

DIGGING FOR VICTORY

THE BEVIN BOYS

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY PUPILS OF WANSBECK FIRST SCHOOL



Four former Bevin Boys, with local historian Mike Kirkup, at Woodhorn Colliery Museum, June 2007
L to R: Ron Jones, Mike Kirkup, Philip Renforth, John Marshall and Sid Stowe

(Image courtesy of Mike Kirkup)

Ron Jones sent from Birkenhead to Newbiggin Colliery in Newbiggin by the Sea "At first it broke my heart. But I knuckled down finding the local pit folk so kind and friendly".

Philip Renforth sent from Newcastle to Woodhorn Colliery "It was hard for us as some folk thought we were conscientious objectors for going down the pit rather than fight for our country, but we simply had no choice".

John Marshall from London, "I was forced to work in the pits before being allowed to join the Paras (Parachute Regiment)".

Sid Stowe from Oxfordshire sent to Ellington Colliery "I thought I was coming to the end of the world. It was terrible cos I was all geared up to go to war and instead ended up down Ellington pit".

Who were Bevin Boys? During the Second World War coal was vital to the war effort but there was a desperate shortage of miners. Minister of Labour & National Service, Ernest Bevin, therefore introduced a scheme in which 1 in 10 men called up for war service were sent to the pits rather than the armed forces. The scheme started in December 1943 but continued long after the war finished, in fact until 1948.

There were around 48,000 Bevin Boys aged from 18 to 25 years old. There were Bevin Boys here in Ashington. Men, who came from different regions, would stay in hostels or with local families. Some men liked our area so much that they decided to stay for many more years.

If it wasn't for the Bevin Boys the pits would not have worked as well and Britain would not have had enough coal for the important matter at hand.

Winston Churchill in 1943 explains the important role of the Bevin Boys

...one will say: "I was a fighter pilot", another will say: "I was in the submarine service", another "I marched with the Eighth Army", a fourth will say: "None of you could have lived without the convoys and the merchant seamen", and you, in your turn, will say, with equal pride and with equal right: "WE CUT THE COAL".



Bevin Boys Veterans badge. Issued in 2008 in recognition of their work in the UK coalfields during and immediately after the Second World War.



A hostel to accommodate up to 300 Bevin Boys was built in Woodhorn Road, Ashington in 1944. Celebrations were held to mark its first birthday in 1945!

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