

# Striking images

Former miner  
**John Dunn's** stories  
of the 1984-85 strike  
inspired artist Darren  
Coffield to create  
his exhibition  
*Ashes and Diamonds*

**I** FIRST met Darren Coffield in 2010. He was interested in our Great Strike and was looking for first hand information about the eventful year of 1984/85.

After a few discussions, we came up with the idea of an exhibition that would be different. This one would be held in ordinary places, where people could get up close and discuss the images and not have to talk in the hushed tones of art galleries.

It launched in 2011 and toured the venues associated with my former NUM area, Derbyshire, the Market Hall in Chesterfield on May Day, placed in the refreshment hall, Hust House WEA centre, home of the Derbyshire Miners' Day Release Course, Open Day at Northern College, where it remained for several weeks. Its official opening was at Wortley Hall in South Yorkshire in November, opened by Arthur Scargill, followed by an educational week of discussions and meetings.

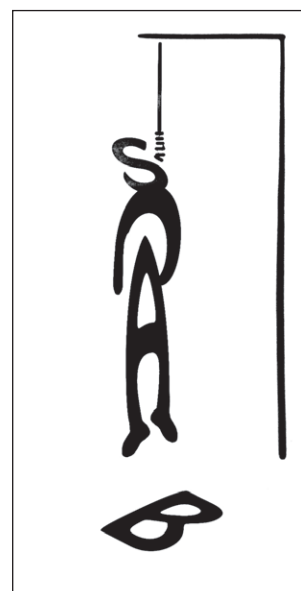
The Durham Miners toured it around the Durham coalfield, keeping it for a year.

Everywhere it was viewed it received rave reviews. From *Che Scargill* done in Maltby NUM coal dust, to the *Iron Lady* done in rust, to the iconic *Clockwork Orgreave* and the *Hanging Scab*, these images conjure up emotive memories of a magnificent struggle.

Darren's words outline his vision: "Every picture needs a subject, just as every novel needs a plot. I remember watching the miners' strike as a child. On one hand, it seemed a million miles away, almost unbelievable; while, on the other, it seemed as if civil war had been declared on the working classes.

"I remember watching the massed police and brutality of the metropolitan police special patrol group (SPG). Witnessing such scenes of unrelenting brutality deeply affected me as a child. Coming back from school one day it was suddenly over. I watched the men return to work with their heads held high. There was something poignant and heroic in the struggle of the Miners' Strike. Britain has long eulogised such events – think of Dunkirk or even Scott of the Antarctic. Heroism and dignity in the jaws of defeat is quintessentially British. These images haunted me.

"Many years later, I became interested in making pictures about British contem-



Some of the iconic images from the exhibition of Darren Coffield's work that conjure up images of the miners' epic year-long struggle against the Thatcher government.

Above: Bloody police.

Far Left: Clockwork Orgreave.

Left: The Hanging Scab.

All images  
© Darren Coffield, 2011

porary/modern history but was always put off by how people had gone about it in the past. History painting is an inherent lie; the artists who painted these pictures were not there to witness the historical events they depicted.

"No artist ever saw King Arthur on horseback or seated at his round table, but the Victorians loved history painting in the way it functioned as a form of propaganda for the church or the state to reinforce its values and push its own agenda. The problem is how to paint history without making it fraudulent or a fabrication

of the facts.

"The miners' strike happened within living memory. I was not there, but there were plenty who were, who fought and suffered.

"To paint a traditional type of painting depicting a scene like the battle of Orgreave would be to lead to charges being levelled against me of being a fraud and exploiting the misery and misfortune of others. So I decided to paint iconic, simple images that would work along the lines of contemporary street art and commercial advertising. To recreate new

images from the old, evoking a place and sense of history in an attempt to intrigue the young, provoke thought and discussion amongst the generations and to act as a key to unlocking the gates of memory."

This year, the 35th anniversary, will see his exhibition relaunched, hosted by the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign.

These images conjure up emotive memories of a magnificent struggle.

Don't miss it, it's coming to a venue near you!