

A Pitman Poet

Mike Westwood is a retired coal miner who spent 30 years working underground. His poetry is widely read in former mining communities and some of his poems have been adapted as songs. Mike is a

Staffordshire man, born in 1944. He left school in 1959 and went to work at Cannock Wood Colliery until it closed in 1972. Then he went to Lea Hall Colliery, Rugeley where he finished in 1990

Not them

After the war's devastation,
And when re-creation began,
Who were the roots of this nation?
The British working man!
When nothing was left from the battle,
Except for the steel and the coal,
The working man's sabre did rattle,
Restoring the heart and the soul.
While bankers and investors dallied,
The working man grafted full tilt,
And slowly this proud nation rallied,
As 'Great Britain' took shape and re-built.
The heart of this nation was beating,
As strong as a nation's heart can,
T'was then the beginnings of bleating,
But not from the working man.
Investors and bankers who'd hidden,
Demanded a say in affairs,
The working man's power was forbidden,
The 'Gentry' said power must be theirs.
And slowly, these rats all came crawling,
And seized from the working man's hand,
All the fruits of the working man's calling,
And the wealth of this shining new land.
Now the rats, and the bankers sit proudly,
All stripped of their yellow disguise,
And they sup on their port and bray proudly,
How they dine, from the working man's prize.
It was not they who rebuilt this proud nation,
No blisters for them on their hand,
It was the worker who began the creation,
That restored the word 'Pride!' to this land!

Light in the shaft

Today is the day, that the mine meets its death,
The fan has been stopped, it has moved its last breath,



Mike Westwood, the Pitman Poet.

The pumps are now silent, the roadways will fill,
And all underground is now quiet and still.
Where miners and ponies once worked side by side,
With 'Pit boys' and 'Rippers' who had the same pride,
Be it 'Candle lit' glow, or the 'Cap lamp's' rude glare,
All people and horses were heroes down there.
A history proud will be buried today,
But memories live and forever will stay,
Of an underground city, where colliers did dwell,
And did feast on the might, of the tales they could tell.
The shaftsmen start filling, and a moaning is heard,

And though everyone swears, they did not say a word,
They cannot believe what they witness below,
A lamplight still shines, in the mine's dying glow.
A coldness, a stillness, descends on the place,
And each person there has a look on their face,
For the light from the lamp, and the low mournful cry,
Is this the voice of our ancestors saying "Goodbye"?
"Goodbye," says the voice, as the lamp stops its wave,
"Leave us down here, locked in our grave,
But never forget, when you take off your boots,
That we are your brothers, we are your roots."
"Take with you now, all that we hold within,
And pass these tales on, to your own 'kith and kin',
So the tale of the miner forever is told,
And the flame of his courage will never grow cold!"
"Tell this to your children, let them tell their friends,
So the story of mining, and us, never ends,
And keep yourselves true, to our traditions divine."
Then the light disappeared, to die with the mine.

A miner's song

I sang, like no – one heard me,
As I made my way around,
Inspecting, testing, watching,
In the tunnels underground,
I sang to match my footsteps,
As I walked alone that day,
And I sang to mask the silence,

As I passed along the way.
My cap lamp light my pathway,
My safety lamp my guide,
The silence heard my singing,
The tunnels heard my pride,
I sang my songs within here,
Their echoes linger long,
I left my mark within her,
Held in a miner's song.
I sang my song forever,
I sang to her each day,
I held my tune within the gloom,
Till they drove me away,
And deep within that coal mine,
My heart will linger long,
For I will long remember,
When I sang my, 'Miner's song.'
Then deep below the valley,
And high above that hill,
The echo of my singing,
Reverberates there still,
I sang along the faceline,
Where coal was watching me
This mineral that called out,
To who I was to be.
And there's the tune I left them,
That is held though we did part,
For these my 'blackened bretheren,
Still here within my heart,
I sang to tell the story,
So all could hear, and see,
Of the power and the glory,
Of a miner's history.
And though my mine has perished,
And we have gone away,
My song is there to testify,
Of the glory of the day,
When miners by the thousands,
Descended in their throng,
To share their trust and comradeship,
And to join within my song!
'God bless you lads'.

All poems © Mike Westwood

The community that rose to the challenge

By Shaun Garratty

IN 1984, in the middle of winter, and at the height of the miners' strike, a community came together and rallied around, to do their bit to support the striking miners and their families. Yes, the people from the Manor (once called 'the worst estate in Britain') and Manor Park council estates in Sheffield got together at their local church, the William Temple Church, Harbrough Avenue, Sheffield.

This phenomenal gathering wasn't for the usual weekly community bingo, it was for a just cause – to feed the miners and their families. After several months

on strike and no income, miner's families were getting so destitute that some had even chopped up their garden fences and bedroom doors so they could have a fire and warmth in their homes.

Several people from the Manor community trawled up and down to supermarkets, wholesale markets and shops to ask for food donations. They even wrote to the European Fund to ask if food from the European food mountain could be donated. Slowly, gifts of food were collected and taken to the church hall.

Then the news filtered through that the EU was sending two lorries of food. It was a case of all hands on deck. Dozens of people waited and waited for the

lorries to arrive; and, boy, did they arrive! Two articulated juggernauts packed to the roof with food from the EU.

Men, women and children formed a human chain in the miserable weather, passing box after box of food into the church hall.

The hall, brimming to the rafters, was so full that there was hardly enough room for anybody to move. Over the next few weeks, people religiously went to the church day after day, packing the food into boxes.

A typical box would have a tin of corned beef, a tin of stewed meat, a tin of peaches, 1lb of butter, 2lb cheese, 5lb potatoes, fruit and vegetables. The food

parcels were then loaded into two minibuses provided by Manor Community Transport. The volunteer drivers (with their passengers) then drove with their valuable loads, through atrocious weather, often getting stuck in the snow, as they delivered the much-needed food.

Day after day they visited mining communities throughout South Yorkshire, North Derbyshire, North Nottinghamshire and North Yorkshire, greeted by crowds of miners and their families who had heard that the food was on its way. Those few winter weeks made me feel so proud to be a Manor lad, and although it was called the worst estate in Britain, it was also one of the best!