.⁵

Hoggart and others of the generation post-war social investigators considered that the limited nature of working class life was reflected in -----

⁵ Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (Harmondsworth, 1958), pp. 27 ff.

the oral culture of the back streets and factories. They considered that the thoughts and attitudes of ordinary people were patterned on maxims drawn from the community's experience of the past. These 'oral tags' were a widely circulated currency which expressed a widely accepted but largely unexamined wisdom. Brian Jackson noted that:

-/ital/ ... working class language tends to communicate similarities rather than differences in experience: it reinforces feelings of solidarity. Middle-class language tends to define, in elaborate ways, the individual as against the group.⁶

-/ Though this language expressed limited perspectives Jackson noted that working class raconteurs were 'deliberate and authoritative within their worlds' and that their language had its own expressive virtues: principally, an unparalleled 'power of uttering direct personal experience'. He speculated that these characteristics had arisen out of a deeply inbred habit of 'valuing people rather than things, principles or ideas' and were evidence of a social world which was defined by interactions with kin and colleagues.⁷

One respondent consulted in my own oral history survey remembered the social culture of the Rhos of his youth in the thirties:

It was a very open [community], [...] everybody walked into everybody else's house, that sort of thing.

There was no privacy, it was a very extrovert, rumbustuous sort of place, not the sort of place for a shrinking violet to be brought up in. I never enjoyed it. I was a little bit introvert rather than extrovert. It didn't suit me by any means, or wouldn't have suited me if I'd have stayed but that was the life of Rhos. Everybody called a spade a spade and no offence was taken and all the rest of it and everybody knew

⁶ Brian Jackson, 'Styles of Living', in Brian Jackson with Dennis Marsden, Working Class Community - Some General Notions Raised by a Series of Studies in Northern England (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 13.

⁷ Loc. cit.

everybody else's business.

That applies to lots of villages but it was more so in Rhos than anywhere I know ...^e

I do consider that this manner of life is reflected in the concerns apparent in the oral culture of the district. Narratives were concerned with the concrete rather than abstract - even concerns as abstract as morality were discussed through the use of archetypes which oral discourses dressed up as local people. There was little privacy in the village or in the workplace, since experiences were regarded as communal rather than personal possessions. The validity of experiences as precedents was acknowledged in consideration of their connection with known individuals and localities. The sometimes stereotypical testimony offered by respondents might lead to the suspicion that some of the incidents were not, as the lore represented them to be, unique to the district. The localisation of these folk tales was the means by which universal experiences were ~~published~~ made available as local wisdom.

- / While the account of the role of oral culture in working class life was generally satisfactory, the analysis frequently attached to it seemed to me flawed and inadequate. The Uses of Literacy was one of the earliest shots
- / in an extended discussion about working class mentalities. The discussion considered the extent to which habits of speech offered insights into habits of mind and the degree to which they indicated a pervasive cognitive
- / poverty or linguistic deprivation in working class culture. Many of these commentators considered that the conservatism of this oral culture
- / reinforced the traditional manner of working class life and not only inhibited escape via education and employment into materially better circumstances but also blurred their vision of a better world.

It is worth remembering the context of this discourse. Historically,

- / elite discussion of working class mentalities has usually been prompted by contemporary concerns in social policy. In the nineteenth and early
- / twentieth centuries observers of working class poverty were concerned with

^e Interview with Tom Ellis.

the apparent illogicality of the household survival strategies described as the 'self taxation of the poor'. Commentators and social reformers tried, by attempting to inculcate more rational strategies of thrift, to improve the economic performance of the nation and reduce spending on the relief of

- / poverty. In the post war period the debate about working class mentalities
- / centred on working class reactions to the reformed education system. Commentators considered whether and how an education system patterned on
- / middle class social culture and expectations should accommodate the
- / patterns of working class culture. These concerns have succeeded in more recent years to a debate centred on the welfare state. This discussion has

g focused of centred on the proposition that an ineptly applied system social palliatives intended to combat relative deprivation had in fact trapped people in a 'dependency culture' created as their own limited expectations of life had interacted with the pessimism expressed by a liberal elite in its construction of a comprehensive system of crutches and doles.

, and/

- / We might suspect that when these observers charged the working class with an inability to think abstractly they were actually lamenting their failure to act, rather than think, in a manner conforming to their own expectations.

I hope I have shown that an oral culture is not necessarily a patchwork composed of threadbare cliches and it is not necessarily indicative of a pervasive cognitive poverty. Notwithstanding the communications

g revolution, oral culture still played and ~~still~~ plays an important part in industrialised society. The oral cultures described by this study were quite sophisticated entities. Oral culture was not reproduced by sterile repetition but rather by the continual re-appropriation of traditions, anecdotes and genres by rising generations of local people. Individuals and groups were capable of taking existing materials and using them and manipulating them creatively to suit their own contemporary purposes.

It might be worth considering why the discourse was historical, and why so much emphasis was placed on the experience of past generations? Perhaps a description of the world depending on 'common common-senseness' demands a

concrete manifestation and this, of necessity, must be located in the past.
 7 - / Standish Meacham[^] spoke of this tendency in the English urban working class society as it stood in the midst of the late Edwardian crisis and on the brink of the Great War. Despite the specific context in which his observations were made they clearly have a more general validity:

Their past, which had left most of them insecure and uncertain, seemed to them their best anchor against an even more uncertain future.⁹

⁹ Standish Meacham, A Life Apart - The English Working Class, 1890 - 1914 (London, 1977), p. 220.

Appendix One.

Directors of Llay Main Colliery Company
who were also
Directors of the Industrial Housing Association.

Sir Charles Markham, a director of Llay Main Colliery and Llay Main Housing Association, was also the Chairman of the Stavely and Sheepbridge Coal and Iron Combine, a director of the Doncaster Colliery Association and a Director of the Hickleton Main Colliery Company. Markham became an inhabitant of Llay and moved into residence at Oak Alyn, a large house near the village. He was later MP for Mansfield, the division previously represented by his father.

Sir Robert Armitage MP, was Chairman of the Llay Main Company and was also Chairman of the Hickleton Main Colliery Company.

William Humble was managing director of the Llay Main Company.

Sir John Tudor Walters MP, was, as Chairman of the Industrial Housing Association Building Committee, the chief consulting architect at the Llay Main scheme. He was the author of the influential 1918 report to the Local Government Board on housing provision for the working class usually known by his name.

Two other directors of the Markham Main Company, William Bird MP and the Hon. John Henry MacClaren MP were also directors of the Industrial Housing Association.

Sources: Colliery Guardian 25 Aug 1922; Chester Chronicle 28 May 1921; Colliery Yearbook and Coal Trades Directory 1923 - 1926; Margot Heinemann, Britain's Coal - A Study of the Mining Crisis (London, 1944), Appendix 'Coal Combines producing over a million tons of coal a year', pp. 176 - 195.

Appendix Two.

**Stoppages and Restrictions Due to Trade Disputes
at Llay Main and Hafod Collieries
1930 - 1962.***

	Llay Main Total Disputes	Hafod Total Disputes	Llay Main Disputes Among Faceworkers	Hafod Disputes Among Faceworkers.
1930				
1931				
1932				
1933		1		
1934	4		4	
1935	3	1	1	1
1936	13	3	10	1
1937	2	11		8
1938		5		4
1939	7	9	5	1
1940	4	6	2	4
1941	3	1	1	
1942	7	1	1	
1943				
1944	1		1	
1945	3	1	2	1
1946				
1947	4	3	2	
1948	5	7	4	3
1949	7	1	7	
1950	15	3	6	3
1951	3	1	1	
1952	1	5		
1953				
1954	3	1		
1955	3			
1956				
1957		1		
1958				
1959				
1960				
1961				
1962	1		1	
Totals	89	61	48	26

* This table is compiled from the following sources: Press: Rhos Herald; Wrexham Leader; Colliery Guardian; Wrexham and North Wales Guardian
National Coal Board Records: PRO COAL/26/94, North Wales Area, Memorandum to the National Conciliation Council 1947 - 1948; PRO COAL/26/94, Reports by Divisional Labour Directors 1949 - 1950; CROH D/NM/338, North Western -
(continued overleaf)

- Division, North Wales Area, 'Stoppages and Restrictions Due to Trade Disputes, 1947 to 17th September 1955.'

Colliery Records: CROH CB/8/3, Llay Main Output Book, 1920 - 1929, 1930 - 1931, 1933 - 1942, CROH CB/8/7, 1944 - 1945; CROH CB/8/6, Hafod Output Book 1933 - 1945, CROH, CB/8/7, 1947; CROH D/NM 232, 247, Llay Main Pit Production Committee, 1943 - 1945; CROH D/NM/744, Llay Main Colliery Consultative Committee, 1952 - 1955.

Union Records: CROH D/NM/564, Llay Main Union Correspondence, c. 1934 - 1937; CROH D/NM/331, Minutes of Llay Main Disputes Committee, 1941 - 1957; CROH D/NM/701, Hafod Colliery Union Correspondence, c. 1942 - 1954.

▫ According to the only inclusive survey of stoppages available for consultation these totals may be regarded as definitive: CROH D/NM/338 North Western Division, North Wales Area, 'Stoppages and Restrictions Due to Trade Disputes, 1 January 1947 to 17th September 1955.'

Appendix Three.

**Biographical Details of Respondents
and
Details of Interview Surveys.**

WELSH FOLK MUSEUM INTERVIEWS.

Lynn Davies conducted a series of interviews with members of the last generations of Welsh speaking miners in an attempt to capture examples of the unique workplace jargon and to record the folklore of the Welsh speaking pits before they disappeared. The results of his survey may be found in: Lynn Davies, Geirfa'r Glowr [Miners' Vocabulary] (Cardiff, 1976) and in: Lynn Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', Folklife 9 (1971). The interviews were conducted in Welsh and recordings are available at the Welsh Folk Museum. The interviews were not all transcribed but are well described in the catalogue notes.

Mr. Bob Ellis. Tape Nos. 2199 - 2205. 11.3.69.

Born 1898. Went underground at Hafod Colliery in 1912. Returned to the colliery after war service in the Royal Flying Corps. Became a deputy in 1922 but returned to the coal face when his district was stopped after he reported the presence of gas. He served from 1924 to 1941 as Lodge Secretary. Became colliery undermanager in 1941. He retired from the industry in 1962.

He served on the colliery Rescue Team and participated in the abortive rescue attempts after the 1934 explosion at Gresford Colliery. He worked with the salvage teams that explored and reconstructed the sealed pit.

A committed chapel goer. He lived in Rhosllanerchrugog and served as a County Councillor.

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY VAL BRENNAN, NE LLOYD.

This series of interviews with former mine workers from the Flintshire and Denbighshire coalfields was conducted in 1981, for a postgraduate thesis. Copies of the transcripts are deposited at the Clwyd Record Office, Harwarden, CROH NT/789.

Mr. Bert Hughes. No. 1. 20.5.81.

Worked at Bettisfield Colliery in Flintshire as a haulage hand and later as a filler between 1924 and 1933. He lived in Bagillt.

Interview with former Point of Ayr Miners. No. 2. 28.7.81.

Mr. Jack Griffiths. Born 1911 and went underground in 1926. Mr. Griffiths was instrumental in re-establishing a branch of the North Wales Miners' Federation at the colliery in the late thirties in the face of opposition from the company union established after the General Strike. He served as

Lodge President in 1942 and later as Lodge Delegate. He also served as President of the Area N.U.M. and in this capacity sat on the National Executive of the N.U.M.

Mr. Rudolph Jones. Born 1919, he went underground in 1935.

Mr. Glyn Hughes. Born 1908, he went underground at Englefield Colliery in 1922 and transferred to Point of Ayr Colliery after its closure in 1929.

Mr. Jack Read. No. 3. 30.7.81.

Born in County Durham in 1918. His parents returned to North Wales. He went underground at Hafod Colliery in 1932. He lost a brother in the Gresford disaster. He moved to Gresford Colliery after the closure of Hafod. He served on the colliery Lodge Committees and as a Workmens' Inspector.

He lived in Rhosllanerchrugog and Pen-Y-Cae. He was a prominent member of the Gospel Hall congregation. Mr. Read has been very active in preserving the memory of the local mining industry.

Mr. Arthur Redhouse. No. 4. 30.7.81.

Born in 1906 in Liverpool. He went underground at Hafod Colliery in 1923. He served on the Lodge Committee. He lived in Rhosllanerchrugog.

Mr. John William Jones - 'John Marged'. No. 5. 31.7.81.

Born 1903. He went underground at Hafod Colliery in 1917. He became a deputy. He lived in Rhosllanerchrugog.

Mr. Bob Ellis. No. 6. 31.7.81.

See Welsh Folk Museum Interviews.

Mr. Robert Owen Roberts and Mrs. Roberts. No. 8. 29.12.81.

Mr. Roberts was born in 1902. He went underground at Moss Colliery in 1916. He later moved to Gatewen Colliery where he continued until 1928. Mr. Roberts worked as haulage corporal. He later became a railwayman.

Mrs. Roberts worked as a nurse in the interwar period. They lived in Brymbo and Southsea.

CLWYD LIBRARY SERVICE INTERVIEWS.

The Clwyd Library Service interview collection is based on several oral history projects which were undertaken in the early 1980s by people employed under the auspices of the Manpower Services Commission. The main collection is kept in the County Library at Mold and is largely untranscribed. Transcripts of the following interviews were made by the present author:

Mr. Tom Jones - 'Tom Spain'. Tape Nos. 31, 58. x.10.80.

Born c. 1908. Mr. Jones went underground at Hafod Colliery in 1922. He later worked at Vauxhall and Bersham Collieries. He participated as a

volunteer in the rescue attempts made after the 1934 explosion at Gresford Colliery. He was involved in the organisation of the unofficial strike at Bersham Colliery in 1935.

He was active in the local Labour Party and later associated with the Communist Party. He travelled to Spain to fight in the Civil War and was captured after the fall of the Republic. Although sentenced to life imprisonment he was released after a campaign was mounted for the government to intervene on his behalf.

He returned to the area in 1940. He worked in a Wrexham brewery and then at a chemical plant in Cefn. He became Area Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union in 1944.

He lived in Rhos and Ponciau in the interwar period and later in Harwarden.

Mr. Tom Tilston. Tape No.63. 1.11.78.

Born 1887. Mr. Tilston worked sinking Gresford Colliery and was afterwards employed underground at the new pit. He was in the Rescue Team and participated in the rescue attempts after the 1934 explosion. He lived in Gresford and Rhosddu.

Mr. Sidney Roberts. Tape No. 74. 13.1.81.

Born c. 1906. He went underground at Brynkinallt Colliery in 1920. He became a deputy in 1927. He worked latterly at Ifton Colliery. He lived in Chirk.

Mrs. Alice Gwilliam. Tape No. 75. 19.2.81.

Born 1895. Her husband was a railwayman. She lived in Chirk.

Mr. Winston Jones. Tape No. 88. n.d.

Born in 1920. Lived in Rhosymedre. He moved to Chirk in 1947 and started an upholstery business.

Mr. James Bentley. Tape No. 180. 26.6.78.

A local folklorist and historian describing the traditions and folk stories of Buckley.

Mr. and Mrs. J. Blundert. Tape 214 Side A. n.d.

Describing life in Buckley between the wars.

Mr. Alf Jones. Tape 214 Side B. n.d.

Describing Buckley life between the wars. He served as a County Councillor.

'Webbert', Blundert and Rowlands. Tape 215. n.d.

Describing working life in Buckley in the interwar period: the local clayworks, the collieries and carting.

WREXHAM MARLOR MUSEUM PROJECT INTERVIEWS.

The interviews were conducted in 1984 and 1985, mainly by Robert Wynn, William Harrison and also by Mr. D. Jones, who were working at the Wrexham Museum Office under the auspices of the Manpower Services Commission. The project concentrated on talking to former miners and clayworkers. The collection was not systematically transcribed by the Museum Office and most of the following interviews were transcribed by the present author.

Mr. Norman Davies. C/1984/1. 6.6.84.

Mr. Davies first went underground in 1925. He worked at Moss, Llay Main and Bersham Collieries, retiring because of pneumoconiosis in 1966.

Mr. J.P. Davies. C/1984/2. 4.6.84.

Born in 1919, Mr. Jones first went underground at Gresford Colliery at the age of fourteen. He attained the position of 'doggie' or haulage corporal. He returned to Gresford Colliery after war service. He lived in Wrexham.

Mr. and Mrs. C.H. Parr. C/1984/3 n.d.

Mr. Parr was born in 1904. He began working on the screens at Gwersyllt Colliery at 13. He worked at Llay Hall Colliery until 1932 before working in the building industry. He was directed to work in Gresford Colliery after period of unemployment in the forties.

Mr. T.D. Jones. C/1984/5 11.6.84.

Born 1918. Mr. Jones first went underground in 1930. He worked at Brynmally and Black Lane Collieries and at Llay Main from 1932 until 1961. He lived in Moss.

Mr. Bob Ellis. C/1984/7,8. 26.6.84. C/1984/15. n.d.

See Interviews by Val Brennan CROH NT/789, No. 6.

Mr. George Thomas. C/1984/9. 26.6.84. C/1984/49, 50, 51. 9.9.84.

Born C. 1903, Mr. Thomas began working on the screens at Bersham Colliery at 13, he went underground at 14. Mr. Thomas became a chargeman on a machine face. He served on the Lodge Committee for 37 years, serving at Chairman for 14 years.

He served as a rescue man and as a Workmens' Inspector. He retired from the industry in 1968.

He lived in Rhos and served as a local Councillor.

Mr. Walter Swinnerton. C/1984/13. 4.7.84. C/1984/30, 31. 26.7.84.

Born in 1906, Mr. Swinnerton went underground at the Moss Colliery in 1914 and worked afterwards at Gresford. He moved to Llay Main in early 1930 where he worked as a ropeman. He served on the Llay Main Lodge Committee.

He lived in Gwersyllt, Llay and Wrexham.

Mr. William Salisbury. C/1984/14 n.d.

Born in 1897, Mr. Salisbury went underground at the Moss Colliery in 1914 and worked afterwards at Gresford. He moved to Llay Main in the early thirties.

He lived in Brynteg and Moss.

Mr. Bill Williams. C/1984/18. 16.7.89.

Born in 1911, Mr. Williams first went underground in 1925. He worked at Hafod Colliery.

Interview conducted during a tour of the Hafod Colliery site.

Mr. D.C. Norman Jones. C/1984/21. 18.7.89.

Born in 1908, Mr. Jones worked at Wynnstay Colliery from 1922 to 1924. He later set up a haulage business.

He lived in Newbridge and Ruabon.

Mr. Silas Davies. C/1984/23, 24. 23.7.84.

Born 1918, Mr. Davies's father worked in Rhosddu and Gatewen Collieries. Mr. Davies worked as a painter and in a Wrexham brickworks in the fifties.

He lived in Pentre Broughton. He served as a Borough Councillor.

Mrs. J. Ellis. C/1984/26. 23.7.84.

Mrs. Ellis's husband worked in Hafod Colliery from 1931 and afterwards at Bersham Colliery. Her grandfather was reputedly the first man killed at Hafod Colliery.

She lived in Rhosllanerchrugog.

Mr. Percy Davies. C/1984/39, 40. 6.7.89. C/1984/62, 63. 20.8.84. C/1984/75. x.9.84.

Mr. Davies began work at Llay Main in 1930 as a wages clerk. Unusually for a clerical worker with no underground experience, he became Secretary of the Llay Main Lodge in the early forties. He served as the North Wales Area N.U.M. finance and compensation officer from 1965.

He sat on many committees connected with his trade union interests. He served as a Magistrate and a local Councillor.

Mr. Reuben and Mrs. Blodwen Whalley. C/1984/41, 42, 43. 6.8.84.

Mr. Whalley was born c. 1923. His father was a Hafod collier who was killed by an accident in the pit. He worked as a shop boy in Wrexham and was drawn to work at Hafod Colliery Lamp Office by higher wages. Despite his intention never to go down the pit, he was conscripted as a Bevin Boy and was directed to work in Hafod Colliery. He studied mining engineering and became an official, finishing his career as an overman. He worked in Bersham Colliery after the closure of Hafod.

Mrs. Whalley was born c. 1925. She worked in a Rhos pawnshop and afterwards in a Wrexham bookshop run by a prominent member of the local Labour Party.

Mr. and Mrs. Whalley lived in Pen-Y-Cae, Rhos, Johnstown and afterwards in Wrexham.

Mr. Coates. C/1984/44. 7.8.84.

Mr. Coates was born in 1917. He went underground at Gresford Colliery aged seventeen. He worked later at Hafod Colliery.

Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Salisbury C/1984/45, 46, 47. 8.8.84.

Mr. Salisbury was born in 1900. He first went underground in 1914. He worked in the small and old fashioned collieries to the North West of Wrexham - Gatewen, Plas Power, Gwersyllt and Brynmally Collieries - and suffered bouts of unemployment in the twenties and thirties. He later worked in a tile factory. He was a keen footballer. He lived in Broughton.

Mr. David Roberts. C/1984/52, 53. 9.8.84.

Mr. Roberts was born in 1908. He first went underground in 1923. He worked at Brynmally, Gatewen, Llay Hall and latterly Bersham Collieries. He was a chargeman on a machine face before nationalization. He lived in the Broughton? area.

Wilf Lloyd. C/1984/54, 55. 13.8.84.

Mr. Lloyd went underground aged 14. He worked at Black Lane, Plas Power and Llay Hall collieries before nationalization. He later worked at Llay Main and Gresford Collieries. He became a deputy. He lived in Coedpoeth.

Mr. Hughes. C/1984/56. 12.8.84.

Mr. Hughes was born in 1921. He started work on the surface at Bersham in 1935. He became banksman in 1959. He lived in Ruabon.

Mr. E. Edwards. C/1984/57. 13.8.84.

Mr. Edwards began work in the garages of the Crosville 'bus company. He gained an introduction to the smithy of Plas Power Colliery because his father had been killed at the colliery. He worked at Llay Main Colliery as a haulage hand and latterly at Bersham Colliery.

A committed chapel goer, he also served as organist and chorister. He lived in Coedpoeth.

Mr. Pugh. C/1984/59, 60. 14.8.84.

Mr. Pugh was born in 1915. He started working on the surface at Gresford Colliery c. 1933. He lived in Rhosrobin.

Mr. and Mrs. Albert Williams and Mr. Williams, junior. C/1984/66 3.9.89.

Mr. Williams, senior was born in 1911 and started work in Llay Hall Colliery in 1925. He was a keen footballer and secured work at Llay Main Colliery on this account. He worked afterwards at Ifton and Gresford Collieries.

Mrs. Williams was born in 1915. Mr. and Mrs. Williams married in 1935. She worked at a textile factory.

Mr. Williams, junior worked in the mines for nine years, first at Llay Main and later at Gresford Collieries.

Mr. Meredith Jones. C/1984/68. 22.8.84.

Born c. 1916. Mr. Meredith started work on the screens at Plas Power Colliery in 1930. He worked afterwards at Llay Main and Bersham Collieries.

Mr. Caradog Pritchard. C/1984/69. 4.9.84.

Mr. Pritchard was born in 1907. He moved with his family to Yorkshire and went underground at Featherstone Main Colliery in 1920. He returned to the area when his father secured work as an official at Llay Main Colliery. He worked at Llay Main and Gresford Collieries and became a beltman. He retired in 1972.

He lived in Coedpoeth, Yorkshire and Llay.

Mr. Don Phillips. C/1984/71, 72. 10. 9.84.

Mr. Phillips was born in 1925. He began work at Llay Main Colliery in 1939. He trained as an electrician and joined the Area electrical staff after nationalization. He later worked for the area Health Authority.

He lived in Gwersyllt.

Mr. Jackson. C/1984/82. 2.10.84.

Mr. Jackson was born in the mid-twenties. He secured work at the survey office in Gresford Colliery where his father worked as an engineer. He became a colliery surveyor in 1948 and worked at Black Park Colliery. He became deputy Sub Area Surveyor for the Southern Part of the North Wales Area and joined the Area Planning Staff in 1957.

Mr. Glyn Hopwood. C/1984/83, 84. 24.9.84.

Mr. Hopwood began working underground at the Vron Colliery in the twenties. he moved to Plas Power Colliery, worked at Llay Main and latterly at Bersham Colliery. He studied mining engineering and was appointed deputy in spite of his resistance to the system of clientage operated by senior officials at Llay Main. After a serious accident in 1959, Mr. Hopwood worked in the Colliery Medical Centre.

Mr. Hopwood was a committed chapel goer with strong evangelical convictions. He lived in Coedpoeth.

Mr. Griffiths. C/1984/85, 86. 22.8.84.

Mr. Griffiths was born c. 1910. He started work in Hafod Colliery in 1924. He eventually became an undermanager. He worked latterly at Gresford Colliery, taking special responsibility for development work. He was made redundant at 58 and worked afterwards in light industry and training.

He lived in Rhos.

Mr. John Rowland Price. C/1984/94. 16.10.84.

Mr. Price worked in the local clay industry - Ruabon Brick and Terracotta, Monk and Newell, in the Ruabon area and for Wrexham Brick and Tile at Kingsmills.

Mr. Price lived in the Ruabon district? and in Coedpoeth. He was precentor at Penygelli Chapel.

Mr. Gwyn Thomas. C/1984/97, 98. n.d.

Born in 1919, Mr. Thomas first went underground at Hafod Colliery at the age of 15. He became a deputy in his early twenties and eventually went on to become an undermanager. He supervised the dismantling of the underground workings after the closure of Hafod, Ifton and Gresford Collieries.

Mr. Thomas lived in Rhos. He was a member of the Young Communist League in the mid-thirties.

Mr. and Mrs. E.D. Parry. C/1984/99, 100. 23.10.84.

Mr. Parry was born in the Coedpoeth area in 1906. Mr. Parry's father was a collier and his mother kept on an upland smallholding after his death from an industrial disease. He gained a scholarship to the local grammar school, became a pupil-teacher and went to teacher training college in 1925. He returned to teach in the area and became headmaster of Gwynfryn school in 1937. He was later head teacher and Pen-Y-Cae school.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Parry served on the Pen-Y-Cae Parish Council and as local representatives on the Rural District Council.

Mr. Horace Davies. C/1984/101, 102. 29.10.84.

Born in Cymmau c. 1914, Mr. Davies moved to the village of Llay when his father secured work as an official at Llay Main Colliery. He went down the pit despite his father's opposition and eventually became an official. He transferred to Bersham after the closure of Llay Main.

He lived in Llay and was active in the Llay Miners' Welfare Institute.

Interviews at Plas Madoc Old Age Pensioners' Group. C/1984/103. 24.10.84.

Interviews with various people.

Mr. Vincent Thomas. C/1984/104. n.d.

Born c. 1925, Mr. Thomas started work at Gresford Colliery c. 1939. He became an apprentice electrician and graduated to work as an electrical engineer. He moved to Bersham Colliery in 1953, retiring in 1984.

He lived in Wrexham.

Mrs. Ilene Roberts. C/1984/107. 6.11.84.

Mrs. Roberts was born in 1913. Her father was a chalter master at Chirk Green Colliery. Her father in law was a haulage contractor and her husband worked at the Monsanto Chemical plant in Cefn.

Mrs. Anne Wilson and Mr. Jack Wilson. C/1984/108. 7.11.84.

Mrs. Wilson was born in Shaddington near Crewe in 1900. Her family moved to Pen-Y-Cae in 1904, when her father secured work as a water bailiff at the Wrexham Water Company's reservoirs. She was a nurse in Liverpool during the First World War and later moved to London where she was active in voluntary work during the Second World War.

Mr. Hughes, senior and Mr. Hughes, junior. C/1984/111. 14.11.84.

Mr. Hughes, junior worked as a fitter in Hafod Colliery, served in the RAF and worked as a technician in industry. He later worked in Bersham Colliery and was active in organising food relief in the 1984 strike.

Mr. Hughes jun. lived in Rhos and was active in the Rhos Miners' Institute - the interview was conducted during a tour of the building.

Mr. Cridall. C/1984/118. 19.9.84.

Born in the mid-twenties, Mr. Cridall went underground at Barrow Colliery in Barnsley in 1942. After war service in the Navy he followed a full-time course of training in mining-engineering. He gained face experience at Silverwood Colliery in Rotheram and became an official. He worked as overman at Hickleton Main and successfully applied for the post of undermanager at Llay Main. He worked latterly at Gresford and Bersham Collieries.

Since moving to North Wales he has lived in Llay.

Mr. Dick Hughes. C/1984/119, 120. 26.11.84.

Mr. Hughes was born in Liverpool in 1899. His parents returned to the area. He started at Aston's Aberderfyn furniture factory aged 14. He later worked as a woodturner.

He lived in Rhos, was secretary of the Rhos Cricket Club and was a deacon of Capel Salem.

Mr. Bryn Powell. C/1984/122, 123. 27.11.84.

Born c. 1916, Mr. Powell was introduced at the Coppi Clayworks in Rhos by his uncle. He continued working in the clay industry and became a director of a local firm.

He lived in Rhos.

Mr. John Hughes. C/1984/124, 125, 126. 28.11.84.

Born in 1912, Mr. Hughes went underground at Hafod Colliery c. 1925. He moved to Black Park Colliery after the closure of Hafod in 1932. He later worked in a clay mine before working as a burner in various brickyards in the Rhos area. He also worked for short periods after the war in the Vickers prefabricated house factory in Broughton and at the Monsanto Chemical Plant in Cefn.

He lived in Rhosllanerchrugog.

Mr. Wilfred Haycock. C/1984/127, 128. 2.12.84.

Born c. 1920, Mr. Haycock's father was a cowman for the Dennis family at New Hall Farm. His first job was as office messenger for the Hafod brickworks and the other Dennis Companies based at the office in Ruabon. He later worked in the office at the Hafod brick and tileworks.

Mr. David Williams. C/1984/141, 142. 19.12.84.

Born c. 1904, Mr. Williams worked as a clerk for Ruabon Brick and Terracotta and later worked as a clerk for the Royal Welsh show association. He returned to the brickworks after war service with the R.A.S.C.. He was involved with the Institute of Clay Technology.

He lived in Rhos and served as a churchwarden, he was active with local choirs and worked as a village correspondent for a local newspaper.

"CLATTER OF CLOGS" INTERVIEWS.

Rev. Colin Gibbs, the Vicar of Pen-Y-Cae, became interested in the stories about mining life told by the former mineworkers among his parishioners. He staged a service of commemoration and thanksgiving for the local collieries in April 1989. The interviews were recorded in late 1989 and early 1990 and were used in the production of the book: Rev. Colin Gibbs, The Clatter of Clogs - A Collection of Mining Memories at the End of an Era (Wrexham, 1990). The recordings are available at the Bersham Industrial Heritage Centre, Wrexham and transcripts of the interviews were made by the present author.

Mr. Pete Rogers and Mrs. Rogers. CLWBC 451.1 n.d.

Mr. Rogers was born c.1915. He worked at Gresford Colliery and latterly at Hafod Colliery. He was working at Gresford Colliery at the time of the 1934 disaster. He lived in Pen-Y-Cae and Ponciau.

Mr. Donald Thomas. CLWBC 451.3. n.d.

Mr. Thomas worked as an electrician in Hafod and Llay Main Collieries. After a time in surface industry he returned to the pit at the Point of Ayr.

Mr. Gerald Evans. CLWBC 451.3. 16.1.90.

Born 1937. He began work at Hafod Colliery in 1951. He worked on hand getting and on mechanised faces. He lived in Pen-Y-Cae.

Mr. Joe Williams - 'Joe Bugail'. CLWBC 451.4. n.d.

Born c. 1907. Went underground at Hafod Colliery in 1922. He worked in the stalls and on machine faces where he served as chargeman to a set of fillers. He left the industry after a serious accident in the forties. He later returned to surface work at Hafod Colliery and served as a Lodge Official.

He lived in Rhos and served as a County Councillor.

Mr. Reuben Whalley. CLWBC 451.5 Side A. n.d.

See Wrexham Museum Project Interviews C1984/41,42,43.

Mr. George Jarvis. CLWBC 451.5 Side B. 11.9.89.

Born 1923. Went underground aged 14. He worked at Hafod, Gresford and Bersham Collieries. He was a chargeman on a machine face. He studied mining engineering and eventually became an overman.

Mr. Jack Read. CLWBC 451.6. n.d.

See Val Brennan interviews CROH NT/789, No. 3.

Mr. Winston Jones. CLWBC 451.7. 2.10.89.

Worked at Hafod Colliery as a railman.

Mr. Colin Reese. CLWBC 451.10. n.d.

Began work at Llay Main Colliery in the late thirties and later moved to Hafod Colliery. Lived in Pen-Y-Cae.

Mr. Jack Griffiths. CLWBC 451.11. Side A. n.d.

Born c. 1930. Worked as a surface fitter at Hafod Colliery.

Mr. Bill Hookwy. CLWBC 451.11. Side B. n.d.

Born 1906 in South Wales. After three years of unemployment, he moved to the area from Senghennydd c. 1930. He worked at Gresford Colliery and was employed underground at the time of the 1934 disaster. He lived in Rhosddu, Wrexham and Pentre Broughton.

Mr. Phil Jones. CLWBC 451.12. Side A. n.d.

Went underground at Bersham Colliery c. 1947. Served as a chargeman on a machine face. He became an official. Served as Captain of the colliery Rescue Team. He lived in Gwersyllt and Pen-Y-Cae.

Mr. Emlyn Jones - 'Emlyn Twisty'. CLWBC 451.12 Side B. n.d.

Went underground at Hafod Colliery aged 14. Worked as a fitter and transferred to Bersham Colliery after the closure of Hafod.

INTERVIEWS UNDERTAKEN BY ROGER LAIDLAW.

Interviews 1 - 15 are short interviews and were undertaken as part of a programme of research for an Additional Thesis, presented in the Final Honour School of Modern History for the degree of BA (Hons.) at the University of Oxford: Roger Laidlaw, Aspects of Religion and Popular Belief in a Twentieth Century Mining Community (Oxford, 1990). Interviews 16 - 26 were undertaken specifically for the current study. They are longer and more detailed discussions and were conceived of as a supplement to the broader interview surveys described above. Several of the respondents consulted in early surveys were revisited.

Mrs. Catherine Williams. No. 1. 8.7.89.

Born 1927. Her husband and father were miners. She was a committed member of the Glanaber Welsh Presbyterian Congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Ainscough. No. 2. 28.7.89.

Mrs. Ainscough was born c. 1908. She moved to Llay in 1957 with her first husband, who was a Pastor of the Calvary Holiness Church congregation. Her second husband was also a Pastor in the Church.

Mr. Herbert Gaskin. No. 3. 31.7.89.

Born c. 1908. His family moved from Kent, attracted by the work made available by the colliery development. He worked as a bricklayer at Llay Main Colliery. He was a committed member of the St. Martin's congregation and served as a Churchwarden.

Mrs. May Jones. No. 4. 2.8.89.

Born c. 1910. She lived in the Caergwrle area before moving to Llay. She was a member of the Emmanuel English Presbyterian congregation before joining the Calvary Holiness Church.

Rev. David Griffiths. No. 5. 5.8.89.

Born in Llay in 1938. Rev. Griffiths worked at Llay Main Colliery before studying for ordination. He is currently the Vicar of Gresford. He retained an interest in first aid he gained while working in the pit and is very actively involved with the St. John's Ambulance Brigade.

Mr. Neville Rogers. No. 6. 7.8.89.

His father was a colliery official who brought his family from the Fron when he secured work at Llay Main Colliery. Mr. Roger also worked at the pit. He performed his war service in the Navy.

He attended St. Martin's and was one of the founder members of the Llay British Legion.

Mr. Bob Adams. No. 7. 8.8.89.

Born c. 1908 in Lancashire. His family came to the area in 1929 to work at Llay Main Colliery. Mr. Adams worked at the pit. An occasional attender at St. Martin's and a prominent member of the local angling association.

Mr. and Mrs. Prichard. No. 8. 15.8.89.

Mrs. Prichard was born in 1912. Her family came to the area in 1922 attracted by the prospect of work at Llay Main Colliery. She attended St. Martin's.

Mr. Prichard worked at Llay Main Colliery. His family were Welsh Wesleyans.

Mr. Prydderch. No. 9. 18.8.89.

Born c. 1915. His family moved into the colliery village from the surrounding hamlet in 1923. He worked at Llay Main Colliery.

Mrs. Helen Williams. No. 10. 29.8.89.

Born c. 1920. Mrs. Williams's family moved to Llay in the twenties. She was a committed member of the Primitive Methodist congregation in Llay but later transferred her membership to a Wrexham congregation.

Mr. Eddie Evans. No. 11. 30.8.89., 24.7.91.

Born c. 1905. Mr. Evans started work at Wynnstay Colliery? and moved with his family to Llay in 1922. He worked at Llay Main Colliery.

Mr. Les Crewe. No. 12. 31.8.89.

Born c. 1910. Mr. Crewe was born in the hamlet of Llay. He worked at Llay Main Colliery, latterly in the Ambulance Centre. He was a member of the Primitive Methodist congregation before he joined the Calvary Holiness Church.

Mrs. Owen. No. 13. 2.9.89.

Born 1907. Mrs. Owen's family moved to Llay from Cefn-Y-Bedd. Her husband worked at Llay Main Colliery and was secretary of the Llay Gardening Society in the thirties. She was active in the village pantomimes. Both she and her husband were committed churchgoers.

Mrs. Edwardson, Mrs. MacNee, Mrs. Roberts. No. 14. 13.9.89.

Mrs. MacNee and Mrs. Roberts are sisters. Born in the 1910s, they came to the village of Llay from a Lancashire mining district in the twenties.

Mrs. Edwardson was born c. 1925 and came to Llay with her family from Lancashire in 1929.

All were members of the Catholic Church.

Mr. Percy Davies and Pastor Hargenrader. No. 15. 13.9.89.

Mr. Davies moved to Llay in the twenties. He worked at Llay Main Colliery. He was a member of the Emmanuel English Presbyterian congregation and was one of the founders of the Calvary Holiness Church in the village.

Pastor Hargenrader was the Pastor of the congregation at the time of the interview.

Mr. Tom Ellis. No. 16. 9.4.91, 20.11.91.

Born in Rhosllanerchrugog in 1924. He took a degree in Chemistry and worked in an explosives factory during the war. He joined a National Coal Board directed trainee programme designed to provide the Coal Board with a new generation of managers and senior officials. He worked at Gresford, Llay Main and Bersham Collieries and became manager of Bersham in 1957. As a colliery manager he was particularly interested in personnel management and pay mechanisms. He was transferred to Hafod Colliery to try and remedy its difficulties but eventually oversaw its closure. He returned to Bersham Colliery.

He became Labour MP for Wrexham in 1970. He was a member of the European Parliament from 1975 until 1979. He was a founder member of the Social Democratic Party in 1981.

Mrs. Maggie Williams. No. 17. 7.5.91.

Born in 1908, Mrs. Williams moved with her family from the Denbigh area to the hamlet of Llay in 1912. Her father was an agricultural labourer, roadman and later worked at Gresford and Llay Main Collieries. Mrs. Williams entered service after leaving school. She married in 1934. Her husband was a Llay Main miner.

She lived in Llay and although she married in an Anglican Church, she later attended the Glanaber Welsh Presbyterian congregation.

Mr. Felix Griffiths. No. 18. 9.5.91.

Born 1908. Mr. Griffiths moved from Pont Blydden to secure work at Llay Main Colliery in the early thirties. He served as a deputy in the interwar period and eventually became pit Safety Officer.

Mr. Griffiths worked at Alyn Bank and Buckley Mountain Collieries in the Flintshire coalfield and at Gresford Colliery after the closure of Llay Main.

Mr. Griffiths lived in Llay from the early thirties. He was a committed member of the St. Martin's congregation.

Mr. Ithel Kelly. No. 19. 9.5.91., 13.5.91.

Born in Pentre Broughton, Mr. Kelly went underground at Llay Hall Colliery aged 14. He began a career in the industry by becoming an official while working at Llay Main Colliery. He moved to the South Wales coalfield but returned to North Wales to work at Ifton and Gresford Collieries. He was Acting Manager at Gresford Colliery at the time of its closure and later worked at the Point of Ayr Colliery where he was Senior Underground Manager at the time of his retirement.

He is very interested in the history of the North Wales coalfield and frequently gives lectures, particularly on the Gresford disaster of 1934.

Mr. Jack Read. No. 20. 19.7.91.

See Val Brennan Interviews NT/789, No. 3.

Mr. Ken Aspinall. No 21. first interview 2.8.91., second interview n.d.

Born c. 1925, Mr. Aspinall's father was the watchman at Hafod Colliery. He went underground at Hafod Colliery in 1939. He worked at the Hafod, Llay Main and Bersham Collieries and became the colliery shaftsman.

He lived in Johnstown and in Wrexham. He was very active in local silver bands and served as conductor of Gresford Colliery Band.

Mr. Joe Williams - 'Joe Bugail'. No. 22. 9.8.91., 12.8.91.

See the 'Clatter of Clogs' Interviews, CLWBC 451.4.

Mr. Gilbert Parry. No. 23. 6.9.91.

Born c. 1934, Mr. Parry went underground at Hafod Colliery aged 17. After the closure of the pit he worked in one of the large factories on the Wrexham Industrial Estate.

He lived in Rhosllanerchrugog.

Mr. Edgar Sides. No. 24. 14.11.91.

Born 1926, Mr. Sides went underground at Llay Main Colliery in 1943. He eventually became an overman. He worked at Llay Main and Gresford Collieries.

He lived in Llay and served as a Community Councillor.

Mr. Morris Gwilym Jones. No. 25. 27.1.92, 28.1.92.

Born in 1906, Mr. Jones moved with his family from the slate district of North West Wales to the Wrexham coalfield. He first went underground at Plas Power Colliery in 1921. He later worked in Bersham and Llay Main Collieries. He returned to the slate quarries in the mid-thirties, after the Gresford disaster. He worked in Llay Main Colliery during the war and later served on the Llay Main Lodge Committee.

He was a member of the Communist Party from the thirties and later joined the Labour Party. He was a committed Nonconformist but also had interests in spiritualism. He lived in Coedpoeth, Rhosrobin and Gwersyllt and served on the Borough Council.

Mrs. Hilda Davies. No. 26. 27.1.92.

Born in 1902 in Bradley, Mrs. Davies went into service after leaving school. She married in 1936. Her husband worked in the lamproom at Llay Main Colliery and later in the Time Office. He was secretary of the Llay Main Garden Society.

Mrs. Davies was often called to confinements and laying outs and prepared herbal medicines and curatives from her garden.

Appendix Four.

Plates - The Geography and Architecture of Rhos and Llay.

Plate One. Rhos from the air.

'The village would surely look very peculiar if seen from an aeroplane!'

The camera is pointing towards the North and shows Rhos as a dense and heterogeneous mass of houses. This picture was taken in the interwar period, before the large Council estates were developed on the periphery of the village. St. John's lies in the foreground. The Stiwt is in the top left hand corner of the picture. The chimneys of the Coppi and Llwyneinion brickworks can be seen in the top right hand corner.

(The Picture is taken from: Dennis W. Gilpin, Rhosllanerchrugog, casgliad o luniau/a collection of pictures, Cyf./Vol. 2 (Wrexham, 1992).)

Plate Two. Chamber houses in Oak Road, Ponciau.

'The poor landlord is a danger to the community.'

Few chamber houses remain in Rhos today. It is probable that these examples have survived because they were in a less congested part of the district and because they were built in a row rather than gathered around a court. Though the houses were built one against another, the differing pitches of their respective roofs betray differing dates of construction. Two and sometimes three chamber houses have to be knocked into one to make an adequate modern dwelling. The interwar Medical Officer of Health's concern about the owners of cottage properties who were too poor to maintain their houses perpetuating the conditions of the slum are refuted by these lovingly tended properties.

Plate Three. Llay from the air.

'You could hardly find a more ruled off and trimmed up village than Llay.'

This picture was taken in 1966. The colliery and its waste tip are in the centre of the picture. The colliery village is in the bottom right hand corner. The Council estates constructed in the late twenties are off the edge of the picture to the right. The Council estate to the left of the main road was constructed after the Second World War. The vertical angle of the shot captures the symmetrical pattern of the streets very well and also shows the large allotment gardens at the centre of each superbblock..

(The picture is taken from the guide produced by Llay Womens' Institute: Colin A.J. Jacobs (ed.), Llay Village Trail (1979).)

Plate Four. A block of houses on First Avenue.

'The highlights of the village.'

The houses on First Avenue were large and well appointed. They were generally occupied by the families of colliery officials and office staff. These houses are very far from the grim terraces seen in many mining villages. The simple functional style of the houses is obscured by the modifications made by the present generation of owners. The high roofs and large gables included in some of the houses show perhaps that their design owes something to style of domestic architecture pioneered by Charles Voysey.

Plate Five. Rhos Miners' Institute.

'Rhos's Cathedral of Culture.'

The frontage of the Stiwt looks out onto Broad Street. The building extends a considerable distance to the rear to accommodate the auditorium with its proscenium arch and flies. The building is currently being restored for use as a community centre and cultural venue.

Plate Six. Llay Miner's Welfare Institute.

'The Welfare of the village, really ...'

The ornamental detail of the Welfare is similar to that of the Stiwt. The green field site allowed the architects to construct a building with a greater breadth of frontage. The second staircase, which allowed those with temperance convictions to reach the facilities on the first floor without having to pass through the licensed part of the building, is on the left of the picture.

Plate Seven. A view down First Avenue.

The wide pavements of First Avenue were intended to accommodate an avenue of trees. The 'Market Square' which later became an ornamental garden can be seen at the end of the road and beyond this rises the spire of St. Martin's. Clearly, the village's architects intended that the central position of the church in the plan of the village should be apparent to all.

Plate Eight. A view across the Ponciau Banks.

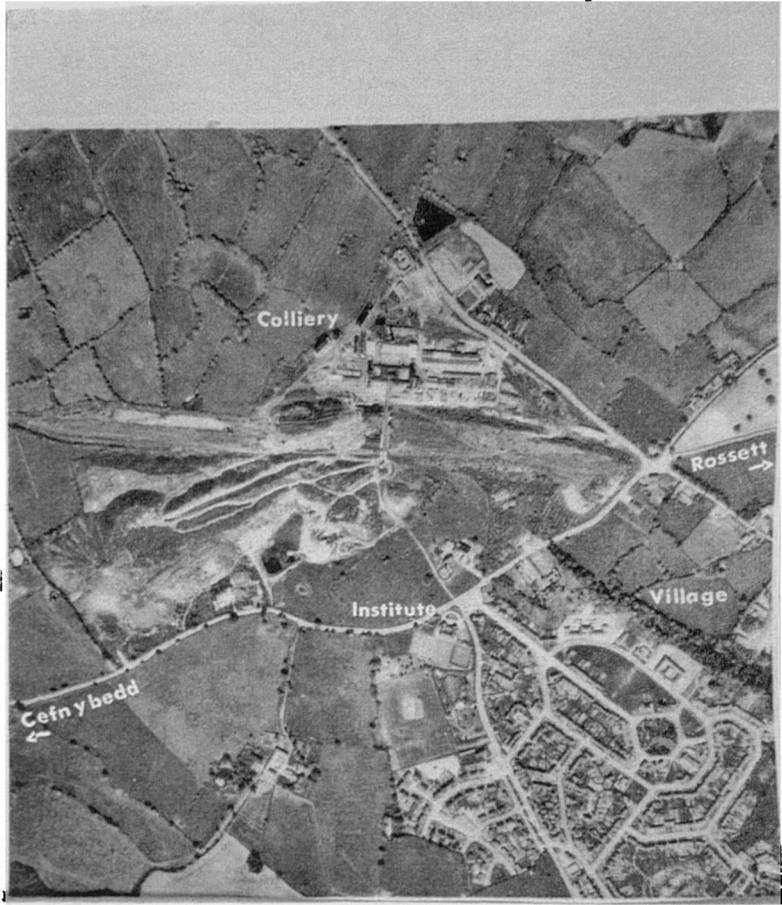
In the foreground of the picture is the ornamental park laid out by voluntary labour in the thirties. The Park now includes the Gorsedd circle erected for the 1945 National Eisteddfod. To the right of the picture are the sports fields constructed by the reclamation project. In the middle distance are the houses of Ponciau itself. Below Wrexham, which can be seen on the horizon, is the slag tip of Bersham Colliery.



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