



The Yorkshire miners 1786-1839: a study of work, culture and protest

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The Yorkshire Miners 1786-1839: A Study of Work, Culture and Protest

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Abstract

This thesis examines the work, culture and protest of the Yorkshire miners between 1786-1839. The original contribution of this work is to emphasise the intimate connection between protest, mainly trade union co-ordinated strikes, and living standards. In doing so, this work brings together areas of investigation into protest history, social history, and economic history, which have in recent years become divorced from one another. For many years historians have accepted that protest was an indicator of discontent, proof of exploitation, and evidence of oppression. This thesis offers an alternative argument. It shows that protest was used strategically, and with a growing level of sophistication, to win real wage increases in a high-wage industry that prospered across the period. This thesis also adds to existing debates around working class radicalism and conservatism. It argues that the Yorkshire miners were conservative loyalists across the entire 1786-1839 period.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the work and culture of the Yorkshire miners. The former emphasises the experience of labour for miners, taking stock of why the industry paid such high wages, which the colliers' trade unions capitalised on. The latter makes sense of their culture, emphasising how the nature of their work and their high wages engendered a competing alehouse and chapel culture. The alehouse and the chapel played an important role in creating and maintaining trade unions. Chapters 4-8 examine instances of protest chronologically. Chapter 4 considers the years 1786-1801, which witnessed a rise in the cost of living and the growth of miners' trade unionism. Chapter 5 explores how and why the Yorkshire miners combined under the Combination Laws. It highlights the role of friendly societies in maintaining living standards when trade declined. Chapter 6 assesses the first regional colliers' strike in 1819 to raise wages when living standards had fallen to their lowest level in the decade. Chapter 7 illuminates 1820-32, years of prosperity, when the cost of living fell and strikes for higher wages became more frequent. Chapter 8 investigates trade unionism in the pre-Chartist years, when wages were unprecedentedly high. It focusses on the violent strike at Wakefield and disputes at Earl Fitzwilliam's collieries.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
5. The word count of the thesis is 72,923.

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Two books were published after I had completed the final edits of the thesis: Carl Griffin's, *The Politics of Hunger: Poverty and Policy in England, c. 1750–c. 1840* (Manchester, 2020) and Emma Griffin's *Bread Winner: An Intimate History of the Victorian Economy* (Yale, 2020)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In November 2016 the BBC broadcast a two-part series, *The Last Miners*, charting the closure of Kellingley Colliery near Selby. When the pit ceased production in December 2015 it brought to an end centuries of deep mined coal in Yorkshire. In the programme one of the miners, Sheldon Griffin, reflected how a rundown of the industry had similarly resulted in the decline of trade union power.¹ For most of the twentieth century Yorkshire miners were known for being the most bellicose, the most militant, of organised workers in Britain. But the origins of this steadfast commitment to trade unionism remain unexplored. Similarly, their experience of labour and their culture remain shadowy and indistinct. This thesis will cast light on the work, culture and protest of the Yorkshire miners across 1786-1839: a period of seismic industrial, political, and social change.

This thesis is more than a history of a neglected group of workers. It advances the debate on key themes in British social history in these ways. Firstly it shows that protest, specifically strikes, took place at a time of *good* trade such as in the winter when the demand for coal was greatest. The miners knew that they had more chance of a wage increase because the coalowners did not want to lose access to markets. Strikes were *offensive* protests not *defensive* protests. Secondly, in stressing the aggressive characteristic of strike action, this thesis reveals the place of protest in the standard of living debate. In recent years protest history, social history, and economic history have become divorced from each other and as a result historians have misunderstood why protests broke out. By

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0845r0t> Accessed 15.02.2018.

re-integrating these three areas we can more accurately make sense of why protest occurred. Fluctuations in the cost of living, specifically food prices, were up until the 1820s the main reason why miners struck (at times of good trade) for higher wages. Maintaining or improving living standards was, therefore, fundamental to the development of trade unionism amongst the Yorkshire miners. Lastly, this thesis contends that for too long we have associated popular protest with radicalism. Despite their industrial militancy the Yorkshire miners were conservative loyalists. Their high wages and good standard of living meant that Yorkshire miners had nothing to gain, but a lot to lose, through an involvement in political radicalism. They did not need radical politics because their standard of living could be augmented through trade union action.

Miners and the 'New' Protest History

Robert Colls' monograph, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield* is the most important work on miners in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Colls' study shifted the field of mining history from one of institutional histories of trade unions to one of broader social history. He argues that to fully make sense of the pitmen we need to understand their lives as lived; in Colls' words a history 'which stopped with their labour would stop short of their lives'.² By avoiding material not found in trade union archives, Colls produced a wider ranging and more holistic analysis of work, culture and protest amongst the Northumberland and Durham pitmen. He argues that protest became a ritualised, customary part of life in Britain's largest coalfield in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He discusses the frequency and form of industrial disputes and demonstrates that

² Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, p. xi.

the North-East miners had a great deal of organisation.³ But Colls' book missed one crucial aspect of why protest occurred: fluctuations in wages and living standards. This thesis takes Colls' work as a starting point and shows that to more accurately understand the causes of protest, we need to explore the complex relationship between wages, trade unions, and living standards.

Recent work - the 'new' history of protest - is beset with the same issue as Colls: hardly any space is given to understanding how changing living standards provoked protest. Carl Griffin stresses the importance of precise geography and a deep understanding of the locality to understand why Swing riots broke out and how Swing spread so rapidly.⁴ Katrina Navickas took this 'spatial' theme one step further, and charted the ways and means that political radicals contested the progressive enclosure (by elites) of public spaces across 1789-1848.⁵ The 'new' protest history is underpinned by forensic archival research that places the actions and words of the agricultural labourer, the weaver, the cropper, at the heart of the methodology. But the overriding focus on space and place has meant that the importance of wages and living standards as a cause of protest has been compromised. Through a case study of the Yorkshire miners, this thesis offers a new way to understand protest that is firmly grounded in the lived experiences of contemporaries.

The Marginalisation of the Yorkshire Miners

Older histories of work, culture and protest ignored the Yorkshire miners. E.P. Thompson's seminal study *The Making of the English Working Class* disregarded the

³ R. Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work Culture and Protest* (Manchester, 1987), ch. 13. John Stevenson in an earlier work recognised that the North-East miners were relatively well organised. They 'appear to have been much more conscious of their bargaining power'. See J. Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England 1700-1870* (London, 1979), pp. 124-25.

⁴ C. Griffin, *The Rural War: Captain Swing and the Politics of Protest* (Manchester, 2012).

⁵ K. Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place 1789-1848* (Manchester, 2016).

Yorkshire miners. Colliers were side-lined by Thompson because, in his view, they did not play a significant role in the development of the working class: he concluded that they 'did not make their influence felt until later in the century'. The miners' apparent backwardness meant that they only emerged as an industrial force long after the working class had been formed, so they were not of interest to Thompson. Despite a strong West Riding focus he restricted his analysis to the artisan trades such as handloom weaving.⁶ This is surprising because George Walker's 'The Collier' from *The Costumes of Yorkshire* (1814) appeared on the front cover for many years.

Two impressive doctoral theses on the West Riding similarly concluded that the miners played a marginal role in the development of trade unionism in the region. Frederick Kaijage, whose thesis focussed on the labouring classes in Barnsley c.1816-1856, referred to the miners as 'Belated Militants'. He suggested that they were 'late comers into the world of industrial militancy' and had even as late as the 1830s 'acquired a reputation of docility and subservience'.⁷ Moreover he was keen to stress that strikes were purely defensive mechanisms to resist wage reductions.⁸ John Baxter, who examined South Yorkshire, contended that trade unionism was slow to develop amongst colliers in this region. He argued that the 'mining proletariat took a long while to stir'.⁹ These interpretations seriously underestimate the significant influence trade unionism had on the Yorkshire miners.

The first national studies characterised miners in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as unorganised and docile. 'For the student of labour organization in the coal

⁶ E.P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1983ed.), p. 232n.

⁷ F.J. Kaijage, *Labouring Barnsley, 1816-1856: A Social and Economic History*. Unpublished University of Warwick PhD thesis (1975), p. 370.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 374. See Chapter 8 for an in-depth analysis of Kaijage's discussion of strike action.

⁹ J.L. Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War in South Yorkshire: A Study of Capitalist Evolution and Labour Class Realization in One Industrial Region*. Unpublished University of Sheffield PhD thesis (1976), p. 309.

industry', wrote Ashton and Sykes in 1929, the eighteenth century belongs, indeed, to 'pre-history'.¹⁰ In periodising the eighteenth century as 'pre-historic', Ashton and Sykes foreshadowed many of the regional trade union histories that followed. Their authors believed that nothing worthy of note happened before the mid-nineteenth century because they could not trace early developments in the union archives at their disposal.¹¹ For instance, J. E. Williams argued that strikes and trade union action did not take place at all in Derbyshire in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.¹² Raymond Challinor argued that a lack of occupational stability, the small unit of production, the paternalistic attitude of the coalowner, and the 'rivalry between one mine and another' prevented colliers developing a sense of unity, and concluded that trade unionism 'was slow to appear' in Lancashire.¹³ Frank Machin, the historian of the Yorkshire miners, recognised that some strikes occurred in the early nineteenth century but attached little significance or importance to them.¹⁴ Subsequently, the idea that the miners were unorganised in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries permeated into more 'general' histories of the miners. Flinn and Stoker recognised that turnouts and strikes of colliers occurred but suggested that these were transient actions, with little co-ordination, and were not the product of trade union organisation. They suggested that 'not until the last few years before 1830 can formally established trade unions be clearly identified'.¹⁵ John Benson argued that during 'the first half of the [nineteenth] century [...] trade unionism was able to make the

¹⁰ T.S. Ashton and J. Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, 1929), p. 133.

¹¹ R. Page-Arnot, *The Miners* (London, 1951); F. Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners* (Barnsley, 1958); J. Williams, *The Derbyshire Miners: A Study in Industrial and Social History* (London, 1962); R. Page-Arnot, *South Wales Miners* (London, 1967); R. Challinor, *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners* (Newcastle, 1972); R.G. Neville, *The Yorkshire Miners 1881-1926: A Study in Labour and Social History*. Unpublished University of Leeds PhD thesis (1974)

¹² Williams, *The Derbyshire Miners*, p.

¹³ Challinor, *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners*, p. 18.

¹⁴ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, ch. 2.

¹⁵ M.W. Flinn and D. Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. II 1700-1830: The Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1984), p. 396.

most marginal impact on the life of the ordinary miner'.¹⁶ The dependency on institutional records has, therefore, undoubtedly distorted and seriously downplayed levels of organisation in the period.

It is perhaps understandable why scholars have neglected the Yorkshire coalfield and, therefore, the miners who worked in it. Across the period this dissertation covers it was comparatively underdeveloped compared to other regions, such as the North East.¹⁷ The vast majority of coal mined in Yorkshire was 'land sale', for local consumption, not for exportation to other markets, and as a result it was *assumed* that the miners had not become economically conditioned to the capitalist labour market, and had therefore not developed a protest consciousness. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Unorganised and Inactive? Trade Union Histories of Miners' Protest

Historians of the trade union movement have similarly denied that colliers had real bargaining power or influence in the late-eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. The Webbs suggested that the 'true' trade unions could only be found amongst the artisans whose 'skill and standard of life had been for centuries encouraged and protected by legal or customary regulations' and 'by the limitations of their numbers'. The miners were not part of this story: they were described as 'semi-servile', lacking agency, and part of the wider illiterate and politically unconscious labouring strata, along with 'farm servants' and 'general labourers'.¹⁸ Subsequent scholars stressed that the Webbs attached too much

¹⁶ J. Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History* (London, 1980), p. 189.

¹⁷ Northumberland and Durham exported coal down the Tyne and the Wear; the Lancashire coalfield was within six miles of the Mersey estuary at its nearest point; South Wales coal was in close proximity to the Bristol Channel; and the river networks of the Severn and Trent provided a gateway for coal mined in Shropshire and Staffordshire respectively. See P. Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation Second Edition: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914* (London, 1983), p. 99.

¹⁸ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London, 1902ed.), pp. 1-2, 37-38.

importance to 'formal' trade unions and showed that instances of trade union action occurred without the existence of formal trade union bureaucracy.¹⁹ However, the Webbs' argument that trade unions were the preserve of the artisan elite and that the miners had no place in the early history of labour organisation, remained unchallenged. Henry Pelling, for instance, argued that trade unionism 'up to the middle of the nineteenth century was largely confined to artisans'. Others have readily accepted this interpretation.²⁰ George Rude, and Kirby and Musson who followed, thought that as late as the 1820s and the 1830s miners' protest was still 'pre-industrial': i.e. its characteristics were machine breaking and riot, not sophisticated trade union organisation.²¹ Only Malcolm Chase has offered a different interpretation and has suggested that early trade unionism amongst miners can be explained by 'pre-existing workplace solidarities' where 'a worker's life literally depended on workmates' vigilance and efficiency'.²² Chase, however, overwhelmingly draws on the miners of Northumberland and Durham for his evidence. Yorkshire, again, is overlooked. Strikes regularly took place across the period. The following table lists instances of strikes chronologically.

¹⁹ V.L. Allen, 'A Methodological Criticism of the Webbs as Trade Union Historians', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 4 (1962), p. 5; A.E. Musson, *British Trade Unions 1800-1875* (London, 1972), p. 13. John Rule has emphasised this point in a number of works of outstanding scholarship: J. Rule, *The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century Industry* (London, 1981) p. 149; Idem., 'The Formative Years of British Trade Unionism: An Overview' in J. Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism 1750-1850: The Formative Years* (London, 1988), p. 1; Idem., *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England 1750-1850* (London, 1998ed.), p. 20; Idem., *Albion's People: English Society 1714-1815* (London, 1992), p. 204.

²⁰ H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (London, 1972ed.), p. 5; H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London, 1969), p. 32; E. Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes 1815-1945* (London, 1984ed.), p. 39.

²¹ G. Rude, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730-1848* (London 1981), pp. 92-93. R.G. Kirby and A.E. Musson, *The Voice of the People: John Doherty, 1798-1854 Trade Unionist, Radical and Factory Reformer* (Manchester, 1975), p. 112.

²² M. Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill, and the Politics of Labour* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 65.

Table 1:1. Strikes at Yorkshire Collieries 1786-1836

Year(s)	Colliery/Location
1786	Middleton Colliery (Leeds)
1791-92	Middleton Colliery (Leeds)
1792	Rothwell Haigh Colliery (Leeds)
1792	Sheffield Collieries
1794 (Two strikes: one month unknown, the other December)	Stanley Colliery (Wakefield)
1796	Middleton Colliery (Leeds)
1799	Thorpe's Colliery (Wentworth)
1810	Tankersley (north Sheffield)
1811	Beeston Park Colliery (Leeds)
1819	Most collieries between Barnsley and Leeds
1824	Storge Hill Colliery (Wakefield)
1825	Lofthouse Colliery (Wakefield)
1825	Manor Colliery (Sheffield)
1826	Unknown Barnsley Colliery
1827	Dore House Colliery (Sheffield)
1831	Button Hill and Greystone Collieries (Sheffield)
1831	Fitzwilliam's Pits (Elsecar)
1833	Wakefield (mainly) and other West Yorkshire collieries.
1833	Fitzwilliam's Pits (Elsecar)
1836 (Two strikes: April and July)	Fitzwilliam's Pits

1836	Thurgoland Pits (Barnsley)
1836	Barnsley Collieries

Patterns of Protest

Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson have stressed how protest movements can only be understood 'in their immediate local context'.²³ By focussing on a specific region we are able to piece together a much richer, more holistic assessment of the world view of a particular group of industrial workers. Indeed, recent scholars have shown how 'new' histories of popular protest are united by 'a commitment to a regional or even "micro-history" approach to historical research'.²⁴ This thesis adopts this method.

For too long we have accepted that protests, mainly strikes, took place during downturns in the economy to *prevent* a wage reduction. Whilst true in some industries, this model of protest has been applied to miners without critical analysis.²⁵ Demands, and strikes, for wage increases did not occur at times of slack trade (with the exception of 1819) when the coalowners had no motivation to settle the dispute and could simply wait until the workmen capitulated and returned to work.

²³ M. Berg and P. Hudson, 'Rehabilitating the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review* 45:1 (1992), p. 39.

²⁴ K. Navickas, 'What Happened to Class? New Histories of Labour and Collective Action in Britain', *Social History* 36:2 (2011), p. 200.

²⁵ For example see A. Randall, *Riotous Assemblies: Popular Protest in Hanoverian England* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 17-18; E. Hobsbawm, 'The Machine Breakers' in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 2015 ed.), pp. 5-17; E.H. Hunt, *British Labour History* (London 1981), p. 191; Kirby and Musson, *The Voice of the People*; R. Fyson, 'Unionism, Class and Community in the 1830s: Aspects of the National Union of Operative Potters' in Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism 1750-1850*, pp. 200-19; F.C. Mather, 'The General Strike of 1842: A Study in Leadership, Organisation and the Threat of Revolution During the Plug Plot Disturbances' in R. Quinault and J. Stevenson (eds.), *Popular Protest and Public Order: Six Studies in British History 1790-1920* (London, 1974), pp. 115-40; E. Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (Yale, 2014), p. 46.

Wages, Living Standards, and Protest: The Optimists vs. the Pessimists

Despite a variety of innovative ways of measuring living standards in the industrial revolution, it is clear that one measurement remains supreme amongst historians: wages. As Michael Flinn has argued, the British working man 'has always shown more direct interest in wage levels than he has in other ingredients of living standards like public health, housing, education, and social insurance, and historians of living standards would do well to follow his lead'.²⁶ Similarly, Lindert and Williamson have stressed the importance of wage data in analysing the changing standard of living: '[t]he most satisfactory clue to a worker's view is his response to living and working conditions that offered different rates of pay'.²⁷ Wages are the best indicator of the miners' standard of living and particular attention is paid to wage data in this thesis.

There are two schools of thought in the debate over the standard of living in the industrial revolution. The 'optimists', pioneered by Clapham and Ashton and later modified by Hartwell, argued that living standards rose in the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. Drawing on a vast range of wage data these scholars contend that prices fell while real wages increased. Optimists have also argued that food prices declined across the period and that increasing government intervention had a considerable impact in improving the working conditions and thus the standard of living for workers.²⁸ On the other hand, the 'pessimists', championed by Hobsbawm, argued that there was a general decline in the standard of living of many of the labouring population across the same period

²⁶ M.W. Flinn, 'Trends in Real Wages, 1750-1850', *Economic History Review*, 27:3 (1974), p. 395.

²⁷ P. Lindert and J. Williamson, 'English Workers' Living Standards during the Industrial Revolution: A New Look', *Economic History Review* 36:1 (1983), p. 22.

²⁸ J.H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain: The Railway Age, 1820-1850* (Cambridge, 1926); R.M. Hartwell, 'The Rising Standard of Living in England, 1800-1850', *Economic History Review*, 13:3 (1961), pp. 397-416; Idem., 'The Standard of Living', *Economic History Review*, 16:1 (1963), pp. 135-46; Lindert and Williamson, 'English Workers' Living Standards during the Industrial Revolution', pp. 1-25.

because wages fell, employment was irregular, and the price of commodities rose.²⁹ E.P. Thompson added a different facet to the pessimist argument through an analysis of the 'human experience'. Despite the rise in real wages across 1790 to 1840 for those in industry, Thompson contended, the breadwinner was "worn out" at forty by the 'longer hours' and the 'greater intensity of labour'. An upward trend in real wages, therefore, did not offset 'immiseration' that followed.³⁰

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s the optimistic interpretation tended to be accepted, drawing heavily on wage data.³¹ In the late 1980s and 1990s the emphasis swung once more to the pessimists. Szreter and Mooney refined the chronology of the pessimist view, arguing that there was a 'serious deterioration in the standard of living' during the 'second quarter' of the nineteenth century amongst urban industrial workers.³² In recent years historians have overwhelmingly drawn pessimistic conclusions from wage data.³³ Only Gregory Clark and Emma Griffin have offered an alternative assessment.³⁴

²⁹ E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The British Standard of Living 1790-1850', *Economic History Review*, 10:1 (1957), pp. 46-68; Idem., 'The Standard of Living During the Industrial Revolution: A Discussion', *Economic History Review* 16:1 (1963), pp. 119-34.

³⁰ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 231. See the rest of ch. 6 and ch. 10.

³¹ Flinn, 'Trends in Real Wages, 1750-1850', pp. 395-413; Lindert and Williamson, 'English Workers' Living Standards during the Industrial Revolution', pp. 1-25; E.H. Hunt and F.W. Botham, 'Wages in Britain During the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 40:3 (1987), pp. 380-99.

³² S. Szreter and G. Mooney, 'Urbanization, Mortality, and the Standard of Living Debate: New Estimates of the Expectation of Life at Birth in nineteenth-century British Cities', *Economic History Review*, 51:1 (1998), p. 109.

³³ C. Feinstein, 'Pessimism Perpetuated: Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Britain During and After the Industrial Revolution', *Journal of Economic History*, 58 (1998), pp. 625-658; R. Allen, 'The High Wage Economy and the Industrial Revolution: A Restatement', *Economic History Review*, 68:1 (2015), pp. 1-22. Allen is optimistic about wage rates in the eighteenth century. He is pessimistic about the same in the first half of the nineteenth century. J. Humphries, 'The Lure of Aggregates and the Pitfalls of the Patriarchal Perspective: A Critique of the High Wage Economy Interpretation of the British Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 66:3 (2013), pp. 693-714; S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Children's Work and Wages in Britain, 1280-1860', *Explorations in Economic History*, 73 (2019), unpaginated. Peter Kirby suggests that it is the 'non-wage' data that has supported an 'optimistic view of living standards'. See P. Kirby, 'The Standard of Living Debate and the Industrial Revolution', *Recent Findings of Research in Economic & Social History* 25, (1997), p. 4.

³⁴ G. Clark, 'Farm Wages and Living Standards in the Industrial Revolution: England, 1670-1869', *Economic History Review*, 54:3 (2001), pp. 477-505; E. Griffin, 'Diets Hunger and Living Standards During the British Industrial Revolution', *Past & Present*, 239 (2018), pp. 71-111.

This thesis will show that trade unionism was fundamentally important to improving wage rates at times of rising food costs to ensure standards of living were maintained. Miners, like most other industrial workers, were reliant on food purchased at public markets and kept a close eye on the cost of provisions.³⁵ From the 1820s onward, when food scarcity concerns became less of an issue, their well-established and increasingly sophisticated (and stronger) unions struck for substantial real wage increases when trade boomed. This thesis, therefore, supports an optimistic perspective on the standard of living for one group of industrial workers.

This is not a business history of the rise of coal industry in Yorkshire. Business records usually place an emphasis on output, profits and costs; they rarely offer information on those who worked there.³⁶ Two useful, but now dated, dissertations have been written on the economic development of the Yorkshire coal industry.³⁷ What is clear is that the industry expanded and output rose across the period covered in this thesis.³⁸ The following graph gives some indication of how the output of Yorkshire coal rose from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries.

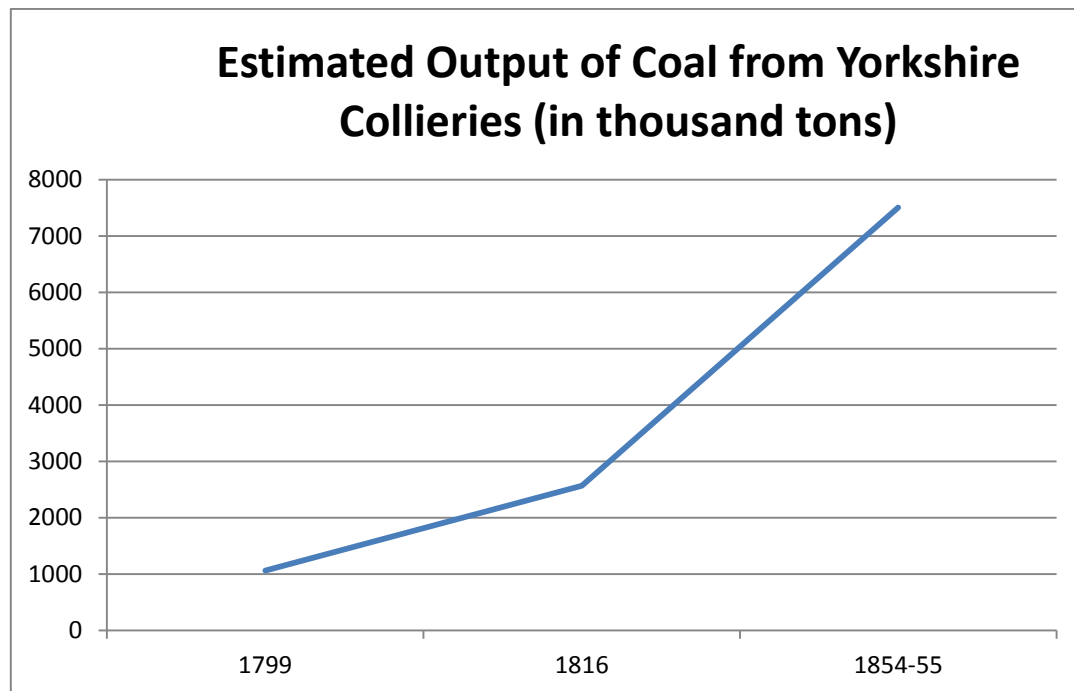
³⁵ D. Hay, 'Patronage, Paternalism, and Welfare: Masters, Workers, and Magistrates in Eighteenth-Century England', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 53 (1998), p. 33.

³⁶ K. Honeyman, *Child Workers in England 1780-1820: Parish Apprenticeship and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 11.

³⁷ G.G. Hopkinson, *The Development of Lead Mining and of the Coal and Iron Industries in North Derbyshire and South Yorkshire 1700-1850*. Unpublished University of Sheffield PhD thesis (1958); R.M. Cox, *The Development of the Coal Industry in South Yorkshire before 1830*. Unpublished University of Sheffield M.A. thesis (1960).

³⁸ See E. Griffin, *A Short History of the British Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke, 2010), ch. 7 for an excellent overview of the expansion of the British coal industry.

Graph 1:1. Estimated Output of Coal from Yorkshire Collieries (in thousand tons) 1799-1855



Source: S. Pollard, 'A New Estimate of British Coal Production, 1750-1850', *Economic History Review*, 33:2 (1980), p. 216.

The heavily capitalised nature of the industry meant Yorkshire miners worked in the pits the whole year round. They did not leave their employment to work on the harvest.³⁹

This thesis draws primarily on hitherto neglected primary sources. An inductive research method was required to approach source material because of its disparate and fragmentary nature. Material has been used from every archive in the historic West Riding of Yorkshire. Un-digitised local newspapers have been used extensively. Almost every

³⁹ Historians have termed the movement between mining and agricultural work as the 'dual occupation'. See, for instance, Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, pp. 25-27; Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 367. C. Griffin, *Protest, Politics and Work in Rural England 1700-1850* (Basingstoke, 2014), p. 22. Local studies: G.B.D. Grey, 'The South Yorkshire Coalfield' in J. Benson & R. G. Neville (eds.) *Studies in the Yorkshire Coal Industry* (Manchester, 1976) p. 31. John Rule, however, described the dual occupation as a 'fallacy'. See Rule, *The Experience of Labour*, p. 14; Idem., *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall c.1740-1870: A Study in Social History*. Unpublished University of Warwick PhD thesis (1971), p. 100. Matthew Roberts has drawn identical conclusions in his investigation into Nottinghamshire framework knitters. See M. Roberts, 'Rural Luddism and the Makeshift Economy of the Nottinghamshire Framework Knitters', *Social History*, 42:3 (2017), pp. 390-91.

edition of the *Sheffield Iris* from 1794 until 1839 has been consulted. Account books, estate papers, Quarter Session rolls, Poor Law records, parish registers, and printed pamphlets, form the rest of the primary source material used in this thesis. In the words of Carl Griffin, I have leant 'hard against the archive' in bringing together the patchy evidence for this dissertation.⁴⁰ I have, however, avoided using evidence from the 1842 Children's Employment Commission as the evidence is temporal for 1840-42 and therefore post-dates this dissertation. Indeed, as Jane Humphries has suggested, the reports have been over-used by historians and to really make sense of the experience of labour before 1830 we need different evidence.⁴¹ But perhaps the main contention with the 1842 report is the loaded nature of the evidence. As Alan Heesom has stressed, those conducting the investigations selected the best evidence to illustrate the iniquity of underground labour in order to bring about the rapid passage of a Mines Act.⁴² Peter Kirby has also shown how pessimistic historians have drawn heavily on the 1842 report as proof of declining working and living conditions.⁴³ It is remarkable that as soon as we begin to interrogate other sources the pessimistic interpretation appears far less convincing.

This thesis is not concerned exclusively with those who worked at the coalface. All who worked in and about the colliery, from the blacksmith on the surface making tools for the miners below, to the person who took care of the pit horses, are considered. These individuals were essential to the working of collieries and the prosperity of mining communities, and merit the same recognition as those who cut the coal.

⁴⁰ M. Roberts, 'Essay in Review: Radicalism, Protest, and Repression in Britain, 1830-1848', *Labour History Review*, 79:3 (2014), p. 329.

⁴¹ J. Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 12-13.

⁴² A. Heesom, 'The Coal Mines Act of 1842: Social Reform, and Social Control', *Historical Journal*, 24:1 (1981), pp. 69-88.

⁴³ Kirby, 'The Standard of Living Debate and the Industrial Revolution', p. 1.

I have used the terms 'working class' and 'labouring class' interchangeably throughout this thesis. Emma Griffin defines the working class as 'those who had no income other than which they earned, those working as manual labourers' and this encapsulates the Yorkshire miners in the period.⁴⁴ Similarly, John Rule argued that the 'labouring classes' were 'the lower orders [that] depended on selling their labour' and we cannot doubt that this included the miners.⁴⁵ The Yorkshire miners were not artisans (despite often earning higher wages than artisans), and have only ever been seen by contemporaries and subsequent historians as 'unskilled'.⁴⁶ Describing them as unskilled, however, belies the true nature of their work. They required a great deal of strength, had to be skilled in the use of tools, and had to be selective in what coal was sent to the surface to be sold before any wages could be earned.⁴⁷

Themes

Paternalism featured in the lives of some Yorkshire miners. Existing scholarship offers a range of contrasting interpretations of paternalism in the industrial revolution. Some historians have characterised paternalism as restrictive, backwards-looking and oppressive, whilst others have stressed that where the paternalistic model of employment relations was accepted, it brought tangible benefits to workers such as work when trade was depressed.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Rule, *Albion's People*, p. 105.

⁴⁶ See Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn*, p. 36; Lindert and Williamson, 'English Workers' Living Standards', p. 6. I am not suggesting that the Yorkshire miners should be seen as artisans. It is well documented that to become an artisan a formal apprenticeship was required and that once completed, the individual would have to join a 'company' which was regulated by statute. None of this existed in mining.

⁴⁷ Rule, *The Experience of Labour*, p. 40.

⁴⁸ For those who have argued paternalism was backwards-looking and restrictive see Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, pp. 161-62; H.I. Dutton and D. King, 'The Limits of Paternalism: The Cotton Tyrants of North Lancashire, 1836-1854', *Social History*, 7:1 (1982), pp. 59-74. For those who have argued paternalism brought

Some limited research has been undertaken on miners. A study of West Midlands colliers, for instance, reveals that the paternalism of coalowners and magistrates had evaporated by the 1790s. Yorkshire has not been entirely neglected; Graham Mee hinted that the fourth Earl Fitzwilliam was a paternalist, but his book focussed more on the economic development of the collieries and the ironworks, rather than employment relations.⁴⁹

This thesis will show that the earls Fitzwilliam pursued a consistently paternalistic strategy. It is clear they had a legitimate concern for their workers. The fourth and fifth Earls provided them with money when injured, pensions to their old colliers, work when trade was slack, and importantly, food at times when wheat was expensive. In return they expected deference, which the miners accepted, until the 1830s when they formed unions to press for higher wages. A minority of other employers occasionally showed a measure of benevolence at times of dearth. Deference was not forthcoming from most Yorkshire miners. Coalowners never offered anything more significant than what trade unionism could achieve: an improvement in wages.

A range of different conclusions have been drawn on the political tendencies of colliers. Ashton and Sykes were probably the first scholars to identify that colliers' were loyalist. They argued that '[t]he coal-miners frequently professed their attachment to the crown and the royal family'; they were 'church-and-state men'. 'Few of them', they continued, 'had [radical] political instincts at all [...] they took no part in the early agitation for Reform'.⁵⁰ Following Ashton and Sykes, Brian Lewis concluded that colliers 'seemed content to remain aloof from major reforming movements' and added that 'in the early nineteenth century the

benefits to workers, see M. Huberman, 'The Economic Origins of Paternalism: Lancashire Cotton Spinning in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', *Social History*, 12:2 (1987), pp. 177-92; D. Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (London, 1979).

⁴⁹ G. Mee, *Aristocratic Enterprise: The Fitzwilliam Industrial Undertakings 1797-1857* (London, 1975).

⁵⁰ Ashton and Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 130.

miner was a loyalist who, if given a chance, could usually be guaranteed to sing “God Save the King”.⁵¹ Yet this view of the miners' political loyalties has been contested. E.P. Thompson demonstrated that the North-East miners were noted for their Paineite radicalism.⁵² Gwyn Williams has similarly stressed how the Merthyr region was a stronghold of Jacobinism in the 1790s.⁵³ The West Midlands colliers were said to be ready to 'rise in revolution' between 1800-01.⁵⁴ It has also been revealed that miners in Lancashire have 'had a long and solid history of [...] radical activity'.⁵⁵

For many years, labouring-class involvement in public expressions of popular conservatism was explained by bribery: elites hired 'bands of ruffians or simple-minded folk' to enthusiastically celebrate the burning of Thomas Paine, for instance. Harry Dickinson and John Stevenson disputed this view, and revealed that expressions of popular conservatism (such as Paine burnings) were too frequent and too extensive; they 'comprised a genuine element of zealous xenophobia and strident loyalism'.⁵⁶ Scholarship on popular loyalism disappears after 1819, in contrast to the corpus of work into political reform in the 1820s and 1830s. Matthew Roberts has recently argued that we should pay more attention to post-war conservatism: loyalism 'did not die with the end of the wars'; it lasted much longer

⁵¹ B. Lewis, *Coal Mining in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Harlow, 1971), p. 66.

⁵² Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 112.

⁵³ G. Williams, *The Merthyr Rising* (London, 1978), p. 73.

⁵⁴ Hay, 'Patronage, Paternalism, and Welfare', p. 35.

⁵⁵ A. Booth, 'The United Englishmen and Radical Politics in the Industrial North-West of England, 1795-1803', *International Review of Social History*, 31:3 (1986), p. 290; K. Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire 1798-1815* (Oxford, 2009), p. 196. However in Robert Poole's recent book on Peterloo he casts doubt on whether Lancashire colliers had any interest in post-war political radicalism. Poole has been unable to trace a single collier at the meeting on St. Peter's Fields 'despite the presence of the Lancashire coalfield'. See R. Poole, *Peterloo: The English Uprising* (Oxford, 2019), p. 364.

⁵⁶ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 79-80, 81-82, 114, 122-23; H.T. Dickinson, 'Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism 1789-1815' in H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *Britain and the French Revolution 1789-1815* (Basingstoke, 1989), p. 11; J. Stevenson, 'Popular Radicalism and Popular Protest 1789-1815' in H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *Britain and the French Revolution 1789-1815* (Basingstoke, 1989), p. 74.

than many historians have recognised.⁵⁷ In contending that the Yorkshire miners maintained their conservatism across the whole period, this thesis has much to add to our understanding of the politics of the working class in the industrial revolution.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 examines the experience of labour for the Yorkshire miners. Only by understanding the nature of work can we begin to understand protest. The first section examines the Yorkshire miners' terms of employment and reveals that 'bonds' were extensively used in West Yorkshire, less so in South Yorkshire. The use of the bond did not provoke a backlash, however, because both coalowners and magistrates were lax in enforcing it. The second section examines the wage and its form. This section establishes that the Yorkshire miners earned substantially higher wages across 1786-1839 when compared to other workers in the West Riding (and beyond), and colliers in other coalfields. Data is also included on the cost of foodstuffs. As the subsequent chapters reveal, the cost of foodstuffs was fundamental in pushing miners into trade union action. The third section assesses how parish apprentices were used in the colliery labour force in West Yorkshire. They were free labour for the collier until twenty-one years old. This section also shows how the Overseers of the Poor went to great lengths to choose a suitable apprentice master and took a range of factors into consideration when making their choice. The fourth section analyses the experience of labour for women and children. Women moved from supplementing the household wage to actively assisting the male breadwinner underground

⁵⁷ M. Roberts, unpublished draft chapter of Roberts' forthcoming book on Radicalism. Unpaginated. The only substantial work on popular conservatism in the post-war period is Jorg Neuheiser's *Crown, Church and Constitution: Popular Conservatism in England 1815-1867* (New York, 2016). Despite a strong West Riding focus, Neuheiser does not mention colliers at all.

across the 1820s and the 1830s. At the same time children began to be employed in increasing numbers and at younger ages. The final section examines accidents. Gruesome and violent death was a characteristic of colliery work across the whole period. The hazardous nature of labour explains why the miners were paid so much.

Chapter 3 examines the Yorkshire miners' culture. Their high wages and dangerous employment engendered two competing cultures of the alehouse and the chapel: their labour conditioned their leisure. The alehouse culture included drinking, gambling, fighting, a proclivity for blood sports, and poaching. These popular recreations took place across the length and breadth of the coalfield and, despite criticism from elites, remained attractive recreations across the whole period. In contrast, a large number of colliers avoided the alehouse and attended the chapel. Wesleyan Methodism was particularly strong amongst the Yorkshire miners whilst the Established Church had little influence. Sunday schools, too, were important institutions in providing an education, however rudimentary, for many collier children. This chapter rejects the idea that the religion and Sunday schools were instruments of social control. Religion and Sunday schools did not, as the following chapters reveal, create a 'submissive industrial worker' as suggested by E.P. Thompson.⁵⁸

Chapters 4-8 examine instances of strikes chronologically. They demonstrate their intimate connection to food prices and living standards. Chapter 4 focusses on the relationship between wages, strike action and the availability of food in the years of dearth 1786-1801. At times of high wages and good trade, when bread was cheap, the miners at various pits in Yorkshire formed unions and struck to capitalise on the booming demand for coal to raise their own wages to improve their standard of living. At times when wages were

⁵⁸ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 404.

high, when the coal trade was good but foodstuffs expensive, the unions resurfaced and miners struck to increase wages further and to negotiate the supply of grain at discounted prices. When Britain's involvement in Revolutionary Wars declined in the late 1790s, the coal trade followed, rendering trade union action ineffective. A reduction in wages and soaring bread costs adversely affected the colliers' standard of living: Leeds colliers rioted. At other Yorkshire pits benevolence in the form of supplied foodstuffs staved off disorder.

Chapter 5 assesses instances of combination under the years of the Combination Laws when unions were supposedly illegal. For many years it was accepted that the Combination Laws circumscribed trade union action in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century. This chapter challenges this interpretation; colliers' unionism flourished - and for the first fifteen years miners capitalised on the favourable demand for coal to improve their standard of living. In the first decade of the nineteenth century trade was good and food was cheap. The rise in the cost of foodstuffs in 1810 and 1811, however, pushed colliers into strike action to maintain their high standards of living. The trade depression from late 1815 onward resulted in a decline in the miners' standard of living: wages fell and the cost of living increased. The reduced demand for coal, again, rendered trade union action ineffective. This chapter also reveals how Friendly Societies emerged at times of depressed trade and rising costs of living. These organisations have been seen as a front for trade unionism; this chapter contends that they were purely 'benefit oriented' and their objectives were more to maintain living standards.

Chapter 6 provides a detailed analysis of the 1819 West Riding miners' strike. A substantial rise in the cost of living in early 1819 (on already low living standards) was the catalyst for intensive trade union organisation on an unprecedented scale to raise wages.

The strike is exceptional because it took place at a time when the coal trade was depressed; but we should not lose sight of the fact that the strike is an important case study demonstrating how trade union action was connected to living standards. It was the first truly regional strike. Coal output from Leeds down to Barnsley was paralysed; miners met *en masse* with bands and banners and paraded around Leeds; colliers (and their wives) picketed pits and attacked working miners; pits were sabotaged and miners imprisoned. The strike ultimately failed; but it provides us with an example to see the lengths Yorkshire miners went to improve their living standards. The strike had no connection to political radicalism which was so prevalent in the West Riding at the time.⁵⁹ The only connection that existed was in the minds of the local magistracy who saw the strike as part a wider revolutionary conspiracy of the labouring classes.

Chapter 7 examines the prosperous years of 1820-1832. The coal industry rapidly expanded across this period and the Yorkshire miners regularly took strike action to improve their wage rates and standards of living. The cost of foodstuffs fell to its lowest level of the whole 1786-1839 period so strike action brought significant real wage benefits. By 1822 the pre-depression high wage rates had been restored. After the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824-25 there was a rapid expansion in trade unionism amongst Yorkshire miners: several strikes took place between 1825 and 1827. The industry prospered to the extent that miners struck in the summer months for wage increases. A short-lived depression in the Yorkshire coal trade in 1830 was offset by the strikes of North-East pitmen in 1831 and 1832. West Riding coal was sent to Newcastle and the flourishing state of the industry gave the miners a renewed impetus for trade unionism. Even Earl Fitzwilliam's colliers were

⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion of West Riding political radicalism in 1819 see J. Baxter and J. Stanley, 'The Time Draws Nigh, it is Just at Hand': The Road to Insurrection in the Industrial West Riding 1819-1820' *Borthwick Paper No. 131* (York, 2020). Forthcoming.

influenced by the growing appeal of collective action. Extensive union organisation took place, particularly in Sheffield, to the extent that by 1832 trade unionism had firmly embedded itself into the fabric of the Yorkshire miners.

Chapter 8 considers the years of increasing union militancy between 1833 and 1839. The extraordinary demand for coal pushed miners into their most intensive period of strike action. Yorkshire miners once again flexed their industrial muscles when coalowners were making substantial profits. Colliers at Alverthorpe near Wakefield struck for a wage increase in April 1833 and this demand soon spread to adjoining pits. In response, the coalowners imported blacklegs from across Britain, who were met with unprecedented levels of hostility and violence. The miners remained on strike across the summer supported by their trade union. In 1836 many strikes took place to raise wages and living standards when the prosperity of the industry was unparalleled. Coalowners conceded to their colliers' demands and by 1837 wages of 4s. and 5s. per day were regularly earned by Yorkshire miners. Despite the rise in the cost of foodstuffs as the 'hungry forties' approached it seems Yorkshire miners were able to absorb price rises as the industry prospered. By the close of our period it seems the well-established trade unions ensured Yorkshire miners' labour commanded a premium which offset threats to their standard of living.

Chapter 2: The Experience of Labour for the Yorkshire Miner 1786-1839

This chapter examines the experience of labour for the Yorkshire miners across 1786-1839. We cannot make sense of why miners protested without understanding their quotidian experiences of labour. The miners' experience of work - how they earned their wages - informed and conditioned their attempts at trade union organisation.¹ This chapter provides an assessment of the terms of employment; the wage and its form; parish apprentices and their role in the colliery labour force; the experience of labour for women and children; and accidents. Whilst their work was undeniably hard and life destroying they were well paid for it. The Yorkshire miners' experience of labour provides us with a new perspective on work in the Industrial Revolution: that labour was well remunerated. They did not eke out an existence on poverty wages like weavers, the 'characteristic workers' of the period, who have clouded our understanding of the Industrial Revolution.²

Terms of Employment

The miners' bond was the document entered into by the collier with the coalowner (or his agent) which bound him to employment under Master and Servant Law. Historians of the coal industry have depicted the bond as an example of ruthless oppression by coalowners in the period. They have, however, drawn evidence almost from the North East, Lancashire, or Cornwall.³ Nothing is known about the terms of employment for Yorkshire

¹ A. Campbell, 'The Scots Colliers' Strikes of 1824-1826: The Years of Freedom and Independence', in Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism 1750-1850*, p. 144.

² Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 711.

³ Page-Arnot, *The Miners*, ch. I; Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, pp. 349-361; Challinor, *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners*, p.20; Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, p. 57.

miners in our period. Frank Machin and Robert Neville concluded that bonds did not exist in Yorkshire in the early nineteenth century.⁴

It seems that the use of the bond in Yorkshire was particularly extensive in the south Leeds/Wakefield area, towards Bradford, and in Silkstone to the west of Barnsley; but the bond was sparsely used in South Yorkshire. For instance, Earl Fitzwilliam's colliers never entered into a formal bond during our period. In contrast, bonds were used at almost every colliery up until 1844 in the North East, which explains why historians have seen the bond as part of the wider apparatus of control exercised by coalowners. The patchy use of the bond in Yorkshire may explain why it does not seem to have caused as much resentment as it did in Northumberland and Durham. But perhaps the most significant reason why the bond did not provoke a backlash was the fact that Yorkshire coalowners were lax in enforcing it, making it less of an issue for their workers and their unions.⁵ Moreover, magistrates often let the colliers off with a warning and did not punish them.

Evidence of binding derives from two sources: firstly, the chance survival of the bond in manuscript or printed form, and secondly, press and quarter session reports of prosecutions brought against colliers for contravening the terms of their employment. The quarter session indictments allow us to see how the bond operated in practice.

It is only a historian of Yorkshire coalmasters, John Goodchild, who has investigated the use of the bond in our region, albeit from an employers' perspective. That said, he was close to the mark when he concluded that '[d]uring the early nineteenth century the bond became of less and less importance – probably owing to the difficulty of forcing its

⁴ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, ch. 1-2; Neville, *The Yorkshire Miners*, ch. 2.

⁵ At the Yorkshire pits where bonds were used, colliers were not permitted to work unless they agreed to the terms stipulated in the bond. Of course, if they broke the bond, the employers had a right to appeal to the Quarter Sessions to have the miner punished.

conditions, with the great increase in the number of both collieries and colliers'.⁶ Very little has ever been written on the terms of employment for Yorkshire miners. This section will attempt to fill this void.

The earliest bond we have found dates from 1794. Getters and hurriers at Fenton's Stanley Colliery near Wakefield were required to sign the following bond to gain employment:

We whose names are underwritten do agree to serve Wm. & Thos. Fenton Esqrs. From the day of the date hereof and for and during one year as Colliers and Hurriers at Stanley Colliery, and to work the Stanley Colliery regularly, and every working-day should our Health permits, and the Colliery be in working condition - And should we want to leave working at the said Colliery at the Expiration of the above Time, we agree to give three Months' Notice to the Agent at the said Colliery, or to serve Three Months after the Expiration of the said year. Also we who are Colliers do agree that when any other Collier shall have occasion to hurry by reason of a Hurrier or Hurriers being wanting to give him every one of us one Corf of Coals to mend his wages.⁷

Master and Servant Law required employees to give three months' notice before leaving off work and all extant bonds state this clause. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, when colliers took strike action, the Master and Servant clause was invoked to bring prosecutions at the quarter sessions against the miners. In 1797 the Fentons' reaffirmed that their 'Miners or Labourers' who they described as 'common or inferior Servants' were

[...] hired and employed most generally by the Agents, Stewards or Superintendents of Messrs. Fenton to work in the Collieries at certain stipulated Weekly, or Monthly Wages, some times for a Term certain, and some times for no certain term, and all

⁶ J. Goodchild, *The Coal Kings of Yorkshire* (Wakefield, 1978), p. 64.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

such Hirings are constantly made with this express Condition, That the Men so hired shall not dissolve the Hiring, or quit the Service of Messrs. Fenton, without giving 3 Months previous Notice for that purpose.

This has been their Custom and Mode of Living, with very few exceptions, for 40 or 50 Years last past.⁸

The variation in the length of the bond was dependent on the ages at which the colliers were hired. A settlement case brought before the magistrates in 1818 provides evidence of this. On the 17 October 1817 a Hunslet collier named Robert Wood, his wife Mary, and their four children were ordered to be removed from Hunslet back to the township of Rothwell, the place of their last legal settlement.⁹ Robert Wood appealed to the Quarter Sessions to have the removal order overturned, basing his argument on the terms of employment, which illuminate the way in which hiring lengths varied. It is worth quoting at length:

[...] the pauper [i.e. Robert Wood] proved that he served at Mess^{rs} Fenton's colliery in Rothwell under weekly hirings for a great length of time until he was about the age of eighteen years when he (amongst others) was sent for by the agents of the colliery into the counting House and signed an agreement of which the following is a copy –

"We whose Names are under signed agree with Thomas Fenton of Rothwell Haigh Esq^r and James Fenton of Glass House Esq^r at the present task in the following manner from the dates against each of our Names for and during one year and should we or any of us want to leave at the years end we also agree to give three Months Notice previous to the expiration of the said year to the agent or agents of the said Colliery or serve three months after the expiration of the said Term as Witness our Hands"

⁸ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

⁹ The post-war period resulted in widespread reductions in colliery labour as the demand for coal from the war industries evaporated. This may explain why Wood had applied for parish relief.

Eleven colliers assented to the contract by signing or making their mark. Each collier was paid an earnest payment of £1 10s. 6d. to confirm the contract, with the exception of the last name, Benjamin Bulmore, who was paid 7s. What is significant is that out of the eleven colliers, only five of them were actually 'Hired for one year' despite the terms of the bond. The rest, including Robert Wood, 'Hired for eleven months'. This would prove crucial to the magistrates' decision. An affidavit specified that '[t]he pauper continued in the service of Mess^{rs} Fenton without any other agreement for above a year' and because 'the above stated agreement was not a hiring for a year' the settlement order was enforced.¹⁰ Despite the fact that Wood had worked continuously for the Fentons between February 1798 and October 1817, he was legally employed on an eleven-month hiring, which made him ineligible for parish relief. Under the Old Poor Law, a person had to be legally settled to be entitled to relief, and to be legally settled, a labourer had to be hired for a year and a day.¹¹ Because Wood was not, he was returned to his last legal settlement. Eleven-month hirings were, therefore, a way coalowners could get rid of unwanted workmen without having to navigate the complexities of the poor law if they were allowed a settlement. And, we know that they were not just restricted to Fentons collieries. In 1812 Francis Maude, a West Riding magistrate, noted that colliers were 'hired only for eleven months [...] & such hirings have been considered fair bona fide transactions'.¹²

The specific terms of the miners' bond relating to the payment for coal getting varied. It seems they were set by the owners themselves which explains why they vary so greatly. For example, two colliers named Isaac Clayton and James Taylor agreed to the piece-rates of '2s/9d for getting and hurrying every Dozen of coals (each Doz: to contain 25 loads) & each

¹⁰ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/157/2. Wakefield Quarter Session Roll Jan. 1818.

¹¹ P. Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531-1782* (Basingstoke, 1990), p. 36; Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, p. 23.

¹² West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/151/7 Rotherham Quarter Session Roll Aug. 1812.

Load to contain 2½ Bushels)'at John Sturges & Co's colliery near Bradford in 1806. They were paid an additional '1s per yard for all customary straight-work' and were paid '2d per dozen extra' if the coal they mined was over 170 yards from the shaft. They were also required to 'to flag & nail the Gates and take them down one yard in Height and to conduct air to every proper place also to remove all crushes of Earth and keep the works clear and to remove all Rails & Flags without any Expense or extra charge to the company'.¹³

In contrast, the bond that operated at Clarke's Noblethorpe Colliery near Silkstone in the 1810s did not stipulate piece-rates but focussed on the process of coal getting. It was stated that '[n]o collier to leave his or her Benk or task work till finished to the satisfaction of the agent; and his or her tools and plates delivered up'. 'The Master himself or Agent', the bond continued:

[...]shall have liberty to discharge any collier or other tenant without previous notice for misconduct in his or her work. A misbehaviour to the Master, Agent or other servant of the colliery or in the event of any decrease in the sale of the coal or any total or partial stoppage in work throughout any means whatever, and in case of such discharge all his or her tools and plates are to be given up as aforesaid with the possession in tenantable repair and discharge of rent of any dwelling house or tenement which he may then occupy under the Master before he shall be entitled to receive the money deposited.¹⁴

The fact that colliers were not able to leave their work 'till the satisfaction of the agent' suggests that each collier had a designated allowance of coal to get, rather than being paid piece-rates suggesting that a set daily wage may have been in operation. Similar terms were used at Thomas Pearson's Herringthorpe Colliery in Rotherham: 'In case any of the above named operatives should become sick or disabled the other colliers shall be compelled to

¹³ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), BIC/10/4 George Wood's opinion on Colliers and Ironstone Getters 7 May 1807.

¹⁴ G. Teasdale, *Silkstone Coal and Collieries* (Barnsley, n.d), p. 8.

send the stipulated quantities of coals so soon as it is possible to put another man into the place of the one so disabled as aforesaid'.¹⁵ However, payment by piece rates remained the norm at most pits in our period.

Trade unions were well established at Yorkshire pits by the late 1830s. Some coalowners tried to limit the influence of trade unionism by specifying that all funds which were to be sent to any external organisation had to be first approved by the coalowner. The bond from Clarke's Silkstone Colliery, which is reproduced in full in Appendix 1, illuminates this. The clause states that

all such sum or sums of money as the said Robert Couldwell Clarke or any of his agents shall, at our request [i.e. the colliers' request], advance to any of us to be by us contributed to any Bank for saving, or Friendly Society (duly established according to law) or for relief in sickness or for the Education of our children[.]¹⁶

Bonds continued to be used until the end of our period. A draft of a bond has survived from Kirkby Fenton's colliery in 1838; we do not know, however, if it was actually used.¹⁷ Similarly, as Appendix 2 shows, we have a bond from around the same time from John L. L. Kaye's Denby Grange Colliery. Again, we do not know if it was ever used as no details are entered.

The terms of the bond provide us with an insight into the quotidian experience of labour for the Yorkshire miners in the period. At times of economic prosperity substantial financial incentives were paid to colliers for hiring. For instance, in 1797, when trade boomed, £5 each was paid to fifteen colliers who agreed to perform piece work at a rate of 3s. per thirty corves with 4d. per yard of straight work in the Heigh Pit, part of the Bowling

¹⁵ Rotherham Archives, 176/B/4 Thomas Pearson Papers.

¹⁶ Barnsley Archives, CR/148. Loose Papers relating to Clarke's Silkstone Collieries.

¹⁷ Goodchild, *The Coal Kings of Yorkshire*, p. 64.

Collieries. Each collier was hired for a full year.¹⁸ Five years later the Bowling Company issued a revised bond which stated that each collier that was 'hired afresh from midsummer 1803 for one year' would receive the substantially reduced sum of one guinea on hiring. The piece-rates were '3s. 4d. a dozen of twenty-six corves at the two Gin Pits, whereof the hurriers are to have 1½d'. At the company's Sough Pit, '3s 11d.' was paid, presumably for the same amount of coals. In the New Heigh Pit an extra 6d per week per man was paid 'for bad coals getting and galls crossing'. Aside from the piece-rates, the bond stipulated that that the workers were to 'begin at this task directly' and that 'Coals [were to] to be got for candles as before'. At this pit it seems that no collier was entitled to take coals for himself; the bond concluded stating that 'no coals to be allowed the colliers'.¹⁹

Under Master and Servant Law the prosecution of a collier for breaking the bond was at the discretion of the coalowner(s) and/or the magistrate(s). The first time Yorkshire colliers broke the bond it seems that their employers were conciliatory towards them. They were more likely to prosecute repeat offenders. In 1794 at the Fentons' Stanley Colliery a short strike took place. Three of the colliers, labelled as 'idle and disobedient servants', 'with many others' left their work. We do not know why; but, as this thesis will show, colliers often struck for a wage increase at times of good trade and 1794 was a profitable year for the industry. The colliers were immediately summoned before the justices and 'begged Messrs. Fenton not to prosecute' which they 'accordingly assented to' with the promise of 'a regular attention to their Duty on the part of the Colliers'.²⁰ This highlights how the bond was invoked at the discretion of the coalowners. Dissatisfaction, however, continued to fester at Fenton's colliery and there was another dispute, as we shall see in Chapter 4, after

¹⁸ W. Cudworth, *A History of Bolton and Bowling* (Bradford, 1891), p. 238.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

²⁰ Goodchild, *The Coal Kings of Yorkshire*, p. 65.

Christmas 1794. In 1803, Stephen Jagger, a collier in the employ of John Mitchell, left off work for the third time without giving his master notice. It was recalled how the first time Jagger did this magistrate named Lodge 'out of humanity' did not prosecute him. The second time Jagger quit his employment his employer 'still continued to exercise his humanity towards him and no commitment took place'. However, Jagger, 'instead of returning to his master's work spent time in alehouses' so Mitchell brought another prosecution against him. Further evidence was provided by the colliery agent, Fletcher, who 'proved the contract' that Jagger had entered into and declared that Jagger was certainly guilty of breaking his terms of employment. Despite protestations from other colliers and a 'patron of Jagger' it seems probable that Jagger was finally committed to the House of Correction.²¹ It is clear that Mitchell twice gave Jagger another chance to return to his employment. Only when he refused to do so did he invoke legislation against him. It is possible that many colliers who broke their bond were similarly dealt with and given another chance by their employers.

Towards the end of our period it seems that coalowners were still comparatively lenient and willing to give colliers a chance the first time they broke their bond. At the Dewsbury Petty Sessions at the beginning of 1833 Henry Firth, a collier, was charged with absenting himself 'a second time' from the service of Joshua Ingham, Esq. There is no record of an indictment the first time Firth broke the bond, suggesting that Ingham let him off. The second time, however, Firth was charged. It was stated how he had not given the 'three months' notice' required. A week later it was reported how another collier named Jos. Gledhill had also left the employment of Ingham 'without having given notice, according to his agreement'. Both men were committed to the House of Correction in Wakefield for one

²¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 June 1803.

month.²² Even during protracted industrial disputes, as Chapter 8 will show, some coalowners agreed to let their colliers return to work without prosecution for breaking their contracts.

The West Riding magistracy did not consider that breaking the bond was a serious offence. The Fentons grumbled in 1797 that the miners were frequently flouting 'the Terms of their Contract or Hiring and Service' without giving the required notice. Somewhat surprisingly, given their conciliatory attitude three years earlier, they lamented that their remonstrances fell on deaf ears, stating that the magistracy 'have refused Redress; and contenting themselves with only recommending better Conduct to the Offenders, have refused to commit them, or exercise a coercive jurisdn. Of any kind; by which the greatest Mischiefs are likely to arise'.²³ Evidently the Fentons wanted the magistracy to take a more proactive approach to suppress 'confederations'. Further evidence reveals that magistrates often gave colliers the option of returning to work before they prosecuted. For instance, in 1834, Francis Ashmore, a collier, was 'discharged by Messrs. Booth & Co. with leaving their service without due notice'. Ashmore did not deny he had committed an offence and 'obstinately refused to return to his work' so was reluctantly committed to Wakefield House of Correction by the magistrates.²⁴ Again, this evidence reveals how colliers were given a chance to return to work before prosecutions were invoked against them.

The bond existed at a number of Yorkshire collieries in the period. It seems probable that they continued to be used after the close of our period. The conclusions drawn by historians that the bond was oppressive, part of the wider repertoire of coercive resources that coalowners and magistrates could draw on, is overstated. The reason for this leniency on

²² *Wakefield and Dewsbury Journal*, 7 Feb. 1834; 14 Feb. 1834.

²³ Goodchild, *The Coal Kings of Yorkshire*, pp. 65-66.

²⁴ *Sheffield Independent*, 25 Jan. 1834.

the part of the coalowners, however, was the rise in the bargaining power of the miners. By the 1830s, Yorkshire miners' trade unions were so large and so sophisticated they were able to challenge prosecutions invoked by employers for breach of contract.

The Wage and its Form

Miners across Britain were generally paid piece rates.²⁵ Yorkshire miners were no different. Piece rates – or payment by results – were used in the mining industry as an inducement to raise output. In collieries, men (and occasionally women) were scattered in small numbers through the workings which made their supervision awkward.²⁶ John Rule argued that piece rates were required 'to ensure the constant attendance of the labourer at his work, by giving him a direct stake in increased productivity'.²⁷ Payments of an hourly or daily wage were infrequent in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century.²⁸

Yorkshire colliers' were generally paid fortnightly or, in some cases, weekly.²⁹ Most surviving pit wage books are divided into fortnightly periods in line with the frequency of payments. These accounts show colliers were paid for coal hewn and brought to the surface. They were also paid an additional sum for the rate per yard of level driven in the workings. The 'butty' system was in operation at some Yorkshire pits. The 'butty' system was in operation at some Yorkshire pits. This was a form of subcontracting where a 'butty master' -

²⁵ M. Dauntton, *Progress and Prosperity: An Economic and Social History of Great Britain* (Oxford, 1995), p. 231. Dauntton discusses the North East coalfield.

²⁶ Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, p. 34; Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, pp. 374, 386.

²⁷ Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, p. 74.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34. For a useful discussion of wages and the method of wage payment in North East and Scottish pits see Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, pp. 374-395.

²⁹ G.G. Hopkinson stated that wages were paid 'fortnightly or monthly' at Yorkshire pits the eighteenth century. I have not found one instance of wages being paid monthly. See G.G. Hopkinson, 'The Development of the South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire Coalfield, 1500-1775' in Benson and Neville (eds.) *Studies in The Yorkshire Coal Industry*, p. 27.

often an experienced collier - hired a group of men and set them to work. He was then paid a sum, by the coalowner, for the coal that they collectively produced. The butty then paid the miners with this money, after taking a substantial cut.

We know the 'butty' system was used in 1793 at Thorpe Hesley Colliery because '& co' is added after the names of the principal coal getter in the account book. Further evidence of the butty system is provided by the fact that the volume of coal got would have been far higher than is possible for one person to get by themselves. Thirty corves were required to fill one pit load, and across a two-week period 'John Shaw & co', for instance, got 57 loads of coal, a total of 1710 corves which suggests that more than one person was getting the coal. For this Shaw was paid £3 6s. 6d.³⁰ However, there was no compulsion to work for a butty; colliers could work independently in the same pit. It is from these individual colliers that we can construct an approximate daily wage for Yorkshire miners.³¹ Table 1:1 provides an overview of a male adult miners' wage in our period at ten year intervals. Wage data for adult males in trades in Yorkshire and elsewhere are provided for comparison. It is clear that Yorkshire miners were very well paid. Data on the cost of living is included because, as this thesis will show, the access to foodstuffs was fundamentally important to explaining why Yorkshire miners formed trade union and struck.

Table 2:1. Approximate Daily Wage Rates for Yorkshire Miners 1786-1836.

Year	Approximate Daily Wage of an adult male Yorkshire Miner	Approximate Daily Wage (male) of Other Occupation	Cost of Living
1786	2s. to 3s. 4d.	Lancashire Colliers: 1s. 9d.	Low food prices. Average cost of wheat in England 40s. per imperial quarter. (Lowest of 1781-1791 decade).

³⁰ Sheffield Archives, A[rundle]C[astle]M[anuscripts]/S/203 Thorpe Hesley Colliery Disbursements 1790-1801.

³¹ Ashton and Sykes claimed that it was 'exceedingly difficult' to calculate a daily wage for a collier in the period. See Ashton and Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 134. We reject this conclusion.

		London saddlers: 2s. 4d.	
1796	3s. to 4s.	West Riding: Skilled labourer: 1s. 3d. to 2s. per day. Agricultural Labourer: 7d to 1s. per day. Gloucestershire master weaver: 2s. Artisan London tailor: 4s.	High food prices. Average cost of wheat in England 78s. 7d. per imperial quarter. (Highest of 1790s). Wheat supplied to miners by coalowners see Chapter 4.
1806	Above 3s.	North West handloom weavers: 3s. Artisan London typefounder: 3s.	High Food Prices. Average cost of wheat in England 79s. 1d. per imperial quarter.
1816	3s. at Rothwell Haigh Colliery. Wages unclear in Sheffield. Proven reduction in piece rates from 2s. 6d. for hard coals to 1s. 7d. across 1815-1816.	Artisan London compositor: 5s. 6d. Artisan London tailor: 6s.	Very high. Crisis year. Average cost of wheat in England 78s. 6d. per imperial quarter.
1826	4s.	Manchester power loom weaver: 1s. 6d. North East colliers: 4s. 6d.	Low food prices. Average cost of wheat in England 58s. 6d. per imperial quarter.
1836	4s. 6d. to 5s.	Sheffield file-cutter: 3s. 2d. Bradford handloom worsted weavers 1s-1s. 2d. (1838)	Low food prices for decade. Price of wheat 48s. 6d. per imperial quarter.

Sources: Yorkshire miners' wages: *Leeds Mercury*, 12 Dec. 1786; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 25 Jan. 1796; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds) WYL/899/77 Middleton Colliery Time Book 1805-07; J. Batty, *The History of Rothwell* (Rothwell, 1877), p. 187; Sheffield Archives, M.D. 3629 Sheffield Coal Company Memorandum book; W[entworth]W[oodhouse]M[uniments]/G40/90 Ben Biram to Earl Fitzwilliam 15 March 1836; *Leeds Times* July 23 1836;

Wages in other occupations: R. Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England* (Gloucester, 1988), pp. 16-17; Rule, *The Experience of Labour*, p. 65; Idem., *Albion's People*, pp. 180-185; J.L and B. Hammond *The Skilled Labourer* (London, 1919) p. 195; Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, p. 247; Kaijage, *Labouring Barnsley*, p. 216; *Sheffield Independent*, 13 Feb. 1836.

Cost of living: B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962) p. 488.

The approximate daily wages included money to pay a hurrier for taking the hewn coal to the pit mouth.³² Ashton and Sykes calculated that around 1803 at Rothwell Haigh Colliery the regular daily wage for a collier and his lad working as one unit came to 3s.³³ At John Sturges & Co's colliery near Bradford in 1806 colliers had to agree to 'pay the hurriers seven shillings out of every twenty five shillings which they shall receive and so in proportion for any quantity more or less' before they began work.³⁴ Edward Brierley, a collier at Cold Harbour pit, stated in 1815 that when he first began work at the pit his father drew his wages as part of his own earnings.³⁵

Colliers' wages could be significantly increased by undertaking sundry tasks to keep the pit productive. For instance, at Middleton Colliery in August 1793, £5 12s. 6d. was spent on miners for doing 'Bye-work, at Sundry Times with a Team'.³⁶ At some pits an extra payment supplemented colliers' wages if they worked a full week. In 1816 at Rothwell Haigh Colliery, for instance, colliers were given an additional 4s., known as 'taking brass', on top of their weekly wages of 18s. if they went to work the full six days.³⁷

Payment by piece-rates created problems for the coalowners. Unless the owners employed an agent to measure the amount of coal produced per collier (or per team if the butt system was in operation) then the colliers could easily lie about the amount of coal they produced, thus earning more money. Three colliers, named Whittaker Lumb, George Ashton and James Arundale, agreed to mine coal for William Fenton at his 'new park'

³² Jane Humphries correctly highlights how there is an absence of information on the wages of children in the Industrial Revolution. See J. Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge 2010), p. 9.

³³ Ashton and Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 139.

³⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), BIC/10/4 George Wood's opinion on colliers and ironstone getters 7 May 1807.

³⁵ Anon., *Report of the Trial of Michael Stocks, Esq. for Wilful and Corrupt Perjury, at the Yorkshire Lent Assizes, 1815* (Huddersfield, 1815), p. 34.

³⁶ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/54 Middleton Colliery Journal 1793.

³⁷ Batty, *The History of Rothwell*, p. 187.

colliery at a rate of 2s. 7d. per dozen corves. In February 1805 the colliers claimed they had produced 18½ dozen of coals when they had, in fact, only produced 14½. A bill of indictment was brought against them by the agent of the pit, Joseph Scholes, and they were subsequently found guilty for 'falsely and illegally' defrauding William Fenton 'out of a Quantity of Coals'. Their punishment is not known.³⁸

Often wages were distributed to the miners in the public house. In 1829, for instance, a colliery agent named John Sellers was given £20 in wages to pay the miners at Wilson's Silkstone Colliery in a local alehouse. It was stated that he 'had received the money [...] for the purpose of being paid over to a number of his workmen' but had instead 'absconded with it'. It was revealed at his trial that the colliers had to give him a penny each out of their earnings for him taking the trouble to distribute their wages. The jury found Sellers guilty and he was sentenced to four months' imprisonment.³⁹ At Killamarsh near Sheffield in 1836 a collier named Samuel Green was charged by his workmate Robert Harris for 'having fraudulently got possession of a sovereign'. As the colliers 'were dividing their wages at a public-house' Green took the sovereign and denied taking it. He was, however, found guilty by the court and ordered to 'refund it, with costs, to the complainant'.⁴⁰ Cornish miners often stayed away from work the Monday after pay day after spending the weekend drinking and this, too, was common in Yorkshire.⁴¹ In 1837 Biram at Elsecar lamented that the miners spent the Monday drinking after the Saturday pay day. It seems earning 30s. a

³⁸ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/144/4 Pontefract Quarter Session Roll, April 1805.

³⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 2 May 1829.

⁴⁰ *Sheffield Independent*, 23 April 1836.

⁴¹ Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, p.75. Other scholars have generally accepted that miners took Monday off after payday. See H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1980), p. 64; Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 58.

week allowed them to choose when they worked - much to the chagrin of Biram.⁴² In 1838 it was stated that 'the greatest part of the Low Moor Company's colliers', 'were not at work' because it was 'Monday'.⁴³

At smaller collieries the workers were only be paid after a sufficient sale of coals. Daniel Scott, the banksman at Michael Stocks' Cold Harbour Pit, stated in 1815 that he or Joshua Watson (the bottom steward) 'paid the colliers their wages when there was money enough in his hands, arising from the sale of Coals at the Pit'.⁴⁴ The payment of wages to colliers seems to have been a time-consuming exercise. In 1815 Thomas Chambers lamented how he was asked to the funeral of a William Oxley 'but I could not attend for I had the colliers &c to reckon with and it keeps me from 10 o' clock in the Morning to betwixt 4&5 in the afternoon'.⁴⁵

Mining historians argued that the real earnings of colliers were reduced because they had to purchase their own tools, from the pit, out of their wages. The Hammonds' used an example from Lancashire to show how, when in full employment, Lancashire colliers earned 15s. per week in 1833. Because they had to pay for tools and candles out of this sum, their actual remuneration was 10s.⁴⁶ Cornish metal miners had similar deductions made.⁴⁷ In Yorkshire the picture is complex. At some pits the colliers had tools provided, whilst at some others they had to make or purchase them themselves. At Noblethorpe Colliery near Silkstone tools were provided. The colliers, however, had to pay 'for sharpening their picks'.

⁴² Hopkinson, *The Development of Lead Mining and of the Coal and Iron Industries in North Derbyshire and South Yorkshire 1700-1850*, p. 360.

⁴³ *Bradford Observer*, 31 May 1838.

⁴⁴ Anon., *Report of the Trial of Michael Stocks, Esq. for Wilful and Corrupt Perjury*, p. 75.

⁴⁵ Sheffield Archives, TR/193/33 Thomas Chambers to Thomas Newton, Jan. 1815.

⁴⁶ J.L and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer 1760-1832: The New Civilisation* (London, 1966ed.), p. 47.

⁴⁷ Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, pp. 47-48, 50. Flinn and Stoker show how this also occurred in the North East. See Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, pp. 379-380.

If they lost the tools they were fined 3s. 6d. for riddles, 2s. for shovels, 2s. for picks, 3s. for 'Peggy', 4s. 6d. for 'Hammer', 2s. for 'Wedges' and 9d. for 'Lockers and Slippers'.⁴⁸ A lost tool at Noblethorpe pit, therefore, could reduce their wages considerably. At Stocks' Cold Harbour Pit tools were supplied. A collier named John Watson stated that the tools he used were all marked I.S. (John Stocks – Michael Stocks' father) or M.S. The blacksmith, John Hartley, declared that he had 'worked the tools' for the pit and that he was paid for them by Michael Stocks. He added that the workmen never paid for their tools nor did he ever ask them for money; rather, he was paid by, Michael Stocks himself.⁴⁹ On 8 February 1829 Joseph Stocks, a coalminer, stole 'a pick-axe and other implements used in mining, the property of Wm Fenton Esq. of Rothwell' which were 'marked with the prosecutors initials'.⁵⁰ Likewise, at Mortimer's colliery near Liversedge, John and William Hey, two colliers, were charged in 1834 with 'absenting themselves from the service of Mr. Wm. Mortimer, contrary to agreement, and damaging the tools of [sic] their master used by them'.⁵¹ In South Yorkshire, however, it seems that the colliers had to make (or buy) their own tools. In 1824 the *Sheffield Iris* reported how '[t]he most wanton depredations have been recently committed in Tinsley Park Wood, and the adjoining estate, the property of the Right Hon. Earl Fitzwilliam, by cutting down young ash trees, for the purpose, as is supposed, of making pick-shafts for the colliers'.⁵² A rather remarkable artefact dating from the late-eighteenth century reveals how colliers requested additional tools when at work. A wooden board, with engravings of tools used by the colliers, was lowered into the pit and the colliers would put a peg in a hole beneath the engraving for the tool that they needed.

⁴⁸ Teasdale, *Silkstone Coal and Collieries*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Anon., *Report of the Trial of Michael Stocks, Esq. for Wilful and Corrupt Perjury*, pp. 44-45.

⁵⁰ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 1 May 1829.

⁵¹ *Wakefield and Dewsbury Journal*, 21 March 1834

⁵² *Sheffield Iris*, 10 Feb. 1824.

The requested tool would be subsequently lowered. The board was used at Dark Lane Colliery near Mirfield.⁵³



Colliers' Peg Board from Dark Lane Colliery, Mirfield. National Coal Mining Museum for England, Wakefield.

The method of mining coal by hand remained unaltered across our period. Mechanical cutting of coal started in Yorkshire in the second half of the nineteenth century, but it was not until the 1920s that it became widespread. The role performed by the miner, his

⁵³ The board is kept at the National Coal Mining Museum for England, Wakefield. I am grateful to Anne Bradley for allowing me to photograph the board.

assistant the hurrier, and the men on the surface remained almost continuous throughout the period this thesis covers.⁵⁴

Parish Apprentices

Parish apprentices made up a significant component of the pit labour force in the West Riding. They were free labour for the collier. Because the collier did not pay money wages to the apprentice, as per the terms of the indenture, the pauper child hurried the coals for free. As miners were paid piece rates, the more coal that was hurried, the more money could be earned. Taking on an apprentice, therefore, was a way for colliers to increase their wages. Although an apprentice resulted in a rise in the collier's outgoings, it seems this was easily offset by the additional wages he would earn.

The part played by parish apprentices in the coal industry has been neglected by social historians.⁵⁵ In contrast, the textile industries have received more attention, and for many years scholars stressed how misery and exploitation characterised the apprentice's experience.⁵⁶ Katrina Honeyman has, however, exploded this view and demonstrated that 'compassion and consent' more accurately reflects the experience of many parish

⁵⁴ Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 443.

⁵⁵ Only John Rule noted that parish apprentices were used in collieries. He erroneously concluded that 'its use in coal mining seems to have developed only in the nineteenth century and to have been largely localised in the Black Country'. See J. Rule, *The Vital Century: England's Developing Economy 1714-1815* (London, 1992), p. 201.

⁵⁶ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 302. This view was also supported by Christopher Hill who argued that pauper apprentices were 'often savagely treated'. See C. Hill, *Reformation to Industrial Revolution* (Harmondsworth, 1986ed.), p. 263; Rule, *The Vital Century*, pp. 198, 201; Idem., *The Experience of Labour*, p.102.

apprentices in the textile industry.⁵⁷ Using examples of parish apprentices to Yorkshire miners, this section will follow Honeyman's tack, and show that Overseers of the Poor took great care when apprenticing children to colliers. They consulted the apprentice's family, they went to great lengths to keep them in their own parish, and ensured that the collier was suitably fit to be an apprentice master.

Pauper apprenticeship indentures generally followed a formulaic narrative. Appendix 3 provides a full example of a typical pauper collier's indenture. In some – but certainly not all – a clause was inserted to prevent the apprentice from making 'mischief'.⁵⁸ Thomas Sunderland, for instance, was apprenticed as a collier to Thomas Pitch of Elland in September 1787 for nine years. For the term of his apprenticeship he assented to keeping his masters secrets and obeying his 'lawful Commands'. In addition:

Fornication or Adultery shall not commit, Hurt or Damage to his said Master shall not do, or Consent to be done, but to his Power shall Let it, and forthwith his said Master thereof warn: Taverns or Ale-Houses he shall not Haunt or Frequent, unless it be about his Masters Business there to be done: At Dice, Cards, Tables, Bowls, or any other unlawful Games he shall not Play.

In return Pitch agreed to 'Teach, Learn, and Inform him the said Apprentice, or cause him to be Taught, Learned, and Informed in the in the [sic] Trade art or Mistery of Coal Mineing'.⁵⁹

Most pauper children were aged between seven and twelve when apprenticed to Yorkshire miners. The apprenticeship was to remain in force until the child reached twenty-

⁵⁷ Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, pp. 8-9, 12; K. Honeyman, 'Compulsion, Compassion and Consent: Parish Apprenticeship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England', in N. Goose and K. Honeyman (eds.), *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 71-95.

⁵⁸ There does not seem to be any explanation why some indentures were stricter than others.

⁵⁹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale), SPL: 108/452 Apprenticeship indenture of Thomas Sunderland 1787.

one years old. Alys Levene's study of London apprentices concludes that it was rare for children to be bound that were under the age of eight or nine. She identifies that the average age for boys was 12.0.⁶⁰ It seems, therefore, that on average collier parish apprentices in Yorkshire were younger than their London counterparts. The average age at the time of binding, for those whose ages we know, was ten years old.⁶¹ Many more indentures survive that do not state the ages of the apprentices, but it seems probable that they were a similar age when apprenticed.⁶² If they completed their term they provided a dozen years of unpaid labour to the master.⁶³ This brought significant monetary benefits for the collier paid by the piece.

Not all apprentices remained with the same master until they reached twenty-one. On the 16 December 1837 John Binns of Sowerby, aged twelve years nine months, was apprenticed to the coalminer John Walsh of Clifton. However, for reasons that are not clear, Binns had his apprenticeship terminated and was re-apprenticed to James Helliwell of Northowram, a cordwainer, to serve out the remainder of the apprenticeship period. We know that John Walsh was still alive because he made his mark on the document.⁶⁴ In 1829 Josh Goodhard was apprenticed as a cardmaker to Charles Johnson of Raven's Wharf (Dewsbury). A year later, for an unknown reason, he was re-apprenticed to Charles Thrush,

⁶⁰ A. Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship and the Old Poor Law in London' *Economic History Review*, 63:4 (2009), p. 924.

⁶¹ Calculation made from the following indentures. All are deposited West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale) unless otherwise stated: SPL: 108/452 Apprenticeship indenture of Thomas Sunderland 1787; SPL: 108/705 Apprenticeship indenture of John Broadbent 1814; SPL: 108/743/1-2 Apprenticeship indenture of James Thorp 25 Oct. 1834; SPL: 108/741/1-2 Apprenticeship indenture of Peter Binns 14 June 1834; SPL: 108/750-51 Apprenticeship indenture of John Binns 1837; Jonathan Saville, 'Autobiography' in Francis A. West, *Memoirs of Jonathan Saville of Halifax; Including his Autobiography* (London, 1848); West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirklees), KC72/17 Batley Overseers of the Poor Records (Indentures of Jonas Keighley 3 Jan. 1821; James Greenwood May 1821).

⁶² Across 1806-1821 ten children were bound out as parish apprentices to colliers by the Overseers of the Poor of Batley. We know the ages of only two of them.

⁶³ Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, p. 7.

⁶⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale), SPL: 108/750-51 Apprenticeship indenture of John Binns 1837.

a collier, of Batley.⁶⁵ Jonathan Saville of Halifax was apprenticed to a collier aged seven where the hard work and long hours irreparably damage his health. He suffered a broken hip and was crippled and was forced to go to the workhouse where he was taught English and mathematics, as well as the trade of 'warping'. Eventually he left the workhouse and worked as a warper in and around Halifax.⁶⁶

Some masters ended the apprenticeship. For instance, on the 26 March 1816 William Greenwood of Batley was apprenticed to a collier named Thomas Noble of Briestfield. Two months later, on the 31 May 1816, Greenwood had his apprenticeship terminated and was 'regularly discharged by the Justices on account of unsoundness'.⁶⁷ Noble appealed to the Quarter Sessions and proved that Greenwood was not performing his labour and was disorderly. On the whole, however, completion rates were generally high with four out of every five parish apprentices reaching twenty-one.⁶⁸ And, upon completion, they were frequently rewarded with 'double apparel' and occasionally basic tools.⁶⁹ But perhaps the greatest reward for an apprentice working in the Yorkshire coal industry was the ability to earn high wages independently for the first time.

There can be no doubt that some parish apprentices were very badly treated. In 1827 a collier named Barker of Catherine Slack (Bradford) was imprisoned one month for being found guilty of abusing his apprentice, an eleven-year-old boy named John Brear. It was reported that Barker had 'stripped him [Brear] to the skin, and beat him with a leathern strap, on which was an iron buckle, severely'. The following day Brear ran away to the

⁶⁵ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirklees), KC1042/5/1 Dewsbury Register of Parish Apprentices 1737-1838.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Saville, 'Autobiography' in Francis A. West, *Memoirs of Jonathan Saville of Halifax*, pp.

⁶⁷ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirklees), KC72/17 Batley Overseers of the Poor Records.

⁶⁸ Honeyman, 'Compulsion, Compassion and Consent: Parish Apprenticeship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England', p. 85.

⁶⁹ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, pp. 288-290.

Overseers in Bradford who examined him and found that he had 'a cut upon the knee, and that his back was much bruised and discoloured' so they indicted Barker to appear at the Quarter Sessions.⁷⁰ In 1831 an Ossett collier named Roger Kilburn, his sons George and John, were fined 30s. by the magistrates for assaulting Roger Kilburn's parish apprentice, Joseph Goodall.⁷¹ Although this evidence does reveal that parish apprentices were badly treated, it also highlights that the magistrates were willing to take action against masters who acted unlawfully. Katrina Honeyman's point that parish officials' often maintained contact with the apprentice and were willing to act on their behalf 'demonstrates a degree of compassion and commitment to long term welfare' seems relatively close to the mark.⁷²

Apprentices also absconded. Honeyman suggests that this was a 'typical indicator' of discontent.⁷³ However, I have only found five separate cases of collier apprentices running away across the whole of the 1786-1839 period.⁷⁴ Of course, there would have been more that remain untraced, but proportionally to the numbers apprenticed it seems that absconsions were relatively rare.

John Rule stated how children were knowingly apprenticed in working conditions 'to which few parents would have willingly consigned their children'.⁷⁵ If the parent(s) refused the apprenticeship they ran the risk of being deprived of relief.⁷⁶ The evidence from the Yorkshire coalfield, however, reveals that the Overseers of the Poor went to great lengths to keep them in their own parish. For example, Peter Binns, aged nine years five months, was

⁷⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 14 July 1827.

⁷¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 23 June 1831.

⁷² Honeyman, 'Compulsion, Compassion and Consent: Parish Apprenticeship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England', p. 76.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 83; Honeyman, *Child Workers in England 1780-1820*, p. 8

⁷⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 Nov. 1810; *Leeds Mercury*, 23 March 1811; *Sheffield Independent*, 22 Sept. 1832; *Leeds Times*, 12 March 1836; *Leeds Mercury* 15 Dec. 1838.

⁷⁵ Rule, *The Experience of Labour*, p. 102.

⁷⁶ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship and the Old Poor Law', p. 918; Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, p. 301.

apprenticed to the collier John Benn of Southowram on the 14 June 1834. It was stated that his mother, Betty Binns, was 'not able to maintain' Peter, but 'the reasonable distance' between Betty Binns and John Benn meant that she still could communicate with her son. The 'fitness, business, and character of the said Master', and the fact he was literate (he signed the indenture in his own hand) may also explain why Benn was chosen.⁷⁷

In 1800 forty West Riding Magistrates ordered that the Overseers of the Poor were not to apprentice children, unless in 'special circumstances', to masters resident in another parish.⁷⁸ By and large this seems to have been upheld in the case of collier apprentices. Seven poor children were apprenticed to colliers by the Overseers of the Poor of Dewsbury between 1817 and 1829. The furthest distance one of them was apprenticed was approximately four miles.⁷⁹ Not one of the ten paupers bound out to colliers by the Overseers of Batley between 1806-1821 was more than eight miles away. Most were apprenticed within a five mile radius of the township. When children were apprenticed slightly further afield every effort was taken to keep siblings together. For example, Abraham Walker and Joseph Walker, two pauper children of Batley were both apprenticed to Joseph Cook a collier of Bowling near Bradford, on 17 September 1811. The distance was seven miles away.⁸⁰ It is possible that Overseers chose to bind out colliers with other members of their family. Thomas Lodge, for instance, was apprenticed to William Lodge of Batley in 1818.⁸¹ Brian Inglis' conclusion that Overseers preferred binding out apprentices to

⁷⁷ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale), SPL: 108/741/1-2 Apprenticeship indenture of Peter Binns 14 June 1834.

⁷⁸ B. Inglis, *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution* (1971), p. 110.

⁷⁹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirklees), KC1042/5/1 Dewsbury Register of Parish Apprentices 1737-1838. The apprentice in question was Joshua Ledger who was apprenticed to Abraham Lockwood, coalminer, of Whitely Upper in 1829. One Dewsbury pauper child, John Riley, was bound to John Goodair in 1817. Two years later Goodair's son would later be found guilty of intimidating a blackleg miner in a strike for 5s. a day.

⁸⁰ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirklees), KC72/17 Batley Overseers of the Poor Records.

⁸¹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirklees), KC1042/5/1 Dewsbury Register of Parish Apprentices 1737-1838.

other parishes to reduce the poor rate was not an accurate assessment of the way the Poor Law operated in the West Riding.⁸²

The suitability of the collier to be an apprentice master seems to have played an important part in the Overseers' decisions. Eleven-year-old Jonas Keighley, 'a Poor child' from Batley was apprenticed to a coalminer named James Smith of Liversedge on 3 January 1821. In addition to the indenture, a note has survived informing us why Smith was chosen:

James Smith to whom the said poor child is proposed to be bound as an apprentice as aforesaid, and also have examined the parents of such poor child, so far as appears to us necessary and proper, with regard to the fitness of such master, and do approve of the said James Smith as a fit and proper person to whom such poor child may be bound as an apprentice as aforesaid.⁸³

Furthermore, literacy seems to have played an important part in the decisions of the Overseers when apprenticing children. John Broadbent, 'poor child' 'aged Seven years and nine months' of the township of Sowerby was apprenticed to John Mann, a Northowram collier, in May 1814. Mann signed the indenture in his own hand.⁸⁴ Likewise, the above-mentioned colliers John Benn and James Smith both signed the indenture with a signature.⁸⁵ In 1834 James Thorp of Sewerby was apprenticed as a collier to William Harwood of Elland

⁸² Inglis, *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 79. Jane Humphries also argues that Overseers' had an incentive to apprentice paupers in other parishes, especially from the late-eighteenth century, when poor relief costs spiralled. See Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, p. 290.

⁸³ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirklees), KC72/17 Batley Overseers of the Poor Records.

⁸⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale), SPL: 108/705 Apprenticeship indenture of John Broadbent 1814.

⁸⁵ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale), SPL: 108/741/1-2 Apprenticeship indenture of Peter Binns 14 June 1834; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirklees), KC72/17 Batley Overseers of the Poor Records.

with Greetland aged nine years and seven months. Harwood, again, signed in his own hand.⁸⁶

The New Poor Law in 1834 abolished parish apprenticeship: pauper children had to remain in the workhouse until work could be found for them. This did not, however, affect those whose apprenticeships had been assented to before this date. By the 1840s parish apprentices were rare in Yorkshire pits: the 1845 Tremenheere report stated how 'few apprentices are employed' in Yorkshire collieries.⁸⁷

Parish apprentices made up an important component of the colliery labour force in the West Riding. They laboured for colliers, for free, for around twelve years until they could earn wages in their own right. For too long a negative view of the experiences of parish apprentices has clouded our understanding. In contrast, it seems that Katrina Honeyman's maxim 'compassion and consent' more accurately reflects the experience of many parish apprentices who worked in the Yorkshire coal industry.⁸⁸

Women and Children

The employment of women and children in collieries has attracted much scholarly attention. Mainly this has focussed on the extent of female and child labour and the types of labour women and children performed underground. Much of the scholarship, however, has drawn heavily from the findings of the Children's Employment Commission (1842) and

⁸⁶ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale), SPL: 108/743/1-2 Apprenticeship indenture of James Thorp 25 October 1834.

⁸⁷ *Report of the Comissioner [S.Tremenheere] Appointed to Inquire into the State of the Population of the Mining Districts [Yorkshire] (1845)*, p. 20.

⁸⁸ Honeyman, 'Compulsion, Compassion and Consent: Parish Apprenticeship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England', p. 81.

subsequent reports meaning most conclusions are based on evidence that post-dates our period.⁸⁹ In order to make sense of the experience of labour for women and children before the 1830s, therefore, we need different evidence.⁹⁰

There is hardly any quantifiable evidence to show how many women and children worked in mines.⁹¹ The coal getter employed his wife and children himself to fill and tram the corves, meaning women (and children) were rarely documented in colliery ledgers.⁹² The employment of women underground had died out by the end of the eighteenth century in the Northumberland and Durham coalfield.⁹³ Likewise, in Lancashire, women ceased to work underground by 1815.⁹⁴ In contrast, historians have shown that the employment of children underground increased from the 1780s to the 1840s.⁹⁵ Jane Humphries posits the logical argument that the number of children in mines increased as the demand for coal rose.⁹⁶

Specific research into women's and children's work in Yorkshire collieries has been minimal. Ashton and Sykes stated that no women and girls worked in the Duke of Norfolk's pits at Sheffield in the eighteenth century; but they did not provide any evidence to support

⁸⁹ For a typical example of this see A.V. John, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines* (London, 1980).

⁹⁰ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, pp. 12-13. Joyce Burnette has argued the same point when investigating children working in agriculture. See J. Burnette, 'Child Day-Labourers in Agriculture: Evidence from Farm Accounts, 1740-1850' *Economic History Review* 65:3 (2012), p. 1096.

⁹¹ Rule, *The Vital Century*, p. 204.

⁹² John, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, p. 20; Hammond and Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, p. 45. See also Berg and Hudson, 'Rehabilitating the Industrial Revolution', p. 35.

⁹³ Hammond and Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, p. 39; Rule, *The Vital Century*, p. 204. Flinn and Stoker and Colls suggest that women ceased working underground in North Eastern pits as early as 1720. See Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 333; Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, p. 133.

⁹⁴ Rule, *The Vital Century*, p. 200.

⁹⁵ Hammond and Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, p. 177; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 366; Rule, *The Vital Century*, p. 200; Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 336.

⁹⁶ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, p. 34.

this interpretation.⁹⁷ Flinn and Stoker conclude that female employment in Yorkshire was 'rather lower' than the national figure of four percent of the total colliery labour force around 1830.⁹⁸ Only one historian, John Goodchild, has investigated female labour in West Riding collieries to a greater degree; even then this merits less than half a page in a book. Goodchild claimed that the earliest we know women worked in Yorkshire pits was 1799 because in that year he found a reference to a woman being killed at a Handsworth colliery.⁹⁹ He adds that '[n]o females seem to have been employed in any of the large West Riding collieries until the first half of the nineteenth century, and then only in small number' and that no women or girls worked underground in any of the Fentons' collieries.¹⁰⁰ His conclusions are relatively close to the mark. It is well documented that the employment of male children was extensive in Yorkshire.¹⁰¹ Even Earl Fitzwilliam, the most paternalistic of coalowners, employed male children in his pits.¹⁰²

All of these historians failed recognise that, between the 1780s and the 1830s, there was a transformation in many Yorkshire mining families as an economic unit. Women shifted roles from supplementing the household wage to playing an active role in assisting the male breadwinner underground. Children, too, began to be employed in Yorkshire mines in increasingly larger numbers and at younger ages.

The earliest reference to the employment of females underground in Yorkshire dates from 1824. In April of that year a 'poor man and his daughter lost their lives' at Storge Hill

⁹⁷ Ashton and Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 172.

⁹⁸ Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, pp. 335-336.

⁹⁹ Goodchild, *The Coal Kings of Yorkshire*, p. 70. I have been unable to find an earlier reference so 1799 remain unchallenged.

¹⁰⁰ Goodchild, *The Coal Kings of Yorkshire*, p. 70.

¹⁰¹ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, pp. 4, 8-9

¹⁰² Mee, *Aristocratic Enterprise*, p. 132.

Colliery near Horbury by an explosion of firedamp.¹⁰³ This is the only accident report involving a girl that we know about from the 1820s. Indeed, the absence of women working in pits in the early part of our period is explained by the fact that women supplemented the breadwinner's (high) wage through other tasks such as weaving.¹⁰⁴ In 1791, for instance, Martha Mountain of Flockton, the wife of a collier named John, reeled worsted to supplement the household income.¹⁰⁵ A possible hypothesis is that families were able to maintain an acceptable standard of living with the combined income of the male and female heads of the household, plus the income of any children who were old enough to work.¹⁰⁶

There was an upsurge in women working in Yorkshire pits in the 1830s. This could reflect that, for much of the 1820s, the other ways in which women contributed to the household economy had declined. Kaijage shows how Barnsley women helped wind and weave linen. But by the 1830s the linen industry had been irreparably damaged by the lowering of tariffs in 1823-25 which exposed linen weavers to German competition.¹⁰⁷ Many Barnsley weavers, such as Richard Wharam, became miners.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, there was an increase in women working with their husbands in collieries. This corresponded with an upsurge in the coal trade and occurred when colliery labour was at a premium. Furthermore,

¹⁰³ *Sheffield Iris*, 27 April 1824; *Leeds Mercury*, 1 May 1824.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Colls shows how miners' wives in Northumberland and Durham similarly 'worked at home'. See Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, p. 135.

¹⁰⁵ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/131/2 Wakefield Quarter Session Roll Jan. 1792.

¹⁰⁶ Women remained dependent on the male wage across 1786-1839. When the breadwinner's income suddenly ceased, women (and their children) were often reduced to poverty. It was common for women to apply for parish relief when their husbands deserted them. In 1788, when Joseph Cockram, a thirty-seven-year-old coal miner of Rothwell absconded, he left his 'Family chargeable to the Parish'. Likewise, in 1807, a thirty-eight-year-old collier named Michael Parker left his family 'chargeable to the Township' of Great Preston near Leeds when he absconded. In some cases families were forced to go into the workhouse after their husbands deserted. When Joseph Stocks, a twenty-seven-year-old collier, deserted his family in 1808 he left them 'chargeable to the Township of Dewsbury' in the workhouse. See *Leeds Intelligencer*, 26 Feb. 1788; *Leeds Mercury*, 7 Feb. 1807; *Leeds Mercury* 17 Dec. 1808; Humphries, 'The Lure of Aggregates and the Pitfalls of the Patriarchal Perspective', p. 706. For an excellent assessment of the impact of desertion see J. Humphries, 'Female-headed Households in Early Industrial Britain: The Vanguard of the Proletariat?' *Labour History Review*, 63:1 (1998), pp. 31-65.

¹⁰⁷ Kaijage, *Labouring Barnsley*, pp. 38, 124.

¹⁰⁸ J. H. Burland, *Annals of Barnsley*, Vol. 1, p. 355.

the increased demand for coal was not accompanied by any technological innovation to improve underground transport.¹⁰⁹ In order to maintain household living standards, women and children were increasingly employed underground hurrying and tramping the coal.

The growing number of reports about female casualties in the mines is evidence of increasing employment of women. In 1833, for instance, Martha Beaver was killed when she got entangled with an ascending corve of coals. She was 'raised half way up the pit' until her dress gave way and she fell to her death.¹¹⁰ We have several other examples.¹¹¹

Other evidence attests that more women were working in Yorkshire pits in the 1830s. In 1837 it was reported how a 'young woman' of Halifax joined 'with the utmost *nonchalance*' the company of a 'beer house'. It was added that she wore "'timber pumps", shod with iron' and that her 'regular employment was "'hurrying" coals at the bottom of a pit'.¹¹² One year before it was stated at the inquest at Cawthorne on Thomas Wilson, a collier, who was killed by a firedamp explosion that there 'were eighty persons in the pit, men, boys, and girls, beside the deceased'.¹¹³ When the South Yorkshire miners' leader John Normansell died in 1875 the reporter for the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* interviewed an old Barnsley woman who worked in Yorkshire pits in the 1830s when he had begun his labour. This 'cheery old lady' stated how 'for four months of the year she never saw the blessed sunshine at all' and how she had to 'leave her bed in the dark, travel three miles in the dark' and 'go down the pit in the dark'. She added that when 'she came out it was dark again'.

¹⁰⁹ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, p. 34.

¹¹⁰ *Halifax and Huddersfield Express*, 1 June 1833.

¹¹¹ *Halifax and Huddersfield Advertiser*, 10 Aug. 1833; *West Riding Herald*, 4 Sept. 1835; *Leeds Times*, 30 May 1840.

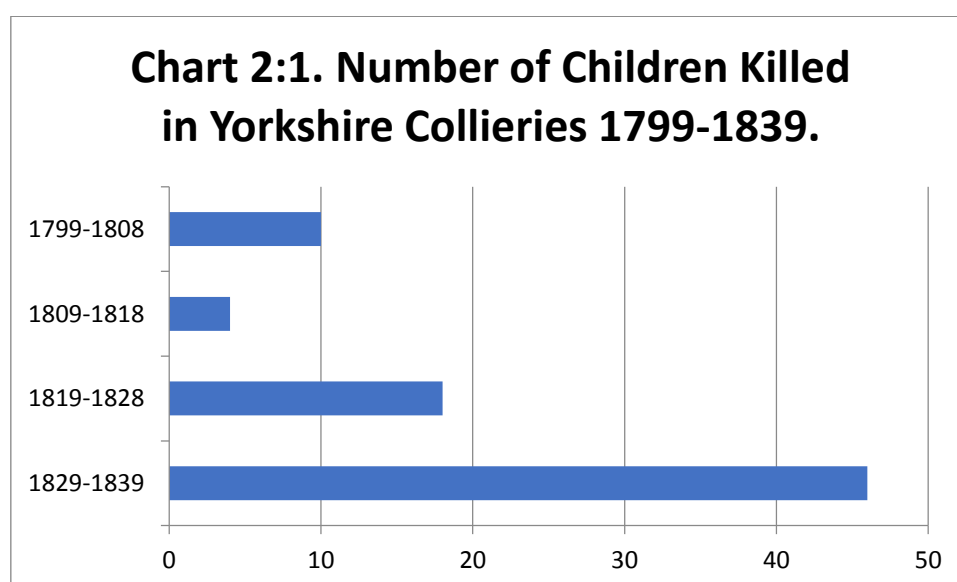
¹¹² *Halifax Express*, 25 Jan. 1837.

¹¹³ *Leeds Times*, 27 Aug. 1836.

This was how, she concluded, her "'girlish" life was passed during the winter months'.¹¹⁴

Overall, the relatively few *documented* cases we have of women working underground suggest that female labour was not widespread. In contrast to the North East or Lancashire, however, it was not in decline: there was an upsurge in the number of women in pits in the boom years of the mid-1830s. The same was true for children.¹¹⁵

The demand for coal was met by a growth in the size of the labour force and many of those who came into the pits were boys. Chart 1:1 shows the number of children killed in Yorkshire collieries between 1799-1839. Only children under the age of fourteen have been included. There is no evidence to suggest that newspapers paid more attention to children being killed later in our period than earlier. One of the ways this chart is a reliable proxy is that the vast majority of the sources are newspapers, and that newspaper reportage of child fatalities in pits was consistent and well-documented across 1799-1838.



¹¹⁴ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 27 Dec. 1875.

¹¹⁵ Joyce Burnette argues that falling household incomes 'could potentially lead to increased child labour'. See Burnette, 'Child Day-Labourers in Agriculture: Evidence from Farm Accounts, 1740-1850', p. 1096. There is little reason to doubt this conclusion based on the evidence we have of the decline in household incomes. However, what Burnette failed to recognise is the significance of the shortage of labour and correspondingly high wages in providing employment to children.

Source: Wakefield Archives, QS1/138/6 Bradford Quarter Sessions July 1799; *Sheffield Iris*, 27 Aug. 1801; *Sheffield Iris*, 23 Dec. 1802; *Sheffield Iris*, 11 April 1805; *Doncaster, Nottingham and Lincoln Gazette*, 16 Aug. 1805; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 Feb. 1806; *Sheffield Iris*, 10 Feb. 1807; *Sheffield Iris*, 5 May 1807; *Sheffield Iris*, 16 Aug. 1808; *Wakefield Star and West Riding Advertiser*, 12 Oct. 1810; *Wakefield Star and West Riding Advertiser*, 2 Nov. 1810; *Leeds Mercury*, 18 July 1812; *Sheffield Iris*, 17 Aug. 1813; *Leeds Mercury*, 26 April 1817; *Leeds Mercury*, 3 Feb. 1821; *Sheffield Iris*, 13 Nov. 1821; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 Dec. 1821; *Sheffield Iris*, 27 April 1824; *Sheffield Iris*, 29 June 1824; *Leeds Mercury* 15 Jan. 1825; *Sheffield Iris*, 13 Sept. 1825; *Sheffield Iris*, 27 Feb. 1827; Anon., *The Fifteenth Report of the Sunday School Union of Sheffield* (Sheffield, 1827), pp. 22-23; *Sheffield Iris*, 6 May 1828; *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 6 Feb. 1829; *Leeds Mercury*, 1 Aug. 1829; *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 24 Dec. 1829; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 11 Nov. 1830; *Sheffield Independent*, 1 Oct. 1831; *Sheffield Independent*, 25 Aug. 1832; *Halifax and Huddersfield Express*, 6 April 1833; *Halifax and Huddersfield Express*, 1 June 1833; *Halifax and Huddersfield Express*, 29 June 1833; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 July 1833; *Halifax and Huddersfield Advertiser*, 10 Aug. 1833; *Wakefield and Dewsbury Journal*, 3 April 1834; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 23 Aug. 1834; *Sheffield Independent*, 4 April 1835; *West Riding Herald*, 19 June 1835; *West Riding Herald*, 6 Nov. 1835; *Leeds Mercury*, 9 Jan. 1836; *Leeds Mercury*, 16 Jan. 1836; *York Herald*, 27 Jan. 1838; *Leeds Times*, 9 March 1839; Burland, *Annals*, Vol. II, p. 87; *Bradford Observer*, 12 Dec. 1839.

Many of those who came into the pits in the 1830s were very young children. For instance, in 1832 a boy named William Unwin, aged nine years, was killed by a piece of wood hitting him on the head when descending to his work at a pit near Attercliffe Common.¹¹⁶ Likewise, in 1835 an eight-year-old boy named George Hibbert was told to take ‘the dinner’ to one of the colliers at work at Stannington Wood Colliery. Unfortunately, he accidentally fell into the pit and was killed.¹¹⁷ Social historians have concluded that the average age for beginning work in the Industrial Revolution was about ten years old.¹¹⁸ The paucity of evidence makes it difficult to prove that children began working in Yorkshire pits

¹¹⁶ *Sheffield Independent*, 25 Aug. 1832; *Sheffield Iris*, 28 Aug. 1832.

¹¹⁷ *Sheffield Independent*, 4 April 1835.

¹¹⁸ Emma Griffin suggests that the average age that children began work was ten years old. Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries argue that the use of very young children (under 10 years old) reached its zenith around the end of the eighteenth- and the beginning of the nineteenth -centuries. They posited that these young children made up a key component of the factory labour force. In contrast, Peter Kirby suggested that the use of children aged ten and under as labour was ‘never widespread’. Flinn and Stoker contended that children went into pits between the ages of seven and ten, ‘though probably in general nearer’ ten than seven. See Griffin, *Liberty’s Dawn*, p. 60; S. Horrell and J. Humphries, ‘The Exploitation of Little Children: Children’s Work and the Family Economy in the British Industrial Revolution’ *Explorations in Economic History*, 32 (1995), pp. 849-80; P. Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain 1750-1870* (London, 2003), p. 131; See also Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 337.

at younger ages than their contemporaries in other trades, but it seems likely. It is probable that in the 1830s there were more girls in Yorkshire pits than ever before, but their number was small when compared to that of boys.¹¹⁹ The most telling (and tragic) evidence we have of the extent of the employment of young children comes from the close of our period. In July 1838 twenty-six children were drowned by an inrush of water after a thunderstorm at Clark's Huskar colliery in Silkstone.¹²⁰ Eleven of them were girls. The youngest child was Joseph Burkinshaw, aged seven, who was at work with his brother, George, (aged ten) who was also killed. The oldest, Hannah Taylor, was seventeen. The average age of the victims was 10.9. The boys were on average younger; their average age was 10.07; for the girls it was 12.¹²¹ John Rule's conclusions regarding child labour in Cornish metal mines can be applied to Yorkshire in the 1830s: children 'worked long hours in unpleasant conditions at the expense of their childhood, health, and education'.¹²²

Across the late-eighteenth into the early-nineteenth centuries there was a transformation in the family as an economic unit. Women shifted roles from the 1820s as their traditional household economies, such as weaving, stagnated. This occurred at a time of broader expansion of the coal industry and some women found employment working with their husbands for high wages. Children, too, began work in the pits in increasingly larger numbers. The household economy thus transformed over the period. Both women's and children's experience of labour underwent a significant transition. This is not to suggest

¹¹⁹ What is certain is that children were an 'accepted component of the labour force' as Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries have argued. See Horrell and Humphries, 'Children's Work and Wages in Britain, 1280-1860', unpaginated.

¹²⁰ For a narrative of this disaster see B. Elliott, *South Yorkshire Mining Disasters: Volume 1 The Nineteenth Century* (Barnsley, 2006), pp. 9-18. For a contemporary newspaper report see *Sheffield Independent*, 7 July 1838.

¹²¹ Burland, *Annals of Barnsley*, Vol. II, p. 87. One of those killed was Mary Sellars, daughter of Ephraim and Ann Sellars (*London Dispatch*, 15 July 1838). We shall meet Ephraim Sellars, a trade union leader, later.

¹²² Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, p. 31.

that women became *independent* wage earners in their own right; rather, they were still dependent on the breadwinner's wage throughout the period. But *the way* they contributed to the household economy changed.

Accidents

Colliery accidents were the most widely shared experience of labour. They took place across the length and breadth of the coalfield. Wherever there was a miner at work there was the risk of an accident. They generally took the form of: explosions, a fall of roof, dirt or coal, and shaft/winding accidents. Many historians recognise that coal mining was the most dangerous of all occupations.¹²³ It would be impossible to speculate how many injuries or deaths occurred in Yorkshire collieries across 1786-1839. As John Rule has suggested, '[t]he toll from less spectacular accidents such as falling from ropes while being lowered or being injured by falling rock, was large and is unknowable. The abounding reports in local newspapers can hardly amount to more than the tip of a very large iceberg'.¹²⁴ Despite the frequency and intensity of mining accidents they have attracted little scholarly attention. Where quantitative research has been undertaken and conclusions drawn about fatal accidents in coal mines, the vast majority of evidence is drawn from the North-East coalfield.¹²⁵ In Yorkshire, only the multiple-fatality disasters that took place after our period have merited investigation.¹²⁶

¹²³ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 8; Rule, *The Experience of Labour*, p.80; Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 37.

¹²⁴ Rule, *The Experience of Labour*, p. 85.

¹²⁵ P.E.H. Hair, 'Mortality from Violence in British Coal-Mines, 1800-50' *Economic History Review*, 21:3 (1968), pp. 545-561.

¹²⁶ B. Duckham and H. Duckham, *Great Pit Disasters: 1700 to the Present Day* (Newton Abbot, 1968); Elliott, *South Yorkshire Mining Disasters*.

Many historians have used colliery accidents to highlight the callous, uncaring and exploitative employers of labour who extracted all they could from their workers and then cast them off to experience the ravages of the Poor Law. The Hammonds, for instance, refer to the 'indifference of the coalowners' to those injured or their dependants left behind.¹²⁷ Whilst this is undoubtedly true in many cases, this examination of accidents reveals that some coalowners provided financial assistance for medical aid and Earl Fitzwilliam provided a lifelong pension to his injured colliers. To explore these issues further accidents are examined in relation to firstly, explosions that resulted in multiple fatalities; secondly, the falls of roof, dirt and coal, which often left individual colliers either dead or paralysed for life; and finally shaft and winding accidents when colliers ascended or descended from their labour which often led to violent and gruesome deaths.

The main cause of explosions in Yorkshire collieries was naked flames meeting firedamp. This danger was peculiar to coal mines: there was no explosive gas in Cornish tin and copper mines.¹²⁸ Before the miners went to work they would lower a lighted candle into the shaft to explode the firedamp that had accumulated. Colliers worked with naked lights before the introduction of the Davy Lamp. This often led to explosions.¹²⁹ For instance, seven men were burnt in an explosion of firedamp at Middleton Colliery in 1806.¹³⁰ In 1808 George Hague, Thomas Hague, John Jarvis and William Firth were killed by firedamp in a pit at Kimberworth. It was reported in the *Gentleman's Magazine* that '[t]he two former were father and son; and were found fast locked in each other's arms'.¹³¹ The earliest reference

¹²⁷ Hammond and Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, p. 38; Page-Arnot, *The Miners*, p. 33; Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 6; Inglis, *Poverty in the Industrial Revolution*, passim.

¹²⁸ Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, p. 24.

¹²⁹ In the Midlands and Scotland, naked lights were used into the early 20th Century, because these areas were not thought to be gassy.

¹³⁰ *Sheffield Iris*, 24 July 1806.

¹³¹ *Sheffield Iris*, 16 Aug. 1808; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1808), p. 953.

to the use of the Davy Lamps in Yorkshire was in March 1817 when they were introduced at Rothwell Haigh Colliery.¹³² Their use, however, did not take off possibly because miners had to purchase them out of their wages. In 1818 the *Leeds Intelligencer* lamented that '[s]everal colliers, at Beeston Park Side, near this place, have been much injured by the *fire damp*'. '[I]t seems', they continued 'unaccountable that miners cannot be induced to use the *Safety Lamp*!'.¹³³ In 1822 a firedamp explosion at Newbould's Intake Colliery near Sheffield killed five men. The *Leeds Mercury* lamented the frequency of firedamp explosions and questioned why 'colliers will thus expose their lives by descending into foul pits with a naked candle, instead of using Sir Humphrey Davy's Safety Lamp'.¹³⁴ The *Sheffield Iris* also stated that safety lamps were 'seldom used' at the pit.¹³⁵ Candles were cheaper and emitted a brighter light than safety lamps. Even when lamps were used colliers would often remove the gauze to light their pipes. They often brought tobacco and matches into the pit to smoke underground.¹³⁶ Only at Earl Fitzwilliam's pits were colliers provided with safety lamps.¹³⁷

A firedamp explosion at Middleton Colliery in 1825 resulted in the largest mining disaster in Yorkshire across our period.¹³⁸ Twenty-three men and boys lost their lives. The explosion was caused by a collier taking off the top of his safety lamp to let it cool. Instantly

¹³² Ashton and Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 52-53.

¹³³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 3 Aug. 1818.

¹³⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 6 July 1822. 'Ten of the workmen descended the pit, where the destructive gas accumulated, about one o'clock in the morning, with a lighted candle, which ignited the vapour, and the whole blew up with a tremendous explosion. The fatal result was, that five of the men were instantly killed, and three others so dreadfully burnt and mutilated that their recovery is deemed hopeless. Two out of the ten escaped with little injury. The mangled bodies of three of the unhappy victims remained among the burning rubbish the whole of Monday and part of next day. What renders this event more truly calamitous, most of the poor sufferers have left large families; it is impossible to give an adequate idea of the distress of the women and children, and indeed of the whole neighbourhood where the misfortune occurred'. For an earlier report of this accident see *Sheffield Iris*, 2 July 1822.

¹³⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 16 July 1822.

¹³⁶ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 10; Lewis, *Coal Mining in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, p.50.

¹³⁷ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/4/vi/89 Milton to Biram 18 April 1832.

¹³⁸ This accident has never merited academic investigation.

this caused an explosion, which scorched 'and destroyed' many of them on the spot. The hurriers in the main passages were 'killed by the storm of splinters which were torn from the sides and roof' or were 'dashed to the earth by the tremendous blast that issued from the cavern'. Five colliers working in another part of the pit were suffocated by afterdamp. 'It is impossible to convey any adequate idea of the distress', the *Sheffield Iris* stated, 'that has thus been unfortunately caused by the momentary imprudence of (we understand) one man'.¹³⁹ 'It is unnecessary to say', the *Leeds Mercury* concluded, 'that the neighbourhood of Middleton is thrown into the utmost consternation and affliction, and that many families are left altogether destitute'.¹⁴⁰ As we would expect, many of the colliers who died were related to each other. The youngest, John Ambler, a thruster, was seven years old; the oldest, John Proctor was forty-eight. The average age of those killed (whose ages we know) was 23.

At the inquests on the bodies it was stated that 'the workmen were in the frequent, probably the daily, habit of taking the covers off from their safety lamps in the pit; that this was done for the most frivolous causes; that they often continued to work with their lamps uncovered'.¹⁴¹ The *Leeds Mercury* stated that this 'melancholy catastrophe ought to impress on the minds of all colliers the necessity of keeping their safety-lamps shut, at all times, and without a moment's intermission' and that 'every man employed in a pit should consider even a moment's removal of the wire-gauze as an act that may plunge himself and all of his companions into eternity'. Brandling's agent resolved 'to affix *locks* to the safety-lamps, so that the men *cannot* open them if they should be inclined' following the disaster.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *Sheffield Iris*, 18 Jan. 1825.

¹⁴⁰ *Leeds Mercury* 15 Jan. 1825

¹⁴¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 22 Jan. 1825.

¹⁴² *Leeds Mercury*, 15 Jan. 1825.

After the explosion funds were raised to help the distressed families of those killed. Charles Brandling, the owner, subscribed the largest amount of £100.¹⁴³ Many of the injured colliers were taken and treated at the Leeds Infirmary as in-patients. Brandling paid a regular subscription to the Infirmary at Leeds so when accidents occurred the injured miners received medical assistance.¹⁴⁴ This was not exceptional. In 1822 ten colliers were burnt at the same pit and they too were taken to the infirmary for treatment.¹⁴⁵ Brandling also provided financial assistance to the dependents of colliers who had been killed in his pits. On October 15 1794 it was recorded in the Middleton Colliery journal that £5 5s. had been given to 'the Widow of James Wood [whose] death was occasioned by the fire damp in the lodge pit' in September.¹⁴⁶ Some Sheffield coalowners did the same. The Duke of Norfolk paid 10s. 6d. as a 'Gratuity to W^o [widow] of Keaton who was killed about this time in the works' in November 1801.¹⁴⁷ A few coal proprietors in the Halifax and Huddersfield areas were also known to pay for surgical assistance following an accident.¹⁴⁸

Of course, not all explosions were fatal. Thomas and George Hanson, for instance, were both burnt by a firedamp explosion at Elsecar New Colliery in November 1808. The explosion 'put their candles out and set their waistcoats on fire'. It seems that both survived; one had 'two or three small places on his Back burnt'.¹⁴⁹ However, colliers must have been lucky to escape with minor injuries after an explosion. Abraham Longbottom, John Sheldon, and Benjamin Hewitt, for instance, were less fortunate. They were hurt by an

¹⁴³ *Leeds Mercury*, 29 Jan. 1825.

¹⁴⁴ Goodchild, *The Coal Kings of Yorkshire*, p. 72

¹⁴⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 21 May 1822.

¹⁴⁶ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/55 Middleton Colliery Journal 1794.

¹⁴⁷ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/205 Vincent Eyre's account for the Joint Collieries of the Duke of Norfolk 1801-1805.

¹⁴⁸ G. Mee, 'Employer: Employee Relationships in the Industrial Revolution: The Fitzwilliam Collieries', in S. Pollard and C. Holmes (eds.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Sheffield, 1976), p. 52.

¹⁴⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StWP/5/ii/66 Biram to Fitzwilliam 20 Nov. 1808.

explosion in a pit at Thorp Hall (Leeds) in 1820. Longbottom was 'dreadfully burnt' but was reported to be 'in a fair way of recovery'; Sheldon had his leg amputated at the infirmary; and Hewitt 'much bruised'.¹⁵⁰ Most probably these three colliers never worked again.

Hair argued that there was no real reduction in fatal accidents from explosions in collieries until a mines inspectorate was introduced in the 1850s.¹⁵¹ This seems relatively near the mark. Firedamp explosions of the sort highlighted above continued into the 1840s and beyond. Despite the heavy toll levied by explosions, however, it was the 'everyday' deaths, caused by the less spectacular falls of coal or roof, which over the weeks, months, and years were responsible for most fatal and non-fatal accidents.¹⁵²

Falls of coal, roof, and debris were undoubtedly the most common pit accidents. In 1787 Timothy Beachill was killed whilst working in Cockshutt's coal pits near Silkstone when 'a coal fell from the top'. He left a wife and 'some small children'.¹⁵³ Likewise, in 1790 it was reported how 'a sudden fall of earth covered' Samuel Graeme, a collier at Attercliffe, and 'crushed him to death'.¹⁵⁴ Two brothers were killed at Intake Colliery by a roof fall in 1802. Their father was nearby when the accident occurred.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, an unnamed man was killed 'in consequence of the severe injury he received from the falling of part of the roof in a coal-pit' in 1805.¹⁵⁶ In late December 1810 Thomas Gledhill was 'crushed to death by the falling of a quantity of rubbish and coals upon him' whilst at work in a colliery near Hanging Heaton.¹⁵⁷ Hundreds of similar reports exist.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 24 June 1820.

¹⁵¹ Hair, 'Mortality from Violence in British Coal-Mines, 1800-50', p. 560.

¹⁵² Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 22.

¹⁵³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 28 Aug. 1787

¹⁵⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 2 Feb. 1790.

¹⁵⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 4 Feb. 1802.

¹⁵⁶ *Wakefield Star and West Riding Advertiser*, 4 Jan. 1805.

¹⁵⁷ *Wakefield Star and West Riding Advertiser*, 28 Dec. 1810.

One feature following roof-falls and cave-ins was the unceasing effort to get those entombed out. The subsequent report from 1789 is indicative of this:

A Few days ago the top of a coal-pit belonging to Mr. Drake, of Holy-Green, near Halifax, suddenly broke in, by which accident seven men at work therein, were shut up from all communication with the mouth of the pit; notwithstanding which, after three days hard labour, in a most melancholy situation, and with no refreshment except the provisions for the day that the misfortune happened to them, they fortunately found the way into an opening that conveyed the water from the common shore, which again enabled them to make their appearance upon *terra firma*, to the great joy of their disconsolate wives and their afflicted families.¹⁵⁹

A similarly tenacious rescue was attempted at Horsforth Colliery in 1806. A roof fall crushed a hurrier and trapped two men alive. An attempt was made to get to the men but the earth continued to fall in as quickly as they got it out. After several days of digging, the colliers reached the location of the fall, only to find that the trapped men were not there. It is not known whether the colliers were ever found.¹⁶⁰

Earl Fitzwilliam provided money to his colliers following an accident. There is no doubt that he had a legitimate concern for his workforce. When a collier named Copley was hurt in an accident at Elsecar, Fitzwilliam wrote to his steward: 'I am very sorry to hear of this accident at Elsecar, let me know what is the nature of it, & how Copley is going on'.¹⁶¹ When John Jessop was severely cut and bruised with a fall of coals at Elsecar Colliery and was lame

¹⁵⁸ An indicative few: *Sheffield Iris*, 17 Aug. 1813; 20 April 1813; 7 Feb. 1832; *Sheffield Independent*, 1 Oct. 1831.

¹⁵⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 Feb. 1789.

¹⁶⁰ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), SpSt/5/2/79 Thomas Lloyd to Walter Spencer-Stanhope 9 Feb. 1806 and 13 Feb. 1806. For a newspaper report of this accident see *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 Feb., 17 Feb. 1806.

¹⁶¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StWP/4/v/28 Fitzwilliam to Biram 9 Nov. 1812.

for three Weeks in 1803, Earl Fitzwilliam gave him a guinea.¹⁶² He also instructed his steward to give a guinea to George Boid, an Elsecar collier who was similarly injured in the pit, in 1806.¹⁶³ John Hirst was given nine shillings a week when hurt by a fall of coals in January 1810.¹⁶⁴ We have many similar examples of Earl Fitzwilliam's financial contributions following colliery accidents.¹⁶⁵ He also provided a lifelong pension to injured colliers, and, to widows of miners who had been killed in his service. In 1794, a year of high food costs and declining living standards, a list of 'pensioners' was compiled stating how much they were allowed and why they were eligible for charity. William Gilbert a 'disabled collier' was allowed £5 6s. per annum; Michael Bisby, the 'late overlooker at Lawwood Colliery' was paid 10s. 6d. weekly; John Lewis an 'old collier' was given 2s. for the same; Thomas Mitchel, also an 'old collier' was given 1s. 6d. per week; and Hannah Roebuck, a 'colliers widow' was allowed 1s. weekly.¹⁶⁶ No doubt these sums would have been gratefully received as living standards were increasingly squeezed.

Despite the frequency and severity of accidents caused by falls of coal, roof, and cave-ins, there was no real improvement in safety across 1786-1839. What also remained unchanged was the method of getting to and from work. Colliers were wound up and down by a horse gin until winding engines arrived at the close of our period and many accidents occurred when miners were travelling to and from their labour. John Rule highlighted that 'falling from ropes while being lowered' contributed to the 'large and unknowable' numbers

¹⁶² Sheffield Archives, WWM/F106/97 Benjamin Hall to Fitzwilliam 29 Jan. 1803.

¹⁶³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/4/ii/5 Fitzwilliam to Biram 17 Feb. 1806.

¹⁶⁴ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/ii/187 Biram to Fitzwilliam 28 Jan. 1810.

¹⁶⁵ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/ii/184 Biram to Fitzwilliam 19 Jan. 1810 and WWM/StwP/5/ii/187 Biram to Fitzwilliam 28 Jan. 1810; WWM/StwP/5/ii/73 Biram to Fitzwilliam 1 Dec. 1808 and WWM/StwP/5/ii/80 Biram to Fitzwilliam 13 Dec. 1808.

¹⁶⁶ Sheffield Archives, WWM/A/1534 Names of persons in all categories employed at Wentworth, 1794.

of colliers who were killed.¹⁶⁷ Shaft or winding accidents remain the most understudied of all colliery accidents. This is somewhat surprising given their frequency and the fact that, generally, they resulted in fatalities.

At almost every colliery a horse gin was in operation. A rope was attached to a drum on the gin which would pass over the headgear and down the shaft. A horse in the gin would be walked forward or backwards – depending on whether the colliers or corves of coal were ascending or descending – winding the rope round the gin. In Yorkshire, the usual method of travelling up and down the shaft was either by a wooden horse, or in the corves that carried the coal.¹⁶⁸

Wooden horses seem to have been more prevalent in South Yorkshire. In 1793, for instance, it was reported that '[a] collier in the pits of Mr. Clarke, of Haugh, near Rotherham, lost his life by imprudently going down into the pit, on a loose piece of wood, instead of what is called a *Horse* - the piece of wood slipping from under him, he fell from the top to the bottom!'. The *Leeds Intelligencer* added that this 'melancholy accident, we hope will caution others against similar practices'.¹⁶⁹ Horses were used at Elsecar in 1809. In that year, Samuel Fallding, a carpenter at Elsecar New Colliery, was 'much hurt by a fall in the Engine pit' as he was descending. The rope broke holding the 'a piece of wood called a Horse which they sit upon to go down' and he fell 18 yards onto a stage which probably saved his life.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Rule, *The Experience of Labour*, p. 85.

¹⁶⁸ According to Ashton and Sykes the 'most common method' – which endured into the 1840s – was for the man to put his leg through a loop at the bottom of the rope, and by holding the rope above him with one hand, he could use the other arm to prevent himself from being dashed against the side of the pit. Boys (and girls) sat astride the knees of the collier and clasped their legs and hands around the rope. This does not seem to have been widespread in the Yorkshire coalfield. See Ashton and Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 56.

¹⁶⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 25 Feb. 1793

¹⁷⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/ii/98 Biram to Fitzwilliam 29 Jan. 1809; WWM/StwP/5/ii/99 Biram to Fitzwilliam 14 Feb. 1809.

Travelling in corves was, however, the predominant way of getting to and from work across most of the Yorkshire coalfield. A large number of accidents occurred when the rope - holding the corve in which the colliers were travelling - broke. In 1802 four colliers were injured at Attercliffe Common when descending to their work when the rope carrying the corve broke. They were all 'dreadfully bruised' but none of them, the *Sheffield Iris* reported, were 'mortally hurt'.¹⁷¹ In December of the same year a boy was killed as he was being drawn up in a corve full of coals from a pit in the Ponds in Sheffield. As he approached 'the landing' the 'chain gave way' and he was 'precipitated to the bottom'.¹⁷² In 1831 as three boys were descending into a pit at Worsbrough Colliery the pit rope suddenly broke and they fell thirty-eight yards to the bottom. One of them, Benjamin Musgrove, was killed, but the other two survived the fall.¹⁷³ And, of course, we have many other examples.¹⁷⁴

Occasionally colliers fell out of the corve when ascending or descending. Often these accidents were caused by a malfunction, or in some cases, the negligence of the winder or the 'whimsey tenter', on the surface. For instance, J. Nowel was killed whilst ascending the shaft of one of the pits at Waterloo Colliery near Leeds in 1830. He was 'thrown out of the corve, by [an] imperfection in the machinery, and killed on the spot'. He left a widow and seven children.¹⁷⁵ As two colliers named John Beecroft and Joseph Sidebotham were descending Fenton's Methley coalpit, 'the rope by which the corf was suspended slipped' and Beecroft was thrown out. Sidebotham, fortunately, managed to regain 'his seat in the corf' and escaped with 'little injury'.¹⁷⁶ A 'young man' named Thomas Brown was killed

¹⁷¹ *Sheffield Iris*, 1 July 1802.

¹⁷² *Sheffield Iris*, 23 Dec. 1802.

¹⁷³ *Sheffield Independent*, 1 Oct. 1831.

¹⁷⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 3 Feb. 1821; *Sheffield Iris*, 9 Dec. 1828. *Sheffield Independent*, 13 Dec. 1828 gives his name as Bailey; *York Herald*, 27 Jan. 1838.

¹⁷⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, 2 Oct. 1830.

¹⁷⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 21 March 1829

when descending a coalpit at Bradgate in Rotherham in 1829. The rope got entangled and the corve he was in turned over which precipitated him thirty yards to the bottom.¹⁷⁷ Fourteen-year-old James Scott was killed at a colliery near Swaines Moor Edge, Halifax, in 1807 because an 'ungovernable horse' at the gin was left under the supervision of a child. Despite his exclamation of "'I shall be killed!'" Scott was drawn into the gin.¹⁷⁸ We have similar examples of malfunctions or mishaps occurring.¹⁷⁹

When colliers reached the top of the shaft they would have to clamber out of the corve and onto the pit bank. Many colliers slipped or tripped and fell back down the shaft. In 1790 a Kippax collier, 'in attempting to land out of the corve, unfortunately slipped, and falling backwards into the pit, was dashed to pieces'. He left a heavily pregnant wife and four children.¹⁸⁰ Likewise, a young man named Jones was killed when he fell out of a corve as it was landed at the Haugh coal pits near Rotherham in 1792.¹⁸¹ The process of landing the coals was also very dangerous. Men would have to reach out over the shaft to pull in the corves, and many fatal accidents followed. William Ingle, the banksman at Waterloo Colliery, for instance, was killed in 1821 as he was landing the coals when the 'catch gave way' and he was 'precipitated to the bottom of the pit'.¹⁸² William Mallinson, 'an old banksman', was killed when he fell into a colliery at Mirfield when landing a corf of coals in 1820.¹⁸³ Similar accidents occurred when empty corves were taken to the top of the shaft to be sent back down. In December 1804 Stephen Bacon, for instance, was killed as he pushed 'a corf to the

¹⁷⁷ *Sheffield Iris*, 3 March 1829.

¹⁷⁸ *Sheffield Iris*, 5 May 1807.

¹⁷⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 29 Oct. 1792; *Sheffield Iris*, 29 Oct. 1801; 11 July 1826; 17 June 1828; *Leeds Mercury*, 19 Nov. 1814.

¹⁸⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 7 Dec. 1790.

¹⁸¹ *Sheffield Register*, 6 Jan. 1792.

¹⁸² *Sheffield Iris*, 3 April 1821.

¹⁸³ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 7 April 1820.

mouth of one of the pits at Darnall' and 'unfortunately fell in, and was dashed to pieces at the bottom'.¹⁸⁴

Surface workers, too, ran the risk of serious injury. One young man had his leg broken and two others were slightly wounded by an explosion of a boiler at Messrs. Charlesworth's Colliery, at Ardsley, in 1826.¹⁸⁵ George Thorneley died 'by a blow from the bolt of a Gin' when the horse he was driving broke loose in 1805. The bolt 'struck him upon the head with such violence, that he languished till the next day'.¹⁸⁶ Benjamin Farrar, a collier working at Fentons Stanley Colliery in Wakefield died after being 'caught in the machinery whilst pulling a new rope round the drum at the pit head' in 1833.¹⁸⁷

Occasionally remarkable acts of survival were reported. In 1835 a 'lad who was engaged at work near the mouth of a coal pit' at Bradgate (Rotherham) fell in. Despite everyone thinking he would have been 'dashed to pieces [...] the lad issued from beneath in the most cheerful tones imaginable'. He said he 'had come down the pit "like a buttercup," meaning that he had spun round and round'. He landed on an ascending corve and was brought up to the surface again. The *West Riding Herald* reported with satisfaction that he was only slightly injured and had 'already got to work again'.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless we should remember that these cases are the exception rather than the rule. Most shaft or winding accidents resulted in serious disfigurement, disablement, or death. It was not until the

¹⁸⁴ *Sheffield Iris*, 20 Dec. 1804.

¹⁸⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 7 Feb. 1826.

¹⁸⁶ *Wakefield Star and West Riding Advertiser*, 1 March 1805.

¹⁸⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 9 Nov. 1833

¹⁸⁸ *West Riding Herald*, 6 Nov. 1835. We have other examples of miraculous survival. See, for instance, *Sheffield Iris*, 25 Dec. 1822.

installation of self-acting fences, which closed automatically when the cage descended, that there was a significant reduction in shaft accidents.¹⁸⁹

Mining was certainly the most dangerous occupation in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. There can be no doubt that gruesome and violent injuries and deaths were all part of the everyday experience of labour for the Yorkshire miner. Accidents also explain why colliers were paid so much when compared to other workers. Wages reflected the hazardous nature of their labour and some strikes for higher wages were accompanied with demands for safer working conditions. For a few colliers, medical assistance was provided following an accident, and for a few of Earl Fitzwilliam's former employees, they benefited from pensions for the rest of their lives. We should, therefore, be cautious when accepting the view that all coalowners were ruthlessly exploitative. However, for most Yorkshire miners, a serious accident was likely to result in either death or disablement and a dependency on the poor law for many years.

Conclusion

The Yorkshire miners' everyday experience was fundamentally shaped by their labour. We cannot make sense of why they formed unions and, more importantly, how these unions became so successful at negotiating wage rates and augmenting the miners' standard of living, without understanding their quotidian experience of work. Their terms of employment varied considerably, but were relatively laxly enforced; it seems coalowners and magistrates wanted to encourage colliers to return to work as soon as possible. Yorkshire miners were unquestionably well paid and earned wages far higher than their

¹⁸⁹ Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 30.

contemporaries, even higher than some skilled artisans. Likewise, the parish apprenticeship system, when completed, allowed paupers access to these high wages. Indeed, great care was taken on the part of the Overseers in choosing a suitable apprentice master: they took into consideration the apprentice's family and, it seems, went to great lengths to keep them in their own parish.

For many mining families there was a transformation in the household economy across the 1820s to the 1830s. Women moved from supplementing the household wage to actively assisting the male breadwinner underground in earning his high wages. Around the same time there was an upsurge of children working in Yorkshire pits. Their place in the high wage economy, however, came at the expense of their childhood. Indeed, coal mining was fraught with dangers; serious injury and death was commonplace. Their labour was undeniably hard and potentially life destroying. But, if they lived and avoided serious injury, they were well remunerated when compared to other workers. They differ quite considerably from other members of the labouring classes, such as the handloom weaver, who eked out an existence on poverty wages across much of the period. Indeed, their high levels of remuneration and their close proximity to death possibly reflects their two competing cultures of the alehouse and the chapel. It is to their culture that we now turn.

Chapter 3: The Culture of the Yorkshire Miners 1786-1839

This chapter will assess the everyday culture of the Yorkshire miners. Their high wages and hard labour engendered two contrasting cultures: alehouse and chapel. Drinking, gambling, fighting, blood sports, and poaching were popular amongst many colliers. In contrast, their proximity to injury and death also produced a deep commitment to religion, particularly Wesleyan Methodism, amongst some of the region's colliers. There was, as Hugh Cunningham argued, an intimate connection between work and leisure.¹ E.P. Thompson recognised that there were 'few old miners'; given their short time on earth it is little wonder that their leisure time was spent devoted to the alehouse or the chapel.² Studies of working-class culture have too often adhered to a dichotomous view: rough or respectable. The Yorkshire miners confound this dichotomy. They were enthusiastic participants in the rough culture of alehouse, whilst at the same time many of them were regular attenders at the respectable church. A more accurate assessment of labouring-class culture is that it was *simultaneously* rough and respectable.

Alehouse Culture

Beer was regarded by many miners as essential to 'put back the sweat' after a day at work.³ The Yorkshire miners' high wages allowed them to regularly indulge in ale. In 1823 the minister of Greasbrough Paul Rodgers criticised the 'drunkenness' of the colliers in his parish. He declared that '[t]he money with which they are too plentifully supplied, through

¹ Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 67-68.

² Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 363.

³ Ibid, p. 350; Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, pp. 247-248; Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. II*, p. 434; Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 143, 145-46.

foolish fondness, introduces them to the public-houses; they soon become adepts in all kinds of wickedness'.⁴ Other evidence shows that colliers were frequent visitors to alehouses. William Naylor, a collier, regularly drank in a Rotherham public house in 1828.⁵ When John Martin's house at Horbury Bridge (Wakefield) was discovered to be on fire in 1832, 'had it not been for the fearlessness of a collier from the influence of liquor', the *Leeds Mercury* stated 'one of the children must have been burnt to death'.⁶ Occasionally fatalities resulted from too much drinking. James Greenhough, a coal-miner from Lowmoor near Bradford, died after consuming too much gin in 1838. From the evidence of Thomas Waddington, also a miner and a workmate of Greenhough, he met him at the Bowling Green Inn, where they had a noggin of gin together, they then left the house, and went into the dram-shop, where 'in the space of little more than half an hour' they had six or seven noggins of gin. Greenhough had the 'principal portion'. He then became sick so, with the assistance of a waiter, they took him to a stable where they 'laid him upon some clean straw, and covered him with a sheet and left him'. Greenhough was found dead the following morning.⁷ But perhaps the most telling evidence of an alehouse culture comes from a lease: when the pub in Middleton was advertised, it was publicised as being 'well-accustomed' and 'nearly at the Centre of the Colliery'.⁸

Gambling often accompanied drinking in the alehouse. Joseph Kay, a Greasbrough collier, was described as being 'much addicted to the vain maxims' and 'various foolish amusements' of the colliery community. He was a frequent attender at the 'public-house'

⁴ P. Rodgers, *Dispensations of Divine Providence Illustrated; in Brief Narratives of the Many Distressing Deaths which have Occurred at the Greasbrough Colliery from the year 1762, to 1823* (Sheffield, 1823), pp. 35-36.

⁵ *Sheffield Independent*, 9 Aug. 1828

⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 28 July 1832.

⁷ *Bradford Observer*, 19 April 1838.

⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 21 July 1798.

where he enjoyed 'jesting and playing at cards'.⁹ In November 1816 a collier named Robinson entered into a five shilling 'eating' wager at the Swan Inn at Boroughbridge. 'After swallowing a pound of oatmeal', Robinson drunk two pints of tea, ate two penny cakes, and completed his meal by eating 5¼ pounds of beef-steaks and four penny-worth of bread. He washed the whole meal down with three pints of strong beer.¹⁰ In 1824 Joseph Parkin, a Hopton collier, played 'pitch-cork' at Mirfield feast for a small stake with two other men named France and Barraclough.¹¹ Gambling remained popular into the high-wage 1830s. In 1837 four colliers from Whitley Lower named William Swallow, Samuel Rayner, James Peace, and George Armytage were fined 3s. 4d. each at the Dewsbury Petty Sessions for 'playing at marbles, for ale', on a Sunday. The *Halifax Express* remarked sardonically that 'they are grown men'.¹² In 1839 John Fletcher of Great Horton, a collier, played Edward Sparks (alias Patterson) a woolcomber at 'toss' for half-a-crown in the Sun Inn dram shop. Unfortunately for Fletcher, Sparks cheated using a modified coin and took Fletcher's money. When Fletcher realised he had been defrauded he brought a prosecution against Sparks which was proved in court.¹³

Intoxicated colliers regularly fought. In 1805 it was reported how a 'few days ago an affray took place at Attercliffe, near Sheffield, with two colliers, when one of them bit off the thumb of his antagonist, which the poor sufferer carried home in his dinner basket'.¹⁴ In 1827 the *Sheffield Iris* recounted how 'a disgraceful scene was exhibited at Hoover, near Wentworth'. 'A few colliers were regaling themselves in a public house, when a quarrel arose between two brothers (middle aged men,) of the name of Parker'. The fight was

⁹ Rodgers, *Dispensations of Divine Providence Illustrated*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 7 Dec. 1816

¹¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 Aug. 1824.

¹² *Halifax Express*, 17 June 1837.

¹³ *Bradford Observer*, 24 Jan. 1839.

¹⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 Jan. 1805

‘prosecuted on both sides with such determined ferocity, that it was not without the greatest difficulty they could be separated’. During the fight:

the younger brother seized the nose of his antagonist with his teeth, and actually severed the cartilaginous [sic] and fleshy part thereof from his face. Surgical assistance was resorted to, but not being near at hand, the inevitable delay, and consequent loss of blood, in connexion with other circumstances, have rendered the case such, that fatal circumstances are apprehended.¹⁵

In 1834 Joseph Garside, a collier, died after a fight with a man named Thomas Lightowlers at a public house in Tong near Bradford. ‘*It began in DRINKING, and ended in DEATH!*’ it was stated.¹⁶ In 1836 Joseph Lowe, a collier, and Joseph Marples, a joiner, were charged with ‘being drunk and fighting in the street’ near Sheffield.¹⁷ It was reported in the *Sheffield Independent* in 1837 that two colliers, William Mosley and John Crapper assaulted Thomas Whitworth. The three were drinking together in a public house when ‘a quarrel took place’ and Whitworth was ‘struck several times’.¹⁸

The colliers' drinking habits were held to cause licentiousness. ‘[T]he awful state of morals in this manufacturing neighbourhood’, six clergymen wrote in 1832, ‘where intemperance not only prevails to an incalculable extent, but is almost the natural parent of every kind of crime, particularly of bastardy; consequently both sexes are so lost to shame, that public worship is greatly neglected’.¹⁹ Records for the parish of Ovenden, near Halifax,

¹⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 14 Aug. 1827. The *Leeds Intelligencer* (23 Aug. 1827) stated their name was Baker.

¹⁶ Leeds University Library, H-Bra-6.4 BUL, *The Gospel of Christ Recommended To Coal Miners. A Sermon Preached at Byerley Chapel, near Bradford, Yorkshire, on Sunday, August 31, 1834, occasioned by the deaths of Joseph Garside, John Carr, John Simpson and John Carr, Jun. by the Rev. George S Bull, the incumbent. Price Threepence, Sold for the Benefit of the bereaved Famileies of Carr, and Simpson, and William Seed.* (Bradford, 1834). For a newspaper report of the affray see *Leeds Intelligencer*, 23 Aug. 1834.

¹⁷ *Sheffield Independent*, 7 May 1836.

¹⁸ *Sheffield Independent*, 25 Feb. 1837.

¹⁹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL250/6/2/B2/6 Six Clergymen to Lascelles 2 Jan. 1832.

attest to the regularity and frequency of bastardy amongst colliers. Emma Griffin has shown that there was a steady rise in the numbers of illegitimate children born across the late eighteenth into the nineteenth centuries, and that levels of illegitimacy were particularly high in industrialising communities.²⁰ The evidence from Ovenden gives credence to this view.

In 1797 Joseph Booth, a collier from Halifax, was identified as the putative father of Susannah Thorp's child. He was ordered to pay a one-off sum of 4s. and make a weekly contribution of fifteenpence to the Ovenden Overseers of the Poor whilst the child was chargeable.²¹ In 1806 Squire Hillam, a collier from Horton near Ovenden, fathered a son with Precilla Sutcliffe. He had to pay £2 6s. to the overseers and make a weekly contribution of 18d. Precilla Sutcliffe had to pay 9d.²² Around the same time Sally Sutcliffe gave birth to a female child. The collier William Sugden, of Bowling near Bradford, was the putative father, and had to pay the one-off sum of £3 7s. 6d. and make a weekly contribution of 20d.²³ In 1810, Hannah Sutcliffe (whether mothers are related it is not known) gave birth to a female child. The supposed father was Benjamin Bartle, of Clayton. As above, both Sutcliffe and Bartle had to make financial contributions to the overseers of the poor.²⁴ When Betty Ibbotson revealed she was pregnant, she claimed the father was the John Sutcliffe, an Ovenden collier, who 'had carnal knowledge of her body, whereby he did beget her with

²⁰ E. Griffin, 'Sex, Illegitimacy and Social Change in Industrialising Britain', *Social History*, 38:2 (2013), p. 151.

²¹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale), HAS: 92(235)640 Filiation order on Joseph Booth 4 Dec. 1797.

²² West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale), HAS: 103(237)39 Filiation order on Squire Hillam 12 April 1806. In 1817, a time of widespread under- and unemployment amongst the Yorkshire miners, Squire Hillam, his wife Betty, and their three children, had become dependent relief from the Overseers of the Poor of Horton. They were ordered to be removed from Horton to Bradford. See West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), Archives, QS1/157/2 Wakefield Quarter Session Roll Jan. 1818.

²³ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale) HAS: 103(237)42 Filiation order on William Sugden 13 June 1806.

²⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale), HAS: 103(237)57 Filiation order on Benjamin Bartle 31 March 1810.

child [...] or children'.²⁵ We have other examples from Ovenden and elsewhere across the Yorkshire coalfield too numerous to mention.²⁶ The extent of the evidence supports Griffin's claim that illegitimacy was common in industrial communities. However, to prove Griffin's argument (in the Yorkshire case) that the process of industrialisation 'altered the cultural horizons for sexually active women' and allowed them a greater degree of sexual freedom than before requires further investigation.²⁷

George Hanby, a Staincross collier and later a banksman, wrote that along with drinking, gambling, and fighting 'dog-fighting, cock-fighting, dog racing, rabbit coursing, pigeon flying', were all other popular recreations enjoyed by miners.²⁸ Blood sports were undoubtedly popular with Yorkshire miners. Older scholarship on blood sports focussed on the Black Country.²⁹ Recently Emma Griffin has broadened the picture and shows that they were popular in other areas including South Yorkshire.³⁰

Bull-baits and cock-fights were all enjoyed by Yorkshire miners on various occasions across our period. The frequency and regularity of bull- and bear-baits on May Day Green in

²⁵ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale), HAS: 103(237)113 Bastardy indictment on John Sutcliffe 28 Dec. 1816.

²⁶ The following are all deposited in West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale): HAS: 104(242)109 Filiation order on Thomas Lacey 28 October 1799; HAS: 103(237)100 Filiation order on Jonathan Barrett 16 Sept. 1815; HAS: 103(237)97 Filiation order on Thomas Lassey 6 July 1815; HAS: 104(242)128 Filiation order on John Cawthron 2 July 1808; HAS: 104(242)138 Filiation order on William Ibbotson 5 Feb. 1811. We have evidence of bastardy from other parishes: West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), WPD20/9/10/13/5 Bastardy Order on George Gomersall of Silkstone 10 Feb. 1826; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), Tong/12e/31 Filiation Order on John Lister of Batley 6 April 1810; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/125/9 Leeds Quarter Session Roll Oct. 1786. (Sadly the child died. A note written by Ben Pulleine, the Overseer of the Poor of Methley, stated that 'Hannah Bradley is brought to Bed an [sic] the Child Dead'). Examples also in West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield) QS1/126/4 Pontefract Quarter Session Roll April 1787; QS1/151/7 Rotherham Quarter Session Roll Aug. 1812; QS1/157/2 Wakefield Quarter Session Roll Jan. 1818.

²⁷ Griffin, 'Sex, Illegitimacy and Social Change in Industrialising Britain', pp. 151-160.

²⁸ Hanby wrote retrospectively. Leeds University Library, S30 Han, *Links from the Chain of Intemperance; or, a voice from the Colliery comprising Tales, Dialogues, Conversations, &C., (In Verse) Original and Transposed. Dedicated to the Miners of South Yorkshire. By George Hanby, Staincross. A Working Man* (Barnsley, 1866).

²⁹ Benson, *British Coalminers*, p. 155; R.W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 45, 49; Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 22-23; D. Philips, 'Riot and Public order in the Black Country, 1835-1860' Stevenson and Quinault (eds.), *Popular Protest and Public Order*, p. 167; E. Griffin, 'Popular Culture in Industrializing England', *Historical Journal*, 45:3 (2002), p. 631

³⁰ E. Griffin, *England's Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes 1660-1830* (Oxford, 2005), ch. 6.

Barnsley the late eighteenth-century was revealed by John Burland. 'These exhibitions were not confined to the holidays', Burland recorded, 'I have seen bull and bear baitings every Saturday evening throughout the summer'. 'Men may be seen, principally colliers, coming from the country villages, many leading ugly bull-dogs by a string or handkerchief. The bull was a fine looking animal, all white, but sadly disfigured in the face from being bitten by dogs, his nostrils being literally torn out'.³¹ In October 1825 three colliers from Beeston named Benjamin Flockton, Daniel Attack and Joseph Wright were charged with 'violently assaulting Mr. Samuel Wood, the constable of Beeston, in the execution of his duty'. Wood tried to close a bull-bait down, but this 'provoked the hostility of the populace, who assaulted Mr. Wood in the most violent manner with large sticks'. All three colliers 'were proved to have taken an active part in this outrage, particularly Flockton and Attack' and were imprisoned.³² Cock-fighting was also popular. In 1799 it was described as a 'favourite diversion among the colliers' of Yorkshire.³³ William Cowper penned the following verse about it:

WHERE Humber pours its rich commercial stream,
There dwelt a wretch, who breath'd but to blaspheme;
In subterraneous caves his life he led,
Black as the mines in which he wrought for bread.
When on a day, emerging from the deep,
A Sabbath-day, (such Sabbaths thousands keep,)
The wages of his weekly toil he bore,
To buy a cock, whose blood might win him more;
As if the noblest of the feather'd kind
Was but for battle and for death design'd;
As if the consecrated hours were meant
For sport to minds on cruelty intent;³⁴

³¹ Burland, Vol I, p.

³² *Leeds Mercury*, 22 Oct. 1825.

³³ Anon. *The Remarkable Story and Sudden Death of Cock-Fighter who Died on the Pit-Hill as he was about to Descend into a Coal-Pit* (London, 1799).

³⁴ William Cowper, 'The Above Story in Verse' in Anon. *The Remarkable Story and Sudden Death of Cock-Fighter who Died on the Pit-Hill*.

A cockfight was held at the Hole-in-the-Wall pub in Barnsley between Ellis, a collier from Worsbrough Common and a foreman named George Rooke, for five shillings' worth of drink. After fighting for half an hour Ellis's cock was 'declared victor'.³⁵

Ministers of the gospel were fiercely critical of colliers spending their wages on such 'vices'. The most dramatic exhortation to colliers to abandon their vices was a sermon preached by the well-known George Stringer Bull following a disaster at Byerley Colliery when four colliers were killed by a firedamp explosion. Bull blamed the explosion on the colliers' immoral habits. He declared:

ARE YOU A *Drunken* COLLIER? Oh, how unfit to *live*! Oh! how unready to *die*! And wilt thou sell thy poor soul for a "*sup*" of drink? Is thy REASON so worthless, that thou wilt drown it in liquor? Did God Almighty bestow on thee this distinguishing gift, by which thou art known from a brute, and wilt thou fling it in thy Maker's face, and dare him to do his worst?

To the colliers who swore he remonstrated: 'Who made thy TONGUE, - who gave thee SPEECH? Did not the Almighty himself? And wilt thou take one of his best gifts to insult him withal? Oh, if he should strike thee *dumb*, or strike thee *dead*, with an oath or a curse upon thy lips, where then, Swearer, would thy soul be?' To the 'GAMESTER, a COCK-FIGHTER, and a DOG-FIGHTER!' he proclaimed:

And this is thy *dignity* – it is thus thou shewest thy *manliness*? Is it thus that thou woudest bring up thy children to cruelty – to bad company – to the gallows? Be sure, O man, thy Maker will avenge, even his dumb creation. There will be no cock-fighting in hell, but if thou has loved cruelty on earth, thou wilt have thy fill of *it*, and thy

³⁵ *Northern Star*, 20 Feb. 1841.

recompence [sic] for it *there!* Shame upon thee, thou bloody man, thou art *a coward in cruelty*, and God shall reckon with thee! It may be thou art a youth, and not a family man, and will this excuse thee? By no means.

In conclusion Bull commanded to 'ye drunken, swearing, gaming, Sabbath-breaking Colliers'

Cry out then to God, and say "Let me live the life of the Righteous – let me die the death of the Righteous!" Without the *first* ye cannot expect the *second*. Come to the House of God! – forsake the Haunts of Intemperance! *Respect yourselves and you will be respected! Love your families and you will be beloved!*³⁶

Bull clearly lamented the colliers 'immoral' habits, but there can no doubt that drinking, gambling, fighting and blood sports were popular amongst Yorkshire miners, and that their popularity endured across the whole of the period.

The customary public holidays - called 'feasts' in Yorkshire - where people would gather for communal celebration were often well attended by miners.³⁷ Drinking - and most likely animal baiting - was commonplace.³⁸ The Greasbrough collier Richard Roscoe 'indulged in liquor to excess' at Scholes feast which, according to the minister Rodgers, explained why he was killed a day later by a fall of coal.³⁹ There can be no doubt such events were looked forward to by colliers. George Mitchell was 'anticipating much worldly enjoyment' at one unknown South Yorkshire feast in 1816. Unfortunately for him he

³⁶ Leeds University Library, H-Bra-6.4 BUL, *The Gospel of Christ Recommended To Coal Miners*.

³⁷ For more detailed assessment of customary public holidays see Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, ch. 2; Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society*, ch. 2; R. Poole, 'The March to Peterloo: Politics and Festivity in Late Georgian England', *Past & Present*, 192 (2006), pp. 109-53; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 449.

³⁸ Griffin, *England's Revelry*, pp. 143-58.

³⁹ Rodgers, *Dispensations of Divine Providence Illustrated*, p. 11.

accidentally lost his grip on the rope when ascending and fell back down the shaft to his death.⁴⁰

Historians have also shown how it was commonplace for masters to give ale to their workers - either at times of national celebration - or when something important happened to a particular family.⁴¹ This was the case with some Yorkshire coalowners. In December 1793, for instance, £38 7s. 7d. was spent on 'Sundries' for the 'Treat given [to] the Tenants Colliers & others employed at Middleton Colliery upon [the] Marriage of Chas John Brandling Esq'.⁴² Similarly, when Lord Milton's birthday was celebrated in 1806 the miners (and other labourers) of Wentworth and Elsecar were supplied with free ale and two large oxen were roasted.⁴³ In 1799 when the Barnsley canal was officially opened, it was stated that a 'vast concourse of spectators, miners, and manufacturers' watched the opening, all of whom 'expressed the most lively joy that the opening had taken place'.⁴⁴ Many Yorkshire miners took advantage of the free ale and indulged to excess, much to the chagrin of their employers. In 1834 the new Earl Fitzwilliam held a ball at Wentworth House attended by many aristocratic families and drink was distributed to his workforce in celebration. Following the ball, 'many thousand persons visited the Park in the course of Wednesday, and a distribution of provisions and ale was made; but a quarrel and fight taking place among a number of colliers, the distribution was stopped'.⁴⁵ However, this did not prevent the fifth Earl from giving his workers ale in celebration of Queen Victoria's coronation - but

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁴¹ Malcolmson suggests that such celebrations 'are reasonably well known'. See Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society*, p. 64. Griffin argues that these acts were political; their 'timing and scale' reflected the statement local officials wanted to make. See E. Griffin, 'Sports and Celebrations in English Market Towns, 1660-1750', *Historical Research*, 75:188 (2002), pp. 202-203.

⁴² West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/54 Middleton Colliery Journal 1793.

⁴³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/i/62 Biram to Fitzwilliam Dec. 18 1805.

⁴⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 June 1799; *Leeds Mercury* 15 June 1799.

⁴⁵ *Sheffield Independent*, 4 Oct. 1834

this time in moderation. He ordered that parties should be held at their respective 'places of employment' where they could be supervised. He deemed this better because 'if they receive their wages & [?] together to feast – there will be intemperance on the part of some of them'. He concluded that the 'principles must be – sufficient – no extravagance – no intemperance'.⁴⁶

Poaching (and the taking of animals) has rarely featured in the history of mineworkers.⁴⁷ It is clear that this was one of the most popular recreations for many colliers across Yorkshire. Osborne and Winstanley have suggested poaching appealed to the industrial worker (much like the elites who had the right to kill) because they enjoyed the 'thrill and excitement' of the sport.⁴⁸ This seems to be true of the Yorkshire miners. In 1828 William Sellers jun. of Scholes, a collier, was fined five pounds by the Rev. J. Lowe 'for poaching on Lord Howard of Effingham's manor, and having a hare in his possession'.⁴⁹ In 1831 James Wilson of Rothwell, a collier, was convicted 'under the Game Laws' for poaching.⁵⁰ In 1833 Joseph, John and Martin Hanson, colliers from Wibsey Low Moor near Bradford were charged with poaching and recognizances placed on them for a year not to 'enter or be in any land whether open or inclosed [sic] with any gun net engine or other instrument for the purpose of taking or destroying game'.⁵¹ Two Bradford men were indicted for poaching in 1837. Joseph Drabble (a collier) and James Dyson (a labourer), were

⁴⁶ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/14/iii/59 Fitzwilliam to Biram June 20 1838.

⁴⁷ Despite an extensive discussion of the culture of the Northumberland and Durham miners, Robert Colls rarely mentions poaching, and does not elaborate on it. Raymond Challinor in his study of Lancashire and Cheshire colliers did not mention poaching or the theft of livestock at all. Only John Rule has recognised that by the late 1830s poaching was well ingrained in the culture of Cornish metal miners. See Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, pp. 129, 219, 226; Challinor, *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners*; Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, p. 332.

⁴⁸ H. Osborne and M. Winstanley, 'Rural and Urban Poaching in Victorian England', *Rural History*, 17:2 (2006), p. 202.

⁴⁹ *Sheffield Independent*, 8 Nov. 1828

⁵⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 Jan. 1831

⁵¹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield) QS1/172/2 Wakefield Quarter Session Roll Jan. 1833.

summoned before the magistrates for being 'in pursuit of Game' on land belonging to James Rimington, Esq.⁵² Edward Taylor, a collier of North Bierley, was out poaching when he was knocked down by a gang of poachers who were all later involved in an affray with gamekeepers. He recognised his assailant from knor⁵³ matches.⁵⁴ At the close of our period five colliers from Killamarsh, named Thomas Senior, John Morris, William Rivington, Henry Bartholomew, and Joseph Harris were charged by John Greaves, 'woodman to Chandos Poole, Esq., with trespassing' in 'pursuit of rabbits'. They were convicted in the penalty of 10s. and promised not to offend again.⁵⁵ Indeed, the colliers' proclivity for poaching was reflected in the concerns of one West Riding farmer around the same time. 'There are very few [agricultural] labourers who are poachers', he declared. 'They are chiefly of another class, colliers and manufacturers and masons and delve men and quarry men and hand-spinners - they can make their nets cheap'.⁵⁶

Yorkshire miners also stole animals. In October 1786 the collier Marmaduke Hudson of East Ardsley was indicted for 'feloniously taking & carrying away four geese the property of William Wrigglesworth of West Ardsley'.⁵⁷ William Paterson, of Shitlington, and George Townend, of Flockton, were committed to York castle for cock-theft. On the night of the 14 January 1797 they 'forcibly broke the lock from the door of a hen-house adjoining to the dwelling-house of John Brooksbank of Shitlington', also a coalminer, and 'stole, from the said hen-house, one game cock'.⁵⁸ In October 1832 David Chapman, a coalminer of North

⁵² *Sheffield Iris*, 5 Sept. 1837.

⁵³ Often called Knor (or Knurr) and Spell.

⁵⁴ *Leeds Times*, 20 Jan. 1838.

⁵⁵ *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 25 April 1840.

⁵⁶ Osborne and Winstanley, 'Rural and Urban Poaching in Victorian England', p. 196.

⁵⁷ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/126/2 Wakefield Quarter Session Roll. Jan. 1787.

⁵⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 April 1797.

Bierley, stole four geese, the property of Benjamin Fieldhouse, of Bradford.⁵⁹ Sheep were a common target because they were profitable. In late December 1790 Matthew Bedford, a collier from West Ardsley was charged with sheep stealing. Unfortunately for the authorities he absconded and was thought 'to be now working in Lancashire or the West Part of Yorkshire'.⁶⁰ In 1803 a collier named George Fielding, his brother John, their two wives, and a breechers-maker (named William Batty) and Batty's wife ran what can only be described as a lucrative sheep rustling business in Stanley near Wakefield. As a group they rustled sheep and threw the skins down collieries to avoid detection.⁶¹ On one occasion George was reported to have 'publicly mocked' a victim when he offered a reward. The group sold the tallow and fed the offal to their pigs. They were, however, eventually caught.⁶²

In 1831 John Ramsbottom, a coal miner from Birstall, was charged with 'having ridden away a black galloway, the property of Henry Robertshaw, which he had left tether'd in the yard of the Red House Inn, in Meadow-lane'. When Robertshaw heard that his horse had been taken he ran out of the pub and chased after Ramsbottom, and hit him on the head with a stick. Ramsbottom denied he was stealing the horse, and told the court that he 'met the horse in the street, and being very tired he jumped upon it, thinking he would have a ride, but he had not ridden far' when Robertshaw hit him.⁶³ In 1836 George Reid, and James Reid, two colliers, and James Attack, were charged with stealing rooks from the rookery of

⁵⁹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/172/2 Wakefield Quarter Session Roll Jan. 1833.

⁶⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 Feb. 1791

⁶¹ John Archer argued that 'the hallmark of poverty-induced sheep stealing was the taking of choice cuts of meat from a single dead animal'. The carcass, head, and entrails were usually left behind'. Archer posits two reasons why these were left behind. Firstly, because 'people only stole what they could consume immediately' and secondly because it helped them avoid prosecution because the 'fleece and the volume of fat' were the 'greatest aids to police and prosecutors'. Although we cannot accept Archer's conclusions regarding why the sheep was stolen in the first place, we cannot doubt his assessment of how rustlers avoided detection. See J. Archer, *By a Flash and a Scare: Incendiarism, Animal Maiming, and Poaching in East Anglia 1815-1870* (Oxford, 1990), p. 16.

⁶² R. Wells, 'Sheep-Rustling in Yorkshire in the Age of the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions', *Northern History*, 20 (1984), p. 34.

⁶³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 Nov. 1831.

T.B. Pease, Esq., of Potternewton, and damaging the trees. Naylor, the constable, caught them red handed in the trees and took them into custody. Each prisoner was ordered to pay 5s. 4d. each which was quickly paid by the two Reid's. Attack, unfortunately, could not pay so was committed to the House of Correction.⁶⁴ These were not crimes of desperation. The miners poached and stole animals because they enjoyed the 'thrill of the chase'. As Douglas Hay has highlighted, these convictions are 'the only direct evidence the historian has of a rich sporting tradition of thousands of working men'.⁶⁵

It is possible that we are distorting reality. It is likely that some colliers were sober, peaceable, law-abiding citizens who did not disturb the peace or transgress any laws. As a result they are almost lost from view because they do not appear in documentary evidence such as quarter session records, bastardy orders, and so forth. We know that William Hays, for instance, was a steady, sober industrious Yorkshire miner. After he was 'crippled & disabled' in the pit he learnt to read, write and calculate. His employers subsequently 'gave him the charge of a weighing Machine' which he controlled for nine years. During this period he 'conducted himself with propriety & improved his leisure time in arithmetic, grammar & in addition to this has for some time kept a night school in his Father's House'. In a letter of reference it is stated that Hays was 'desirous of obtaining the Master's situation in the New School at Tankersley'; his employers Newton, Scott and Chambers declared that 'we hope on trial he will be found competent to its duties & discharge the same in a manner which shall be mutually beneficial both to himself & the children

⁶⁴ *Leeds Times*, 14 May 1836

⁶⁵ D. Hay, 'Poaching and the Game Laws on Cannock Chase', in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1975), p. 202.

committed to his care'.⁶⁶ Indeed, many Yorkshire miners seem to have abjured the alehouse culture for religion, and it is to this that we now turn.

Chapel Culture

Religion was fundamentally important to many Yorkshire miners. The biblical inscriptions chosen on the monument to the twenty-six children killed in the Huskar disaster of 1838 reflect why the chapel mattered to so many colliers in the region: 'boast not thyself of tomorrow'; 'take ye heed watch and pray for ye know not when the time is'; 'therefore be ye also ready'. Their everyday exposure to serious injury and death no doubt influenced to a great extent their religiosity. Fatalism summarises the miners' commitment to religion.

For many years historians stressed that religion, and Sunday Schools, were instruments of social control.⁶⁷ In contrast, a more realistic assessment is that belief was a fundamental component of the cultural world-view of the Yorkshire miners; denigrating both as merely an instrument of indoctrination distorts their significance for contemporaries.

Methodism is often seen as being the most important religion to colliers. More specialised scholarship has drawn attention to the strengths of specific types of Methodism in mining communities.⁶⁸ We cannot doubt that Wesleyan Methodism was very strong

⁶⁶ Sheffield Archives, TR/294/1/11 Newton Scott and Chambers to Mr. Lowe 27 March 1830.

⁶⁷ Hammond and Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, pp. 63, 67-68; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 404, 415; T.W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850* (New Haven, 1976), pp. 203, 217, 242; Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, p. 164.

⁶⁸ John Rule has convincingly shown how Wesleyan Methodism was extremely strong amongst the Cornish miners. See Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, pp. 214-300. Robert Colls has highlighted the strength and the grip of Primitive Methodism - often seen as more plebeian and radical - amongst North East pitmen. Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, pp. 118-189. See also E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Methodism and the Threat of Revolution in Britain', in E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 2015ed.), p. 26.

amongst the Yorkshire miners. The Wesleyan Methodist revival of the 1790s had a significant impact on the colliery communities around Leeds. In February 1794 Methodist fervour reached Bellisle, near Middleton which had a great population of miners.⁶⁹ Many colliers in the south of the region, particularly around Tankersley and Thorncliffe, were similarly affected during the revival. Henry Longdon, one of the partners of Newton, Scott and Chambers recorded in his diary in 1798 how he '[w]ent to Thorncliffe and met the happy praying colliers'. 'They appear', he continued, 'to be men after God's own heart'.⁷⁰ Indeed, the strength of Wesleyan Methodism in this village possibly reflects the fact that the Newtons and Chambers were prominent Methodists themselves. We know that they permitted their colliers to preach in their chapel. The colliers Thomas Platts, Charles Heys, Jonathan Allen and John Sheldon all preached in the chapel across October 1813 to March 1814. Furthermore, Jonathan Allen additionally subscribed 2s. 6d. for a seat in the chapel in July 1815.⁷¹ John Rule has shown that Methodism provided an 'opportunity to play a responsible community role as class leader or local preacher' which 'enriched the lives and released the talents of many working people'.⁷² Other scholars have drawn a similar conclusion.⁷³ Indeed, the religiosity of many Thorncliffe colliers seems to have been unaffected by the trade depression following the Napoleonic Wars. In 1817 George Newton wrote that '[i]t is gratifying to observe, that notwithstanding the numbers of workmen we

⁶⁹ J.L. Baxter, 'The Great Yorkshire Revival 1796-96: A Study of Mass Revival among the Methodists', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 7 (1974), pp. 54-55.

⁷⁰ M.H. Habershon, *Chapeltown Researches: Archaeological and Historical; Including Old-Time Memories of Thorncliffe, its Ironworks and Collieries, and their Antecedents* (London, 1893), p. 155.

⁷¹ Sheffield Archives, TR/292/8/12 Methodist Chapel Leaders 1813-1814; TR/335-337 Truck Shop purchase books 1802-1811; TR/348 Truck Shop Book 1817-1819; TR/292/8/14 Chapel Seat Subscription List 13 July 1815.

⁷² Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, p. 164.

⁷³ Lewis, *Coal Mining in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, p. 36; Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn*, ch. 8. Indeed, Griffin correctly argues that Nonconformity allowed men 'from the lowest rung in society' to 'embark upon a life of preaching'. See Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn*, p. 202.

have discharged, & the consequent removals, as well as deaths, yet our chapel continues to be well attended, & the society keeps up in Numbers beyond expectation'.⁷⁴

Evidence from other parishes across the coalfield attests that many colliers were deeply committed to Wesleyan Methodism. John Dixon's collier father was a Wesleyan preacher and the superintendent of the Sunday School in Briestfield where Dixon attended.⁷⁵ Jonathan Saville of Halifax, a parish apprentice who was bound out to a collier aged seven, later became a Wesleyan preacher.⁷⁶ William Parkinson, a Greasbrough collier 'took an active part' in Wesleyan prayer meetings before he was killed whilst at work in 1807.⁷⁷

Baptism registers also reveal the importance of Wesleyan Methodism to colliers. At Cawthorne, for instance, of the 38 baptisms across 1816-1833, colliers' children made up the joint-second highest percentage at Cawthorne Wesleyan Chapel across 1815-1833 at 15.8% shared with weavers. Labourers made up the majority with 42.1% of all baptisms.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Sheffield Archives, TR/139/52. George Newton to Thomas Newton 25 March 1817.

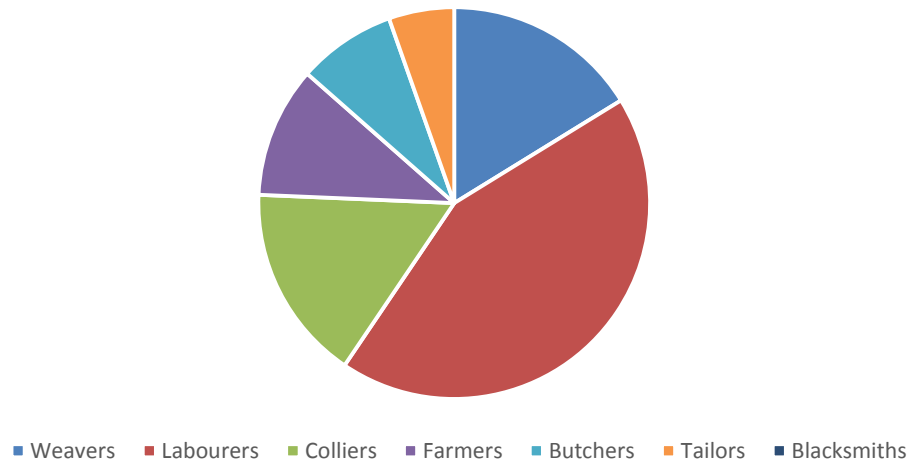
⁷⁵ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 215; *Leeds Times*, 15 April 1876. Dixon later became Secretary of the West Yorkshire Miners' Association.

⁷⁶ West, *Memoirs of Jonathan Saville*.

⁷⁷ Rodgers, *Dispensations of Divine Providence Illustrated*, pp. 19-20.

⁷⁸ Sheffield Archives, SY 334/K1/3(mf) Cawthorne Wesleyan Church Baptisms 1816-1833.

Chart 3:1. Baptisms at Cawthorne Wesleyan Chapel 1816-1833



Source: Sheffield Archives, SY 334/K1/3(MF). Cawthorne Wesleyan Church Baptisms 1816-1833.

But the best evidence we have of the adherence to Wesleyan Methodism comes from the converts themselves. David Utley, a Greasbrough miner, was religious as a boy, but being 'surrounded by bad examples' due to the 'immoral condition of the neighbourhood' he became 'thoughtless of God and his soul's welfare'. Utley continued to live without God, it was recorded, until he married whereupon the duties of a husband 'had a greater demand on his time and attention, than the calls and entreaties of former companions'. In 1804 Utley heard the Wesleyan Robert Newton preach and became 'more deeply convinced than ever of the need of vital religion'. After a sermon in 1815 he told a friend 'how much he had felt on the divine goodness of his soul'. Utley was, however, killed the next day when a chain of corves fell upon him in the Great Whimsey Pit in Greasbrough aged forty-one. He left a wife and seven children.⁷⁹ Likewise, George Oxley, also a Greasbrough miner, lived his early

⁷⁹ Rodgers, *Dispensations of Divine Providence Illustrated*, pp. 25-29

life 'in great measure, if not altogether, without any concern [...] [for] the Glory of God' until he married. After conversations with his neighbours he was prompted to join 'the Methodist society' where he 'made advancements in divine grace'. He was later killed in October 1819 in the 'Great Whimsey Pit' along with another 'religious man' named John Hurst. The day before the explosion, however, Oxley had 'five times entered the house of God for divine worship'.⁸⁰ In 1824 Isaac Walton, a hanger-on at the pit bottom, was mortally injured by a fall of a sheeting-board in Charlesworth's Jane pit. He was brought out of the pit alive and taken to a cabin. Sammy Hick, the village blacksmith and local Wesleyan preacher, who was on his way to the pit for coals, arrived just after Walton had been brought out of the pit. He prevented them sending for a doctor until he had prayed with Walton, who, it was stated, found 'pardon and forgiveness' and that 'before death, became converted, and left signs of divine acceptance'.⁸¹ In Sheffield in 1820 it was reported how a nine-year-old boy – an attendee of the Manor Sunday School – when 'ill of the small-pox and likely to die' was 'much pleased when his father, a pious collier, or any other person would pray with him'.⁸² Moreover, the financial contribution from collections made at the Methodist churches after the Middleton Colliery disaster of 1825, when twenty-three men and boys were killed, highlight how deep-rooted Wesleyan Methodism was amongst Yorkshire miners. The sum of £30 was raised at the Albion Street Chapel; £19 was collected at the Old Chapel; and £23 at the Wesley Chapel. These three Wesleyan churches, therefore, raised a total of £72 for the

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 30-34.

⁸¹ Batty, *The History of Rothwell*, pp. 179-180.

⁸² Anon. *The Eighth Report of the Sheffield Sunday School Union* (Sheffield, 1820), p. 18.

victims' families. This was £32 more than what was collected at the Established St. James's Church, by the Rev. John King.⁸³

Other Nonconformist chapels were regularly attended by Yorkshire miners. When the collier Thomas Hodson of Rawmarsh died in 1830 it was stated how he 'had been a member of the Independent church at Masbro' for nearly 50 years; during which lengthened period, he had, by a very consistent walk and conversation, adorned the profession he made, which will cause his name to be remembered with the most endeared Christian affection'.⁸⁴ Earlier in the century the Greasbrough collier Joseph Kay was said to be 'joined to the Lord' through his attendance at the 'Independent Church' at Masbrough.⁸⁵ In 1829 an attendee of the Zion Chapel at Attercliffe was 'killed by an accident in one of the pits, and unable to speak after he had been hurt'. After he died it was stated that 'he was not only blessed himself, but made a blessing to others' because of his commitment to the church.⁸⁶ George Hodson, a collier who was killed in 1801, was a member of the Baptist Church at Masbrough Common; it was said that 'his heart and treasure were in heaven'.⁸⁷ John Taylor, a Halifax collier, was also a Baptist; he later became the pastor of the Baptist Church at Queenshead near Halifax.⁸⁸

We have one incredibly well documented example of how a collier transformed his ways to become a Godly Congregationalist. Although we must exercise caution when accepting the truth of the events described, it nevertheless provides a useful insight into the

⁸³ *Leeds Mercury*, 22 Jan. 1825. For John King see the Clergy of the Church of England Database see <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/index.jsp> person number 88840. Accessed 08.10.2018.

⁸⁴ *Sheffield Independent*, 30 Oct. 1830

⁸⁵ Rodgers, *Dispensations of Divine Providence Illustrated*, pp. 22-23.

⁸⁶ Anon., *The Seventeenth Report of the Sunday School Union of Sheffield and its Vicinity* (Sheffield, 1829), p. 30.

⁸⁷ Rodgers, *Dispensations of Divine Providence Illustrated*, p. 17.

⁸⁸ Adam Taylor (ed.), *Memoirs of the Rev. John Taylor, Late Pastor of the General Baptist Church at Queenshead, Near Halifax, Yorkshire: Chiefly Compiled From a Manuscript Written By Himself* (London, 1821), pp. 6-14.

religiosity of the Yorkshire miners. When Robert Hazlem, a Hunslet collier, was on his way to Leeds one Saturday in the late eighteenth century, he met a 'brother collier'. Hazlem asked where the collier was going and he replied '[t]o buy a cock – we are to have a match to-morrow'. Hazlem told him that this was a 'bad errand any day, but much worse on a Sabbath'. He suggested that they both go to White Chapel on Hunslet Lane in Leeds to hear the Congregationalist preacher John Edwards give his sermon.⁸⁹ Both of them attended the sermon and afterwards Hazlem's collier companion declared himself to be 'one of the vilest sinners out of hell'. Afterwards they went to hear another sermon. The following day, the collier was 'accosted' by his companions at the pit who demanded to know where the cock was. He declared that he 'brought no cock, nor do I ever intend to fight again'. The colliers remonstrated with him announcing 'here's bonny (fine) to do! What's to become of our half-guineas?' Hazlem's friend stated that he would 'freely forfeit' his half-guinea and said to the assembled colliers that they should 'go down into the pit'. The pit-steward declared that 'I'll give thee guinea if thou dost not swear for a month', but I'll bet thee a guinea thou'll swear before the week is out'. In reply, the collier, knowing that 'if left to himself' would 'blaspheme before night' knelt down on the pit-hill and prayed that he might die rather than blaspheme the 'Holy name he now so much revered'. And, according to the treatise, he 'died instantly as soon as he had finished his prayer'.⁹⁰

Primitive Methodism, too, was influential in some communities. Samuel Beaumont, who was born in Wentworth in 1783, became a Primitive Methodist preacher in 1820 and a 'class-leader' at Elsecar. Despite being badly injured in an accident in the pit in 1836 he

⁸⁹ J.H. Westaway, "Edwards, John (1714–1785), Independent minister." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 11 Sept 2018.
<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-8547>.

⁹⁰ Anon. *The Remarkable Story and Sudden Death of Cock-Fighter who Died on the Pit-Hill*.

continued to 'prosecute his temporal and spiritual duties' until he died in 1840.⁹¹ Several unnamed Primitive Methodist preachers were reported to be active in Emley in the 1830s: 'After toiling during each day in the [...] coal pit, they have cheerfully spent their nights, often to a late hour, in struggling with principalities and powers to rescue their fellow immortals'.⁹² David Milner likewise, born at Emley in 1817, was a Primitive Methodist preacher in Drighlington whilst working as a collier.⁹³ Out of the 134 baptisms which took place at Barnsley Wilson's Place Primitive Methodist Chapel between 1822 and 1832, eighteen (13.4%) were children of colliers.⁹⁴ We know one union organiser was a Primitive Methodist. Ephraim Sellars, who we shall meet in Chapter 7, was convicted of leading a strike at Manor Colliery in 1825. He baptised a child at a Primitive Methodist chapel in 1834. This may have been the same 'brother Sellars' who was identified as preaching at Elsecar in 1820.⁹⁵

Some religious colliers were ardent teetotallers. The Staincross Methodist and colliery banksman George Hanby declared how '[m]y own experience in teetotalism is not of a day, but upwards of 20 years; and I am happy to say that every branch of my family (numbering ten) are all teetotallers, and from the youngest of 4 years to the eldest of 22, not one have ever seen me touch, taste or handle the unclean thing'.⁹⁶ Likewise, Reuben Holder, who started work driving the gin-horse in 1797 at a Hunslet colliery, and aged eight began working in the pit, was praised retrospectively over his 'bold stand for total abstinence

⁹¹ James Crompton, 'Memoir of Samuel Beaumont' in *The Primitive Methodist Magazine for the Year of Our Lord 1840* (London, 1840), pp. 339-340.

⁹² Anon., *The Primitive Methodist Magazine for the Year of Our Lord 1847* (London, 1847), p. 372.

⁹³ Edward Day, 'Mr. David Milner' in *The Primitive Methodist Magazine, for the Year of Our Lord 1870* (London, 1870), pp. 420-421.

⁹⁴ Sheffield Archives, Barnsley Wilson's Place Primitive Methodist Baptism Register (MF).

⁹⁵ J. Gilbert, 'Memoir of Jeremiah Gilbert' in *The Primitive Methodist Magazine for the Year of our Lord 1853* (London, 1853), p. 325.

⁹⁶ Leeds University Library, S30 Han, *Links from the Chain of Intemperance*.

principles' and was described as 'one of the pioneers of the Temperance movement'.⁹⁷ In the early 1830s, one Yorkshire collier, a regular drinker, reformed his habits when the landlady of a pub showed him some 'grand furniture' which she had bought from 'fools' pennies'. Within twelve months he had become a prosperous man, had clothed 'his own wife' and furnished his own home. If wages were not spent in the alehouse it seems the Yorkshire miners could live in relative comfort in the 1830s.⁹⁸ A visitor to Sheffield in 1800 was impressed by the town's colliers. He described them as 'a race of men, sooty and dark in complexion, strong and nervous in labour'.⁹⁹

Many colliers saw survival from accidents as a direct manifestation of the hand of God.

At one of the Manor coalpits in 1827 it was reported how:

A boy [...] who works in the coal pits, was coming up what they call the conductor; he had nearly got to the top, when he lost his hold, and was falling headlong into the pit again, when, by the mercy of God, his jacket wrapt round the conductor, and held him fast. There he was, suspended on the mercy of God, without being in any way able to help himself, till the corf came up the pit and brought him in it.¹⁰⁰

Similarly, the Baptist John Taylor stated how he was injured by a large stone falling upon his head whilst at work in a pit near Halifax in the late eighteenth century. He recovered to tell his tale and described his survival as 'nearly a miracle' and that all who knew him remembered it as 'an occasion of special thankfulness to our Almighty Preserver'.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ West Yorkshire Archives Service (Bradford), DB3/C4/1/1 Scrapbook of Reuben Holder's Broadsheets.

⁹⁸ Leeds University Library, H-Bra-6.4 BUL, *The Gospel of Christ Recommended To Coal Miners*.

⁹⁹ *Sheffield Iris*, 2 Oct. 1800.

¹⁰⁰ Anon., *The Fifteenth Report of the Sunday School Union of Sheffield*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁰¹ Taylor (ed.), *Memoirs of the Rev. John Taylor*, p. 8.

Historians have highlighted that the Established church lost a great deal of influence across the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.¹⁰² This was particularly marked in industrialising communities and their conclusions seem to be borne out by the evidence we have from Yorkshire. Although miners often did marry in the Established church, we should not interpret this as inner conviction; up until 1836 marriage was forbidden in any Nonconformist chapel by Hardwicke's Act (1753).¹⁰³ The Anglican church did preach sermons following colliery disasters to raise funds for the injured; but, as we saw earlier, the funds were often significantly less than those raised by nonconformist churches.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the best evidence of the way the colliers distanced themselves from the Established church comes from the end of our period. Two substantial collections were made at the Protestant Methodist Chapel at Crane Moor (Barnsley) in aid of the local Sunday School. The *Leeds Times* commented:

We wonder how it is that in such a densely populated place as Crane Moor, the church extension clergy and gentry have not adopted measures for giving instruction to the children and families of that illiterate body of coal miners, who reside there; and we are more surprised at this on account of the contiguity of the moor, being only about two miles distant to the residence of Lord Wharnccliffe and Archdeacon Corbett, who are such unwavering advocates for the law church, and yet who never exert themselves in this place, but permit a reed maker, who resides nearly five miles from it, to take the lead. Well may the church be in danger.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (London, 1976), pp. 27, 67, 94. H. McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1984), p. 17; Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn*, ch. 8. The best assessment of the weakness of the Anglican church and the rise of Methodism in Yorkshire is E. Royle, 'The Church of England and Methodism in Yorkshire, c. 1750-1850: From Monopoly to Free Market', *Northern History*, 33:1 (1997), pp. 137-161.

¹⁰³ I am grateful to Miranda Reading of Kings College London for this information.

¹⁰⁴ *Sheffield Iris*, 30 July 1822; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 Aug. 1834; *Leeds Times*, 6 Sept. 1834.

¹⁰⁵ *Leeds Times*, 30 May 1840.

Moreover, superstitions no doubt put them at odds with the Established church. Any superstitious feelings and some colliers would not work.¹⁰⁶ John Burland recalled how in 1817 a collier called Thomas Scholey, who he described as 'superstitious', refused to go to work at Worsbough Park Colliery because he saw a padfoot, which seems to have been a spirit or ghost animal. Scholey visited Dicky Maudsley who asked him "'What's t'do now?'" enquiring whether there was any work. Scholey replied stating that he "["]set off tat pairk [Park, as in Worsbrough Park Colliery] this morning and when ha gat tut Benkend, wot sud be stannin but t' padfooit, an it rowl'd [rolled] on befooar ma till it got tut pit, wen daan went it heead, and up went its heals, an heeadlong it went daan t'shaft; sooa ha [so I] thowt it wor a sign at summat wor gooin t'happen, sooa ha set off hooam ageean"''. Burland recalled how the same day the pit fired and 'and two men were killed and several burnt'.¹⁰⁷ At the funeral of John Walker, who was killed in a coalpit in 1838, the members of the Lodge of Oddfellows that he belonged to attempted to read the burial service for their departed brother. The Anglican vicar of Silkstone refused and warned the Oddfellow that 'if he did not obey his order, he should certainly enter him into the Ecclesiastical Court'.¹⁰⁸ Such actions no doubt further antagonised colliers who were already at odds with the clergy.

Connected to the issue of religion is the education of the colliers. We cannot doubt many colliers derived a reasonable education from Sunday schools. As Emma Griffin has recently argued, they were fundamentally an 'important institution in the lives of the poor' and 'dismissing them as dark agents of social control' is unacceptable.¹⁰⁹ Recalling his youth

¹⁰⁶ John Rule showed how the Cornish miners were superstitious. They believed that 'Knackers' inhabited the mines and brought good fortune if left an ore, or a crust from the tinner's lunch. If the Knackers were ignored by the miners, it was thought that they brought bad luck; at best this could be not finding any more ore; at worst this could be an underground accident. See Rule, *Rule, The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, p. 249.

¹⁰⁷ Burland, *Annals*, Vol I., p. 367.

¹⁰⁸ *York Herald*, 16 June 1838.

¹⁰⁹ Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn*, p. 178.

in the early nineteenth century, the Staincross miner George Hanby stated that 'my education was chiefly derived from the Sunday School Teacher. I have need to praise Sunday Schools'.¹¹⁰ Sunday schools provided an education to the collier children in Greasbrough that otherwise they would not have received. Godfrey Thompson, who was 'killed above ground, by being run over with the waggons' in 1820 was described as 'one of the most tractable children in the Sunday School'.¹¹¹ John Dixon (born 1828), who began work underground aged seven, attended a Sunday School in Briestfield where his father, a collier, was Superintendent.¹¹² He later became the secretary of the West Yorkshire Miners Association; no doubt his early education was beneficial for his union position later in life.¹¹³

In October 1812 a Sunday School was opened in the colliery community of Darnall on the outskirts of Sheffield. The school was 'the means of great grace to many families in the neighbourhood' who '[b]efore that time' had spent the Sabbath 'in idleness or dissipation'. Two years after the school had been founded it was noted that many of the inhabitants were now 'constant hearers, and some of them faithful keepers of the word of God'. Since the establishment of the school it was also recorded that 'nearly thirty persons had joined the Methodist Society' and that '[t]his ... has been brought about by the *active ministry of the Children of the Sunday School*'.¹¹⁴ The Low Moor Company, near Bradford, opened a Sunday school for the children of its employees in 1814. 'We understand', the *Sheffield Iris* stated, that 'more than 1,200 families are employed in these works. The younger children

¹¹⁰ Leeds University Library, S30 Han, *Links from the Chain of Intemperance*.

¹¹¹ Rodgers, *Dispensations of Divine Providence Illustrated*, p. 34.

¹¹² Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 215. Dixon later became Secretary of the West Yorkshire Miners' Association.

¹¹³ It is accepted by most social historians that there was a link between schooling and literacy. '[S]chooling creates literacy' E.G. West wrote. See E.G. West, 'Literacy and the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 31:3 (1978), p. 372.

¹¹⁴ Anon. *The Second Report of the Sunday School Union in Sheffield* (Sheffield, 1814), p. 14. One of the members of the School Committee was John Jeffcock. Jeffcock was the manager of Dore House, Attercliffe, and Handsworth Collieries. Later he became the mineral agent to the Duke of Norfolk (p. 47).

are to be educated during the day, and the apprentices and youths connected with the works, in the evenings, and on Sundays'.¹¹⁵ By 1819 other Sunday Schools had been established in colliery communities around Sheffield. In Manor it was stated that:

We have the pleasure to announce a general improvement in the Children, both in regard to their learning and moral behaviour. This is general, but we have the satisfaction further to add, that the children employed in the pits, instead of cursing, and singing profane songs, when in the caverns of the earth, are frequently heard singing the praises of the Redeemer, apparently with heartfelt joy.¹¹⁶

At the Sunday School at Thorncliffe it was reported in 1820 that:

The number of children is on the increase; religious instruction, both in private and public, continues to be given: though not obliged to come to the public meetings, many of the children attend them voluntarily, and the weeping eyes which we behold amongst them bespeak the feeling of their tender minds; several of those who some time passed joined our society, still remain united with us in church fellowship; though on the other hand, some have drawn back again.¹¹⁷

In Halifax, Dan Taylor, a collier, attended a Methodist Sunday school run by Titus Knight in the late eighteenth century. Despite his work keeping him away from the school from Monday to Saturday it could not 'damp his ardour for knowledge, nor abate his exertions to obtain it'. Indeed, Taylor desired to learn to such an extent that 'he soon began to take a book with him into the coal-mine, and improved every occasional intermission of labour to

¹¹⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 16 Aug. 1814.

¹¹⁶ Anon. *The Seventh Report of the Sheffield Sunday School Union* (Sheffield, 1819), p. 32.

¹¹⁷ Anon. *The Eighth Report of the Sheffield Sunday School Union*, p. 24

enrich his mind'.¹¹⁸ In a 'few years' it was stated, 'he had attained a considerable acquaintance with the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages'.¹¹⁹

Flinn and Stoker declared that with 'scanty evidence of schooling it is hardly to be expected that there would be very high standards of literacy among miners'.¹²⁰ We cannot accept this interpretation as realistic in the Yorkshire miners' case. Although evidence of long-term literacy trends amongst the Yorkshire miners is hard to construct, we nevertheless have indicators that suggest levels were relatively good. At the end of our period a colliers' bond from Robert Clarke's Silkstone Colliery reveals that of the 81 colliers who assented to these terms of employment, 20 of them (24.7%), could sign their name in their own hand.¹²¹ Moreover, an analysis of marriage registers from the parish of Rotherham, reveals that a surprisingly high number of colliers could sign in their own hand. Of the 32 miners who married at All Saint's church in 1838, 44% signed the register.¹²² (This stands in stark contrast to the 13.94% of Lancashire colliers who Michael Sanderson identified as being able to sign their name in the 1830s).¹²³ And, we saw earlier how Overseers of the Poor tended to bind out parish apprentices to literate colliers. Jane Humphries' conclusion that literacy was not unusual 'among the male working class' is close to the mark in the Yorkshire miners' case.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Adam Taylor (ed.), *Memoirs of the Rev. Dan Taylor, Late Pastor of the General Baptist Church, Whitechapel, London; With Extracts From His Diary, Correspondence, and Unpublished Manuscripts* (London, 1820), p. 3

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹²⁰ Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol II*, p. 439.

¹²¹ Barnsley Archives, CR/148 Loose Papers Relating to Clarke's Silkstone Collieries.

¹²² Sheffield Archives, PR87/31 Rotherham All Saint's Church Marriage Register 1837-39.

¹²³ M. Sanderson, 'Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England', *Past & Present*, 56 (1972), p. 90. The 13.94% was out of 210 colliers.

¹²⁴ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, p. 21. Emma Griffin similarly argues that 'there was nothing exceptional in a labourer knowing how to write'. See Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn*, p. 6.

Conclusion

Continuity rather than change reflects the culture of the Yorkshire miners across 1786-1839. High wages and hard labour with the risk of serious injury or death sustained two competing cultures of the alehouse and the chapel; both were well established at the start of our period and endured until the end. It is possible that colliers fluctuated between the two cultures at various point in their lives. We know colliers found religion after years of 'vice', but we do not have any evidence of colliers moving from religion to the alehouse. 'Back-sliding' remains, however, a likely possibility. The Yorkshire miners were enthusiastic participants in both the 'rough' alehouse culture and the 'respectable' chapel culture. The 'rough or respectable' dichotomy, which has for so long framed how historians have viewed working-class culture, is unhelpful. It unnecessarily compartmentalises and as a result distorts, the true nature of labouring class culture in the Industrial Revolution and should be abandoned.

Drinking, gambling, fighting and participating in blood sports were all popular recreations for many colliers. These recreations took place across the length and breadth of the coalfield. Poaching (and the theft of animals) was similarly widespread. In contrast to what many historians have argued, these were recreations, not crimes of subsistence.¹²⁵ Their high wages meant that they were never close to the margins of poverty, unlike handloom weavers, or agricultural labourers. It was trade unionism to improve wage rates, as the subsequent chapters will show, that had the greatest effect in improving their living standards.

¹²⁵ A.J. Peacock, *Bread or Blood: A Study of the Agrarian Riots in East Anglia in 1816* (London, 1965), pp. 38, 43; E.J. Hobsbawm and G. Rude, *Captain Swing* (London, 1969), pp. 57, 245; Thompson, *The Making of The English Working Class*, p. 248; Inglis, *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 288; Osborne and Winstanley, 'Rural and Urban Poaching in Victorian England', p. 187.

For some Yorkshire miners, the chapel was just as important as the pit in their lives. Wesleyan Methodism and other forms of Nonconformity were particularly strong. Many colliers played an important role in the chapel which 'enriched their lives'.¹²⁶ Conversion accounts, too, provide us with an intimate way of understanding the significance of religion to contemporaries. Sunday schools provided an important education, however limited, to the children of colliers; we cannot doubt that some children and their families embraced the opportunity for learning. Religion did not, however, create a 'submissive industrial worker' as suggested by E.P. Thompson.¹²⁷ If anything, as the subsequent chapters will show, religion (and education) provided colliers with the skills necessary to form increasingly sophisticated trade unions.¹²⁸ It is to how trade unionism improved the Yorkshire miners' standard of living that we now turn.

¹²⁶ Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, p. 164.

¹²⁷ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 404.

¹²⁸ Hobsbawm, 'Methodism and the Threat of Revolution in Britain' *passim*.

Chapter 4: 'Infatuated Men!' Combination in the Yorkshire Coalfield 1786-1801

This chapter will argue that instances of mineworkers' protest across 1786-1801 were intimately linked to their standard of living. The study of protest is divided into three economic time periods. Firstly, between 1786 and 1792, years of high wages, good trade, and cheap bread, the miners at various pits in Yorkshire struck to capitalise on their good fortune to improve their standard of living. Secondly, between 1793-97, when colliers' wages were high, the coal trade was good, but foodstuffs acutely expensive for the labouring classes, some miners struck to increase wages further and to negotiate the supply of grain at discounted prices. Lastly, this chapter will examine the years 1798-1801, and how the miners responded to the gradual downturn of the coal trade, a series of failed harvests, and rapid increases in the price of foodstuffs which greatly impacted on the miners' standard of living. At Middleton Colliery the miners established a culture of trade unionism. This 'culture of collective action' gave, in the words of Carl Griffin, 'form and discipline' to strike action. This chapter will also draw our attention to instances of political Loyalism amongst the Yorkshire miners across the 1786-1801 period. Before we examine how and why the Yorkshire miners' protested, however, we need to sketch out the limitations of the existing scholarship on food riots and trade unionism in the late eighteenth century.

Historiography of Food Riots and Trade Unionism

A regional focus has dominated the historiography of food riots.¹ In much of this scholarship, food riots have been treated as isolated incidents caused only by the access to, and price of, foodstuffs. The part played by miners in food riots is well documented but the focus is on other regions.² For E.P. Thompson, rioting colliers provided additional evidence for his moral economy thesis. Most of Thompson's evidence, however, comes from the West Midlands or the South West of England but he treats it as representative of the rest of England.³ However, this corpus of work does not make an explicit connection between the access to, and cost of, food and the standard of living of those who rioted.

To augment how much food they could buy, miners formed unions and struck for higher wages. For many years it was assumed that trade unions did not exist for 'unskilled' workers before 1799. The Webbs described miners as 'semi-servile', part of the 'politically unconscious' labouring strata, along with 'farm servants' and 'general labourers'.⁴ As we noted in the introduction, this argument has been proven incorrect for other trades, but the

¹ R.B. Rose, 'Eighteenth Century Price Riots and Public Policy in England', *International Review of Social History*, 6 (1961), pp. 277-91; D.V. Jones 'The Corn Riots in Wales, 1793-1801', *Welsh Historical Review*, 2 (1965), pp. 323-51; A. Randall and A. Charlesworth (eds.), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Liverpool, 1996); R.A.E. Wells, 'Dearth and Distress in Yorkshire, 1793-1802', *Borthwick Papers* 52 (1977); A. Booth, 'Food Riots in the North-West of England 1790-1810', *Past & Present*, 77 (1977), pp. 84-107; Baxter, *Origins of the Social War*, pp. 157-8. Kaijage, *Labouring Barnsley*, ch.8 does not deal with food riots *per se* but food shortages. By a significant margin the best study on food riots is R. Wells, *Wretched Faces*, and more recently J. Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provisions: Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, c. 1550-1850* (Farnham, 2010).

² C. Fisher, *Free Miners and Colliers: Custom, the Crown and Trade Unionism in the Forest of Dean, 1788-1886*, Unpublished Warwick University PhD thesis (1978) and his subsequent *Custom, Work and Market Capitalism: The Forest of Dean Colliers 1788-1888* (London, 1981); Rule, *The Labouring Miner in Cornwall*, pp. 119-75; *Idem*, *Albion's People*, pp. 196-201. Other references to southern colliers include: E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 76-136. Rose, 'Eighteenth Century Price Riots and Public Policy', p. 285; S. Poole, 'Scarcity and the Civic Tradition: Market Management in Bristol, 1709-1815', in Randall and Charlesworth (eds.), *Markets, Market Culture*, pp. 91-114; J. Archer, *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England 1780-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 34; Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England*, Dudley colliers, p. 59, Warwickshire colliers, p. 60, Forest of Dean colliers, p.60, Radstock colliers, p. 63; Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provisions*, pp. 177-184, 233-235.

³ Thompson, *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd*, pp. 76-136.

⁴ Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 1-2, 37-38. This interpretation has been supported in some mediocre general textbooks such as Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes*, p. 39.

point that unions did not exist for colliers prior to 1800 has remained unchallenged.⁵ This chapter, in establishing the connection between protest actions and the standard of living, will also demonstrate that trade unionism amongst miners at particular pits had more organisation than has been recognised in the scholarship.

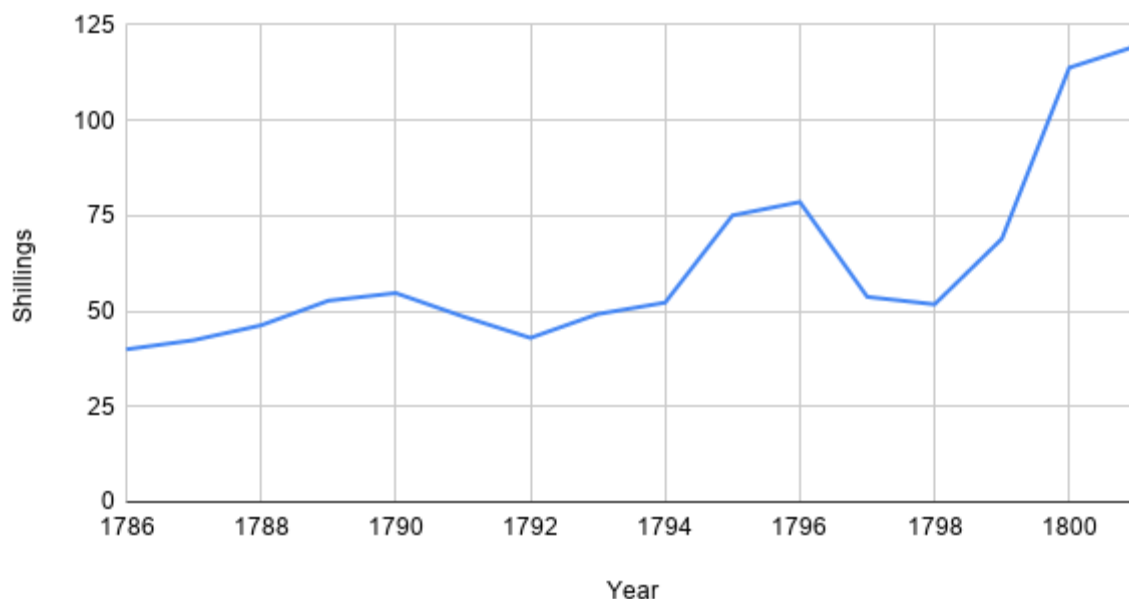
Why should we consider the relationship between wages, food prices, and protest amongst Yorkshire miners? As Roger Wells reminds us, between 1793 and 1803, 'the vast majority of workers, irrespective of where they lived, and how they ate, spent between sixty and eighty per cent of incomes on food'.⁶ How much they earned was crucial to how much they ate. Hunger, as Emma Griffin stresses, sheds 'new light on the human experience of industrialisation' and this chapter will add to our understanding through the example of the Yorkshire miners.⁷ For reference, the graph below illustrates the price of wheat (per Imperial Quarter) between 1786 and 1801. A graph showing wheat prices across 1786-1839 is provided in Appendix 4 for comparison.

⁵ For critics of the Webbs see pp. 6-7

⁶ Wells, *Wretched Faces*, p. 19.

⁷ Griffin, 'Diets, Hunger and Living Standards', p. 73.

Graph 4:1. Price of Wheat (Per Imperial Quarter) 1786-1801



Source: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

Years of Prosperity: 1786-1792

In the 1780s the Yorkshire coal trade expanded. Benjamin Hall, Earl Fitzwilliam's colliery steward, wrote with satisfaction over how the sale of coal at Lawwood Colliery near Elsecar was 'constantly increasing'.⁸ Wages were high and the cost of wheat remained low, allowing the miners to enjoy a relatively good standard of living. The following table shows the average price of wheat in England between 1786 and 1792.

Table: 4:1. Average Price of Wheat in England (per Imperial Quarter) 1786-1792

Year	Price
1786	40s. 0d.
1787	43s. 5d.
1788	46s. 4d.

⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F70/30 Hall to Fitzwilliam Nov. 7 1782.

1789	52s. 9d.
1790	54s. 9d.
1791	48s. 7d.
1792	43s. 0d.

Source: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

It was in this context of high wages and low food prices that the miners struck at Middleton Colliery near Leeds in the winter of 1786 for a wage increase. This strike took place when the demand for coal was the greatest which suggests the dispute was more measured than spontaneous. The strikers clearly knew that a restriction of supply at the time of the year when demand was greatest would give them more leverage and, as a result, more chance of success. The strike, which is probably the first colliers' strike in Yorkshire, began on 6 December 1786. The Liberal *Leeds Mercury* printed a 'caution' from Richard Humble, the viewer⁹ at the pit, which stated that:

THE COLLIERS at MIDDLETON COLLIERY, belonging to CHARLES BRANDLING, Esq; having without reasonable Cause, refused to work the said Colliery, unless an Advance be made to their Wages; it is thought necessary to inform the Public, that Part of such Colliers have constantly earned Two Shillings and Sixpence or Three Shilling per Day, by working Eight Hours in each Day only, and that none of them, even Men of Sixty Years of Age, and upwards, earned less than Two Shillings per Day; yet, notwithstanding such high Wages, the Colliers have combined together, and have laid up the said Colliery.

⁹ A professional with expertise in mine management. Martin Daunton describes viewers as the 'new profession of mining engineers, who solved the formidable technical problems of working deep mines, planning large pits with their complex systems of ventilation, drainage and roadways'. See Daunton, *Progress and Poverty*, p.223.

Humble claimed he issued this caution 'to prevent the said Colliers from imposing upon the Public by asking Charity under false Pretences.'¹⁰ It seems the strike endured until the second week of January 1787 which is when the 'caution' ceased to be printed suggesting the dispute had been settled.¹¹ We do not know what the outcome of the strike was, and we hear nothing further of any instances of protest at Middleton until 1791. In December of that year, amid a severe winter,¹² the culture of protest was revived and it was reported that 'twenty seven colliers were committed to the House of Correction, at Wakefield, for refusing to work in the colliery at Middleton, near this town'.¹³ One of the colliery managers drafted a letter to a local clergyman denouncing the 'disagreeable conduct of the workmen' and added that '[t]his time of year is in general a very busy one'.¹⁴ It seems that, again, the miners struck for higher wages, but rumours of payment in kind seem to have gained currency in the district. On 31 December Humble wrote to the Tory *Leeds Intelligencer* stating that 'SEVERAL ill-founded Reports having been industriously propagated and disseminated in the Town and Neighbourhood of Leeds, relating to the EARNINGS of the COLLIERS, in the above COLLIERY, and to their being *obliged* to take the Necessaries of Life from the Agents to the said Colliery, at an extravagant Price, in Part of their Wages'. Humble thought it

necessary to publicly declare, that the said Colliers have for several antecedent Years, and up to the Time of their conspiring to quit the said Colliery, earned from Two to Three Shillings per Day, and many of them (exclusive of such Earnings) are accommodated with a convenient House, Garden and Coals (worth at least Four Pounds per Annum) for Twenty Shillings per Annum each.

¹⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 12 Dec. 1786.

¹¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 18 Dec., 26 Dec., 1786, 2 Jan. 1787; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 2 Jan 1787.

¹² The *Leeds Mercury* (13 Dec. 1791) declared that 'Winter has set in rather severely in the Northern Counties' and that the 'snow is so deep ... [that it] renders travelling very disagreeable, and sometimes dangerous.

¹³ *Sheffield Register*, 30 Dec. 1791.

¹⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds) WYL/899/246 Rothwell Easter Book 1791-93. The letter is enclosed at the front of the book. Unfortunately water damage has obscured the name of the sender and the recipient.

He particularly stressed that '[t]he report that the Colliers being OBLIGED to take from the Agents and Part of their Earnings in the Necessaries of Life, is an infamous Falsehood' and that his miners were 'paid every Saturday in Specie, without any Deductions'. Humble claimed that only candles were supplied in lieu of wages and this was done 'in the same Manner, and at the same Rate, with all other Collieries in the Neighbourhood.'¹⁵ The strike drastically reduced coal output: from 31 December 1791 to 3 February 1792 only £191 8s. 8d. of coal was sold by the colliery which was significantly lower than the £1830 9s. 3d. made from sales between 28 October and 2 December 1791.¹⁶ Indeed, subsequent statistics from February to March 1792 substantiate the impact the strike had on coal sales: £1480 18s. 6½d. was made between the 3 February and 2 March 1792.¹⁷ Indeed, in an attempt to draw public opinion to the side of the coal owner, publicity was given to Brandling's request that forty wagons of coal (containing 24 corves each) were to be distributed amongst the poor of Leeds.¹⁸ This act of benevolence would hardly have gone unnoticed at a time of coal shortages when the miners were striking for higher wages.

The dispute at Middleton dragged on into late January 1792 and it seems that the striking miners were evicted. The *Leeds Intelligencer* printed an advert for 'SINKERS, PIT-MEN, and Hurriers' and stated that they would be 'accommodated', where possible, because '[t]he Houses occupied by the present Colliers will be empty on Monday the Sixth

¹⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 2 Jan. 1792; *Leeds Mercury*, 3 Jan. 1792.

¹⁶ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/53 Middleton Colliery Journal 1792; WYL/899/52 Middleton Colliery Journal 1791.

¹⁷ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/53 Middleton Colliery Journal 1792.

¹⁸ *Sheffield Register*, 30 Dec. 1791; *Leeds Mercury*, 27 Dec. 1791.

of February'.¹⁹ The use of the eviction tactic is well documented to have been a chosen method to break a union and to compel the men back to work, indicating the relative permanency of the Middleton union.²⁰ This is most probably the earliest example of the eviction method being used in Yorkshire. We do not know what happened to the men who were evicted, but the colliery journal suggests the pit resumed work around the time of the evictions, suggesting that the strike was unsuccessful.

The Middleton strikes may have inspired the colliers at Rothwell Haigh (near Leeds) to combine in an attempt to raise their own wages. Middleton is in the parish of Rothwell and it is almost certain that the miners from one pit interacted with the other.²¹ (Indeed, at a subsequent Middleton strike in 1796, terms of settlement were offered matching those at Rothwell Haigh revealing awareness amongst the Middleton miners of what their contemporaries were earning).²² It must be stressed, however, that there is no evidence of an inter-colliery miners' union between the Middleton and Rothwell Haigh pits; but this does not preclude the idea that the Middleton strike may have stimulated the Rothwell Haigh turnout. In mid-October 1792 many colliers with their wives and children assembled at Rothwell Haigh and marched to the colliery, shouting and blowing horns in an attempt to induce those still at work to stop. When the parish constable arrived to arrest the strike leaders a 'resolute mob immediately got together' and prevented the constable and his assistants from apprehending them. However, the strike leaders Isaac Briggs and Jonathan Longbottom, were subsequently captured on 17 October and taken to York Castle for trial.

¹⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 23 Jan. 1792.

²⁰ Flinn and Stoker were correct to highlight that 'actual evidence' of eviction taking place is scarce. Nevertheless they concluded that it was 'unlikely that they [coalowners] always resisted such a temptation'. See Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 406.

²¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 12 Dec. 1786.

²² *Leeds Intelligencer*, 25 Jan. 1796.

The *Leeds Intelligencer* condemned the action taken by the Rothwell Haigh colliers and described them as 'Infatuated men!' who would through such 'tumultuous acts' 'bring ruin and misery upon themselves, their wives and their families!'. As with the strike at the Middleton pit, publicity was given to the miners' high earnings, and they were advised to consider 'the common labourer and manufacturers whose earnings are far inferior to theirs, [who] may by their means be distressed for the want of coals, or obliged to procure them at an advanced price' .²³ At the subsequent trial of Briggs and Longbottom it was stated on evidence of William Thompson, the colliery agent of Thomas and James Fenton, that both had assembled 'together with a great number of other persons in a riotous and tumultuous manner at the coal pits situated at Rothwell Haigh' causing 'the said works to be stopped, to the great loss' of the Fentons'.²⁴ Both were found guilty and were committed to York Castle for imprisonment. The Rothwell Haigh strike was probably unsuccessful. We do not hear of another turnout at the pit until the strike of 1819.

Colliers at Sheffield also struck in 1792. A close reading of the dispute reveals that it was well organised with some degree of prior planning. The strike for an increase in wages, which the visiting Colonel de Lancey described as an 'unreasonable demand of the populace', began around 9 June and very quickly reduced coal supply to Sheffield.²⁵ The Duke of Norfolk settled the dispute the following week. Only 27 large waggons of coal were sold between the 9 and 22 June when the average number sold from 21 March 1792 to 25 August 1792 was – excluding the strike weeks - 46.25 waggons.²⁶ The turnout, therefore, certainly restricted the amount of coal for sale. However, it seems that the miners had

²³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 22 Oct. 1792.

²⁴ *Sheffield Advertiser*, 19 Oct. 1792.

²⁵ The National Archives, HO42/20, Col. de Lancey to H. Dundas 13 June 1792.

²⁶ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/200 Weekly Account of Coal Got and Sold at Sheffield, Manor, and Attercliffe Collieries 1789-1801.

agitated for a wage increase in May as the account books refer to 'The Colliers advance Money' for the week beginning 19 May 1792.²⁷ This 'advance money' does not seem to have been paid in the two subsequent weeks suggesting why the miners struck around 9 June. This was not a spontaneous eruption of discontented colliers. It seems that there was a relative degree of organisation amongst them. The Sheffield Colliery miners were determined to keep the advance in wages acceded to them. As with the West Yorkshire strikes, contemporary comment on the dispute was critical. Colonel de Lancey, declared that the miners had 'no real cause for their discontent' given their high wages of '3/ to 4/6 a day', but instead demonstrates 'the unruly spirit of the people and the little check given to it by the civil power'.²⁸ Following the turnout the 'advance money' became much more regularised suggesting that the strike was successful.²⁹

The early years of the 1790s also witnessed the first public demonstration of the Yorkshire miners' loyalism. They publicly burned Thomas Paine in effigy.³⁰ It was reported that the

Colliers and Labourers residing in the town and neighbourhood of Kippax, paraded the boundary of the parish, carrying with them the effigy of Tom Paine. Under one arm he had a pair of stays, and under the other a bundle of infamous books. On his back was written "Tom Paine, stay-maker to Citizen Pluto's wife." In the evening a large fire was lighted up in the middle of town, into which was thrown the above figure, a puppet show drum all the time beating the rogue's march. The whole of the business was planned and executed by the people themselves, without the advice or interference of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood. The evening concluded with a village dance, at which bumpers of good ale went round to the health of the King and Constitution. One toast was exceedingly well received: "May the farmers of old

²⁷ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/202 Attercliffe Colliery Disbursement Accounts Book Including Wages 1789-1798.

²⁸ TNA, HO42/20 de Lancey to Dundas 13 June 1792.

²⁹ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/202 Attercliffe Colliery Disbursement Account Book Including Wages 1789-1798.

³⁰ Frank O'Gorman describes Paine burnings as 'the most dramatic expression of English loyalism'. See F. O'Gorman, 'The Paine Burnings of 1792-93', *Past & Present*, 193 (2006), p. 111.

England never live to see their stock driven off by Republicans and Levellers; and may they have courage to defend what their industry has gained.”³¹

In the same month James Milnes, a Flockton coalowner, gave his workers a roast sheep, 'twenty stone of beef, with 150 gallons of ale' at a Paine burning in that village. Toasts were given to the king, the queen and the royal family along with 'many other loyal and constitutional toasts' and God Save the King was 'repeatedly sung'.³² Despite being organised by the coalmasters the point remains that colliers enthusiastically celebrated and participated in the ritual burning of Thomas Paine. Later in the decade Yorkshire miners continued to support the establishment through financial contributions to loyalist associations.³³

High wages and Dearth: 1793-1797

³¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 Jan. 1793. The Paine burning followed a public meeting at the Royal Oak Inn in Kippax on the 12 January 1793 where it was unanimously resolved that: 'That deeply impressed with a lively Sense of the inestimable Privileges enjoyed under our most excellent Constitution, we do, in this public Manner, declare our Allegiance and unshaken Fidelity to our most gracious Sovereign, and our firm and sincere Attachment to the present Form of Government, as by Law established within these Realms.

That we cannot, without the utmost Abhorrence, hear of the daring Attempts made by seditious Combinations of Republicans and Levellers, obviously tending to undermine our invaluable Constitution, and to introduce amongst us a System of Anarchy and Confusion, in Lieu of the manifold Blessings afforded by our Laws, to the Protection of our Liberties, Lives and Propertied.

That under these Circumstances, we are determined, in our several Stations, to co-operate with the Civil Magistrate, in maintaining established Order, and promoting public Tranquillity; convinced that such, under Divine Providence, will be the most effectual means of counteracting the wicked Attempts of evil-designing Persons.'

³² *Leeds Intelligencer*, 7 Jan. 1793. For proof that Milnes was a coalowner see J. Goodchild, 'The Old Flockton Collieries, c. 1772-1893', *Northern Mine Research Society*, 19 (1982), pp. 97-122.

³³ See below p. 124.

The period 1794-96 was one of acute distress for many of the labouring classes. A prolonged summer drought in 1794 resulted in wheat yields being deficient nationally.³⁴ This was followed by an intense winter which – while excellent for the coal trade – was disastrous for winter wheat production. The price of wheat rose steeply and by mid-1795 had reached 75s. 2d. per imperial quarter. Many of the labouring poor in the West Riding could not afford the inflated prices so rioted. Yet the Yorkshire miners are conspicuously absent from the reports of food riots in 1795. It will be demonstrated that miners at certain Yorkshire pits were able to insulate themselves from the famine which affected the labouring population because of their high wages and, in some instances, the paternalistic and benevolent action of employers which preserved their standard of living. At one pit, Middleton, the miners used trade unionism to capitalise on the booming coal trade and to ensure their standard of living was maintained through the supply of discounted food.

The start of the Revolutionary Wars in 1793 stimulated the growth of industry and, reciprocally, the demand for coal rose.³⁵ Early in 1793 some Yorkshire coalowners found themselves under-manned and put out adverts for labour to meet the demand for coal: at Furnace Colliery, near Ecclesfield in Sheffield, colliers would meet ‘with Constant Employment’.³⁶ In April and May of the same year William Pickard had three adverts printed for ‘several COLLIERS’ to work in his Barnsley pit.³⁷ John Curr, the agent of the Duke of Norfolk, retrospectively commented how prosperous the ‘Attercliffe and Ponds Collierys’ were. They made a handsome £4600 profit in 1793.³⁸ On 16 January 1793 future colliery proprietors George Newton and Thomas Chambers met Charles Bowns near Westwood

³⁴ Wells, *Wretched Faces*, p. 36; Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provisions*, p. 173.

³⁵ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 150.

³⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 Jan., 28 Jan., 4 Feb. 1793; *Sheffield Register*, 11 Jan. 1793.

³⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 22 April, 29 April, 6 May 1793.

³⁸ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/214/1 Curr to Duke of Norfolk 23 Oct. 1801.

Colliery who commented on the 'eligible situation for minerals' at that time.³⁹ Further north around Leeds, a bill drawn up in 1793 highlighted the importance of the coal industry to that town. The 'Trade and Manufactures', it stated, had been 'greatly increased and extended' because of the increasing supply of coal. The bill advocated further that more coal should be sent to Leeds.⁴⁰

Throughout 1793 Yorkshire colliers' wages were high. At Thorpe Hesley Colliery in January 1793 Thomas Fullylove, working twelve days in the fortnight, got 9 loads of coal at 1s. 2d., 4 loads of slack (small coal), and headed 2 yards at 1s. 2d. per yard. He was remunerated with £1 10s. 6d. In July of the same year John Fisher 'in the level' got 2 loads of coal at 1s. 5d. per load, 5 loads of slack, and headed 12 yards earning him £1 16s. 9d. for the fortnight.⁴¹ If we divide Fullylove's and Fisher's earnings by twelve, the average daily wage for the former is 2.5 shillings and the latter 3 shillings; a substantial wage in the early 1790s when compared to labourers. In the West Riding's eastern agricultural belt the average earnings for a skilled labourer were between 1.33 and 2 shillings per day.⁴² The rate of 1.33-2 shillings per day was up to fifty percent higher than that of the general labourer at the same time.⁴³ Those working at Thorpe Hesley Colliery were, therefore, earning up to double the daily wages of general labourer.

³⁹ Sheffield Archives, TR/446/8 Transcribed notes relating to George Newton's family. Paper entitled 'Account of Mr. G. Newton's Business Life in Connection with Thorncliffe'.

⁴⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F/65/97 Printed Bill: For Better Supply of Leeds with Coals.

⁴¹ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/203 Thorpe Hesley Colliery Disbursements 1790-1801.

⁴² Masons, bricklayers, wheelwrights and carpenters. See Wells, *Wretched Faces*, p. 16

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

In Earl Fitzwilliam's enterprises, even the colliery ancillaries – both underground and surface workers – were well paid.⁴⁴ A 1794 list of employees at Lawwood Colliery near Elsecar records their daily wage rates. All of them earned between 1s. 4d. (William Barwick, who took 'care of the horses') and 2s. 6d. (Joseph Hague, the 'overlooker') per day. At the nearby newly-sunk Elsecar Colliery, Peter Bailey, and William Burtoft each earned 2s. 6d. per day for driving the gin on the surface and Samuel Bailey, the lander, earned 2s. per day.⁴⁵ Thus, even those engaged in the more ancillary tasks, such as driving the gin, were earning between 1s. and 1s. 6d. more than the general labouring man (and woman) daily.

In late December 1794 colliers at Fenton's Stanley Colliery attempted to leave work. We saw in Chapter 2 how a short strike a few weeks earlier had resulted in a threat of prosecution being brought against the colliers. The colliers, however, 'begged Messrs. Fenton not to prosecute' which they 'accordingly assented to' with the promise of 'a regular attention to their Duty'. On the 29 December, however, dissatisfaction resurfaced when Thomas Fenton, who was present at the pit, refused to allow the whimsey tenter to wind ten men out. The ten colliers demanded on 'having Holiday, it being Christmas time' but Fenton 'insisted that they should not quit their work'. The coalowner, no doubt aware of the favourable state of trade, insisted that they be returned to the bottom of the shaft until their shift was over, and they were kept at the bottom of the pit for another hour. The men evidently wanted to finish work early after Christmas; but this was, so Fenton argued, in

⁴⁴ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F100/11 An account of the Prices of getting Coals at Lawood Colliery 21 Sept. 1793. Colliers at Lawwood Colliery were paid 2s. 6d. per pit load (39 corves) and 8d. was paid for filling the corve and the same amount for barrowing, 'striking and stacking'.

⁴⁵ Sheffield Archives, WWM/A/1534 Names of Persons in all Categories Employed at Wentworth, 1794.

breach of their terms of employment. Unfortunately we do not know what the outcome of the dispute was; but it does not seem that any further action was taken.⁴⁶

There was 'almost continuous sub-zero temperatures from December' 1794 to March 1795 and the north was badly hit with recurrent falls of snow.⁴⁷ Crops failed and the price of wheat rose substantially. The following table highlights the dramatic increase in the price of wheat nationally.

Table 4:2. Average price of wheat in England (per imperial Quarter) 1793-1797.

Year	Price
1793	49s. 3d.
1794	52s. 3d.
1795	75s. 7d.
1796	78s. 7d.
1797	58s. 9d.

Source: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

In the West Riding the (average) weekly cost of a wheat-based diet for a family of four for the first quarter of the 1794-95 season (6 September-29 November 1794) was 7s. 6d. This increased in subsequent quarters to 8s. 1d., 9s. 4d. and lastly 14s. 1d.⁴⁸ The high food prices provoked the poor to riot and several violent disturbances broke out across the region. The most serious riot took place in Sheffield on 4 August, when two people were killed and several injured after the Volunteers fired into a crowd which had gathered to protest at the high prices.⁴⁹ Other disturbances across the West-Riding followed.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Goodchild, *The Coal Kings of Yorkshire*, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Wells, *Wretched Faces*, pp. 36-37; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 156.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴⁹ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, pp. 143-45.

⁵⁰ For a disturbance at Halifax see *Leeds Mercury*, 22 Aug. 1795.

High wages, which continued throughout 1795, mitigated the miners' hunger amid increasing food costs and preserved (to a certain degree) their standard of living. Throughout the crisis period of the summer of 1795 miners were still earning comparatively good wages. At Thorpe Hesley Colliery, Thomas Teasdale earned 16s. 10d. for a fortnight's work in May 1795.⁵¹ At Halton Colliery on the Temple Newsam estate near Leeds, Robert Goodall earned 18s. and John Harreson earned 15s. 9d. respectively for one week's work in August.⁵² Indeed, during the height of the hunger, adverts for colliery labour continued to be printed, demonstrating that the coal trade was brisk. At Beeston Park Colliery it was stated that 'FIFTEEN or TWENTY GOOD PICK MEN' were required, 'for Working COAL' in May 1795.⁵³ Later, at Royd's Colliery, near Leeds, it was specified that 'A NUMBER of COLLIERS, HURRIERS and OTHERS, that have been accustomed to working THIN BEDS of COAL' were required.⁵⁴ In Sheffield, John Curr wrote twice to the Duke of Norfolk in July 1795 informing him of his plans to sink another pit near to his Attercliffe Colliery suggesting how profitable the coal trade was.⁵⁵

The regular supply of food to colliers, too, may also explain why Earl Fitzwilliam's colliers remained quiet whilst other members of the labouring classes rioted. Benjamin Hall informed him of the high price of oats in the country at '26 to 30s per Quarter' and the fact that he 'bought 12 quarters to day tolerable good at 27s' for the colliers. Hall added that he thought the oats would be cheaper but 'the farmers in this country I am well informd [sic] seem determined to keep up the price'.⁵⁶ Paternalistic acts insulated Fitzwilliam's colliers from price rises. The following table, printed in the *Sheffield Iris*, demonstrates the

⁵¹ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/203 Thorpe Hesley Colliery Disbursements 1790-1801.

⁵² West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/100/HA/C/25 Halton Colliery Daybook 1793-1795.

⁵³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 4 May, 11 May 1795.

⁵⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 9 Nov. 1795.

⁵⁵ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/225 1-2 Curr to Duke of Norfolk 2 July and 4 July 1795.

⁵⁶ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F106/96 Hall to Fitzwilliam 2 Dec. 1795.

significant rise in the cost of living in South Yorkshire between pre-war levels and 1796. The newspaper lamented the recent 'alarming increase' in the price of 'necessaries of life'.⁵⁷

Table 4:3. Price of foodstuffs in Sheffield Marketplace 1793-1796.

Product	Pre-war Price	1796 Price	Percentage Increase
Bread (per quartern loaf)	6½d.	8½d.	33%
Meat (lb.)	4½d.	8½d.	89%
Butter (lb.)	9d.	1s. 2d.	55%
Cheese (lb.)	6d.	8d.	33%

Source: *Sheffield Iris*, 30 December 1796.

The swelling levels of social unrest amongst the labouring poor in the West Riding prompted the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Norfolk, to issue a proclamation to the magistrates affirming that it was their duty to 'use their utmost Endeavours and Influence to enforce due Execution of the Law against all riotous and unlawful Assemblies, Combinations and Confederacies'.⁵⁸ The *Leeds Intelligencer*, too, affirmed its belief in the political economy of supply and demand and informed its readers of the futility of combination:

A variety of well-intended paragraphs have appeared in all the public prints, on the dearness and increasing price of provisions; but most of these paragraphs are inflammatory [...] [they] excite the mobs to rise; which must increase the evil of which they complain. [...] Men may talk of forestalling and regrating; but this can never be done to any amount, by any combination of men, so as materially to affect the price of articles of the first necessity.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Sheffield Iris*, 30 Dec. 1796.

⁵⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 17 Aug. 1795.

⁵⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 29 June 1795.

The magistrates' proclamation had little effect on the Middleton colliers who struck in January 1796. They demanded 'an advance in wages'; but another demand was to be supplied with wheat at discounted prices. The *Leeds Intelligencer* lamented that the 'inhabitants of this town should be so frequently, in the winter season' without coals. The newspaper lambasted the colliers for striking and declared that 'the present combination of workmen is certainly deserving of severe punishment' because 'the pitmen in the above colliery have each a house and coals for a bare acknowledgement'. 'Such men', it continued, 'are not in any respect *objects of charity*.' As with the Middleton strikes of 1786 and 1791-92, publicity was given to the miners' earnings of '3s to 4s per day'.⁶⁰ The colliery journals tell us that the strike had a significant impact on the output and sale of coal. Only £680 11s. 11d. was received by the pit for the period 31 December 1795 to 29 January 1796.⁶¹ Compared to the previous entry (27 November to 31 December 1795) where a substantial £1874 2s. 8½d. of coal was sold, and the subsequent entry (29 January to 26 February 1796) where £1378 8s. 6½d. was sold, we can see that the strike, like former ones, had a substantial impact on profits at Brandling's colliery.⁶² Moreover, the colliery management had to source coal from elsewhere to satisfy orders. In March 1797 a late payment of £15 8s. was made to Messrs. Chadwick and Sons for 'one Boat Load of Coals ... had from them Jany 1796 when the Colliers made the Stick [struck]' and coals were also procured 'from Rothwell Haigh Colliery'

⁶⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 25 Jan. 1796.

⁶¹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/57 Middleton Colliery Journal 1796.

⁶² West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/56 Middleton Colliery Journal 1795; WYL/899/57 Middleton Colliery Journal 1796.

at the same time when 'the Colliers were striking out'.⁶³ The fact that a colliery had to buy in coals from a rival enterprise suggests the strike was effective in restricting output.

To settle the dispute, Brandling offered the colliers 'good wheat at 27s per load'⁶⁴, upon their agreeing to return to and continue their work for one year, at the present rate of wages', the same rate as given 'by Mr. Fenton at the Rothwell-haigh colliery'.⁶⁵ This suggests that food supply concerns were at the forefront of the minds of both the miners and the owners. The miners agreed and discounted wheat was supplied soon after. What this demonstrates is the intimacy between trade union action and high food prices; two phenomena which have scarcely been considered as related in existing scholarship. It is impossible to see how food scarcity concerns can be separated from trade union action when the colliery owner, Brandling, agreed to supply food to get the striking miners to return to work.⁶⁶ Table 3:4 demonstrates the purchase and sale of foodstuffs and the outcome of the transaction for Middleton Colliery.

Table 4:4. Wheat Transactions at Middleton Colliery 1796.

⁶³ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/58 Middleton Colliery Journal 1797; WYL/899/57 Middleton Colliery Journal 1796.

⁶⁴ One load = two imperial quarters.

⁶⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 25 Jan. 1796.

⁶⁶ Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 381. In the subsequent crisis of 1800-1801 this was a tactic favoured by Earl Fitzwilliam. See below p. 131. Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/3/viii/63 Fitzwilliam to Hall 7 March 1800.

Date	Colliery Buying	Colliery Selling	Expenditure	Income	Result
27 2 1796	12 Loads of Wheat from John Rawling at 38s a load.		£28 16s 0d		
ditto	34 loads of wheat from George Humble at 38s a load.		£64 12s 0d		
ditto		48 loads of wheat to the 'colliers Hurryers & others employed at Middleton Colliery at the reduced price of 24[s] a load.		£58 8s 0d	Net loss for Middleton Colliery of £40 0s 0d.
***	***	**	***	***	***
15 3 1796	48 loads of Oat meal for 'the colliers and others' from Messrs Musgraves		£108 8s 0d.		
Ditto		'For oat meal to the colliers & others at the reduced price'		£65 10s 3d	Net loss for Middleton Colliery of £42 17s 9d.
***	***	***	***	***	***
15 4 1796	Loads of 'oatmeal for the colliers &c.' from Messrs Musgraves		£103 6s.		
Ditto		'For oatmeal sold to the Colliers and others at the reduced price'.		£64 19s 9	Net loss for Middleton Colliery of £38 6s 3d.
***	***	***	***	***	***
17 6 1796	For 439 'packs of oatmeal'		£43 19s 4d		
Ditto		'For oatmeal sold to the Colliers &c at the reduced price'	£32 1s 3d.		Net loss for Middleton Colliery of £11 18s 4d.
***	***	***	***	***	***
24 6 1796	For 429 ½ packs of oatmeal obtained for the colliers &c'.		£42 19s 0s		
1 7 1796		'For oatmeal sold the colliers employed at Middleton Colliery being the am ^t [amount] sold them at the reduced price.'		£32 4s 4d	Loss for Middleton Colliery of £10 15s 0d.
***	***	***	***	***	***
9 7 1796	'For 414 Packs of Oatmeal sold to the colliers &c'.		£41 8s		
15 7 1796		'For 141 Packs of Oatmeal sold to the colliers at the reduced price'		£31 1s	Loss for Middleton Colliery of £10 7s.
***	***	***	***	***	***
5 8 1796	427 packs of oatmeal for the colliers		£42 14s		
Ditto		'For Oatmeal sold the colliers at the reduced price		£32 6s	Loss to Middleton Colliery of £10

					14s.
***	***	***	***	***	***
12 8 1796	438 packs of oatmeal 'for the colliers &c' paid to Joshua Barnard		£43 16s		
13 8 1796		'For oatmeal sold to the colliers &c at the reduced price'		£32 12 6	Loss to Middleton Colliery of £11 3s 6d
***	***	***	***	***	***
29 8 1796	437 packs of oatmeal 'for the colliers' paid J. Barnard		£40 1s 2d		
Ditto		'For oatmeal sold to the colliers &c at the reduced price'		£32 12 6	Loss to Middleton Colliery of £7 8s 6d
****	***	***	***	***	***
5 9 1796	'For 213 [stroaks?] of wheat for the colliers &c' paid Joshua Barnard		£42 12 0d		
12 9 1796		'For 426 packs of wheat [the incoming stock evidently had been halved before it was distributed] sold to the colliers'.		£42 12s	Break even.
***	***	***	***	***	***

Source: West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/57 Middleton Colliery Journal 1796.

The table shows that the sale of discounted foodstuffs continued until the end of 1796. This was around the time the colliery took over two farms to grow wheat which must have been a cheaper for the employers than purchasing it from external sources. But this had disastrous consequence for the Middleton miners when the harvest of 1799 failed, as will be discussed below.

The coal trade continued to boom throughout 1796 and into the first half of 1797. In the latter year more workers were hired at Middleton Colliery: £24 17s. was paid in 'hiring money' for 'the little coal colliers + Hurryers'. Later in the year £17 15s. 4d. was paid to Thomas Wright, the publisher of the *Intelligencer* for 'Advertisements' suggesting the demand for labour was still brisk. Middleton Colliery made a total profit of £5075 9s. 11¼d.

profit in 1797, the highest amount for the whole of the 1790s.⁶⁷ William Pickard advertised for colliers at his Barnsley pit stating that they would receive 'constant Work, liberal Wages, and good Dwelling Houses'.⁶⁸ In South Yorkshire the demand for coal necessitated Newton and Chambers to erect a steam engine at one of their Thorncliffe collieries in 1796.⁶⁹

Wages remained high in 1797. At Thorpe Hesley Colliery, a collier named Jackson, working independent of a butty, earned 16s. 6d. for 9 days work.⁷⁰ A price list for labour at Lawwood Colliery at Elsecar in 1797 stated that colliers could earn 2s. 6d. per pit load of 26 corves and that 10d. per day would be paid to 'the boys that drive the Horses for hanging on'.⁷¹

Distress: 1798-1801

From 1798 onward the coal trade entered a depression. Britain's reduced involvement in the Revolutionary Wars resulted in a fall in orders for munitions and the demand for coal decreased. Unemployment rose steadily from 1798 as many coalowners began to lay men off or reduce their wages. In 1799 the harvests failed, and the price of bread rose more steeply than in 1794-95. With low wages and expensive food, the miners took to the marketplace to redress their grievance.

Britain's declining role in the Revolutionary Wars has generally been interpreted as one of the principal causes of the trade depression that began in 1798.⁷² The government's demand for manufactured goods peaked in 1797 and then declined, and Yorkshire coal

⁶⁷ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/58 Middleton Colliery Journal 1797.

⁶⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 March 1797.

⁶⁹ Sheffield Archives, TR/446/8 Transcribed notes relating to George Newton's family. Paper entitled 'Account of Mr. G. Newton's Business Life in Connection with Thorncliffe'.

⁷⁰ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/203 Thorpe Hesley Colliery Disbursements 1790-1801.

⁷¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F100/20 Wage Rates at Lawwood Colliery Aug. 10 1797.

⁷² Wells, *Wretched Faces*, p. 57

reflected this picture. At Middleton Colliery there was a substantial fall in profit across 1797-1799. We mentioned earlier how in 1797 the colliery made £5075 9s. 11½d. profit but the following year it only made £2988 0s. 8½d.; and this further declined to £1448 11s. 11d. in 1799.⁷³ ‘Things are very flat & mony very scarce’ lamented Richard Chambers, the Tankersley coalowner and iron manufacturer in August 1798.⁷⁴ Around Bradford the state of trade was similar. In 1799 Isaac Wells wrote to the Bowling Ironworks Company stating that there had been no demand for ‘the gall coals at the New Hey Pit, of which we have about fifty tups’ and that the coal drawn from the three pits in ‘the Lamb Closes’ were ‘not saleable’.⁷⁵ Another Bradford coalowner lamented how the increase in labour during the earlier prosperous times was now a hindrance: ‘We were much in want of men. on this account we were taken advantage of & our prices are, I fear, too high [...] we wish and mean to have an alteration’.⁷⁶ Colliers at Elsecar too, presumably discontented with the state of trade, resolved to find work elsewhere. Charles Bowns wrote to his employer Earl Fitzwilliam, stating that the Elsecar colliers ‘had given notice of their intention to quit their work, and both Mr. [Benjamin] Hall and myself were of opinion it would be the best to let these act accordingly, and make no overtures for their continuance’.⁷⁷ Roger Wells’ assertion that collieries stockpiled coal instead of laying-off skilled workers during ‘temporary recessions’, is not supported by this evidence.⁷⁸

Despite the precarious position that the Yorkshire miners found themselves in they continued to demonstrate their loyalism to king and country. At a meeting of the

⁷³ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/58 Middleton Colliery Journal, 1797; WYL/899/59 Middleton Colliery Journal 1798; WYL/899/60 Middleton Colliery Journal, 1799.

⁷⁴ Sheffield Archives, TR/151/19 Richard Chambers to Longden, Chambers and Newton 8 Aug. 1798.

⁷⁵ Isaac Wells to Bowling Ironworks Company 1799 quoted in Cudworth, *History of Bolton and Bowling*, p. 209.

⁷⁶ Sheffield Archives, TR/269/124 Joseph Dawson to Longden, Newton & Co. 9 Aug. 1800.

⁷⁷ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F70/93 Charles Bowns to Fitzwilliam 18 Dec. 1797.

⁷⁸ Wells, *Wretched Faces*, p. 58.

inhabitants of Sandal near Wakefield ‘to take into Consideration the most effectual Method of promoting a Subscription for the Aid and Support of Government in this alarming Period’ Mr. Charlesworth’s colliers donated 12s. 1d. This was one of the highest amounts donated.⁷⁹ Similarly, the colliers and ironworkers at Low Moor near Bradford subscribed ‘in aid of the Government’ £120. The ‘men at Mess. Jarratt’s, Dawson, and Hardy’s collieries, near Bradford’ subscribed £50. It was also reported that the ‘men likewise employed at the different collieries in that neighbourhood are also subscribing 2s. 6d. each, to be applied for the same purpose’.⁸⁰ It seems that the prospect of economic insecurity was not enough to alter the political persuasions of the Yorkshire miners. Their ability to make political donations shows that they were not on the breadline.

For most of 1798 the price of bread remained lower than previous years and no disturbances broke out. In the summer of 1799, however, the weather turned; rain fell continuously and large amounts of agricultural land was flooded and crops were ruined. One Yorkshire contemporary recalled that ‘unripe wheat stood in six inches of water’.⁸¹ Naturally the disastrous harvest of 1799 had serious repercussions for food supplies in 1800 and prices rose substantially and at a much quicker rate than in 1794-95.⁸² The table below demonstrates the price of wheat in Leeds market.

Table 4:5: Price of Wheat in Leeds Market May 1799-May 1800.

Date	Price of wheat per load (2 imperial quarters).	Price of oats per quarter (8 bushels)
May 1799	22s.-24s.	26s.-31s. 6d.
Sept. 1799	32s.-35s.	29s.-36s.
Dec. 1799	28s.-38s.	28s.-50s.

⁷⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 May 1798.

⁸⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 21 April 1798.

⁸¹ Wells, *Wretched Faces*, pp. 37-38.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Jan. 1800	26s.-39s.	26s.-40s.
May 1800	39s.-44s.	38s.-60s.

Source: *Leeds Mercury*, 11 May 1799; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 Sept., 9 Dec. 1799; *Leeds Intelligencer* 6 Jan., 12 May 1800.

As the price of bread rose, wages fell, as the demand for coal declined. Across 15-20 July 1799 At Tong Colliery near Bradford, 1s 3d. was paid to John Webster for endheading. By the 10-15 March 1800 the piece-rate had fallen to 1s. 1d. The average earnings for one collier, Samuel Hargrave, in the same period was just over 1s. per day; clear evidence that wages were lower by 1800 than they had been earlier in the decade.⁸³

In 1799 colliers at Mr Thorpe's colliery near Wentworth struck work. 'Every man at his colliery has deserted it by combination' Charles Bowns wrote to Benjamin Hall. A proposed reduction in wages precipitated the turnout. 'The Reason of the quitting was, that he [Thorpe] wanted to reduce their prices to the same Terms as those given at the adjoining and neighbouring Collieries, which they wo^d not agree to' and 'formed a confederacy to leave'. Bowns added in his letter that Thorpe requested that the striking colliers should not be employed in any of Earl Fitzwilliam's enterprises.⁸⁴ Unfortunately we do not know what the outcome of the dispute was as nothing more is heard of it. Further north around Bradford colliers demanded an advance in wages in 1799 but there is no evidence that this precipitated a strike. Isaac Wells complained that 'I have had some trouble with the colliers wanting more wages, but I will not submit to it'. Three colliers named James Green, William Roberts and Richard Land, all from Bell Isle near Middleton were prosecuted in July 1799 for

⁸³ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), Tong4d/64 Colliers' Wage Book 1799-1800. At the nearby Bowling Ironworks and Colliery in 1807 one dozen was 25 loads and each load contained 25 bushels. See West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), BIC/10/4 George Wood's Opinion on Coal and Ironstone getters 7 May 1807.

⁸⁴ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/6/vi/54 Charles Bowns to Benjamin Hall 29 May 1799.

‘not fulfilling their agreements’ in ‘refusing to go to Work at the Colliery’ belonging to William Fenton. It was stated how they were guilty of ‘divers Misdemeaours [sic], Miscarriages and ill Behaivour towards’ Fenton’s steward, Joseph Arundel.⁸⁵ It is not known, however, why the three miners refused to work and we can find nothing further about the prosecution. Nonetheless, such prosecutions show how at times of depressed trade employers felt confident in their ability to resist the demands of the workforce.

Roger Wells argued that the dearth in Yorkshire was severer than anywhere else in the country.⁸⁶ In December 1799 a ‘soup shop’ was opened in Leeds and sold soup to the poor and unemployed at one penny per quart, and by the end of the month was supplying 4000 quarts of soup every ten days.⁸⁷ ‘All sorts of grain continuing at so extravagant a price’ grumbled Earl Fitzwilliam, ‘the lower orders are now pinch’d for the want’ of bread.⁸⁸ ‘It is not the proper season for lessening charity’ he wrote later the same month, ‘or for withholding occasional comforts which have been the habits of furnishing to the neighbourhood’.⁸⁹ This paternalism had important repercussions on Fitzwilliam’s miners’ inclination for disorder. Some Bradford coalowners paid miners to undertake other tasks in the pit. For instance, Jeremiah, Thomas, and John Clayton, colliers from the New Heigh Pit at Bowling Colliery, were engaged to wall the shaft of the pit at 18s. per yard.⁹⁰ No doubt this work would have been welcomed by the colliers, desperate for any form of remuneration. Early in 1800 the *Leeds Mercury* reported how Charles Brandling made a ‘benefaction of 20 Loads of coals to the poor of this town’ in an attempt to alleviate some of the distress facing

⁸⁵ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/138/6 Bradford Quarter Session Roll July 1799.

⁸⁶ Wells, ‘Dearth and Distress in Yorkshire, 1793-1802’, pp. 2, 4.

⁸⁷ *Leeds Mercury*, 14 Dec., 28 Dec. 1799.

⁸⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/3/viii/51 Fitzwilliam to Hall 6 Dec. 1799.

⁸⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/3/viii/55 Fitzwilliam to Hall 19 Dec. 1799.

⁹⁰ Cudworth, *A History of Bolton and Bowling*, pp. 238-39.

many members of the labouring population.⁹¹ 'The present state of the markets' stated the *Leeds Mercury*, 'holds forth a very uncheering prospect for the poor industrious workman, who toiled these eighteen months past, upon half meals, in hope of better times'.⁹²

On 6 May 1800 at Leeds, 'Colliers from some of the Neighbouring Collieries' along with other members of the labouring poor, were led into the market by a collier from Hunslet named Samuel Attack⁹³ and rioted over the high price of provisions.⁹⁴ Samuel Attack was apprehended on the evidence of local innkeeper Joseph Broadbent and sent to York Castle because he, and several others, had 'continued in a state of riot within this Borough, for upwards of one hour after the riot act had been read'.⁹⁵ Following the disorder, John Beckett issued a proclamation on behalf of the Mayor of Leeds which stated that the Magistrates were 'determined to preserve the Peace, and to do what lies in their Power to protect the Farmers and Others attending this Market', and warned those who had shown intent to riot, that a 'a STRONG MILITARY FORCE will be ready to resist them; and if any fatal Effects ensue (however the Magistrates may lament it) they will, after this Notice, hold themselves blameless'. 'Tumults and Riots', he declared, would only 'increase the Evil' of hunger. This was followed by another proclamation by Lucas Nicholson, the town clerk, who warned against further disorder, what he termed 'the Suggestions of ill-designed Persons' whose intent it was to 'seduce the Unwary to Acts of Violence and Outrage'. He advised the poor to 'humbly submit to the Dispensation of Providence' and declared it his intention to suppress any further tumults:

⁹¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 1 Feb. 1800.

⁹² *Leeds Mercury*, 1 Nov. 1800.

⁹³ He had previously been found guilty, in 1796, along with Sarah Thomson of 'a conspiracy' and was sentenced to stand in the pillory for one hour and then confined in the Wakefield House of Correction. See *Sheffield Iris* 14 Oct. 1796. It is not known what the conspiracy was.

⁹⁴ *Sheffield Iris*, 15 May 1800.

⁹⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 May 1800; *Sheffield Iris*, 15 May 1800.

Painful indeed would it be to those, to whom the Preservation of Peace in this Borough is committed, if they should find themselves under the Necessity of using any other Means for preserving Public Tranquillity, than the Mild means of Reason and Persuasion, but they must excuse the Duty committed to them, however painful; and after this friendly Warning, the Consequences, however lamentable, can only be imputed to those who act in Defiance of the Laws of their Country.⁹⁶

Atack was, however, subsequently acquitted.⁹⁷ The participation of colliers in the Leeds food riot re-emphasises the intimacy between work, wages, protest, and living standards. Colliery owners had reduced wages and/or laid men off, trade unionism was ineffective because of the slack trade, so colliers from the from the Leeds area rioted over the high price of food which had eroded their standard of living.

Although we cannot prove that Middleton colliers took part in the disturbance, shortly afterwards Charles Brandling began to supply foodstuffs at discounted prices again. On the 30 May 1800 the journal records how £104 11s. 3d. was received for 'wheat sold this month to the colliers' and the *Leeds Mercury* reported how Brandling was, again, supplying 'his workmen with wheat, at Forty Shillings per load'.⁹⁸

The situation in the West Riding worsened throughout May 1800 and public appeals were made for financial help to keep the soup kitchens going. 1,200 quarts of soup per day were being distributed to the impoverished. 'The Sum in Hand' the chairman of the Leeds relief committee R.R. Bramely declared 'cannot at the present high Price of Provisions last ... for more than the Space of One Week'. 'Humanity therefore calls loudly on the Benevolence

⁹⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 May 1800.

⁹⁷ *Sheffield Iris*, 7 Aug. 1800 and *Leeds Intelligencer* 4 Aug. 1800. Alan Booth highlights that this was relatively common and that 'the courts did attempt to be lenient' when dealing with food rioters. See Booth, 'Food Riots', p. 106.

⁹⁸ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/61 Middleton Colliery Journal, 1800; *Leeds Mercury*, 17 Jan. 1801.

of the Charitable' he added, and trusted subscriptions would continue from 'every one whom Providence has blessed with the Means of alleviating the Miseries of their Fellow-Creatures'.⁹⁹ The owner of Rothwell Haigh Colliery, Samuel Fenton pledged £2 2s. to the fund regularly¹⁰⁰ and Charles Brandling, the owner of Middleton pit, gave £5 in the last week of May 1800.¹⁰¹ But such chartable instances, however, seem to have done little to alleviate the distress. By June 1800 wheat was selling for between 36s. and 45s. a load and oats, too, had reached the astronomical height of 45s. to 59s. per quarter.¹⁰²

In Sheffield, however, the colliers did not riot. As in 1795, the continued payment of high wages, along with paternalistic and benevolent action on the part of the leading coalowners, siphoned off disorder. Other members of the labouring classes regularly rioted. In late April 1800 the poor of Sheffield attempted to break into a flour warehouse on Queen Street which the *Sheffield Iris* called an act of 'wanton, foolish, criminal outrage',¹⁰³ and in late August, 'several hundred people, principally women' rioted and smashed windows of meal-sellers' shops at West Bar.¹⁰⁴ By the beginning of September the food shortage in Sheffield had reached crisis point. On the 2 September, a market-day, angry inhabitants marched on corn mills situated along the Attercliffe Road. As the crowd passed the Duke of Norfolk's 'extensive collieries' it was expected that the colliers would join the procession, but this did not happen. Earl Fitzwilliam wrote to Portland stating that the crowd was 'manifestly [...] disappointed' of the colliers' reluctance to join, and 'there was not the appearance of a Collier among them'.¹⁰⁵ The Earl despatched the Rotherham Yeomanry

⁹⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 May 1800.

¹⁰⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 May, 19 May, 26 May 1800.

¹⁰¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 26 May 1800.

¹⁰² *Leeds Mercury*, 14 June 1800.

¹⁰³ *Sheffield Iris*, 1 May 1800.

¹⁰⁴ *Sheffield Iris*, 28 Aug., 4 Sept. 1800.

¹⁰⁵ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F44/51 Fitzwilliam to Portland 3 Sept. 1800.

Cavalry, and after a brief confrontation, the crowd scattered.¹⁰⁶ It seems that the Sheffield colliers did not join the crowd because their wages remained comparatively high. John Curr, the agent of the Duke of Norfolk, stated that one of the reasons why the Duke's collieries were not making enough profit was that, along with the bad trade, '[t]he high price of hay and corn, [and] Workmen's Wages on acct [account] of the high price of provisions'.¹⁰⁷ We know that the Duke continued to pay relatively good wages. For the week May 3 to 10 1800, the time when the food riot occurred in Leeds, at Attercliffe Colliery, William Alsop got 6 loads of hard coal at 1s. 6d. and 10 loads 4 corves of small coal which earned him £1 0s. 10d. John Hopewell who only got 2 loads of hard at 1s. 6d. and 4 loads of small, and headed 4 yards at 2 shillings per yard still managed to earn 15s. James Cutt, who got 3 loads of hards at 1s. 6d. per load and 6 loads of small at 1s., in addition to heading 8 yards at 2s. per yard, was paid £1 6s. 6d. for one weeks work.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the amount paid for getting hard coal in 1800 (1s. 6d. per load) was the same as in March 1798, revealing that at the Duke's pits piece rates were maintained despite the depressed state of trade.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, on 10 October 1801, the Duke paid a gratuity of £5 15s. to the colliers of Sheffield and Attercliffe collieries.¹¹⁰

Indeed, to recoup some profit, the Duke of Norfolk ordered that the price of coals be raised in Sheffield. On 22 April 1799 the price of small coal from Attercliffe Colliery, used for domestic consumption, was increased from 6d. per corf (Nov. 1798 rate) to 6½d. per corf. At his Sheffield (Pond Lane) Colliery the price of small coal was raised from 6½d. per corf (Nov.

¹⁰⁶ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁷ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/214/1 John Curr to D. of Norfolk Oct. 23 1801.

¹⁰⁸ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/200 Weekly Account of Coal Got and Sold at Sheffield, Manor, and Attercliffe Collieries 1789-1801.

¹⁰⁹ Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/202 Attercliffe Colliery Disbursement Account Book Including Wages 1789-1798.

¹¹⁰ Sheffield Archive, ACM/S/205 Vincent Eyre's account of the Joint Collieries of the Duke of Norfolk, 1801-05.

1798 rate) to 7½d.¹¹¹ It was this increase, it seems, that prompted the sending of a seditious letter found in Sheffield in 1800: 'the Duke of nor folk is in a bad name he rased coles so much [...] & makes the pore inhabitins [inhabitants] pay for all he Canot be [?] a onist [honest] Man'.¹¹²

Earl Fitzwilliam maintained his paternalism, and we hear of no disturbances involving colliers at his pits. He was cautious in how he exercised his paternalism, however, as the letter to Benjamin Hall reveals:

Instead of adding 2d a day to the labourers wages a quantity of potatoes could be procured or any other description of food, not being Wheat Barley or oats, I should prefer giving a quantity weekly of the value of the proposed additional wages as such an allowance would be considered as given only during the scarcity & more easily drop'd than a money payment ... let me know if this can be accomplish'd.¹¹³

Subsequently he had distributed 2 tons of rice, 8970 herrings, 90 stone of flour, 10 loads of wheat, and 51½ loads of potatoes.¹¹⁴ By January 1801, however, he decided that monetary payments would be welcomed and gave 'sixpence in money to each poor person' along with 'three beasts to the poor of Wentworth and the neighbourhood'.¹¹⁵ It seems likely that the supply of discounted food maintained Earl Fitzwilliam's colliers' living standards. There can be no doubt that they were in an enviable position in 1800-01 when compared to other members of the labouring classes.

¹¹¹ Sheffield Archive, ACM/S/212/8; ACM/212/10 Handbills of price of coal in Sheffield 1799.

¹¹² Sheffield Archives, WWM/F44/64 Unsigned seditious letter 1800.

¹¹³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/3/viii/63 Fitzwilliam to Hall 7 March 1800.

¹¹⁴ Mee, 'Employer: Employee Relationships in the Industrial Revolution', p. 51.

¹¹⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 8 Jan. 1801.

Food riots also broke out in other coalfields, suggesting that declining standards of living were not confined to the Leeds area.¹¹⁶ Despite these years being the worst on record so far for the Yorkshire miners, they did not turn to political radicalism. They continued to demonstrate their loyalism through supporting the state in apprehending radicals. In 1802 it was a collier, William Simmet (or Simnet) that betrayed Wm. Lee and Wm. Roukesley, two United Englishmen in Sheffield, to the authorities.¹¹⁷

The pinch of hunger in the West Riding was mitigated by the regular supply of soup to the poor which is possibly why riots did not break out again. In January 1801 one quart of 'exceedingly palatable, wholesome and nutritious' soup was being given to families of three persons and under, and two quarts given to families of four and upwards. In March Earl Fitzwilliam 'with his usual humane attention to the interests of the lower orders', subscribed £100 to the Sheffield relief fund.¹¹⁸ Similarly the 'Soup Establishment' in Leeds supplied soup, rice, and corned herrings to 5434 to the lower orders on the 28 February and at the end of March 8963 barrels of soup, along with 2085 quarts of rice, and 13 barrels of herrings continued to be supplied weekly.¹¹⁹ From 1801 the Yorkshire coalfield entered a period of quiescence. Food prices slumped and no more riots broke out in the region. The start of the Napoleonic Wars in 1803 revitalised the coal industry and, once again, adverts were circulated advertising for colliery labour. Wages improved and the standard of living returned to the pre-1798 level.

¹¹⁶ For riots in Dudley see *Sheffield Iris* 8 May 1800. For riots in Burslem see *Sheffield Iris* 9 Oct. 1800

¹¹⁷ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F45/105 Deposition of William Simnet 2 December 1802. For an good discussion of radicalism in 1800-01 see F.K. Donnelly and J.L. Baxter, 'Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition, 1791-1820' in S. Pollard and C. Holmes (eds.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire*, pp. 100-102. See also R. Wells, *Insurrection: The British Experience 1795-1803* (Gloucester, 1986), pp. 233-242.

¹¹⁸ *Sheffield Iris*, 8 Jan., 15 Jan., 12 March 1801.

¹¹⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 2 March 1801; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 March 1801.

Conclusion

Instances of protest were intimately linked to colliers' standards of living. Between 1786-1793, a time of good trade and low grain prices, the miners sought to improve their standard of living through trade union action, notably at Middleton and Sheffield, to increase wages. These disputes established a culture of trade unionism that was brought to bear on coalowners at a time of brisk trade and was preserved through the experience of contemporaries. Historians of miners or trade unions have denied that trade unionism existed before 1799. This chapter has proven this view to be incorrect. Between 1794-1797, at times of brisk trade but high food prices the miners at most pits remained quiet, insulated by their high wages and, at some pits, paternalistic and benevolent action of coalowners. At Middleton Colliery, trade unionism resurfaced: the miners struck for higher wages and for the supply of foodstuffs at discounted prices. There was a clear connection between trade unionism and the accessibility to food. From 1798, trade declined, rendering strike action ineffective; wages were reduced and food costs rose, eroding their standard of living for many Yorkshire miners. Colliers in the Leeds area had seen their standard of living reduced to the extent that they had become subject to the same pressures for food that affected the other members of the labouring classes so they rioted. In the South Yorkshire, wage rates remained higher, especially at the Duke of Norfolk's pits, and Earl Fitzwilliam provided food at discounted prices to his colliers. No disorder broke out in this area. All protest instances covered in this chapter – whether strikes or food riots – have the same characteristics: they are all conditioned by the miners' standard of living which is couched in the relationship between work, wages and the accessibility to food. By the time of the Leeds disturbance in 1800, however, the Combination Laws had been enacted. It is to the period 1800-1818, and

the subsequent impact the Laws had on mineworkers' protest and growing trade unionism in the region that we now turn.

Chapter 5: Combination under the Combination Laws

John Baxter argues that in the early nineteenth century ‘the miner and his experience remained at this stage more elusive than his employer’.¹ Baxter provides a challenge to resurrect the ‘elusive’ miner in a period of dramatic economic change. This chapter will investigate how and why the Yorkshire miners protested when the Combination Laws were in force and again identifies the importance of the standard of living in provoking protest. The study of protest is, again, divided into three economic time periods. Until 1810 trade was good, food was cheap, and the miners enjoyed a good standard of living. From 1810, however, food prices rose and the miners struck for a wage increase to maintain their high standards of living. It was in the final period, 1815-1818, that miners experienced a decline in their standard of living. During this period wages fell and the cost of living rose, while the reduced demand for coal rendered trade union action ineffective. In the latter period, paternalistic acts and in some cases friendly societies cushioned miners against the difficulties faced by their contemporaries and diffused the potential for disorder. Before we examine the three time periods, it is important to firstly situate this chapter in the historiography of the Combination Laws.

Historiography of the Combination Laws

The Combination Laws did not prevent strike and trade union action by Yorkshire miners. Interpretations differ to a great extent on the nature and effectiveness of the Combination Laws. Early scholars such as the Webbs saw the acts as proof of the coercive

¹ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 195.

nature of the early nineteenth century state.² The belief that the acts were a repressive piece of class legislation that retarded the growth of trade unionism met with widespread approval from left-wing scholars (such as E.P. Thompson) that followed.³ Revisionist historians challenged this consensus. The 'cruelly oppressive Combination Laws', A.E. Musson argued, were nothing but a myth based on 'historical error and misconceptions'; they did very little to hinder workmen from forming unions.⁴ This assessment has been supported by other scholars of more general trade union histories.⁵ Some historians have, however, challenged the revisionist interpretation on the grounds that it downplays the length to which elites and manufacturers went to prosecute under the Acts.⁶ A logical argument posited by more recent historians is that trade unionism was far too developed by 1799 for the Laws to have any significant effect. By the end of the eighteenth century, Alastair Reid has demonstrated, 'trade unions had established themselves as a permanent element in the country's social framework' to the extent that they just continued to operate as they had done during the period the Acts were in force.⁷

The scholarship on miners has largely concluded that the Combination Laws totally suppressed what little trade unionism existed.⁸ Robert Colls rejected this view and stressed that the Acts drove organisation underground. Colls argued that the North-Eastern pitmen

² Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 64, 69-70, 72.

³ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 216-217, 546, 575. See also H. Browne, *The Rise of British Trade Unions 1825-1914* (London, 1979), p. 4.

⁴ Musson, *British Trade Unions 1800-1875*, p. 23.

⁵ Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society*, pp. 33, 188; Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*; Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes*, p. 40; W. Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism 1700-1998* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 10-11. Fraser, however, adds that the 'shadow of illegality' may have deterred many from joining unions.

⁶ Rule, 'The Formative Years of British Trade Unionism: An Overview' in Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism 1750-1850*, p. 11; Idem., *The Labouring Classes*, pp. 259-60, 266-7; Archer, *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England*, p. 47.

⁷ C. Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen: A Prehistory of Industrial Relations 1717-1800* (London 1980), p. 152; A. Reid, *United We Stand: A History of Britain's Trade Unions* (London, 2004), pp. 21, 36-9.

⁸ Page-Arnot, *The Miners*, p. 33; Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 30; Challinor, *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners*, pp. 22-25.

continued to form unions in covert associations that surfaced and struck several times throughout the period the Acts were enforced.⁹

Many historians have stressed that friendly societies were a way that trade unions could continue to exist without being prosecuted under the Combination Laws.¹⁰ Friendly societies were, therefore, a front for trade union organisation. More recently scholars have failed to reach a consensus on the extent to which friendly societies served as covert trade unions and/or political clubs. Alastair Reid argues that sick and burial societies existed as just that: 'occupational friendly societies' that should 'be seen as merely one aspect of an urban network of plebeian savings associations' that had no trade union dimensions.¹¹ Simon Cordery contested this view and revitalised the idea that friendly societies were covert trade unions.¹² In Brian Lewis's general study of eighteenth and nineteenth century miners he argued that trade unions and friendly societies were, generally, separate organisations.¹³ Robert Colls argues that the North-Eastern 'Brotherly Friendly Society' was established as a friendly society but developed an overt trade union principle.¹⁴ Yet all of these historians have missed the point. They have failed to identify the link between friendly societies and the standard of living. This chapter will show how friendly societies were important organisations in maintaining living standards of the Yorkshire miners when the cost of living was high. Given how ineffective trade unionism was in economic depressions -

⁹ Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, pp. 246-47.

¹⁰ Musson, *British Trade Unions 1800-75*, p. 18; Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes*, p. 39; Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p. 11; Browne, *The Rise of British Trade Unions*, p. 6; Hunt, *British Labour History*, p. 191; Kirby and Musson, *The Voice of the People*, p. 13; Hill, *From Reformation to Industrial Revolution*, p. 267; Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, p. 269; Dobson, *Masters and Journeyman*, pp. 41, 45, 134-44; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 182, 199, 459, 461.

¹¹ Reid, *United we Stand*, p. 32.

¹² S. Cordery, *British Friendly Societies 1750-1914* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 6, 43, 44, 52, 53.

¹³ Lewis, *Coal Mining in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, p. 67.

¹⁴ Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, pp. 81-83, 246.

when friendly societies emerged - it is clear that they served a different purpose than to agitate for wage increases.

Prosperity: 1802-1809

Across the Yorkshire coalfield the local press gave full coverage to the passage of the Combination Acts. The *Sheffield Iris* quoted the laws in full to 'apprise the public' and the *Leeds Intelligencer*, likewise, informed its readers of the government's intentions to 'prevent the combination of workmen'.¹⁵ In the immediate aftermath of the passage of the Acts little happened in the way of trade union agitation amongst miners. The coal trade continued to stagnate across 1801-02 rendering trade unionism ineffective. The Yorkshire miners' standard of living remained lower than much of the previous decade. It was not until late 1803, when demand for war industries returned, that the depression began to lift and standards of living began to rise.

In the winter of 1802, the Middleton colliers published a request for public subscriptions at Christmas to help with relieving the distress amongst the miners through financial contributions to a 'Benefit Society'. In their 'humble Address' the Middleton miners asked for 'Humane [...] Christmas Benevolence' to 'alleviate much Affliction'. They declared that their 'Benefit Society' no longer had funds to 'allow the necessary Supplies that our Afflictions demand'. The miners also suggested that the dangerous nature of their employment exacerbated the dependency on the society's reserves. The 'frequent, sudden, and untimely Deaths' had resulted in significant numbers of 'Widows and Fatherless Children' and they trusted that 'they will not withhold this Sympathy and their Aid, which

¹⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 25 Sept. 1800; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 28 July 1800.

will be gratefully received'.¹⁶ Money was to be sent to 'Mr. John Broadhead, Tea-Dealer, Briggate, Leeds' - who was stated as an 'Honorary Member' - and to 'Wm. Bedford, Book-keeper at Leeds Coal Staith'. It is hard to see how this organisation could be a trade union given it had honorary members and that money was to be given through external agents. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest the Middleton colliers 'benefit society' continued to seek money in the following year. The restart of the French Wars and the upturn in trade may go some way to explaining this. This friendly society was clearly oriented towards improving or maintaining living standards at a time of depressed trade and high food costs.

The Yorkshire coalfield entered a period of prosperity between 1803 and 1809. The start of the Napoleonic Wars increased the demand for coal, and as a result, high wages were offered as they had been before the depression began in 1798.¹⁷ Real wages rose as large imports maintained supplies of essential foodstuffs and commodities.¹⁸ Coal working continued to expand to meet the demands from the war industries and adverts reappeared for colliers in the local press. In December 1803, for example, an advert for labour at Tong Colliery stated that miners would meet with 'constant Employ and good Wages'.¹⁹ This advertisement was reprinted several times across the next two years.²⁰ Yorkshire coalowners even advertised as far away as the Black Country for labour.²¹ George Newton, the Tankersley coalowner later described the war years as 'a long continuous tide of

¹⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 Dec., 27 Dec. 1802.

¹⁷ Flinn and Stoker argue that during the Napoleonic War, colliery labour was 'scarce'. Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 342.

¹⁸ Bohsteadt, *The Politics of Provisions*, p. 240.

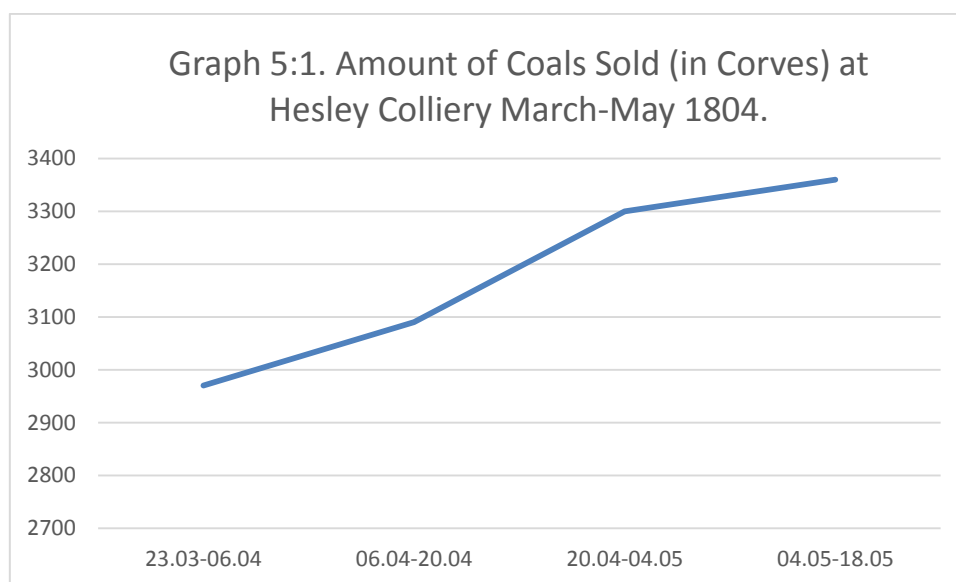
¹⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 Dec. 1803.

²⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 26 Dec. 1803, 2 Jan., 9 Jan., 16 Jan., 1804, 3 June, 1 July, 8 July 1805.

²¹ Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 343

prosperity’.²² The cost of food remained lower than previous years allowing the miners to enjoy a relatively good standard of living.

The year 1804 was a particularly good year for the coal trade. Longden, Newton and Chambers, colliery owners and ironmasters, received a flurry of letters from other local coalowners requesting various materials for their collieries. Joseph Charlesworth, the owner of Holling Hall Colliery near Newmillerdam, for instance, ordered a ‘load of bottom plates’ for the colliers’ use in September 1804 and stressed that they were ‘immediately wanted’. Later the same month, Thomas Fenton ordered metal parts for his collieries at Rothwell Haigh and Greasbrough.²³ It was reported that Samuel Thorp of Gawber ‘was sending 100 waggons of Silkstone coal per week to the canal wharf’.²⁴ At the Duke of Norfolk’s Hesley Colliery near Sheffield production gradually increased across 1804.



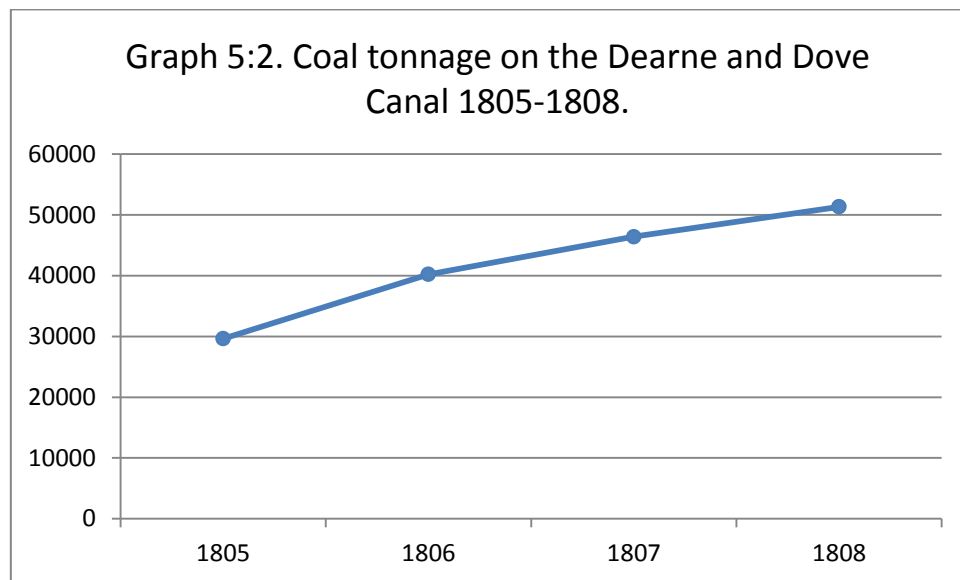
Source: Sheffield Archives, ACM/S/209/1-4 Hesley Colliery Fortnightly Accounts 1804.

²² Sheffield Archives, TR/149/11 George Newton to Mr. Pipe 12 Dec. 1816.

²³ Sheffield Archives, TR/271/58 Joseph Charlesworth to Longden, Newton Chambers & Co. 4 Sept. 1804; TR/271/62 Thomas Fenton to Longden, Newton Chambers & Co. 9 Sept. 1804.

²⁴ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 194.

Coal tonnage figures for the Dearne and Dove Canal, meticulously kept by Earl Fitzwilliam, similarly demonstrated the year-on-year increase in coal transportation from Elsecar.



Source: Sheffield Archives, WWM/F68/7 Annual tonnage statement Dearne and Dove Canal 1805-1806; WWM/F68/13 Annual tonnage statement Dearne and Dove Canal 1806-1807; WWM/F68/14 Annual tonnage statement Dearne and Dove Canal 1807-1808.

As Martin Dauntton reminds us, investment in canals, and the subsequent expansion of the market, helped inland coalfields like Yorkshire to expand. They were no longer confined by the ‘tight geographical limits upon the application of coal’.²⁵ ‘They are for sinking another coal-pit’ wrote James Hardy to his employer Walter Spencer-Stanhope in 1805; ‘Hitherto they have come very easily to their coal’.²⁶ Just under a year later he wrote again informing him that ‘[t]he colliers are going to sink at the other end of town’ and subsequently added

²⁵ Dauntton, *Progress and Poverty*, p. 219.

²⁶ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), SpSt/5/2/86 Hardy to Spencer-Stanhope 25 July 1805.

that '[t]he colliers are going on very well Woodheads employs in general Four pick men'.²⁷ Some coalowners capitalised on the booming demand and raised the price of coal. Joshua Biram, Earl Fitzwilliam's agent, ordered that the price of coal be advanced by 5s. at Lawwood Colliery from 3s. per dozen corves to 8s. per dozen corves.²⁸ The increased cost did not put customers off, and two months later Biram wrote again explaining that 'we have had a good sale for coal at Elsecar and Lawwood Collieries, and also there has been great sale at greasbro colliery'.²⁹ After Christmas 1805 Biram anticipated further profit: 'there are great expectations of the Demand for coals being very brisk' he wrote.³⁰ This seems to have continued throughout 1806 and 1807.³¹ 'There has been a good sale for coals lately', Biram wrote, 'in consequence of which, I have ordered for men to be got ready at the beginning of the year to finish the remainder of the coal that may be got [at] Cortworth present pit'.³² Across the same year 'steady workmen' were informed they would 'meet with liberal Encouragement' at Royds Colliery near Leeds.³³ In 1808 further collieries were sunk at Elsecar although production was briefly halted when the canal basin had to be dredged in the spring.³⁴ Following this 'a great number of boats have come [...] for coals', Biram informed Fitzwilliam.³⁵ Like Earl Fitzwilliam, other colliery owners in South Yorkshire took advantage of the favourable demand for coal and raised their prices.³⁶

²⁷ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), SpSt/5/2/86 Hardy to Spencer-Stanhope 13 March 1806 and 7 Aug. 1806.

²⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/i/15 Biram to Fitzwilliam 15 May 1805. Robert Colls highlights that there was a 'great demand for labour' in the Durham coalfield in 1805. See Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, p. 123.

²⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/i/30 Biram to Fitzwilliam 27 July 1805.

³⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/i/65 Biram to Fitzwilliam 30 December 1805.

³¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/i/103 Biram to Fitzwilliam 7 June 1806; StwP/5/i/119 Biram to Fitzwilliam 19 July 1806; StwP/5/i/136 Biram to Lord Milton 12 Dec. 1806.

³² Sheffield Archives, WWM/F106/49 Joshua Biram to Fitzwilliam 9 Dec. 1807.

³³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 26 Jan. 2 Feb., 9 Feb. 1807; *Leeds Mercury*, 7 Feb. 1807.

³⁴ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/iii/1 Fitzwilliam to Biram 14 Feb. 1808.

³⁵ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/ii/30 Biram to Fitzwilliam 11 May 1808.

³⁶ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/ii/28 Biram to Fitzwilliam 7 May 1808.

Across the last two years of the decade the brisk trade continued. In 1809 Joseph Woodwiss, the agent or owner of Wosbrough Bridge Colliery near Barnsley wrote a letter to Longden, Newton and Chambers complaining that their lack of speed with an order was holding up the working of the colliery: 'the wheels did not come Wensday [sic]; this is to inform you that we are intirely at a stand for them therefor I could wish you to be so kind as to send them to day or to morrow without fail'.³⁷ Near Leeds, Walter Spencer-Stanhope's colliers were reported to be 'very busy going on with their work', and Biram reported to Fitzwilliam 'the sale at Elsecar new colliery seems [to be] going on well'.³⁸

The high wages enjoyed by the miners before 1798 were restored at some point around 1804 when the industry once more began to expand significantly. At Middleton Colliery across the week of 27 April-5 May 1805 substantial amounts were earned. For example, waggonmen John Crompton, Levi Wales, and John Hindle earnt between 12s. and 15s. for six days work; 2s. or more per day per man. Across the 20-26 December 1806 large amounts were earned, despite most of the workforce taking Christmas Day off. The above John Hindle earned 13s. for six days work; one of the bricklayers John Hardwick was remunerated with 14s. despite having both Christmas Day and Boxing Day off work. Even the general labourers were well paid. Samuel Littlewood, who took Christmas Day off earned 12s. 6d. for the week; John Rodginson 10s. 6d. for the same; William Gregg, Josh Bold and William Fisher, all who similarly took Christmas Day off, earned 10s. for the week. Thus even the general colliery labourers were earning in excess of 2s. per day in the winter of 1806.³⁹ In Earl Fitzwilliam's collieries it seems the same was true. Joseph Law, an eleven-

³⁷ Sheffield Archives, TR/274/11 Joseph Woodwiss to Longden, Newton Chambers & Co. 13 July 1809.

³⁸ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), SpSt/5/2/86 Hardy to Spencer-Stanhope 11 June 1810; Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/ii/92 Biram to Fitzwilliam 11 Jan. 1809.

³⁹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/77 Middleton Colliery Time Book 1805-07.

year-old boy employed at Lawwood Colliery earned 6s. a week in 1808.⁴⁰ And, it seems that some colliers had managed to build up enough savings to insulate them for significant periods of time when out of employment. When William Evans, an Elsecar collier, was injured in the Autumn of 1809 it was stated he 'was about 6 weeks off work without making any application for assistance' suggesting his family survived without the main breadwinner's wage.⁴¹

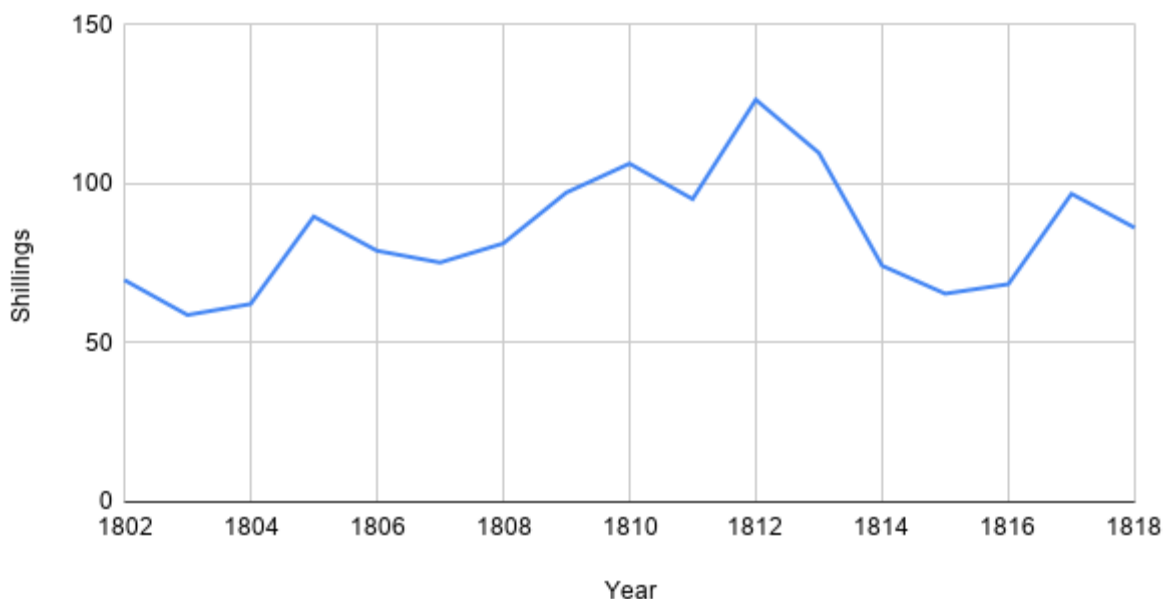
Substantial imports of foodstuffs and the increase in money wages from their nadir of 1800 helped acclimatise working families to wartime inflation.⁴² It seems that the expanding trade in war related industries meant that employment was available, wages remained relatively good, and food could be procured without much problem. For the first decade of the nineteenth century the Yorkshire miners enjoyed a very good standard of living: trade boomed, wage rates were high, and food was available. When the price of food began to increase significantly in 1810 and 1811 strikes broke out. The following graph highlights the cost of wheat (per imperial Quarter) across 1802-1818.

⁴⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/ii/73 Biram to Fitzwilliam 1 Dec. 1808; WWM/StwP/5/ii/80 Biram to Fitzwilliam 13 Dec. 1808.

⁴¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/ii/184 Biram to Fitzwilliam 19 Jan. 1810.

⁴² Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provision*, p. 240.

Graph 5:3. Price of Wheat (per Imperial Quarter) 1802-1818



Source: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

A list of employees at the Elsecar collieries in 1808 provides an insight into the numbers employed and their various occupations. In total there were ninety five people at work in and around the pit in that year. Thirty two of them (33.7%) were listed as 'colliers': i.e. those who cut the coal. Twenty two of them (23.2%) were recorded as 'trammers'. Ten (10.5%) were noted as 'Horse Lads' and eight of them (8.4%) were enumerated as 'ginneymen'. The remaining twenty three employees (24.2%) were employed in a variety of roles: packer; road mender; hanger on (x2); horse tender; topsman (x5); whimsy tender (x2); corf greaser (x2); corf mender; labourer (x3); smith (x2); carpenter; engine tender and a sleek cinder burner. However, at Elsecar Old Colliery only 20 men were employed. Nine of them were colliers (45%); three of them were topsmen (15%); three of them horse lads (15%); two were gin drivers (10%), and amongst the remaining three (15%) there was a

hanger on, a horse tender, and a filler.⁴³ This evidence perhaps best highlights the diversity of occupations above and below ground.

Loyalism remained an important aspect for many Yorkshire miners. In March 1805 David Beaver, a coalminer from Thornton (Bradford), was enumerated as a member of the loyalist 'Lodge of Prince George' which met at the White Lion in nearby Howarth. The occupational makeup of the other members undoubtedly hints that this society was for the wealthy, artisan elite. Also enrolled in the society were cabinet makers, stone masons, worsted manufacturers, corn millers, a glazer, an engineer, a shuttle maker, and a clock maker.⁴⁴ Although artisans made up the backbone of radicalism there can be no doubt they were important in loyalist politics too. Harry Dickinson suggested that it was the 'more militant loyalists' that joined the Volunteers' and colliers are significantly represented in this respect.⁴⁵ The Staincross Volunteers contained many miners. Richard Bollands, William Birkett, Andrew Dyson, John Eyre, John Fish, Josh Firth, Richard Hattersley, Thomas Mallard, Joseph Saddler, David Stafford, and Benjamin Scott, all from Cawthorne, served in this unit in 1800. Moreover, of the forty-two enumerated, colliers made up the largest percentage of any occupation (26%). This was closely followed by labourers (16%) and servants (14%).⁴⁶ The importance of Cawthorne colliers in this Volunteer force to resist Napoleon cannot be doubted. Indeed, in 1799 William Spencer-Stanhope described that the West Riding Volunteers was 'an Epitome of the Island itself [...] We have Weavers of Wool of Cotton of Linen we have Colliers and [...] Smiths'.⁴⁷

⁴³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F106/56 A list of Colliers and Labourers Employed at Elsecar Old Colliery 1808.

⁴⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/144/4 Pontefract Quarter Session Roll April 1805.

⁴⁵ Dickinson, 'Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism 1789-1815', p. 113.

⁴⁶ C.T. Pratt, *A History of Cawthorne* (Barnsley, 1882), pp. 60-61.

⁴⁷ Wells, *Wretched Faces*, p. 268.

Rising Living Costs and Protest: 1810-1812

The prosperity of the coal industry continued into 1810. However, for many trades such as weaving, 1810 ushered in a period of economic stagnation. Napoleon's blockade limited exports and warehouses filled up with goods.⁴⁸ In the summer twenty-six British banks failed. Exports to Britain's last significant market, the United States, closed when Britain refused to repeal the Orders in Council. Two years of industrial stagnation and distress for many followed.⁴⁹ Food prices increased to the distress of the labouring poor.⁵⁰ The cost of provisions had not been as high since the famine years of 1800-1801, with the average price of wheat in England (per imperial quarter) standing at 106s. 5d., despite large imports of grain.⁵¹ There is no evidence that the coal trade was adversely affected by the depression and it is clear that demand continued brisk and at a high price for the consumer. High wages continued to be paid in Yorkshire pits. It was the fluctuating food prices - a threat to their high standard of living - which provoked strike action for a wage increase.

Led by James Parkin and John Thorp, Tankersley colliers struck work for 'several Days' in December 1810. The strike quickly collapsed, however, and warrants were issued to the parish constables for the arrest of James Parkin. According to a surviving warrant, Parkin 'with several other journeymen colliers' entered into a combination three months previously 'to obtain an advance of wages'.⁵² We have no evidence whether the strike was successful or not; but the public apology the union leaders were subsequently made to issue strongly suggests that it failed.

⁴⁸ C. Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars 1793-1815* (London, 1979), p. 153. For a similar overview of the economic crisis of 1810-1812 see Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provision*, pp. 240-41 and I. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Folkestone, 1979), p. 64.

⁴⁹ Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars 1793-1815*, p. 153.

⁵⁰ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 198.

⁵¹ Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, pp. 488.

⁵² Sheffield Archives, TR/453/7/1 Warrant issued to parish constables 28 Dec. 1810. In all probability a similar warrant was issued for the arrest of John Thorp but unfortunately it has not survived.

Using colliery truck shop purchase books, we can sketch out a brief picture of James Parkin before the strike. We know Parkin began work at the colliery at some point before or in 1801, and he is recorded in the shop books as purchasing a book costing 2d. He regularly bought various goods at the shop including candles (presumably for use underground) and meal, cheese, and coffee, and he used the shop considerably in 1803 and 1804. Across 1805 to 1807 he habitually purchased malt and hops which may indicate that he brewed beer, either for himself or for sale to other colliers. But, by the time the warrant was issued for his arrest, we have no trace of him in the shop purchase books.⁵³ The last reference we have to him was the public noticed dated 31 December 1810 admitting the error of his ways that he signed with John Thorp, the other leader of the combination.

WHEREAS, We the Undersigned have been concerned with other Colliers in the Employment of Messrs. Longden, Newton, Chambers and Scott, at Thorncliffe Iron Works, in an unlawful Combination to demand an unreasonable Advance of Wages, and remained out of Employment several Days, to the great Inconvenience and Disadvantage of the said Company, for which they have commenced a Prosecution against Us, but which they have kindly consented to withdraw in Consideration of our signing a Submission to be inserted in the Public Papers at our Expense. We do therefore humbly acknowledge the Impropriety of our Conduct, and return Thanks or the Lenity we have experiences and promise not to be guilty of the like in future.⁵⁴

We know even less about John Thorp. Two John Thorps – a father and son - are mentioned in the colliery purchase books which makes it impossible to know which one formed the union. A John Thorp worked at the colliery in the summer of 1795.⁵⁵ This was presumably the same man that still worked at the colliery across 1805-1810 along with William Thorp,

⁵³ Sheffield Archives, TR/335 Shop Purchase Book 1801-1804; TR/336 Shop Purchase Book 1805-1807; TR/337 Shop Purchase Book 1807-1811.

⁵⁴ *Wakefield Star and West Riding Advertiser*, 11 Jan. 1811; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 14 Jan. 1811.

⁵⁵ Sheffield Archives, TR/292/2/3 Thorncliffe Colliery Accounts 18 April-2 May 1795; TR/292/2/5 Thorncliffe Colliery Accounts 16 May-30 June 1795; TR/292/2/10 Thorncliffe Colliery accounts 25 July to [18?] August 1795.

Thomas Thorp and John Shaw Thorp who were presumably other family members.⁵⁶ The latter, John Shaw Thorp, was listed in the 1807-1810 purchase books as 'John Thorp Jun' highlighting the familial connection. But we do not know whether it was father or son who was active in leading the strike.⁵⁷ We hear nothing more of the combination formed at Tankersley after the arrest of Parkin and Thorp.

In January 1811 the Yorkshire press gave much publicity to the suppression of a colliers' union in Cheshire suggesting miners in other regions felt their standards of living were under threat.⁵⁸ In September 1811 the *Iris* lamented how the '[h]arvest in some parts of the Country has not been quite so productive as in the last year', and by December wheat had reached a maximum of 39s. per load in Leeds.⁵⁹ Although prices were lower than in the previous year they were higher than they had been for most of the first decade of the nineteenth century. The average selling price of wheat in England (per imperial quarter) in 1811 was 95 shillings.⁶⁰ Coal was still in demand, however, and one correspondent to the *Iris* lamented 'the want and the high price of coal'.⁶¹

In the spring of 1811 Earl Fitzwilliam advanced the miners' wages in his pits after his colliers requested an increase for abnormal place work, where coal was harder and thinner than usual and, therefore, more difficult to get. The colliers requested 6d. extra per pit load (3¼ dozens) on the current rate of 3s. per pit load which they were paid for getting the 'soft' coal. Biram added that the colliers who got the 'very hard' coals at the 'North side' of Elsecar Colliery were being paid 3s. 6d. or 3s. 9d. per load and wrote to Fitzwilliam for his opinion. Earl Fitzwilliam thought that the miners' request was perfectly acceptable:

⁵⁶ Sheffield Archives, TR/336 Shop Purchase Book 1805-1807.

⁵⁷ Sheffield Archives, TR/337 Shop Purchase Book 1807-1810.

⁵⁸ *Sheffield Iris*, 1 Jan. 1811.

⁵⁹ *Sheffield Iris*, 24 Sept. 1811; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 Dec. 1811.

⁶⁰ Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

⁶¹ *Sheffield Iris*, 5 Nov. 1811.

‘Respecting the demands of the colliers for additional allowances for getting where the coal now proves hard it seems no more than is reasonable, & the allowance ask’d no greater than is already given under similar circumstances’. Wage rates were therefore soon augmented.⁶² The miners at Earl Fitzwilliam’s pits continued to enjoy high wages for the remainder of the year.

In the winter of 1811, amid high food prices, colliers at Beeston Park pit struck for a wage increase. James Leather, the colliery agent, wrote to the *Leeds Mercury* complaining that the men in his employ had:

left their Work on the Ninth Inst. and have been strolling about the Town of Leeds, and its Neighbourhood, ever since, giving themselves the Names of ‘Stick Colliers,’ and propagating many Falsehoods, in Order to excite the Pity and extort Money from the unwary. It is understood their Principle Preference is, that their Wages were about to be abated, so as they could not make a Living by their Labour. The Truth is, the Beeston Park Colliers had a higher Price offered them before they left their Work, that is given by any substantial Colliery in the Neighbourhood, for the same Quantity of Work; and that Price will not be exceeded when the Colliery goes to Work again.

Leather subsequently stated that if ‘these Combinations are encouraged and the Price of Colliers’ Labour advances’ the price of coals would advance ‘which are already too high for the manufacturing Poor’.⁶³ The colliers replied in what seems to be the first instance of Yorkshire miners propagating their reasons for striking through the medium of the press. Their reason for turning out, they suggested, was twofold: resistance to the imposition of an underground steward who they did not feel capable of performing that activity, and an

⁶² Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/ii/331 Biram to Fitzwilliam 4 May 1811; WWM/StwP/4/iv/69 Fitzwilliam to Biram 6 May 1811; StwP/5/ii/333 Biram to Fitzwilliam 8 May 1811.

⁶³ *Leeds Mercury*, 30 Nov. 1811.

increase in wage rates because of the rise in the cost of foodstuffs. 'In Answer to an Advertisement in the last Mercury', they declared,

the BEESTON PARK COLLIERS do declare that they do not desire any more Wages than all other Colliers in the Neighbourhood have.

Every feeling Man must be aware of the Dangers Colliers expose themselves to daily. It is well known that the Beeston Park Colliery is very liable to the Fire Damp, and amongst One Hundred Men and Boys, it cannot be supposed that all are equally careful. The slightest Neglect might subject the Whole Body to be blown out of the Pits' Mouth, and leave their Wives and Families to lament their untimely End.

Hitherto, under the Hand of Providence, no serious injury has arisen; but the Colliers have felt considerable Alarm from the Appointment of any Person to superintend "the Bottom Work," who, they fear, may not be properly acquainted with the Nature of the Pits.

Mr. LEATHER asserts, that the Beeston Park Colliers have *more* Wages than are given at any other Colliery. The Colliers again declare this to be false. On the contrary, he has pulled down their Wages at a Time when every Article, a poor Family wants, is risen.

They are ready to go to their Work upon the same Terms they have had for many Years, as their Whole Desire is to work with Safety to themselves, and to earn a decent Support for their families.⁶⁴

In the subsequent edition of the *Mercury* Leather wrote again and denounced the miners' reply. He declared that if the miners were so worried by the threat of explosions they would 'have changed their Trade long ago, and not have brought up their Children to a Business where they must be subjected to such dreadful Danger of their Lives'. In closing, Leather condemned the demand for additional wages and claimed that their wages were already too high. 'They have not been offered less than they have had for many Years back, except for working by the Day' he declared, 'which I do not intend any of them should be troubled

⁶⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 7 Dec. 1811.

with in future, as I know whether I give them Three or Ten Shillings per Day, many of them will not do One Shilling's worth of Work for it.'⁶⁵

The strike endured throughout December with both sides reluctant to give way. By late December it seems that the strike had generated sufficient interest in the district for contemporaries to add to the debate. A COLLIER'S FRIEND' gave wholehearted support for the miners and highlighted that they were 'so useful a Body of Men' and that 'James Leather's Statement is false and untrue; so much so that I think he ought to have signed himself Agent to *Baron Munchausen*.' The author went on to state that Leather

wants to reduce their weekly wages from a *Guinea* to *Eighteen Shillings* per week, when by the Day; and when they are by the Piece he has increased the Quantity of their Labour, which will make from Three to Five Shillings and Sixpence per Week difference in their Wages; besides having reduced the Quantity of Coals used at their Houses from *Eight* to *Five* Pulls every six Weeks.⁶⁶

The Beeston Park strike was probably the first where the positions of both sides were articulated through the press. Although publicity was given to the imposition of the underground steward it seems that the principal cause of the dispute was a demand for higher wages when the cost of living had increased. Other longer-term issues also played a part, such as the erosion of the miners' customary coal allowance. The miners evidently felt that strike action was the best way to maintain or improve their standard of living when they knew the demand for coal continued brisk.

⁶⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, 7 Dec. 1811.

⁶⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 28 Dec. 1811.

The 1810 and 1811 strikes have important implications for the historiography. The fact that miners were able to organise and come out on strike shows, as Musson and others have argued, that the Combination Laws were ineffective in proscribing trade unionism. It is clear that the Tankersley union had a three-month gestation period which suggests that the colliers were able to organise covertly and were only prosecuted under the Combination Laws when the union surfaced to take strike action. Although the Acts were largely ineffective in circumscribing organisation, in this instance, they were relatively speedily applied when the union came out into the open. In contrast, the miners at Beeston Park were able to strike for over a month without any prosecution. This is testament to the inefficacy of the legislation. Furthermore, the fact that the miners were brazen enough to articulate the demands of their combination through the press suggests they were not worried about the effects of the legislation or being prosecuted. Both strikes took place at a time when the demand for coal continued brisk and the miners knew they would have more chance of success. The strikes took place when the cost of foodstuffs had risen. The real significance of the strike was the connection to living standards. The strikes took place because the miners felt their living standards were under threat. Interestingly the formation of a miners' friendly society was linked to a rise in the cost of living between 1810 and 1811.

In January 1811 the 'Friendly Associated Coal-Miners, within the Township and Parish of Wakefield' was established. Despite the context of strike action, this friendly society did not have any trade union dimensions. The aims and objectives of the society were wholly welfare orientated. Rule 10, for instance, stated that 'If any Member shall happen to be sick or lame and receive Relief on account thereof he shall during such Sickness and Lameness be exempt from paying his Weekly Subscriptions'. Similarly, Rule 20 declared that If a member was unemployed, and it was not 'through his own Misconduct', he would be

entitled to 'Relief or Assistance from the Fund' at the 'Discretion of the Officers'. Unemployment or injury could have significant repercussions for families at a time when the cost of living had risen. Thus under Rule 22 any collier who was unable to work through sickness or lameness would be entitled to the substantial sum of 'six shillings weekly and every Week during the time of his Unfitness of Inability'. The society's rules made it clear that they would not tolerate any member participating in trade union action. Rule 25 stated that:

If any Member of this Society shall be convicted in any Court of Justice of any Felony or of combining with any other Person or Persons illegally to raise Wages; every such Member so offending in any of the Cases aforesaid, shall be immediately expelled [from] this Society, and forfeit and lose all the Benefits thereof:-

Furthermore, the Association was approved at the Wakefield Quarter Sessions on 17 January 1811. Two of the West Riding's principal magistrates, Godfrey Wentworth-Wentworth and Jeremiah Dixon approved the existence of the Association, which they would not have done had they been suspicious about its intentions. The interpretation that friendly societies were covert trade unions can hardly be accepted as realistic – at least not in the case of the Yorkshire miners - given this evidence. It is not known how long the Association existed or how many members subscribed.⁶⁷ Across 1810-1811 therefore, it seems that trade unions and friendly societies coexisted together but were mutually exclusive. They may have, however, shared members.

In 1812 the stagnation of other trades gradually began to affect the Yorkshire coal industry and coal stocks built up at the pithead as markets could not be found. Trade union

⁶⁷ National Union of Mineworkers Archive. I am grateful to the archivist Mr. Paul Darlow for bringing this document to my attention.

action, therefore, was rendered useless. The cost of foodstuffs rose dramatically throughout 1812. The yearly average price of wheat reached 126s. 6d. per imperial quarter: the highest it had ever been. The famine prices of 1800-01 were quickly eclipsed.⁶⁸ In April, the poor in Sheffield rioted over the price of provisions, and broke into the cellars of potato dealers and stole fish, grain, potatoes and flour.⁶⁹ There is no reference to any collier participation in this disorder, despite the coal trade being affected. Indeed, John Howson, Walter Spencer-Stanhope's steward at Cannon Hall wrote to his employer on April 15, the day after the Sheffield riot, stating

This day at Barnsley there has been an alarm, as a great number of suspicious fellows (apparently most of them colliers and Ironstone getters strangers) were hanging about the Market, but nothing serious broke out, tho the Butter people were much alarmed and dare not set their Butter at more than from 4d to 6d pr pound lower than it had before been sold at⁷⁰

Earl Fitzwilliam sought whatever means necessary to keep his colliers in some form of employment:

By a letter of [Charles] Bowns, I find we not have less than 2500 doz: of coal on hand at Elsecar, the Darwins having only one furnace at work, & I conclude from the tenor of B's letter, the water-sale very slack indeed, or none at all – under the circumstances it is necessary to reduce the getting, which necessarily calls for a reduction in the number of pick-men [...] if however for the purpose of reducing the general quantity gotten to a level with the general demand, the whole number of pickmen must be reduced, with a view to avoiding throwing any of them out of work, I wish you would consider if such men could be employ'd in carrying on levels, or

⁶⁸ Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

⁶⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F45/127 H. Parker to Fitzwilliam 15 April 1812; *Sheffield Iris* 21 April 1812; West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/151/7 Rotherham Quarter Session Roll Aug. 1812; Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 209. The Riot Act was read and the crowd subsided. Another crowd, however, arrived and was led by the radical tailor John Blackwell. The crowd, which numbered 4000-5000, converged on the Spital Hill Militia Depot in the Wicker, overpowered the guards and with shouts of 'all in a mind', 'succeeded in destroying 3 or 400 stand of arms'.

⁷⁰ Barnsley Archives, SpSt/60586/297 John Howson to Walter Spencer-Stanhope 15 April 1812.

making any winnings for future works, though such levels or winnings may not be immediately required – if no such employment can be found for them, I would have them employ'd in making the new road, or in any other work, that will furnish them a livelihood, till an increased demand of Coal shall call them again to their old business.⁷¹

Five days later the colliers were put on short time with no getting taking place one day every fortnight.⁷² Nearby at Greasbrough Colliery the Fenton's reduced the price of coal from 17s. or 17s. 6d. to 15s. a waggon and were reported to have a 'good sale lately' because of it.⁷³ It seems the miners at this pit were kept in employment. Around Leeds the picture was similar. James Hardy informed Walter Spencer-Stanhope that 'at present they [the colliers] are very slack of work' and added that 'they are very industrious men and are deserving of encouragement'.⁷⁴ Earl Fitzwilliam ordered that potatoes be distributed free to his employees: 'I would have the potatoes given, & not sold: you will distribute them among those who work under us'.⁷⁵ Although in the spring of 1813 he reneged on this commitment and instructed Joshua Biram to distribute them at 9d. a peck, but this was still considerably less than the market price. Biram maintained that this was a 'great service to them at this scarce time'.⁷⁶ At some pits it seems the customary relationship of supplying fuel for the

⁷¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/4/v/33 Fitzwilliam to Biram 12 Dec. 1812. Carl Griffin suggests that road making was a regular alternative to unemployment in the early nineteenth century. See Griffin, *The Rural War*, p. 43.

⁷² Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/iii/105 Biram to Fitzwilliam 17 Dec. 1812.

⁷³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/iii/115 Biram to Fitzwilliam 20 Jan. 1813; WWM/StwP/4/v/37 Fitzwilliam to Biram [undated] Jan. 1813.

⁷⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), SpSt/5/2/86 Hardy to Spencer-Stanhope 24 April 1811.

⁷⁵ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/4/v/13 Fitzwilliam to Biram 4 May 1812.

⁷⁶ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/4/v/48 Fitzwilliam to Biram 5 April 1813; StwP/5/iii/46 Biram to Fitzwilliam 8 April 1813.

miners' households free of charge continued. Richard Milnes stated to Charles Bowns that the miners at Newhall Colliery near Sheffield 'pay nothing for their Coals'.⁷⁷

Nevertheless colliers at some pits were affected by the provision shortages in 1812. In March nine out of twenty one colliers who used the truck shop belonging to Newton, Scott and Chambers at Tankersley owed less than one pound in shop debts. This increased steadily throughout the year and by 3 October only four of twenty-one colliers owed less than one pound. Some colliers owed considerable sums. Jon[athan] Allen and Jos Holmes, for instance, owed £5 5s. 3½d. and £5 4s. 2½d. respectively. One collier, G. Shaw, owed 'all he earns' in a week to the truck shop. In the summer of 1812, when wheat prices reached the highest point in the year, John Chapel owed a staggering £7 7s. 3½d. and a note stated that 'he had better have no more goods but pay his debts first'.⁷⁸

Why, then, did the Yorkshire miners not riot like the rest of the labouring classes? It was a matter of the *degree to which* the miners were affected. Clearly the paternalistic action of Earl Fitzwilliam – through finding the miners other work and supplying them with food – insulated them against the severity of 1812. At other pits, such as Greasbrough, work was available for the colliers because the coalowners reduced the price of coal. And, at Newhall, the customary supply of coal continued amid the depression allowing the miners to keep their fires burning. Indeed, as Howson made clear in his letter, price-fixing was already occurring in Barnsley marketplace without the recourse to violence. It seems the very presence of the colliers in the marketplace was enough for vendors to sell their goods at prices (deemed) affordable for the poor. Furthermore, where the colliers were evidently affected – such as at Tankersley - the miners *still* had access to food. Although colliers

⁷⁷ Sheffield Archives, Wh.M/116/77 Richard Milnes to Charles Bowns 10 Dec. 1812.

⁷⁸ Sheffield Archives, TR/345 Shop Purchase Book 1811-1812.

accrued increasingly large debts in the truck shop at least they were able to eat. It seems, therefore, that the Yorkshire miners did not riot in 1812 because their standards of living were just that little bit better than the other members of the labouring classes; they were protected against the grinding poverty which affected the labouring poor.

In June 1812 the Orders in Council were rescinded and trade steadily increased with America. Napoleon's disastrous Russian campaign led to the collapse of the blockade of Europe and additional export markets opened again revitalising the manufacturing districts. The plentiful harvest of 1813 resulted in the price of bread falling dramatically.⁷⁹ The following table shows the fall in cost of foodstuffs.

Table 5:1 Average Price of Wheat in England and Wales (per Imperial Quarter) 1812-1815

Year	Price of Wheat
1812	126s. 6d.
1813	109s. 9d.
1814	74s. 4d.
1815	65s. 7d.

Source: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

However, the standard of living of many Yorkshire miners across 1813-1815 depended on where they were employed, and whether markets could be found for the coal they mined. At some pits, trade improved; at others, the depression continued and discontent

⁷⁹ Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars*, pp. 160-163, 166.

amongst the labour force festered. At the beginning of 1813 there was a resurgence in the demand for Elsecar coal.⁸⁰

Around Barnsley in May 1813 a 'slack sale' was reported. The only way coalmasters were holding onto markets, John Howson wrote, was by 'tempting custom by giving so much over measure'.⁸¹ At some Yorkshire pits it seems the miners were content with their wages while at others the opposite was true. At the Meadow Pit in Handsworth Colliery, for example, it was stated in 1814 that William and Samuel Alsop, along with Peter Cartwright, 'have 16s/ allowed for wood' and they 'attend their work very well and appear quite content'. Similarly, in Jagling's bank in the same pit it was recorded that Thomas Jagling, George and William Cutt, and George Jeffcock 'have 15s per week for wood & are a steady set of men particularly Tho^s Jagling who is an old man'.⁸² However, at the Finch Well pit in Sheffield in October 1814, the miners were quite clearly dissatisfied with their earnings. It is worth quoting the management's comments at length:

Taylor's bank is 44 yd^s long & is worked by Geo^e Taylor W^m Jeffcock, & John Carr who is a lad. They have 13s allowed for setting, getting, & removing the wood, &c. These took this bank to work up 50 yd^s at the above price but now they want something more. They are by far the most dissatisfied men I have met with & the sooner we are rid of Geo^e Taylor the better.

Watson's bank is 46 yd^s and is wrought by Josh^h Watson John Linley, & Jos^h Staniforth they are allowed 15s per week for wooding. They seem to be a reasonable set of men but want an alteration all they want is the allowance they had when more were wanted for sale.

Goulder's bank is 46 yds long & is worked by Wm Goulder John Batty & John Leversidge & have 15s pr week allowed for wood money there are only two men working here at present of course the wood is less viz 18s they are dissatisfied with their wages.

⁸⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/5/iii/116 Biram to Fitzwilliam 21 Jan. 1813.

⁸¹ Barnsley Archives, SpSt/60586/327 Howson to Spencer-Stanhope 25 May 1813.

⁸² Sheffield Archives, M.D. 3629 Sheffield Coal Company Memorandum Book.

Bradshaw's bank is 46 yd^s long & is worked by Tho^s Bradshaw Jos^h ashforth and Sam^l Oates. They have 15s per week allowed for wood. They are an industrious lot except Oates who frequently loses a day, but when a day is lost the wood is taken off for that day. They are a reasonable set of men but still they want an advance.

Allen's benk is 47 yd^s long and is worked by Jos^h Allen Matt^w Cutt & Will^m Buxton they have 14s allowed for wood but want raising same as all the rest. They want 1s more for wood.⁸³

At some Barnsley collieries coalowners reduced the number of miners. Referring to Mr. Wilson's collieries, John Howson wrote that 'the state it is now in, he says – will not employ so many pick men as they before had'.⁸⁴ Likewise, when Walter Spencer-Stanhope expressed an interest in purchasing property that possessed mining rights his steward informed him that 'I conceive sir, the coal is worth little supposing is not likely to be got, or at least not of a long time' suggesting that many involved with mining thought the immediate future looked bleak.⁸⁵

By the beginning of 1815, however, the coal trade across most of the region experienced a resurgence. 'I believe both Mr Thorp and Mr Clarke', wrote John Howson in May 1815, 'have lately been sending off a deal of Coal lately, as I have observ'd a many vessles up'.⁸⁶ Wage rates recovered a little and this was shared by other industries.⁸⁷ Standards of living briefly rose when corn prices slumped in the spring of 1815: 'Corn had fallen again in these Markets for two weeks' Howson announced and briefly it seemed that the prosperous pre-1810 times had returned.⁸⁸

⁸³ Sheffield Archives, M.D. 3629 Sheffield Coal Company Memorandum Book.

⁸⁴ Barnsley Archives, SpSt/60586/344 Howson to Spencer-Stanhope 7 May 1814.

⁸⁵ Barnsley Archives, SpSt/60586/341 Howson to Spencer-Stanhope 28 April 1814.

⁸⁶ Barnsley Archives, SpSt/60586/361 Howson to Spencer-Stanhope 2 May 1815.

⁸⁷ Rule, *Albion's People*, p. 186.

⁸⁸ Barnsley Archives, SpSt/60586/357 Howson to Spencer-Stanhope 6 March 1815.

Economic Depression: 1815-1818

Towards the end of 1815 the coal trade once more began to contract. John Bell, of Newhall Colliery wrote to Charles Bowns lamenting the situation: 'I can seriously assure you sir that all the profit of our coal trade does not cover your Rent altho' we have only £185 p^r aⁿⁿ'.⁸⁹ Many heavy industries in the region stagnated.⁹⁰ The coal trade entered a depression and unemployment rose significantly, exacerbated by the return of soldiers and sailors from the war.⁹¹ Wages were soon reduced for those still in work.⁹² Malcolm Chase characterises the post-war years as 'the sternest test yet for industrializing society'.⁹³ 'The situation of the labouring classes', George Newton lamented, 'is deplorable, & trust a wise & gracious providence will over-ride these calamities for the good of His dependent Creatures & soon provide a favourable change'.⁹⁴

Wages were soon reduced across the West Riding in line with the falling demand for coal. At the Sheffield Coal Company's Sheffield Colliery No. 2 deep pit it was noted in 1816 how '[t]he colliers get, set, and remove the wood, build packs of bind 3 yards wide for seven pence per wagon; they [the colliery company] pay 1s 7d for filling Hards and eleven pence for small'. One year earlier, when wages had momentarily increased, colliers had been paid for hard coals '2s. 6d. and smalls 1s. 3d. per cart'.⁹⁵ John Rule's assessment that colliers did not experience a 'widespread fall in earnings after 1790' is hardly borne out by this

⁸⁹ Sheffield Archives, Wh.M/116/91 John Bell to Charles Bowns 17 Oct. 1815.

⁹⁰ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 227.

⁹¹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 660

⁹² Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*, p. 64.

⁹³ Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 103.

⁹⁴ Sheffield Archives, TR/149/11 George Newton to Mr Pipe 12 December 1816.

⁹⁵ Sheffield Archives, M.D. 3629 Sheffield Coal Company Memorandum Book.

evidence.⁹⁶ Likewise, Flinn and Stoker's conclusion that colliers' wages 'seem mostly to have retained their wartime level through to the late 1820s' cannot be considered accurate.⁹⁷

The depression worsened throughout the year. The Shropshire coalfield was particularly badly affected and colliers rioted.⁹⁸ In September 1816 George Newton lamented the seriousness of the times in his diary:

The commercial atmosphere is also very gloomy, and trade in general in a state of great depression, at the close of a long, tedious, and expensive war, and money remarkably scarce that the nation is in a state of great embarrassment and the situation of the lower classes truly deplorable. At Thorncliffe we have at length been under the necessity of contracting our business and of reducing wages, which causes much distress and uneasiness, especially among the colliers, some of whom are very refractory and unreasonable. Several attempts have been made to burn one of our haystacks (at Newbegin) and we are in [a] state of great alarm[.]⁹⁹

In a letter to his son the following month George Newton stated his concerns of the potential for disorder. '[A] great Number of our workmen are under Notice to quit' he revealed 'which is very distressing, & we are afraid will be productive of much mischief the ensuing winter'.¹⁰⁰ The following graphs highlight the significant decline in the amount of coal produced and wages expended at Newton, Scott and Chambers Mortomley Colliery near Tankersley in 1816.

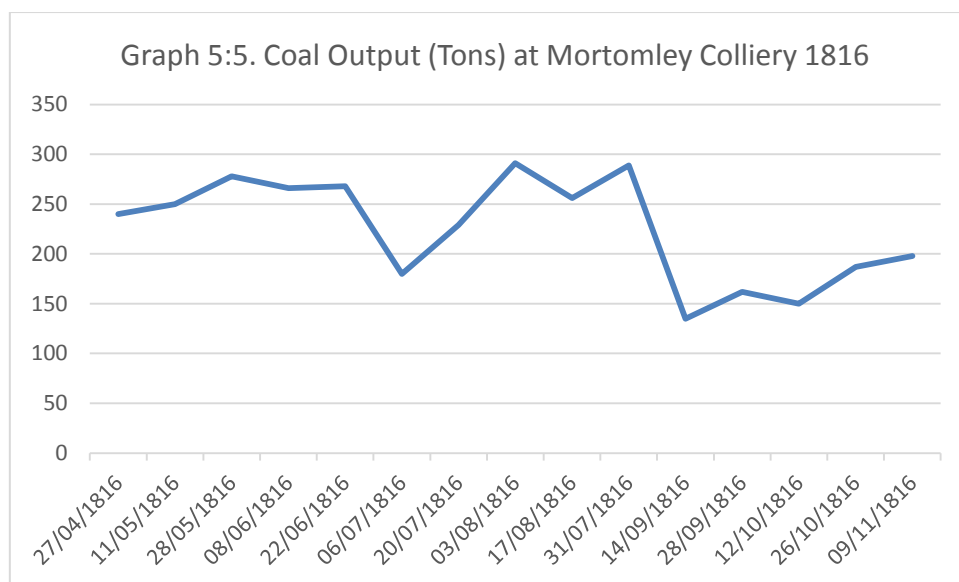
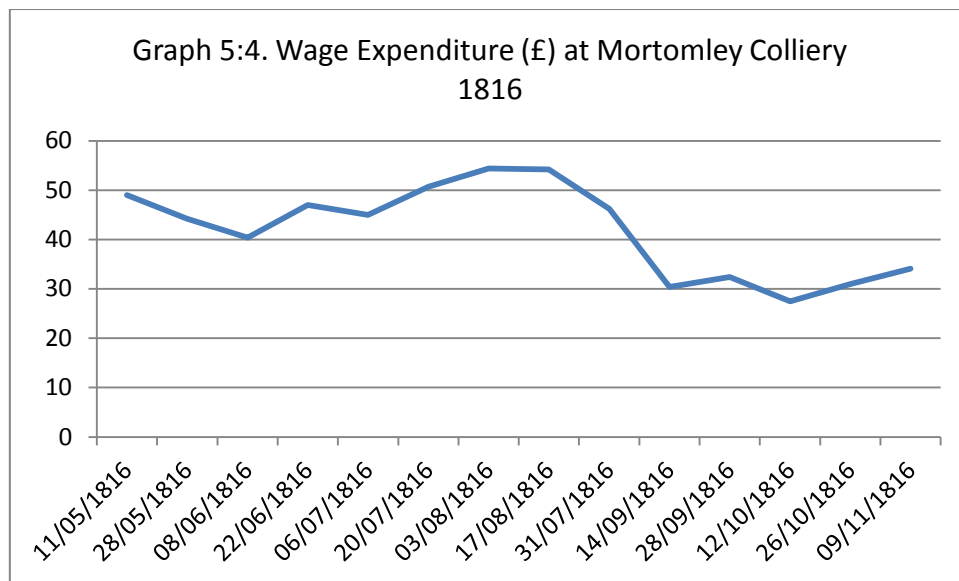
⁹⁶ Rule, *Albion's People*, p. 173.

⁹⁷ Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 387.

⁹⁸ *Sheffield Iris*, 13 Aug. 1816. See Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars*, p. 170.

⁹⁹ Sheffield Archives, TR/446/8 Transcribed notes relating to George Newton's family. (Diary entry Sept. 22 1816).

¹⁰⁰ Sheffield Archives, TR/292/8/18 George Newton to Thomas Newton 19 October 1816.



Source: Sheffield Archives, TR/303/55 Mortomley Colliery Accounts.

Sarah Marshall Newton, the daughter of George Newton, wrote to her brother Thomas hoping ‘the times will soon mend for the sake of the poor’.¹⁰¹ In November 1816 the lack of demand from the local iron industry meant miners’ hours were reduced at Elsecar.¹⁰² Charles Bowns wrote to Fitzwilliam explaining how ‘I have desired Mr. Biram to

¹⁰¹ Sheffield Archives, TR/193/47 Sarah Marshall Newton to Thomas Newton 13 Aug. 1816.

¹⁰² Sidney Pollard highlights that the iron industry was a ‘major consumer of coal’. See Pollard, ‘A New Estimate of British Coal Production, 1750-1850’, p. 217.

give the necessary notice to the Colliers, who were appraised on the notice received from Mess⁵ Darwin, that it was fully expected that they would have to submit to another reduction in their workings at the end of the present year, on account of this Furnace blowing out'.¹⁰³ Indeed, the total sale of coal from Earl Fitzwilliam's collieries declined across 1815-1817. In 1815, 85,662 tons of coal was sold. This dropped to 76,324 tons in 1816, and had plunged to 51,879 tons by 1817.¹⁰⁴

A sharp rise in the cost of foodstuffs led to a further decline in the miners' standard of living. The following table shows the increase in the cost of the average price of wheat per imperial quarter 1816-1818.

Table 5:2 Average Price of Wheat in England and Wales (per Imperial Quarter) 1816-1818

Year	Price of Wheat
1816	78s. 6d.
1817	96s. 11d.
1818	86s. 3d.

Source: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

Distress abounded in Sheffield in the winter months of 1816. The *Sheffield Iris* described it as an 'unprecedented situation of difficulty' and exhorted the propertied to contribute to the relief of the poor.¹⁰⁵ On 3 December the immiserated labouring poor rioted in Sheffield. Led by John Blackwell, the crowd organiser of 1812, a crowd of men, women and children made their way through the town with a blood-covered loaf held aloft

¹⁰³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/30 Bowns to Fitzwilliam 30 Nov. 1816.

¹⁰⁴ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 234.

¹⁰⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 31 Dec. 1816.

on a pole surmounted with a banner inscribed 'bread or blood'. Eventually the magistrates and special constables arrived and, having previously read the Riot Act, dispersed the crowd from the Haymarket where it had assembled. Blackwell was arrested and taken to York Castle for trial.¹⁰⁶ The *Iris* recognised that the '[t]he sufferings of our townspeople' arose 'from two causes'; 'the failure of the harvest, - and the failure of trade', but stated how acts of violence would not redress hunger and unemployment.¹⁰⁷ One correspondent similarly lamented the 'season of great distress to the lower orders of Society, from wanting employment, through stagnation of Trade, and from the high price and bad quality of bread'.¹⁰⁸ As the year ended George Newton prayed for an upturn in trade: 'O that it may please the Almighty Governor of the world to grant, that the coming year may be more propitious, that the channels of commerce may be once more, opened, so that the poor may have labour and bread'.¹⁰⁹

Some coal-kings decided to quit the industry. Charles Smith sold his Wheldale Colliery near Castleford at the beginning of 1817.¹¹⁰ Charles Bowns wrote to Fitzwilliam in the spring of 1817 complaining about 'the reduction in the price of iron-stone and coal' and added that 'Mr. Fenton called upon me but for no other purpose than to say, that he could not possibly get any money from those persons who were indebted to him, and to shew the loss which he was sustaining by the Colliery'.¹¹¹ Bowns enclosed the report on Greasbrough Colliery for the first quarter of 1817 which reveals that a total loss of £580 14s. 7½d. was made. The

¹⁰⁶ *Sheffield Iris*, 10 Dec. 1816. See Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, pp. 240-241; R.M. Hartwell stated that 'food prices also declined after 1815' and that 'Wheat prices fell sharply after 1815'. This is not true. The average price of wheat (per Imperial Quarter) in Britain rose from 65s. 7d. in 1815 to 78s. 6d. in 1816 to 96s. 11d. in 1817. It is, therefore, difficult to see how Hartwell came to this conclusion. See Hartwell, 'The Rising Standard of Living in England, 1800-1850', pp. 406, 408.

¹⁰⁷ *Sheffield Iris*, 10 Dec. 1816.

¹⁰⁸ *Sheffield Iris*, 7 Jan. 1817.

¹⁰⁹ Sheffield Archives, TR/292/3/6 Transcribed diary entry of George Newton 31 Dec. 1816.

¹¹⁰ *Sheffield Iris*, 18 Feb. 1817.

¹¹¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/35 Bowns to Fitzwilliam 22 May 1817.

report also revealed that the colliers had only worked four days per week per man across the thirteen-week period.¹¹² One correspondent of Newton, Scott and Chambers stated how he was 'sorry to find [that] Trade is so slack with you'.¹¹³ Underemployment (and the ensuing Christmas) pushed more colliers to use the truck shop. Of the 31 colliers who had their fortnightly debts calculated on 25 October 1817 five owed less than £1; eighteen owed between £1-2; six between £2-3; and three between £3-4. John Senior owed the highest amount of £3 18s. 1d. Debts had increased substantially by the time the calculation was made on December 24 1817. Of the 30 colliers who used the shop in the previous fortnight five owed less than £1; eleven of between £1-2; six between £2-3; five between £3-4; two between £4-5 and 1 collier, C. Burgin, had a debt of £5 1s.¹¹⁴

From 1818 trade revived slightly, but this was short lived and the overall decline persisted.¹¹⁵ Newton, Scott and Chambers wrote to Earl Fitzwilliam stating that their annual loss for 1817 amounted to a staggering £2141 7s. 3d. They requested a reduction in the coal lease price because, 'by painful experience [...] the present rents cannot be afforded', and added that the selling price of coal 'are still low, and likely to continue so'.¹¹⁶ Industrial production from the region's ironworks too declined. Samuel Walker, the Rotherham ironmaster, wrote to Earl Fitzwilliam's agent requesting him to reduce the price of coal that supplied his ironworks because he was unable to make a profit.¹¹⁷ The following June, Earl Fitzwilliam was told that hardly any coal was being sold from Elsecar Colliery.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/37 Greasbrough Colliery Account Statement 31 March 1817.

¹¹³ Sheffield Archives, TR/276/40 W. [Laverack?] to Newton, Scott and Chambers 15 Feb. 1817.

¹¹⁴ Sheffield Archives, TR/348 Shop Purchase Book 1817-1819.

¹¹⁵ Sheffield Archives, TR/139/59 Isaac Newton to Thomas Newton 23 April 1818; TR/139/63 George Newton to Thomas Newton 4 July 1818. Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 237.

¹¹⁶ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/64 Newton, Scott and Chambers to Fitzwilliam 10 Feb. 1818.

¹¹⁷ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/72 Walker to Newman 24 Aug. 1818.

¹¹⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/106 W. Newman to Fitzwilliam 9 June 1819.

The use of the truck shop owned by Newton, Scott and Chambers increased too. We saw how thirty-one colliers were using the shop in October 1817; by May 1819 sixty-six colliers were recorded as owing debts to the shop. It seems that the depressed state of trade was having a serious impact on colliers' standards of living and many had resorted to the truck shop. Twenty nine owed less than £1; twenty three between £1-2; three between £2-3; eight between £3-4; two between £4-5; and one collier owed above £5.¹¹⁹ John Baxter stated that '[o]nly the expensive system of poor relief and charity prevented a complete social breakdown in the years following the war'.¹²⁰ Poor relief and charity, combined with the availability of (expensive) provisions at truck shops in the immediate post war period in colliery communities, offers the most realistic assessment of why disorder did not break out in the West Riding. Friendly societies, too, may have maintained the living standards of colliers above the immiserated level that many of the labouring poor found themselves in.

The Barnsley 'Coal Miners' Hobby' was established around 1817. This friendly society, like the Wakefield one founded in 1811, had no trade union dimensions. Mostly the rules focus on providing relief to the 'sick' and 'lame' miners. Rule III, for instance, states:

When any member falls sick or lame, he shall send a written notice to one of the committee before twelve o'clock at noon, or it shall not stand for that day, and he shall receive six shillings per week while sick or lame for 16 weeks[.] [A]nd if any member continues sick or lame he shall receive 3 shillings per week for [a further] 16 weeks and if he still remains sick or lame he shall receive 2 shillings per week.

Similarly, Rule IV emphasised how, when he was ready to return to work, the collier should 'send a written notice to one of the committee' stating how much he had received when

¹¹⁹ Sheffield Archives, TR/348 Shop Purchase Book 1817-1819.

¹²⁰ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 237.

sick or lame. The 'Coal Miners' Hobby' also provided £2 to the collier or his wife for funeral expenses. However, if miners were injured in non-work-related incidents they would be ineligible for funds. 'No member shall receive any benefit', Rule IX stated 'if lamed by fighting, or getting into fighting company'. It seems that the 'Coal Miners' Hobby' was initially set up solely for workmen at Porter's Colliery in Barnsley but they were willing to allow members from other pits to join provided they had worked at Porter's Colliery beforehand (Rule VI). The objective of the 'Hobby' was to maintain, to a limited degree, the living standards of sick or injured colliers (or their spouses if they were killed) and keep them above the Poor Law at a time when the cost of living was high. Furthermore, the total absence of any evidence of strike action at Porter's Colliery in the immediate post-war years suggests that this was purely a friendly society concerned with providing its members with sufficient funds should misfortune occur.¹²¹

The harvest of 1818 was deficient and Lancashire colliers struck for a wage increase.¹²² At some collieries minor concessions were won and by November disorder had subsided. In St Helens, however, the owners were more recalcitrant and the strike dragged on until the beginning of 1819, when it collapsed and the men returned to work without the desired advance.¹²³ By 1819 the coal trade was severely depressed. This is, however, more appropriately discussed in the next chapter when we turn to the strike of 1819 which resulted from the low wages and high cost of provisions.

Conclusion

¹²¹ Barnsley Archives, B.622.33 Printed Rules of the Coal Miners' Hobby of Barnsley.

¹²² R.J. White, *Waterloo to Peterloo* (London, 1963), p. 179.

¹²³ Challinor, *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners*, pp. 23-25.

This chapter has demonstrated how and why the Yorkshire miners protested under the period when the Combination Laws were in force. Protest was intimately linked to standards of living. For the first few years of the new century the coal trade was good and food prices remained relatively stable. The Yorkshire miners enjoyed continuous employment and high wages. The rise in the price of foodstuffs in 1810 and 1811, however, pushed miners into strike action to maintain or improve their standards of living. These strikes, which demonstrate that the Combination Laws were ineffective, took place when the demand for coal was brisk. Indeed, the levels of organisation suggest that Reid's assessment - that trade unionism was far too developed by 1799 for the Laws to have real impact - is legitimate. When the economic depression and the high price of food did affect the coal trade in 1812, paternalistic action - notably at Fitzwilliam's pits - once again insulated some miners from distress. From late 1815 the coal trade entered a depression and the colliers' standard of living declined. Wages were reduced in consequence of the falling demand and underemployment was commonplace. Many coalowners' profits slumped whilst the price of foodstuffs rose. Protest action was averted due to a combination of poor relief, the ability to access provisions (albeit through the truck shop) and the existence of friendly societies. The latter emerged when the cost of living was high and their objective was to provide financial assistance to maintain the living standards of miners and their dependants who fell sick, were injured, or were killed at work. The miners' societies that existed in 1802, 1811 and c.1817-1818 were not covert trade unions. But fixating on whether friendly societies were trade unions or not means historians have missed their real significance: like trade unions, their objective was to maintain living standards of their members. By 1819 the economic depression reached its nadir and miners

struck in unprecedented numbers to improve their standard of living. The following chapter charts the 1819 Yorkshire miners' strike in detail.

Chapter 6: 'Five Shillings Per Day': The 1819 Yorkshire Miners' Strike

Until the dispute of 1844 the 1819 West Riding colliers' strike was the largest instance of trade union action in the region. Collieries from Leeds to Barnsley were shut down; coal miners articulated their demands through the press; they traversed the district intimidating blacklegs; pits were sabotaged and striking miners imprisoned. Despite the significance of the dispute it has been relatively neglected by historians. John Baxter asserts that 'little can be discovered about this strike' and that it was 'no more than [a] sporadic effort' at organisation and was 'short lived'.¹ Fred Donnelly made one reference to 'a strike amongst the West Riding colliers', and nothing more was said on the matter.² Similarly, Fred Kaijage stated 'trade unionism and industrial action [is] known to have taken place in some Yorkshire collieries in 1819' but added nothing else.³ Only Frank Machin, in his post-1858 study of the Yorkshire miners, hinted at the significance of the strike. In his fleeting coverage, however, Machin failed to grasp the extent of organisation amongst the miners, the duration of the dispute, and its impact on coal output in Yorkshire.⁴ All of these historians failed to recognise that the principal aim of the strike was to raise living standards.

This strike was fundamentally different from those disputes that preceded and succeeded it because it occurred at a time of bad trade which ultimately explains why it failed. It took place when the miners' standard of living had been eroded by widespread wage reductions and a dramatic rise in food prices. The quotidian life experience of the Yorkshire miners was intimately linked to the further development of trade unionism. The

¹ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, pp. 289, 235, 266.

² F.K. Donnelly, *The General Rising of 1820: A Study of Conflict in the Industrial Revolution*. Unpublished University of Sheffield PhD thesis (1975), p. 189.

³ Kaijage, *Labouring Barnsley*, p. 371.

⁴ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, pp.

1819 strike demonstrates the rapid growth of miners' trade unionism in the region in the post war period, and the depth of support from rank-and-file members.

Malcolm Chase argued that many 'trade societies were sympathetic to the revolutionary underground'.⁵ In contrast, it will be emphasised through this chapter that the strike had no connection to political radicalism. The only connection was the one manifested in the minds of elites who mistakenly conflated industrial unrest with political radicalism. Scholars of West Riding radicalism have been too eager to see miners as part of the wider radical nexus in the region. This was far from the case; the miners' demands were purely based on ameliorating their living standards. Why, then, have scholars misinterpreted the role of colliers in West Riding radicalism in 1819? The most plausible explanation seems to be the absence of a thorough investigation into the 1819 strike. Many of the letters in the West Riding lieutenancy correspondence discuss both the strike and the activities of the Radicals and, as in the minds of the authorities at the time, the two have become conflated by historians. R.A. Roberts represented the perceived view that 'radical ideas had percolated down to, and taken root in, the vastly growing 'industrial' proletarian workforce, of weavers, miners, quarrymen, and general labourers'.⁶ This chapter will challenge the existing historiography by arguing that the obsession with post-war Radicalism has distorted the picture to such a degree that we have missed sight of what really mattered to the labouring classes: improving living standards at a time of widespread economic distress and dislocation. To investigate these issues this chapter will firstly examine the

⁵ Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 103.

⁶ R. Roberts, *The Barnsley Weavers and the Grangemoor Uprising, 1820* (Barnsley, 1977), p. 18. See also F.J. Kaijage, 'Working-Class Radicalism in Barnsley, 1816-1820', in Pollard and Holmes (eds.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire*, p. 121.

immediate context of the strike, secondly the experience of miners during the strike, and finally assess the aftermath of the dispute.

The Context of the 1819 Strike

Yorkshire miners' wages continued to decline across the first few months of 1819. At Birley Moor Colliery, on the outskirts of Sheffield for example, Robert Nightscales fortnightly wages declined from £1 16s. (February 12) to £1 13s. (July 2). Across the same period the amount paid for 'endheading' was reduced. In February, 2s. 0d. was paid per yard; by July this has been reduced to 1s. 10d.⁷ Around the same time the government proposed a new tax on coal. A meeting of coalowners was held in Barnsley on 11 March chaired by Jonas Clarke and condemned the tax. The same day a large demonstration was held on May Day Green in Barnsley where the same resolution was passed and the meeting also resolved to petition parliament against the tax.⁸ A petition from 'the Workers of Coal Mines in the Township and vicinity of *Barnsley*' was received by Parliament on 17 March.⁹ In April the Rotherham coalowner Mr. Kent sold his collieries by auction. Despite them being 'at a convenient Distance from the River Dunn' no market for coal could be found.¹⁰ By October the Barnsley coalowner Samuel Thorp complained that the stagnation of trade had necessitated him to reduce the hours of his colliers: 'I can not Dispose of any coals by water, & the colliers Employed about half work, I am oblig'd to make up some way for a living for

⁷ British Library, Egerton Ms. 3573 Birley Moor Colliery Accounts 1819.

⁸ Burland, *Annals*, Vol. I, p.

⁹ *Commons Journal*, Vol. 74. p. 238. I am grateful to Dr Henry Miller of Durham University for this information.

¹⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/169 Printed Handbill Advertising the Sale of Kent's Rawmarsh Lands.

them. I never had such a large stock of coals as at present an I hope we shall be set at liberty soon'.¹¹

It is in this context of low wages and short time that the Yorkshire miners organised on a degree hitherto unprecedented. John Rule's assessment that 1819 was a 'bad year' which witnessed 'dramatic short-term increases in unemployment among industrial workers' seems near the mark.¹² Moreover the cost of living in the region had increased dramatically. William Leake, a Barnsley weaver, spoke of the rise in the price of foodstuffs in 1819. Flour had risen from 1s. 6d. to 3s. per stone; potatoes from 3d. to 8d. per peck; and meal from 1s. 2d. to 2s. 6d. per stone.¹³ Like twenty years earlier, seventy five percent of earnings were spent on food across 1819-20.¹⁴ The average price of wheat stood high at 74s. 6d. per imperial quarter in Britain in 1819.¹⁵ Undoubtedly the reduction in wages and the increase in the cost of living further eroded the colliers' standard of living. It is in this context that miners took strike action.

The trade union that coordinated the strike in the winter months of 1819 was formed at Middleton on 1 July in the same year. The union's printed rules have survived and are reproduced in Appendix 5. This is probably the union which organised the strike because in December, at the height of the dispute, a Yorkshire coalowner lamented 'About Six Months since, a Combination was begun amongst the Colliers'.¹⁶ From July onward it seems that the union was gradually able to extend its membership southward from Leeds to Barnsley.

¹¹ Sheffield Archives, TR/280/107 Samuel Thorp to Newton Chambers & Co. 25 Oct. 1819.

¹² Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, p. 39.

¹³ Burland, *Annals*, Vol. I, p. 388.

¹⁴ M. Chase, *1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester, 2013), p. 3.

¹⁵ Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

¹⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 4 Dec. 1819.

The first reference to a threat of a strike emerged in early November 1819. Several threatening letters were sent to coalowners across the region warning them of a strike if they did not increase wages. The winter of 1819 was uncommonly severe, and for the colliers in employment this may have helped strengthen their bargaining position.¹⁷ The following letter was sent to Timothy Wheatley, a coalowner at Mirfield. It is possibly the earliest known threatening letter sent by Yorkshire miners:

SIR,- As Miners employed in Collieries of Land Sale [i.e. local consumption] will be turned out on Monday next ensuing, and as the Proprietors, &c. of such Collieries will, in consequence, be necessitated to rise the price of their Coals, it is deemed prudent to advise you immediately to rise yours also, (viz. the Land Sale) in order that you may have no advantage to the said Proprietors' &c prejudice in the Consumption of such Coal. Should any Proprietor, &c. or Workman be prejudiced through your refusal to take the Council, your Men will be taken from you immediately; but, on the contrary, should you feel disposed to concede what we desire, (which by the bye, will be a temporary advantage to yourself,) and show a Disposition, *really felt*, to behave well to your Workmen in case of turn-out, which in a future Day as it relates to yourself will inevitably come to pass, a case, *like the present*, will be maintained, that none shall derive any advantage to your prejudice or at your expense. Respecting the necessary rise you may receive Information from the Proprietors, &c. of Works either in Dewsbury, Osset, Hightown, or Robertown. – By Order of the Body of COAL MINERS.¹⁸

The Experience of the Striking Miners

We do not know whether the letter had any effect. But we can be more certain that the strike began on Friday 20 November 1819 as the *Leeds Mercury* reported how '[t]he Master Colliers in this neighbourhood have determined to dismiss their men this day, for

¹⁷ Chase, 1820: *Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom*, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Sheffield Iris*, 7 Dec. 1819.

the purpose of breaking up their *Union*'.¹⁹ It was stated how the miners had 'bound themselves to the payment of a weekly sum to support any of their body when thrown out of work under certain conditions'.²⁰ On the same day, John Margerison was committed to York Castle for three months for 'for enticing his fellow workmen, at the Flockton Colliery, to enter into an illegal combination, called the Colliers' Union Society'.²¹ Three days later, on 23 November, twelve colliers employed by 'Messrs. Chaster and Co.' were arrested and transported to the House of Correction at Wakefield for not giving the required three months' notice under Master and Servant Law when terminating their contract. As they passed through Batley headed by a band they were, one correspondent wrote, 'hailed as martyrs' and were 'accompanied to the House of Correction by hundreds of people, with a band of music at their head!'²² During the course of the procession into Wakefield a Mrs Naylor died, so the papers claimed, of a burst blood vessel in the head occasioned by fright. Joseph Beckett, the Barnsley weaving master stated that she died of shock as she thought the advent of the noisy colliers was the impending rising of the Radicals.²³

At the end of November the coalowners met in the Yew Tree pub in Roberttown where it was resolved to 'discharge every man then in work [...] that would not deliver up his *Union* Ticket, and engage to work at the present prices, for a period to be fixed engaging at the same time to give proper notice before he left his work'.²⁴ The *Wakefield and Halifax Journal* noted that a 'general dismissal took place in consequence, and all the mines in this district of country were shut up. Most of the workmen yet stand out, but some have

¹⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 20 Nov. 1819.

²⁰ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 31.

²¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 11 Dec. 1819.

²² *Leeds Mercury* 27 Nov. 1819.

²³ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL250/6/2/B2/4/40 Beckett to Lascelles 24 Nov 1819.

²⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 27 Nov. 1819.

announced to their masters their willingness to submit'.²⁵ At Marston (sic) Mr Waud offered to increase his colliers' wages in line with the other pits in the district if they would go 'quietly to their work'. The miners refused.²⁶

On 25 November, the colliers' union demonstrated its numerical strength through a demonstration. Around 8,000 colliers paraded through the streets of Leeds 'accompanied by six bands of military music'. The bands collected in the East Parade and played the patriotic songs of Rule Britannia and God Save the King and, after doing so, the 'immense assemblage' quietly dispersed.²⁷ As Katrina Navickas has shown through numerous examples, the singing of patriotic songs was an overt expression of loyalism from the labouring classes.²⁸ The fact that the miners chose to sing Rule Britannia and God Save the King highlights that the miners wanted to make a public spectacle of their loyalism.

The same week the union publicly issued their demands through the *Leeds Mercury*. A decline in living standards framed their demand for higher wages:

Should it be asked what Wages are required by the Workmen, we answer, Five Shillings per Day, of Eight Hours, for a Man; and for a Boy, from Twelve to Eighteen Years of Age, from One Shilling to Two Shillings and Sixpence per Day, of Eight Hours; which it can be easily proved is no more than they had Eighteen Years ago, notwithstanding the considerable advance in the price of Coals by the Employer. But it is easy to prove that at present, upon an average, no Collier is able to earn above 2s.6d. per Day, of Eight Hours, which must be considered by all impartial Judges quite inadequate to supply all their temporal Necessities, considering the many disadvantages, inconveniences, and misfortunes, which frequently occur by reason of Damp, Fire, and Water, tending to retard the Labour of the Workmen, and making a considerable deduction from his Weekly Earnings. And owing to the reduction which has taken place in the Price of getting Coals within these last 18 Years, a boy

²⁵ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 26 Nov. 1819.

²⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 27 Nov. 1819.

²⁷ *Leeds Mercury*, 27 Nov. 1819.

²⁸ K. Navickas, 'Lancashire Britishness: Patriotism in the Manchester Region During the Napoleonic Wars', pp. 12-13. <http://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/13539/906806.pdf?sequence=2> accessed 09.02.2018.

from 12 to 18 Years of Age now earns less by One-third than he did then. Considering the high rate of Provisions these late Years, what must have been the distressed situation of those Families who have had to earn a scanty pittance under these and many other distressing circumstances, such as an advance in House Rent, Assessments, expense of Tools of various kinds, besides other misfortunes common to all Men in the course of Divine Providence.

‘Should any Coal Master allege’, they stated, that miners had earned ‘Five Shillings per Day, of Eight Hours, for a Man, and so in proportion for a Boy’ they would ‘refer them to the Earnings of the Workmen for the last Twelve Months’ and highlight the fallacy of the owners’ claims; ‘we are firmly determined’ they continued, ‘that rather than Labour and Toil, and Pine for Want of Bread, with all Exertions in Labour, that we will desist from Labour, and patiently pine and have no Labour until are more amply recompensed’. The union also demanded an eight-hour day for colliers. ‘[I]t is necessary’, they stated, ‘that the Hours of Labour should be restricted. [...] Eight Hours per Day for a Miner is quite sufficient to Labour, and in some particular Cases too long’. The miners disparaged ‘those Gentlemen who sit comfortably in their Parlours [...] indulging themselves by the Fire, and have every sensual gratification’ whilst the collier is at the same time ‘stripped naked, and with all his strength exerting himself to get a small pittance to supply his temporal Wants’. The union stated that the colliers were:

confined to Twenty or Thirty Inches in Height panting and sweating more like a poor brute pursued by the hunters into some subteraneous [sic] cavern, than a human being: he has no time for Eating till his Work is done, and then, in consequence of his being so long confined in his contracted situation, it is with difficulty that he can get himself erect, thus he trudges home to his poor Family, cheerful and happy if he has

been able to earn a moderate competency for their supply; this is sufficient, but alas, the reverse is too often the case, and especially has been these late Years.²⁹

On 29 November the coal owners replied. They stated that the strike 'would inflict the severest Privation upon the Country'. Such action, the coalowners stated, 'most imperiously called upon the Coal Masters to act in Unison'. 'It was clear' they continued, 'that, unless the Evil was met by Promptitude and Decision, the Country must be compelled to submit to the most arbitrary and exorbitant Advance in the Price of One of the most indispensable Articles of Consumption'. The miners' demands could not be acceded to, they stated, for the good of the public at large:

a Compliance with the Miners' Present Demands would cause an Advance in the Price of from Two Shillings to Two Shillings and Six-pence per Ton, which it was obvious would amount to a prohibition of working the inferior Coals which are used for Steam Engines, Lime Burning, &c and would bring incalculable Distress upon the Country. There are, moreover, many Conditions which the Miners wish to impose upon their Employers, quite as objectionable as the Advance of Wages, and to which it is utterly impossible for the Coal Masters to accede.³⁰

The owners reiterated to the public how the miners were remunerated with high wages. 'Their earnings', they claimed, 'may truly be stated at three to five shillings per day, and there are instances where a good Workman can gain from six to seven shillings per day clear of all deductions'. 'According to the printed statement of prices sent in by the Union Committee' they continued, 'the Colliers would regularly earn from one shilling to one shilling and three pence per hour whenever they choose to work'. 'So far it is from the desire of the Coal Masters to deny their men a fair Compensation for their Labour, that they

²⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 27 Nov. 1819.

³⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 4 Dec. 1819.

may, without any fear of Contradiction, assert that no large body of Workmen have so little reason to complain of the times as the Colliers'. Indeed, the masters hinted at the ineffectiveness of the Combination Laws in their public indictment of the miners:

It has been asked of the Coal Masters, why suspend your Works? Why not make examples of your Men for entering into an unlawful combination to raise wages? The answer is, that the punishment awarded by the Law for this offence would afford no relief, inasmuch as it would not dissolve the Union. All the Gaols in the Riding could not contain one-third of the Union Men, even if crowded to suffocation; and so far is imprisonment from being considered as a punishment in this case, that it is viewed by these deluded men as a kind of triumph; and in the instances where it has been inflicted, hundreds of their companions have accompanied the prisoners to the gaol with bands of Music and cheering.

After mature consideration there appeared no other method effectually to meet the evil than for the Coal Masters at once to suspend their Works until the Men agreed to abandon the Union; and as pursuing this course it is evident that the Coal masters are advocating the cause of the country at large, and they may confidently add the true interests of their Workmen also, at a very heavy loss and serious inconvenience to themselves, it is reasonably hoped that no improper motives will be imputed to them. In conclusion, the Coal Masters earnestly recommend to all consumers of Coals to be as careful as possible in the use of them, as the supply must necessarily be exceedingly limited until the great body of Miners return to a sense of their duty.³¹

Others outside the dispute joined in debating miners' wages. One correspondent to the *Leeds Mercury*, styling himself 'A Resister' declared that the miners should be 'abundantly satisfied with their late earnings' because they have had 'from 21s to 28s per week, at the rate of work of eight hours per day for six days in the week'. He recognised, however, that at the larger collieries in Yorkshire 'which from want of sale at particular seasons, are under the necessity of limiting their men, in order that they may all have a share, and in such cases,

³¹ *Sheffield Iris*, 7 Dec. 1819; *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 3 Dec. 1819.

their average earnings, at those times, do not exceed from 12 to 15 shillings weekly'. He remonstrated that the miners' demands should be opposed as it 'would advance the price of coals full 50 per cent. to the consumer, and leave the masters under the complete control of a set of men that know less of how to govern than they know how to obey'. Because the colliers would 'not deliver up their tickets, and withdraw themselves from the Union Combination' the dispute would become a 'trial of privations', he concluded, 'where either the masters with their more ample means, or the workmen, backed by the *Union Societies*, can hold out the longest'.³²

On 30 November a meeting of coal masters was held at Dewsbury. 'From all we have heard on the subject of existing differences' the *Leeds Mercury* declared, 'we conclude, that the advance asked by the workmen is enormous, but the same information induces us to believe, that some increase of wages is necessary, and a little relaxation on each side might lead to an amicable adjustment'. The paper lamented the 'repulsive and unaccommodating nature' of both parties and added that 'we do not know how better to serve the contending parties, and to secure the country against starvation'.³³ From the Dewsbury collieries it was stated that if the unions' demands were agreed to 12 corves of coal would advance from 6s. to 9s. 1d. - an increase of fifty percent. Indeed, the Dewsbury magistrate Michael Stocks, at a meeting of coalowners, stated that 'that 'the advance of wages claimed by the work men was unreasonable and inadmissible' and should be 'steadily resisted'.³⁴

The impact of the strike was felt at the beginning of December. The *Wakefield and Halifax Journal* recommended that 'the inhabitants of this neighbourhood, to be as

³² *Leeds Mercury*, 27 Nov. 1819.

³³ *Leeds Mercury*, 4 Dec. 1819.

³⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 4 Dec. 1819.

economical as possible, in the use of fuel, as there is a prospect of a long contest between the workmen and their employers, during which, the supply, if not wholly stopped, will be very precarious'.³⁵ This newspaper clearly articulated its position on the dispute:

Some few individuals may perhaps have had some cause to complain, but the present demands of this discontented body are certainly most unreasonable. We observe therefore with satisfaction, the determination manifested by proprietors of collieries to resist them, as were they to take effect, they would be highly pernicious to the trade of the country in general, and ultimately ruin even the workmen themselves.³⁶

Some coal masters advertised for blackleg labour to keep their pits going. In an advert for colliers the Bowling Company near Bradford stated '[n]o Workmen need apply who are Members of any existing Combination or Union, established for the unlawful Purpose of controlling any Trade or Business, as to Wages, Manner of Working, or otherwise'.³⁷ Indeed, on 2 December the Bowling colliers stated their demands. The 'true cause of our dismissal from Employment', they declared, was that '[o]ur Employers required of us to sign a Paper, which they presented, but the content of which we could not, on account of the Technical Terms and Phrases used therein, sufficiently understand'. They 'unanimously refused to Sign' and were as a result dismissed from employment. Indeed, the Bowling colliers also printed 'a correct statement of the Rate of Wages' to demonstrate the inadequacy of what they were paid. In the Best Bed at Bowling it was stated that the miners earnt '2s. 6d. per Day, or 17 Shillings a Week, for Getting, Hurrying, and Drawing' the coals. In the same pit, the Black Bed colliers earnt slightly less: 2s. 4d. a day, or 16 shillings a week. Out of these wages the

³⁵ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 3 Dec. 1819.

³⁶ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 3 Dec. 1819.

³⁷ *Sheffield Iris*, 7 Dec. 1819.

miners 'have Tools and Candles to purchase out of their pittance'. At the Low Moor Colliery, part of the same enterprise, the miners stated that they earned from '2s 3d to 2s 6d. per Day, averaging about 17 Shillings a week' and in the Black Bed only 1s. 6d. was paid per 16 loads. They concluded:

We have now, in a plain a way as possible, laid before the Public the Rates of Wages, for which the Mines have lately been working; and we appeal to them [the public] to say, whether or not we are justified in demanding an Advance, ere we return to the Bowels of the Earth, to be incarcerated for the space of Eight Hours Daily, without a moment's time for Refreshment: liable to the most dreadful of Deaths at every stroke, and labouring in postures the most prejudicial to Health; we demand no more than what a common Mechanic is in the regular habit of receiving.

The condition of the Poor in this Country calls for compassion and redress, and we sincerely hope that a benevolent and charitable Public will not withhold that compassion from us, of which we stand so much in need.³⁸

When we compare wages to earlier in the decade, the average earnings of colliers had declined by 1819. In 1811 it was reported that colliers were earning a guinea a week; by the winter of 1819 this had been reduced to sixteen or seventeen shillings.³⁹ And, as we know, this decline in wage rates took place as the cost of living rose. By 1819 miners' real wages were significantly lower than they had been ten years earlier.

As the strike continued the region's coalowners continued to refuse union men into the pits. Joseph Beckett wrote to Viscount Lascelles informing him:

We have a coal miner here, an owner, who also agents S^r Thomas Gascoins mines. This man aware of the combination, at Garforth, & knowing that his men here, were in the Miners Union Club, which was formed to support turn out colliers 'till their

³⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 4 Dec. 1819

³⁹ See pp. 150-151.

object of raising wages was obtained. This miner has, I say, got the [?] word with his colliers here & would not allow one of them to Descend, until they had surrendered to him their Union Tickets. Two of these ticketts are just now before me; & got by this spirited measure. Seven more are in the hands of the miners, as the work men will not give them up; & go to work on the condition required. ... You w^d do well to endeavour to put an end to these unions. They make Labour Dear, & enhance the cost of manufactured articles.⁴⁰

Large meetings of colliers were held across the West Riding in the first week of December. '[T]he Colliers are in a ferment', John Carr of Wakefield wrote; 'on my way Home last Saturday I pas'd many who stated they had been at Colton Moor near Temple Newsome, where nearly 400 had assembled, headed by a local preacher, they had not determined upon any thing particular, but that there wo^d very soon be another meeting of all the Colliers in this part of the Country when something to the purpose wo^d be done.'⁴¹ Despite numerous meetings taking place in the West Riding for political reform in the winter of 1819 there is no evidence that this was one of them.⁴² In all the depositions sworn before the West Riding magistrates preserved in the voluminous lieutenancy papers not one mentions colliers participating in drilling and arming.⁴³ Indeed, the striking absence of any reference to colliers in the depositions indicates that the Yorkshire miners were not a key component of West Riding radicalism as historians have suggested. Based on the evidence the miners' demands were conditioned by the widespread distress resulting from progressively lower real wages and the rise in the cost of living. This does not, however, preclude that the

⁴⁰ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WY250/6/2/B2/4/51 Beckett to Lascelles 3 Dec. 1819.

⁴¹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WY250/6/2/B2/4/56 John Carr to Lascelles 6 Dec. 1819

⁴² Baxter and Stanley, 'The Time Draws Nigh, it is Just at Hand'.

⁴³ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WY250/6/2/B2/4/62 Deposition of John Heywood of Barnsley, Farmer, 7 Dec. 1819; WY250/6/2/B2/4/63 Deposition of William Fletcher of Barnsley, Weaver, 7 Dec. 1819; WY250/6/2/B2/4/64 Deposition of Thomas Knavin, Joiner, of Barnsley 7 Dec. 1819; WY250/6/2/B2/4/65 Deposition of Thomas Wilkinson of Barnsley, Manufacturer of Glass, 7 Dec. 1819.

Radical Associations and the Colliers' Union could have been organised on similar lines. W.

Herbert wrote to Lascelles stating:

Of course you are aware of the unceasing & [?] distress of this part of the country in consequence of the cessation of the colliers from work at this season of the year with a view to an advance of wages; [...] I am informed that the radicals in this neighbourhood make use of union tickets similar to those of the colliers, by which they agree to contribute a small weekly sum, & that their mode of recruiting is like raising a regiment [?] rank. A certain number of tickets are left with an active talkative fellow, & as soon as he has added twenty five recruits to the Union, he is declared their leader. In my humble apprehension the organisation of the radicals has in a great measure sprung from the manner in which the colliers manufacturers &c have been permitted to combine for the purpose of forcing an encrease of wages: for in the natural course of such combinations if successful will be extended to political objects. [...] In my own mind I am satisfied that the system of contributory unions to force an advance of wages is the root of the present extended mischief[.]

He also articulated concerns of a wider conspiracy with the miners of the North-East coalfield, reflecting concern about how trade unionism had spread in the first two decades of the nineteenth century: '[I]f those of Durham & Northumberland do not yet act in concert with them [the Yorkshire miners], it cannot be doubted that the time is not very distant when they will'.⁴⁴ It was not until 1842, however, that the two coalfields joined in one union.

Around 10 December a meeting of colliers, masters, and magistrates was held at the Wakefield courthouse to try and settle the dispute.⁴⁵ Although the strike was not ended, the magistrates were 'clearly of opinion that the combination of the masters to [turn off] their workmen without any warning, was no less illegal than that of the workmen to refuse to work unless their demands for an advance of wages were agreed to'. The magistrates used

⁴⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WY250/6/2/B2/4/68 W. Herbert to Lascelles 8 Dec. 1819.

⁴⁵ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WY250/6/2/B2/4/71 John Maude to Lascelles 10 Dec. 1819.

the Master and Servant Law and awarded all colliers who were illegally dismissed the wages they should have earned if they had stayed at work.

The *Wakefield and Halifax Journal* stated:

The Magistrates, therefore, unhesitatingly awarded to all the men under such engagements, who had been dismissed, their wages for the fortnight, during which they had been out of work. – Some of the Masters acquiesced so far as to receive their men into work again, and allow them to make up for the time they had lost by additional work; to which arrangement the men consented. Others expressed a willingness to take the men again into employment, but positively refused to make them any allowance for the time they had lost. The magistrates, however, signed several warrants against the masters for these wages; against which award of the Magistrates, the masters gave notice of appeal to the Quarter Sessions. We have heard that, in some instances, amicable arrangements have been made between the parties, and a number of workmen have, in consequence, resumed their wonted employment.⁴⁶

Some of the indictments issued to the coalowners for unpaid wages have survived. All colliers mentioned were owed between one pound one shilling (William Scargill of Shitlington) and four pounds four shillings (Jonas Barraclough of Mirfield). The vast majority, however, were owed two pounds two shillings.⁴⁷ Interestingly, John Goodair jun., one of the

⁴⁶ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 10 Dec. 1819; *Sheffield Iris*, 14 Dec. 1819.

⁴⁷ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/159/2 Wakefield Quarter Session Roll Jan. 1820: Jonas Barraclough of Mirfield; John Barraclough of Mirfield; Joseph Bentley of Shitlington; John Nicholls of Shitlington; John Midgley of Flockton; William Hargreaves of Shitlington; Thomas Hargreaves of Shitlington; John Hampshire of Thornhill; Reuben Hargreaves of Shitlington; William Johnson of Shitlington; John Goodair Jun. of Shitlington; Joseph Bolton of Shitlington; Robert Hargreaves of Shitlington; John Lumb of Shitlington; William Lumb of Shitlington; William Scargill of Shitlington; John Hargreaves of Shitlington; Mark Lumb of Shitlington; Thomas Hodgson of Shitlington; William Walker of Shitlington; William Wilkinson of Shitlington; Joseph Shires of Shitlington; John Goodair of Shitlington; George Robinson of Shitlington; John Thewlis of Flockton; George Goodair of Shitlington; John Webster of Shitlington; John Leather of Flockton; James Thewlis of Flockton; David Rhodes of Flockton; James Ewebank of Flockton; John Winpenny of Thornhill; Joseph Wilkinson of Shitlington; John Lumb of Shitlington; Isaiah Margison of Shitlington; George Armitage of Shitlington; George Brooke of Shitlington; John Hawkland of Shitlington; William Westwood of Shitlington; Joseph Winpenny of Thornhill; Abraham Matthews Junr of Shitlington; Abraham Matthews of Elmley.

colliers owed two pounds two shillings was later found guilty of intimidating a blackleg miner.⁴⁸

On 10 December the Middleton Colliery miners issued their statement on how their wages had declined over 1819. The colliers stated how they had not earned 'above 16s. 6d. per week for the last Eleven Months back' and denounced the rumour that some colliers were earning 7s. per day. They stated that

Eight Hours is generally granted to be sufficient for a Person to be hid in the Bowels of the Earth; but we lament to say, that the decrease of our Privileged has given Cause for us to be often Two and sometimes Three Hours longer in than the Time specified above; and when that Day's Work is done, we have earned the enormous Sum of 2s. 8d. free from all Deductions. We would now say, are we deserving of an Advance of Wages or are we not?

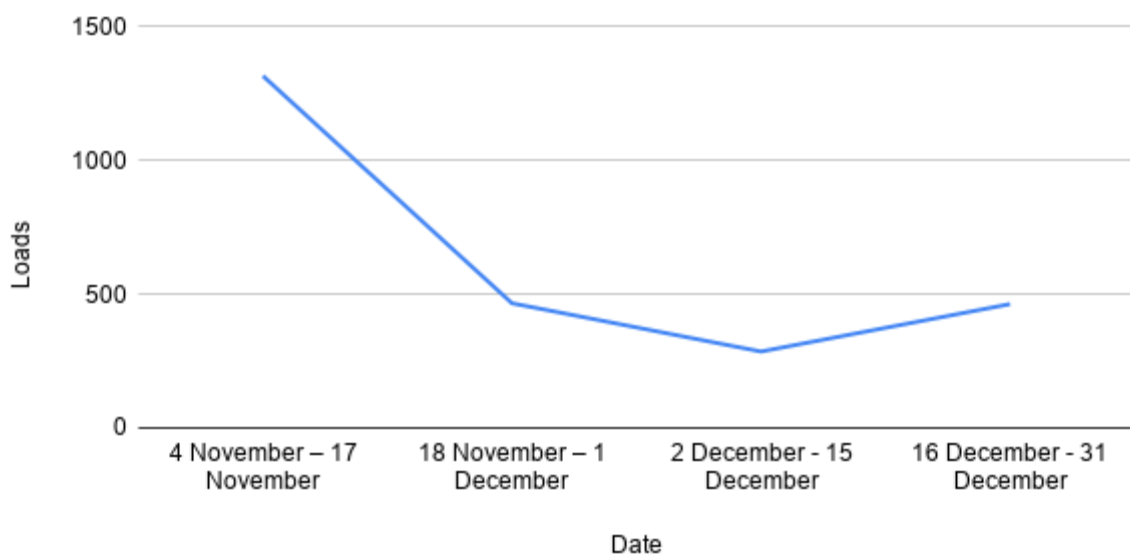
The Middleton colliers criticised the coalowners' repeated assertion that the strike would have the greatest impact on the public through raising the price of coals: 'one or more of our Masters has Impudence to say, that if our demands were acceded to, it would raise the Price of Coals to the Consumer from 2s. to 2s. 6d. per Ton'. '[L]et this inform the Public', they stated, 'either they (the Masters) or the Press-Setter, must have committed an Error by this Assertion; yet we have no Reason to think that the Setter of the Press would make such a Mistake'. They declared that the Miners would return to work 'if the Public would but allow them One Shilling per Ton, which would be easier paid than from 2s. to 2s. 6d. and the Men would then be gaining considerably more than by the Advance they are wanting'. They lamented the 'evil Methods taken to punish the Workmen by some Coal-Masters in this

⁴⁸ See p. 189.

Country' and concluded their demands by quoting the evangelical abolitionist William Cowper: 'Remember Heaven's an avenging Rod: To smite the Poor is Treason against God'.⁴⁹

The strike was certainly effective at Middleton. The graphs below demonstrate the impact on coal production and wage expenditure for the period immediately before and during the strike. The strike ended in late December or in early January at the latest.

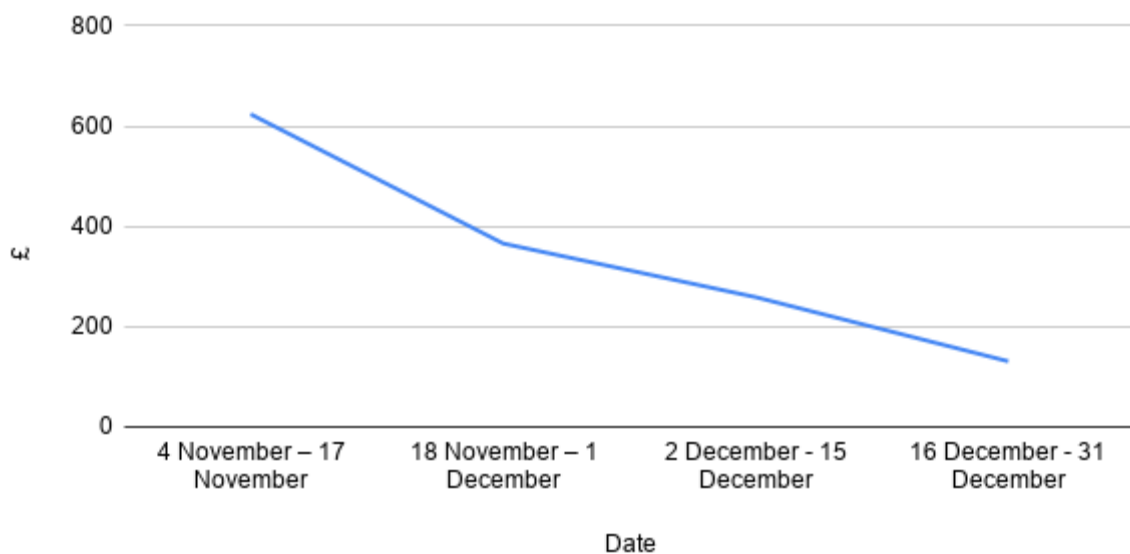
Graph 6:1. Amount of Coal Produced (Loads) at Middleton Colliery late 1819



Source: West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/165 Middleton Colliery, Working, Leading and Land Sale Book 1819.

⁴⁹ *Leeds Mercury* Dec. 11 1819.

Graph 6:2. Wage Expenditure (£) at Middleton Colliery late 1819



Source: West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/138 Middleton Colliery Pay Book 1819.

Between 2 and 31 December only the Venture Pit and Garden Pit produced coal at Middleton Colliery. The fortnight before, however, (18 November to 1 December) there were many more pits in operation. In addition to the Venture Pit and Garden Pit, the Fanny Pit, Garden Pit, Bawcliff Pit, Spring Hill Pit, Gosforth Pit, and the Day Hole were all producing coal. Between 2 and 15 December inclusive £4 15s. 6d. was spent on 'men not being colliers at 6d' in the Venture Pit and £2 2s. for the same 'not being hurriers' suggesting blackleg labour was being used to work the pits. During the period 18 November to 1 December when all the pits were in operation, there is no reference whatsoever to those being employed in the pits 'not being colliers' or 'not being hurriers'. It seems blackleg labour continued to be used throughout the course of the dispute. Between 16 and 31 December £5 3s. 6d. was spent on blackleg colliers and 18s. on hurriers in the Venture Pit.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/138 Middleton Colliery Pay Book 1819.

By mid-December, as graph 5.1 suggests at Middleton, the strike began to crack. It was reported in the *Leeds Mercury* that 'The low Moor men have [...] all given up their Union Society tickets, and those collieries are proceeding as usual. The Flockton colliery, is also at work again, and a number of men have abjured the combination'. And, as the Middleton expenditure books highlight, blackleg labour was increasingly being used. 'At other works, men not hitherto employed in the trade, are set to get coal, and many common labourers are earning good wages in this way'. At a meeting of the coalmasters it was again resolved to 'adhere to their former resolution to break up the Union Societies'. The miners remained resolute, however, in their refusal to give up the union tickets, 'nor to relax their claims for an advance of wages' and the 'generality' of collieries remained 'at a stand'. 'This state of things', the *Leeds Mercury* stated, 'cannot continue long'.⁵¹ Sir John Lister-Kaye, who owned the Flockton Colliery, stated on 20 December that: 'My Colliers are all at work, & laughing at those who struck. Such a measure will never happen again. For, they now find that the funds are not distributed to the seceders consequently they are quarrelling with their treasurers, their leaders, & with one another'.⁵²

Acts of violence broke out as the miners became more desperate. John Robinson of Calder Main Colliery and the previously-mentioned John Goodair jun. of the Flockton colliery were both committed to York Castle 'for enticing colliers to enter into an unlawful combination [...] and for intimidating others who were not in the Union from working, by using threatening language'.⁵³ Later, other individuals were found guilty of intimidation and were made to issue a public pardon. Nancy Brown, Ruth Brown, Mary Longley, Martha Bickerdike, Charlotte Hartley and Mary Fielding, were all found guilty of obstructing William

⁵¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 11 Dec. 1819; *Sheffield Independent*, 18 Dec. 1819.

⁵² West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/250/6/2/B2/4/91 John Lister-Kaye to Lascelles 20 Dec. 1819.

⁵³ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 31 Dec. 1819.

Broadhead from attending his employment at Rev. Wood's colliery at East Ardsley, because he was not a member of the union.⁵⁴ After the dispute ended Joseph Arendale and George Ashton of Alverthorpe were imprisoned three months in York castle for intimidating two working colliers, Charles Scholes and Richard Davis, on 24 December at W. Fenton's Potovens Plain Colliery.⁵⁵ Indeed, in an attempt to prevent blacklegs going to work the strikers disabled collieries. At a pit belonging to Rev. Wood near Wakefield, the pit rope was cut though 'by some unknown hand' and broke, precipitating a man and a boy going to work to the bottom. At a meeting of the colliers' union at Swillington Bridge near Leeds it was determined to 'hold out to the last, and not to submit to the masters', and the same night 'considerable damage' was done to the spouts⁵⁶ at Thorp-Hill Colliery'. The *Wakefield and Halifax Journal* declared that 'there is every reason to suppose that [the offence] was perpetrated by a number of the men now standing out for wages'. The same week an outhouse belonging to Sir John Lister-Kaye was broken into and the carcass of a recently killed calf was carried off.⁵⁷

On Christmas Day working colliers from Lister-Kaye's Flockton Colliery assembled at Denby Grange and 'in good ale drank "health to the King and success to the coal trade"'. 'Highly to their credit', it was stated, 'this respectable body of men [...] have not struck work at any time, nor are they engaged in any illegal combination whatever'. Although these men were not striking miners the 'drinking a health to the king' again hints at the loyalism of colliers. The paper subsequently stated how 'the persons taken to the House of Correction, and the man sent to York Castle for three months, [John Goodair jun.] designated in the

⁵⁴ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 7 Jan. 1820.

⁵⁵ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 14 Jan. 1820.

⁵⁶ This could possibly have been a chute that coal slid down to be loaded onto waggons or barges. See Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 460.

⁵⁷ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 24 Dec. 1819.

public papers as being “*of the Flockton Colliery*,” have had no concern whatever with the above colliery, or with any of the collieries attached to it’.⁵⁸ Evidently either Lister-Kaye or his colliers wanted to reject any connection to the union. Indeed, Quarter Session papers reveal that John Goodair jun. was actually employed by William Stansfield and Joseph Child and not by John Lister-Kaye at his Flockton Colliery.⁵⁹

The strike gradually petered out after Christmas. The *Wakefield and Halifax Journal* reported on New Year’s Eve how ‘the colliers union has in a great measure been dissolved’ and ‘a great proportion of the workmen have already submitted, returned to their work at former prices, and given up their Union tickets’. A few staunch members, however, stayed out on strike.⁶⁰ It is not known if or when they returned to work. The strike failed because it took place at a time of depressed trade. Coalowners reduced wages due to the lack of demand for coal; and the owners had no incentive to settle the dispute because the pits continued to be worked by blackleg miners desperate to earn wages when the cost of living was high. It was not until 1833 that the Yorkshire miners struck *en masse*. When the colliers returned to work the coalowners congratulated the West Riding magistracy for their role in supressing the union.

The Aftermath of the Dispute

On 1 May 1820 the principal coalowners of the West Riding met at the White Hart Inn at Wakefield. Chaired by Jonas Clarke, a Silkstone coalowner, the owners unanimously agreed to purchase a ‘[p]iece of Plate’ for the Wakefield magistrate Michael Stocks, for ‘our

⁵⁸ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 31 Dec. 1819.

⁵⁹ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Wakefield), QS1/159/2 Wakefield Quarter Session Roll Jan. 1820.

⁶⁰ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 31 Dec. 1819.

great admiration of his Conduct during the late disturbed state of the Country' particularly 'during the Disputes of the Workmen employed in the Collieries with their Employers, under the influence of illegal Combinations and confederated Union Clubs'. The masters described the miners' union as 'one of the most alarming and dangerous Combinations that ever existed in this or any other Country'.⁶¹ This meeting was the culmination of two months discussion about how to reward Stocks for his actions. Earlier in March, an anonymous correspondent from Dewsbury wrote to the *Leeds Mercury* to publicly thank Stocks for his 'prompt and decisive measures' in suppression of the miners' union. The correspondent added that his actions 'have been attended with the happiest effects'. 'Tranquillity is perfectly restored' they added; 'the union appears to be completely dissolved, and that great numbers of its members have come forward to accept of work on the terms offered by the masters'. The letter, however, highlighted how many of the union men's families were distressed and that their futures looked even bleaker:

the situation of the workmen, however, is not likely to be much improved, at least generally, for it is absolutely impossible for all to obtain employment – nay, perhaps one one [sic] tenth of them cannot do it for several months at any rate. – This neighbourhood never at any pervious time was so much distressed for want of work, and there is no prospect of improvement.⁶²

The letter was probably written by John Halliday junior, a Dewsbury coalowner. In September 1820 Halliday, accompanied by '[t]hree other Gentlemen' presented Stocks with 'a massive Silver cup'. The *Leeds Mercury* stated that the cup was presented for his services

⁶¹ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 5 May 1820.

⁶² *Leeds Mercury*, 4 March 1820.

‘during a Period of great Insubordination among the Workmen employed in the Collieries’.

After he had accepted the cup Stocks replied:

During the late disturbances amongst the Coal Miners, in the West Riding of the County of York, no one I assure you, lamented more sincerely than their obstinate and ill-advised conduct than myself; neither did any one hail with greater pleasure the subjugation of that dangerous and Illegal combination, which threatened alike destruction in a great measure to the manufacture of this Riding, annihilation to the authority of the Master Colliers, and ruin to the best interests of the men. Gentlemen, it is not very surprising that the captivating yet delusive ideas of men becoming masters, through the means of a combination never defined, consequently Omnipotent in operation, should be eagerly embraced by the Miners[.]⁶³

Stocks was hardly the ‘sympathetic magistrate’ portrayed by Katrina Navickas.⁶⁴ He was remembered for his role in suppressing the union. At a testimonial for him in 1830 a Mr. Oldroyd ‘expressed his approbation of the conduct of Mr. Stocks, during the turn-out of the colliers and the clothiers in 1820’. At the same event a Mr. Hinchcliffe ‘bore similar testimony to Mr. Stocks’ firmness during the turn out of the colliers’. He added that he ‘put an end to the Union, which if it had continued would have been ruinous to the neighbourhood owing to the increased price of coal occasioned by the high wages they demanded’.⁶⁵ He may have suppressed the 1819 union; he did not, however, suppress Yorkshire miners’ trade unionism.

As the Dewsbury correspondent highlighted, the coal trade continued in depression in 1820. Colliers sought work elsewhere. In 1819 at St Mary’s Church in Worsbrough, of the 34 baptisms recorded, 33.3% were children of colliers; by 1820, 51 baptisms were recorded,

⁶³ *Leeds Mercury*, 23 Sept. 1820.

⁶⁴ Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place*, p. 89.

⁶⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 11 Nov. 1830.

but only 17.7% were children of colliers. It was not until the mid-1820s that a significant number of colliers returned to Worsbrough. The charts below highlight how the number of colliers bringing their child to baptism declined as a proportion of all baptisms across 1819-1820.

Chart 6:1. Occupations of Adult Males bringing their child to Baptism at Worsbrough St. Mary's in 1819

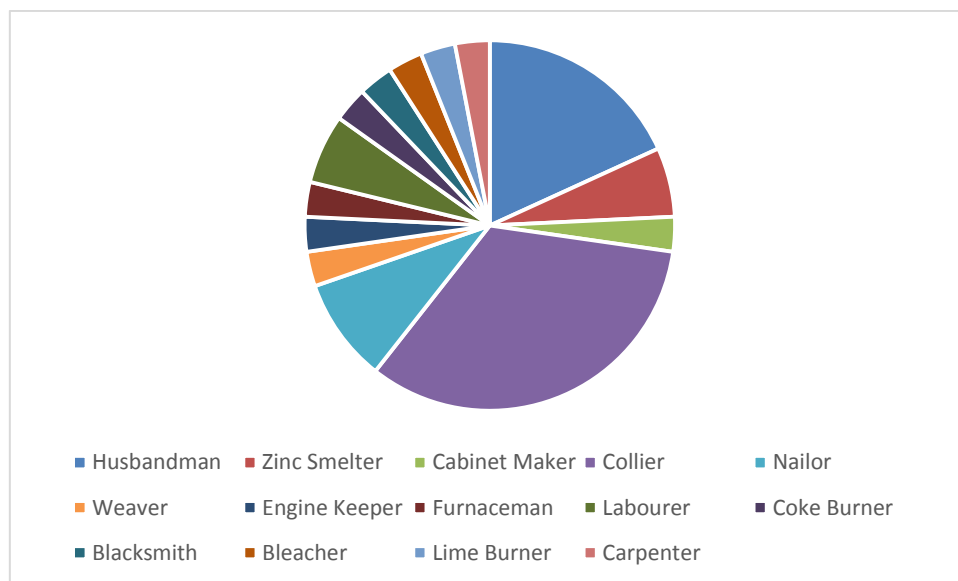
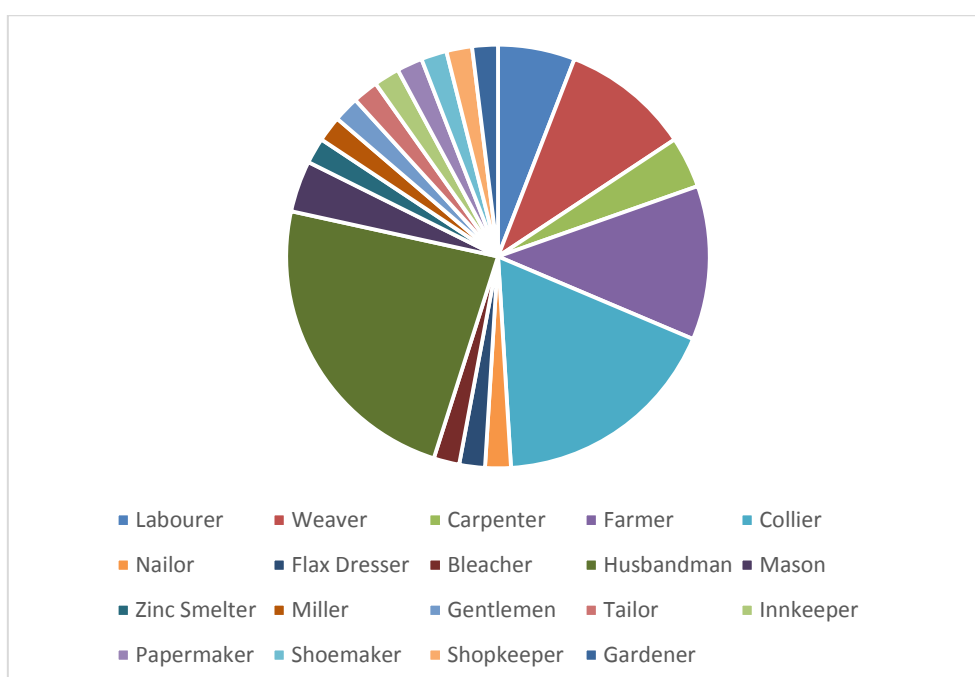


Chart 6:2. Occupations of adult males bringing their child to baptism at Worsbrough St. Mary's in 1820



Source: Doncaster Archives, PR/3/5 Worsbrough St. Mary's Baptism Registers 1819-20.

In June 1820 the coalowners met at Mirfield to try and establish a foothold in the London market but this, it seems, failed.⁶⁶ The West Riding coal trade did not significantly improve until 1822.

Conclusion

This chapter has charted the causes of, events, and consequences of the 1819 Yorkshire miners strike. John Baxter's assertions that little can be discovered about the strike is incorrect. Similarly, both Donnelly and Kaijage seriously underestimate the significance of the strike, and Machin fell far short in appreciating the extent, duration, and impact the dispute had on the West Riding. All these historians, however, missed the real reason why the strike took place at all. The Yorkshire miners' wages had declined whilst the cost of living had rose; when compared to the war years their standard of living was much lower. Indeed, the repeated insistence in their demands that their wages had been reduced and that they could no longer make a living highlights the precarious position the miners found themselves in by the winter months of 1819. The strike ultimately failed, but there can be no doubt that it was costly in lost sales for many employers.

Despite the apprehensions of elites that the strike was part of the wider radical nexus there is no evidence that this was the case. The strike was purely a dispute concerned with improving wages and a time when living standards had declined. Criticism of Peterloo or discourse advocating the reformation of parliament - despite loud calls for reform in the

⁶⁶ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 16 June 1820.

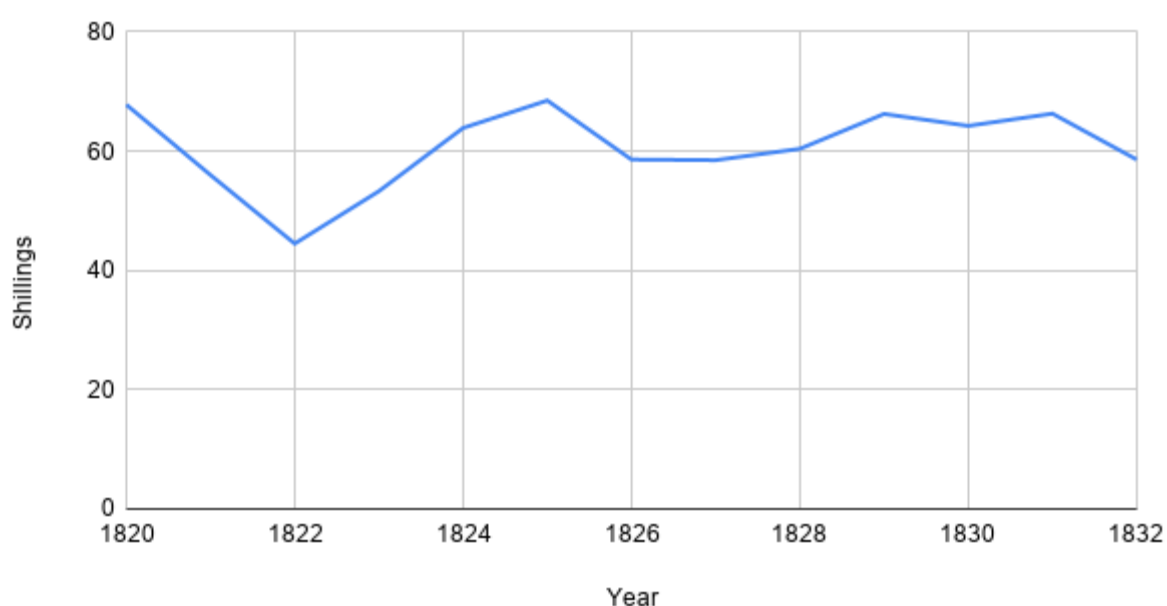
region - did not feature in the miners' demands: they were solely focussed on wages and improving living standards. And, according to the depositions, the total absence of any colliers during episodes of drilling and arming is further testimony to the fact that the strike had no connection to West Riding Radicalism.

The early years of the 1820s were very similar to 1819. By late 1822, however, the Yorkshire coal industry was booming again and the miners decided to take advantage of the favourable demand for coal and strike for higher wages at a time when the cost of living was declining. This is, however, more appropriately dealt with in the next chapter where we examine the mainly prosperous years of the 1820s and early 1830s.

Chapter 7: Prosperity and Protest 1820-1832

This chapter will assess how and why the Yorkshire miners protested across 1820-1832. We reject, again, John Baxter's interpretation that the Yorkshire 'mining proletariat took a long while to stir' during the 1820s and the 1830s.¹ It will, once more, show how at times of good trade miners took strike action to improve their standard of living. Strike action increased real wages as the cost of living declined. Food prices plummeted to the lowest levels until the 'hungry forties'. The popularity of the potato as a foodstuff increased significantly in the 1820s.² Graph 6:1 demonstrates wheat prices across 1830-1832. Appendix 4 highlights the cost of wheat across 1786-1839 for comparison.

Graph 7:1. Price of Wheat (per Imperial Quarter) 1820-1832



Source: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

¹ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 309.

² Bohsteadt, *The Politics of Provisions*, p. 270; Archer, *By a Flash and a Scare*, p. 38. Adrian Randall stresses how 'agricultural output increased dramatically following the extensive enclosures that took place during the French wars' and thus food scarcity concerns evaporated. See Randall, *Riotous Assemblies*, p. 218.

This chapter is divided into four time periods. Firstly, the period 1820-1824 is investigated. This charts the transition between the depression, where friendly societies cushioned the miners against immiseration and kept their standard of living above poverty levels, and the return of prosperity in late 1822. Secondly, the years 1825-1830 are examined, when booming trade, and the repeal of the Combination Laws, led to a significant expansion in trade unionism. The coal industry was prosperous and wages were high, in contrast to other West Riding trades that stagnated. Thirdly, the year 1831 is assessed when the Yorkshire coal trade expanded due to a strike of colliers in the North-East. A strike of Elsecar miners is investigated in detail. Lastly, the year 1832 is explored, and how the Yorkshire miners responded and reacted to another North-East colliers' strike. By 1832 trade unionism was integral to the Yorkshire miners and was firmly established as their primary method of protest. The Yorkshire miners were indifferent to the Reform Bill crisis because their immediate economic grievances could be redressed through trade union action. But first, we need to examine the shortcomings of what historians have written on miners, trade unionism, and popular protest between 1820-32 and where the Yorkshire miners fit into this.

Limitations of the Historiography: 1820-32

Mining historians have neglected to investigate the 1820s in detail. Despite Robert Colls' assertion that in 1820 the North-Eastern pitmen 'entered upon two decades of unprecedented coalfield expansion and conflict'³ he passes quickly over the 1820s to focus on the 1830s. He does, however, recognise that a trade union called the United Association

³ Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, p. 232.

of Colliers on the River Tyne and Wear surfaced after the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1825 but says little about this.⁴ Raymond Challinor argued that the Lancashire miners remained docile in the 1820s. He described them as 'far too disorganised and unco-ordinated' and said nothing more on the decade.⁵ Frank Machin recognised that a strike of colliers took place in Sheffield in 1825. He did not, however, investigate the dispute in detail. He simply moved on to the 1830s declaring that there was no 'record of trade union organisation of coal miners in South Yorkshire for some years'.⁶ This chapter will show this could not be further from the truth.

Trade union scholars have shown considerable interest in the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824 and 1825. However, they have generally focussed on the reasons for repeal, the key individuals involved, and the process of repeal, at the expense of what happened to trade unions in the immediate aftermath.⁷ Often scholars have generalised about the nature of trade unionism in the 1820s. E.P. Thompson, for instance, stated that the decade was one of 'growing trade union strength'.⁸ Two very important studies exist of influential trade union leaders in the 1820s. Kirby and Musson examined John Doherty and Iorwerth Prothero investigated John Gast.⁹ However, nearly all of these studies have stressed how trade unionism was confined to the skilled working man: the 'aristocrat' of labour. This chapter will show that the Yorkshire miners were as much a part of trade union development in the 1820s as the weaver or the artisan.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 247-248.

⁵ Challinor, *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners*, p. 25.

⁶ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 36.

⁷ Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, ch. 12.

⁸ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 781. See also Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes*, p. 39.

⁹ Kirby and Musson, *The Voice of the People*; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*.

In the historiography of protest and popular politics the 1820s have been similarly been ignored.¹⁰ E.P. Thompson described the 1820s as being 'strangely quiet' when contrasted with the radical 1810s and the Chartist 1830s. He claimed the decade was a 'mildly prosperous plateau of social peace'.¹¹ More specialised literature on agricultural labourers has examined episodic outbreaks of rural protest.¹² A richer body of protest scholarship undoubtedly exists for the early 1830s. The upsurge in disorder in the late 1820s has been the focus of Swing scholars seeking to understand the origins of the movement. Swing scholarship has, however, overwhelmingly focussed on the southern agricultural labourer.¹³ Consequently the northern workers of the late 1820s and the early 1830s have been neglected by scholars. We should not place too much emphasis on Swing scholarship, however. Firstly, there is there no evidence of any Swing incidents involving Yorkshire miners; secondly, by the early 1830s miners had a much higher standard of living than agricultural labourers because they had a well-established network of trade unions to improve wages.

Economic Improvement: 1820-24

¹⁰ The absence of academic interest in the 1820s is possibly because it is an awkward decade for beginning or ending a historical monograph. General textbooks on the eighteenth century end in 1815 with Waterloo; nineteenth century scholarship begins in with the Great Reform Act of 1832. More specialised scholarship on the post-war period reaches 1819 and climaxing with Peterloo or the risings of 1820. For two typical examples see Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place*, ch.3 and ch.4 and Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England*, p. 218.

¹¹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 781.

¹² P. Muskett, 'The East Anglian Agrarian Riots of 1822', *Agricultural History Review*, 32:1 (1984), pp. 1-13.

¹³ For Swing historiography see: Griffin, *The Rural War*; Idem., *Protest, Politics and Work in Rural England*; Idem., 'Swing, Swing Redivivus, or Something after Swing? On the Death Throes of a Protest Movement, December 1830-December 1833', *International Review of Social History*, 54 (2009), pp. 459-497; Idem., 'The Violent Captain Swing?' *Past & Present*, 209 (2010), pp. 149-180. Only Katrina Navickas has shown the extent to which Swing spread to the north through a focus on the North-West: K. Navickas, 'Captain Swing in the North: the Carlisle Riots of 1830', *History Workshop Journal*, 71 (2011), pp. 5-28.

The post-war depression continued throughout 1820 and the demand for political reform reached its climax in the spring. Various risings took place across Britain but all were quickly crushed.¹⁴ On the night of 11-12 April a group of Barnsley radicals marched to Grange Moor with arms, flags, and drums. They found no contingent of Huddersfield radicals and the men fled. They were quickly rounded up by the authorities.¹⁵ The Grange Moor rising has, however, been amply investigated and this scholarship has shown that the involvement of colliers was minimal.¹⁶ Fred Donnelly, for instance, has shown that only five colliers took part out of eighty-two identified individuals with known occupations. And, four out of the five, the Hutchinsons of Dodworth, were members of the same family. By comparison, sixty-seven of those who took part were immiserated linen weavers.¹⁷

In the winter of 1820 a colliers' friendly society emerged around Leeds. This operated in a similar way - to maintain living standards - as the ones which emerged in 1800, 1811 and 1817. It was stated that the colliers at 'Middleton, Lofthouse, Waterloo, Beeston-Park, and Rothwell' were 'united in a Sick Club' that was 'enrolled at the Quarter Sessions'. The colliers claimed their society had been established to raise funds to 'improve the morals and alleviate the distress of a deserving class of men' through 'the diminution of pauperism'. They added that:

Colliers are more liable to disease and accident than most other men, the funds of their Sick Club are not equal to their wants; and this consideration of the hazardous nature of their employment, prevents them from being admitted as members in other benefit societies. In order to assist this useful class of labourers, the benevolent public are now solicited to give their Christmas donations to the Colliers

¹⁴ Chase, *1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom*, pp.

¹⁵ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England*, pp. 216-7.

¹⁶ Donnelly, *The General Rising of 1820*; Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, pp. 250-273; Kaijage, *Labouring Barnsley*, pp. 407-459.

¹⁷ Donnelly, *The General Rising of 1820*, pp. 259-260.

in aid of the funds of their Sick Club, and respectable members are appointed to hand about a subscription list for that purpose, with attested copies of this address.

The friendly society stated that there were 'six honorary members': Charles Brandling, the owner of Middleton Colliery; Wm. Fenton, Esq., the owner of collieries in Rothwell; Mr. John Blenkinsop, the agent of Middleton Colliery; Mr. John Broadhead; Mr. J.B. Charlesworth; Mr. T. Tatham. The society stated that more honorary members were required 'so as to enable the funds to meet the claims of its members, and to increase the superannuated allowance to men past work'.¹⁸ It is very difficult to see how this sick club could be a trade union when so many of the principal Leeds coalowners had contributed financially to it. Rather, it was a welfare organisation that provided funds to maintain living standards when wages were low, underemployment was widespread, and wheat prices were at the highest point of the decade. The existence of friendly societies, however, may explain why Yorkshire colliers continued to take no interest in political radicalism. Because they provided colliers with funds to insulate them against extreme distress, colliers were not, despite the trade depression, in the facing extreme poverty like other members of the labouring classes.

The coal trade depression continued into 1821. Riots broke out in the Shropshire coalfield.¹⁹ In February, Newman wrote to Fitzwilliam highlighting the £2000 debt of the Elsecar iron manufacturers Messrs. Darwins, because of a lack of demand for iron. He suggested that the colliers supplying the foundries with coal have their hours reduced. Because 'no money can be got from them for the coals which your Lordship sells to them', Newman continued, 'it is worthy of consideration whether it would not be more prudent,

¹⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 16 Dec. 1820.

¹⁹ *Sheffield Iris*, 13 Feb. 1821.

for to with-hold the supply'. 'It is true', he announced, 'the suspension of the [iron] works may throw several men out of Employ, but the summer months are the most favourable for obtaining work elsewhere'.²⁰ Additional proof of the slack demand for coal comes from interesting sources. In October 1821 the *Leeds Intelligencer* reported that 'a poor woman at Beeston, of the name of Grace Heaton, was safely delivered of three children, two boys and a girl, who, with their mother, are doing well. Her husband is a collier, and very frequently out of work'.²¹ As John Baxter has correctly argued, the 'legacy of overstimulated war-time production was not quickly offset by peace-time demand' and at some collieries it seems men were made redundant.²²

At the same time colliers' friendly societies continued to provide welfare benefits for the membership. Although wheat prices had declined many colliers remained underemployed as the depression in the coal trade continued. Shortly before Christmas 1821 'the MIDDLETON SICK CLUB' stated that colliers from 'Rothwell-Haigh, Carr-Gate and Outwood' collieries had joined the society. The sick club wished 'gratefully to acknowledge the Liberality of the Public in aiding their Funds last Winter, by liberal CHRISTMAS BOXES amounting to 35/.' 'This Sum', they stated 'is equal to 1000 weeks' Allowance to Sick Members. The Donors will feel much Satisfaction in their Alms being thus applied rather than being spent in Rioting and Drunkenness'. The sick club stated that '[t]he universal Approbation this Mode of aiding their Sick Club has met with, encourages them to pursue the same Steps this Christmas'. They declared that:

Books similar to last Year have been prepared and attested, and Men of Probity appointed to wait on the Public, who they trust will continue their Liberality, when

²⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/119 W. Newman to Fitzwilliam 13 Feb. 1821.

²¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 8 Oct. 1821

²² Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 311.

they reflect on how dangerous is the Employ of a Collier, and how exposed to Suffering, whilst procuring an essential Article of domestic Comfort and indispensable Use in all our Manufactories.

Interestingly the society also supplied a longer list of 'Honorary Members' who, presumably, had also made some financial contribution to the fund: 'Messrs. Banks and Goodman, Mr. C. Chadwick, Mr. John Cawood, Messrs. Beecroft and Co. Messrs. Abraham Dickinson and Sons; Messrs. Aldam, Pease, and Co.; Mr. Tottie, Mr. Hebblethwaite, Mr Kemplay, Mr. Samuel Hare, Surgeon; Messrs. Charlesworth and Sons'.²³ A search through Baines' *Directory* reveals that Messrs. Charlesworth and Sons were coalowners at Lofthouse.²⁴ The other businesses listed were mostly involved in the stuffing, woollen and worsted trades which could suggest a wider appreciation of the importance of colliery work.²⁵ Or, perhaps, their contributions were to show to the colliers that it was the employer-approved friendly societies, not trade unions, which provided the most to keep Leeds colliers' living standards above poverty levels.

Other colliers' friendly societies were numerous in the winter of 1821. 'A NEIGHBOURING COAL-AGENT' wrote to the *Leeds Mercury* stating that:

²³ *Leeds Mercury*, 15 Dec. 1821.

²⁴ E. Baines, *History, Directory & Gazetteer of the County of York: Vol. 1 – West Riding* (Leeds, 1822).

²⁵ Banks and Goodman were 'stuff merchants' at Hunslet Lane; Beecroft and Co. were probably 'wrought iron and steel manufacturers and merchants'; Abraham Dickinson and Co. were 'wool staplers' at Boar Lane; Aldam Pease and Co were 'stuff merchants' at Park Lane; Messrs. Charlesworth and Co. I think are the 'coal merchants' at Lofthouse. It is harder, however, to be more precise with individuals and even more so when they are listed as 'Mr': John Cawood was more than likely the 'saddler' of 21 Union Street; Mr. Tottie was possibly T.W Tottie of Beech Grove, Woodhouse Lane; Mr. Hebblethwaite could have been any one of John, Robert, Christopher or Thomas Hebblethwaite. All four were listed as being merchants. All except Christopher, who lived at Pleasant Dairy, lived in Woodhouse Lane; Mr. Kemplay could have been Richard Kemplay who ran an 'academy for young gentlemen' at St John's Place. It could also have been John (and Mary) Kemplay who ran a 'ladies seminary' in Boar Lane. There was also a Robert Kemplay, a joiner, also of St. John's Place.

Observing a Paragraph in your Paper last Week advertising the Public, that they will be called upon the ensuing Christmas by People in Behalf of the COLLIERS' FRIENDLY SOCIETY, at Middleton, for any Donation they may be pleased to give; the Public are respectfully informed, that there are other Societies of the same kind in this Neighbourhood, particularly one held at the White Horse, in Hunslet, whereof One Hundred and Eight Members are Colliers, chiefly of the Waterloo Colliery, (Four of them only being Members of the Middleton Society,) and submit to the Pubic whether their Benevolence should not be given to all the Societies alike, according to the Number of Collier Members.²⁶

Given how integral the management of collieries were in colliers' friendly societies (a coal agent managed the day-to-day sales of coal at the colliery) it is hard to accept John Baxter's interpretation that the 1820s witnessed the growth of a more 'definite social polarization of economic classes representing labour and capital'.²⁷ We hear nothing more of Leeds colliers' friendly societies beyond 1822. This almost certainly reflects a resurgence in the demand for coal. Miners were no longer dependent on the societies when full employment returned and wheat prices fell to the lowest level of the decade. The possibility of poverty declined.

In the summer months, however, as trade revived, unrest developed amongst the miners at Middleton Colliery. 'We understand', the *Leeds Intelligencer* stated 'that, during the last week several anonymous letters have been distributed amongst the colliers at Middleton colliery, near this place, inciting them to commit wilful murder. A reward is offered for a discovery of the base incendiaries, who we ardently hope will be brought to justice'.²⁸ In June a substantial fifty guineas was offered to anyone who had any information about who wrote the 'most DIABOLICAL ANONYMOUS LETTERS [...] inciting the Colliers

²⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 22 Dec. 1821

²⁷ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 298.

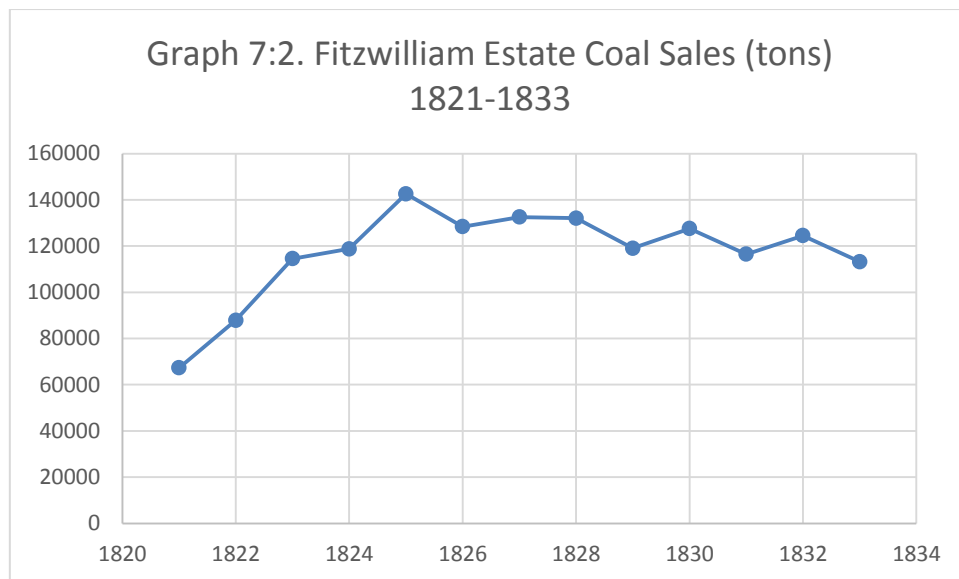
²⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 27 May 1822.

employed there to COMMIT WILFUL MURDER'. Twenty guineas was offered 'to any Person who can prove the Hand-writing of the Author, or the Delivery of any of the said Letters' and a further thirty guineas was to be paid to 'on the Conviction of any person engaged in writing or sending the said Letters'.²⁹ It is not known if anyone was caught. The motives behind the sending of the threatening letters, therefore, are lost to us. However, during the same week that the letters were found, a violent attack was committed by one Middleton collier on another. John Longbottom was charged with 'having violently and unprovokedly assaulted one James Hewitt, a Workman, at the Colliery of C.J. Brandling, Esquire, situate at Middleton, near Leeds, on the Fifth Day of June Instant'. Hewitt agreed that he would not take proceedings further if Longbottom agreed to publicly apologise for his actions - which he did.³⁰ Evidently during late May and early June 1822 there was some unrest that is difficult to define at Middleton Colliery.

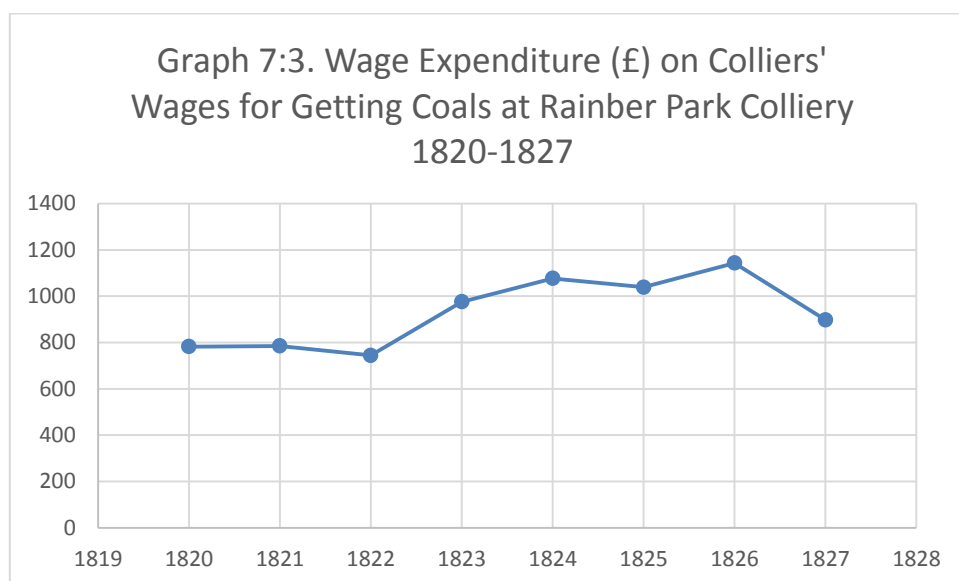
Towards the close of 1822 the demand for coal increased substantially. The following graphs illustrate the rapid upsurge in coal sales at Earl Fitzwilliam's collieries and the increase in wage expenditure for coal getting at Rainber Park Colliery.

²⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 1 June 1822; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 June 1822.

³⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 June 1822; *Leeds Mercury*, 15 June 1822.



Source: Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 317.



Source: Sheffield Archives, WWM/A/1574 Rainber Park Colliery Annual Statements.

The early 1820s also witnessed a decline in the cost of living. Lindert and Williamson (and subsequent historians) have shown how the cost of living fell, resulting in a dramatic

growth of real wages in the 1820s in a variety of trades.³¹ Despite criticism that they were too optimistic, little has shaken their overall conclusions that real wages and therefore the standard of living rose for many industrial workers.³² The Yorkshire miners shared in this prosperity.

Adverts were printed for colliery labour. At Middleton Colliery, for instance, it was stated that a 'NUMBER of COLLIERS and HURRIERS' were required. The advert was followed with a 'Statement of Earnings' quoting the fortnightly wages of both categories of employees. The individuals are not named; but R.A., for twelve days work getting coals, earned £2 11s. 2½d. for the two weeks preceding 14 June 1822. He earnt £2 12s. 10d. for the fortnight before 26 June; and for the fortnight before 12 July he was remunerated with £2 18s. 6d. For the last fortnight quoted on the table – before 26 July – he earnt £2 7s. 11d. This gave him an average daily pay of 4s. 4d. per day for 12 days a fortnight. Likewise, the other colliers listed on the table also earned similarly high sums. 'W.R.' earned an average of 4s. 5d. per day working three fortnights at 12 days and one fortnight for 10 days. 'W.A', despite only working 26 days out of a possible 48, was still remunerated with an average of 3s. 7½d. per days worked. Hurriers were also paid high wages. 'W.A', who was noted as being '17 yrs. old' earned an average of 3s. per day for four fortnight's work (48 days). Likewise, 'T.H.', '16 yrs. old' earned an average 2s. 2½d. for working 47 days; and 'J.L.', also '16 yrs. old' earned an average of 2s. 2½d. daily for the same for 48 day period.³³ The next week the same advert for labour was printed but with an affidavit signed by John Blenkinsop: 'The Colliers at Middleton have houses, gardens, and coals, for twenty shillings a

³¹ Lindert and Williamson, 'English Workers' Living Standards during the Industrial Revolution', pp. 1-25.

³² J. Humphries, 'Standard of Living, Quality of Life' in C. Williams (ed.), *A Companion to Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 2006), p. 291.

³³ *Leeds Mercury*, 10 Aug. 1822.

year each man, besides rates of every description paid for them, which I consider is full four shillings per week over and above their earnings'. He also added that the wages stated was a '*faithful* Statement of Earnings'.³⁴ We can conclude, therefore, that the high wages enjoyed by the colliers before the post-war depression had returned. In 1822 the average wheat prices reached their lowest point of the decade. There was a bountiful harvest and prices fell dramatically in the second half of the year. 'In the memory of man', the *Iris* declared, 'never has there been known a harvest more productive, nor a season more congenial than the present'.³⁵ The Yorkshire miners enjoyed a good standard of living in 1822: wages were high and bread was cheap. Even pessimists have recognised the early years of the decade were prosperous. Brian Inglis, for instance, argued that, '[f]or the workers in industry, unlike the agricultural labourer, the early 1820s were a time of gradually improving living standards'.³⁶

The demand for coal increased in late 1822. 'I find the demand for coal has been so brisk this autumn', Newman declared, that 'Mr. Fenton has raised the price 2s a waggon'.³⁷ To meet the favourable demand for coal the industry expanded. In February 1823 Biram informed Earl Fitzwilliam that he had 'begun sinking a Coalpit near Mr. Foljambe's Land' and that he was 'laying the Iron Railway for conveying the Coals from the said Coalpit to the new Wharf'.³⁸ In March Biram commented on the 'excellent water sale of coal from Swallow Wood Colliery'.³⁹ Later in the same month he wrote saying he had 'contemplation to sink a

³⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 17 Aug. 1822.

³⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 20 Aug. 1822. See also *Sheffield Iris*, 3 Sept. 1822 for more reports of the excellent harvest. J.D. Marshall also makes the point about a good harvest in this year. See J.D. Marshall, *The Old Poor Law 1795-1834* (London, 1968), p. 25.

³⁶ Inglis, *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 224. For agricultural labourers' protest in 1822 see Muskett, 'The East Anglian Agrarian Riots of 1822', pp. 1-13.

³⁷ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/136 Newman to Fitzwilliam 2 Dec. 1822.

³⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/243 Biram to Fitzwilliam 28 Feb. 1823.

³⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/244 Biram to Fitzwilliam 4 March 1823.

Pit joining upon the Hoyland Glebe'. The coal from this pit, he added, would 'be likely to supply Milton Iron Works [...] which in our present way of working will be full Employment for three Pits'. He also added that he Messrs. Hartop and Company were 'preparing to blow another Furnace and requested that more coal be provided for them'. '[I]n consequence of which', he announced, 'we are preparing for setting a third Pit to work, which has been standing for some years on account of the Demand for coal there being less'.⁴⁰ Good prices were realised for Earl Fitzwilliam's coal in the spring of 1823. '[W]e are selling the Swallowwood Coal at 8½d per corf for Ready Money, 14 Corves to the Dozen, which amounts to 9s 11d per Dozen'.⁴¹ In April it was noted that there was a 'good Sale for the Swallowwood coal'; '[t]he Sale continues good at the other Collieries', Biram added.⁴² Some tried to illegally capitalise on the demand for coal to make more money. John Brock, for instance, 'master of the keel *Ellen*, was convicted in the mitigated penalty of ten shillings and costs, for altering his coal ticket'. Brock had 'purchased 15½ waggons from Lord Fitzwilliam's pits, and sold them by the altered ticket for 16½ waggons'.⁴³

It seems there was a steady increase in coal output across the whole decade. The following table highlights the continual growth in tonnage of coal along the Dearne and Dove Canal across 1821-1832.

Table 7:1. Average annual tonnage of coal carried on the Dearne and Dove Canal 1821-1832.

Years	Tons
1821-23	106,284

⁴⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/245 Biram to Fitzwilliam 17 March 1823.

⁴¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/248 Biram to Fitzwilliam 3 April 1823.

⁴² Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/249 Biram to Fitzwilliam 8 April 1823.

⁴³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 23 Oct. 1823.

1824-26	138,500
1827-29	159,667
1830-32	181,000

Source: Baxter, *Origins of the Social War*, p. 317.

Furthermore, we saw earlier in Graph 6:2 how there was a steady expansion in coal sales across 1821-25 on the Fitzwilliam estate. In May 1823, in order to further supply the markets with Earl Fitzwilliam's coal, a new canal basin was opened and, as we saw in Chapter 3, such events were an occasion for festivities. Joshua Biram organised a party. He had 'a Quantity of roast and boiled Beef and Bread taken to the Wharf and 2 Pipes of ale, for the different workmen, and many others partook of it; it being a fine day there was a great concourse of people attended; I also had the Rawmarsh Band of Music which enlivened the scene'.⁴⁴ Other coalowners also took advantage of the booming trade in 1823 and opened collieries. In December a new colliery was opened at Worsbrough by Messrs. John Field and Company. It was noted in the *Sheffield Iris* how 'considerable rejoicings' took place and that Field and Company 'very liberally provided substantial dinners at three public-houses in the village, for one hundred and seventy persons'. 'The pleasure of the evening, the *Iris* continued, 'was much enhanced by the incessant attention of Mr. Andrew Field: and the whole separated at rather a late hour, fully satisfied with the arrangements which appear to have been quite complete'.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/251 Biram to Fitzwilliam 27 May 1823.

⁴⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 23 Dec. 1823.

The coal trade continued in a prosperous state into 1824. Adverts were put out for colliers to work pits belonging to Edward Hinchcliffe at Huddersfield.⁴⁶ A new colliery was opened at Herringthorpe in Rotherham.⁴⁷ Another pit was sunk at Middleton Colliery and the miners' wages were advanced. For 'straightwork' per yard in the Gosforth Pit of the colliery, 1s. was paid in 1822; this had risen to 1s. 2d. in 1823 and had further advanced to 1s. 3d. in 1824.⁴⁸ Many scholars have shown these to be boom years nationally and the Yorkshire coal industry is a case in point.⁴⁹ At Earl Fitzwilliam's Elsecar New colliery the price of coals per waggon was raised. In 1824 12s. 6d. was charged per waggon; in 1825 14s. 2d. was charged for the same amount.⁵⁰ In order to capitalise on the continuing boom Earl Fitzwilliam raised the price of coal on 1 January 1825.⁵¹ The *Sheffield Iris* reported in the same month how there had been a steady increase in the price of coal locally. In September 1824 sixpence had been added to a ton; another sixpence was added in October and in November one shilling was added. In December a further one shilling was levied on a ton of coal and on 13 January an additional shilling was added.⁵² In October of the same year Newman wrote to Fitzwilliam declaring that '[t]he collieries have been so productive'.⁵³

In April 1824 colliers at Storge Hill Colliery near Horbury struck work. On the 10 April, Thomas Kitchen and his daughter were killed, and three others injured, by a firedamp explosion. The colliers subsequently refused to work, and the coalowner agreed to provide them with alternative employment, until 'he got two men of competent judgement to view

⁴⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 15 May 1824.

⁴⁷ *Sheffield Iris*, 31 Aug. 1824.

⁴⁸ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/142 Middleton Colliery Pay Book 1822; WYL/899/143 Middleton Colliery Pay Book 1823; WYL/899/142 Middleton Colliery Pay Book 1824.

⁴⁹ Campbell, 'The Scots Colliers' Strikes of 1824-26', p. 143.

⁵⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/A/1573 Yearly Statements at Elsecar New Colliery 1798-1836.

⁵¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/152 Newman to Fitzwilliam 1 Feb. 1825.

⁵² *Sheffield Iris*, 25 Jan. 1825.

⁵³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/158 Newman to Fitzwilliam 4 Oct. 1825.

the works'. However, the prospect of high wages seemed too great for some of the colliers, who returned to work. On 19 April, to stop the pit working completely, 'two of the refractory [sic] workmen went into the pit earlier than usual, under a pretence to bring away their tools' and 'made up one of the air roads' to prevent air circulating round the pit. It was recorded that had the strike-breakers 'not had the precaution to take one of Sir Humphrey Davy's Safety Lamps, instead of a candle, when they went into the works [...] their lives would have been in danger'. It is not known what the outcome of the strike was.⁵⁴ We cannot doubt the anger directed towards the working colliers from the striking miners.

The coal boom continued into the new year. In February 1825 labouring jobs were advertised at the Deep Pit Colliery at Sheffield.⁵⁵ In March, Newman wrote to Fitzwilliam requesting his authorisation to sink another colliery and erect another furnace in Elsecar.⁵⁶ Malcolm Chase shows how the economic prosperity of 1825 was 'propitious for the formation of trade societies'⁵⁷ and it is in the context of the booming coal trade that the Yorkshire miners took offensive strike action.

The End of the Combination Laws: 1824-1830

The repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824 led to an upsurge in trade union action. Although we cannot go into great detail about the process of repeal, some context is necessary to understand the Manor strike of 1825 and others that followed. John Rule has shown how Francis Place was the main 'architect of repeal' and through his 'adroit

⁵⁴ *Sheffield Iris*, 27 April 1824; *Leeds Mercury*, 1 May 1824

⁵⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 1 Feb. 1825.

⁵⁶ Sheffield Archives, WWM/F107/154 Newman to Fitzwilliam 2 March 1825.

⁵⁷ Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 112. Scots colliers also formed unions in these prosperous years see Campbell, 'The Scots Colliers' Strikes of 1824-26', pp. 143-161.

diplomacy' parliament (already aware that the acts were ineffective) gradually accepted that the acts were 'unfair'. Place was a firm believer in the 'free labour market' and during his campaign for repeal argued that 'wages were determined by competition in the labour market' and that unions could only be effective when wages fell below their "natural' level'. Strike action was, therefore, futile. Place argued that this would have 'already have been learned by workers had they not been distracted by the government's imposition of oppressive laws'. As Rule concludes, the 'crux of Place's argument' was that 'repeal would bring about a decrease or even demise' of trade union activity. He was ultimately successful and the government repealed the Act.⁵⁸ But, contrary to expectations, this led to an upsurge in trade union activity across Britain. The labouring classes were aware of the profitable trade and attempted to capitalise on it. Frightened employers, conscious of the success of the unions, insisted on the re-imposition of the Combination Laws. Place advised the government not to do so and a select committee was created to come up with a solution. In 1825 another act was introduced which, once again, made unions 'subject to the common law of conspiracy' and reintroduced the ability to prosecute individuals for absenting themselves from work when bound by contract. The law on picketing and intimidation was tightened. As John Rule has argued, '[u]nions kept the right to exist' but were also subjected to 'powerful legal sanctions'.⁵⁹

Despite the amended legislation, however, strikes continued. Iorwerth Prothero described 1825 as a 'year of strikes'.⁶⁰ Lancashire colliers struck in January.⁶¹ Sheffield colliers first pressed for a wage increase in September 1825. The *Iris* reported how 'the

⁵⁸ Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, p. 285.

⁵⁹ Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, pp. 285-286. See also Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*, ch. 9; and Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 126.

⁶⁰ Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*, p. 159.

⁶¹ Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 126.

colliers in this neighbourhood, are [...] contending with their employers for a rise of wages. The result of which, if not soon terminated, will be a great scarcity of that article which adds so much to our domestic comfort in the cold nights of winter'.⁶² Further north around Wakefield in November it was reported how a 'number of the colliers at Lofthouse Pit, belonging to William Fenton, Esq turned out on Monday last for an advance of wages, but this being refused them, they very properly turned in again the following day'.⁶³ In Sheffield, however, it seems that the colliers were more determined for a wage increase. At the end of November the Sheffield Coal Company's Manor colliers struck work with union support. The *Sheffield Mercury* reported how:

The Colliers at Manor Colliery *turned out* a short time ago for an advance of wages. Their masters then agreed to give them what was demanded, viz. 3s. 2d. for the work for which they before had 2s. 3d. Soon after they returned to their work, several other men were employed in the same pit, at which the men took offence, and on Thursday last, again turned out, and refused to work, unless the men lately engaged were discharged.

The masters refused to concede any ground and had above 30 of the colliers sent before the magistrates. Four of them, William Orgreaves, John Rodgers, Ephraim Sellars, and Thomas Walker, were sent to the House of Correction and the others told that unless they returned to work they would follow.⁶⁴ Despite the repressive action by coalowners the strike continued. After some time the owners capitulated and increased the price of coal to pay the miners their additional wages. After the owners conceded they lamented how a collier could earn 5s. 3d. daily and hurriers 3s 9d. Other ancillaries in the pit were reported to be

⁶² *Sheffield Iris*, 20 Sept. 1825.

⁶³ *Leeds Mercury*, 19 Nov. 1825.

⁶⁴ *Sheffield Mercury*, 26 Nov. 1825.

remunerated with 3s. 5d. daily.⁶⁵ These substantial wages highlight the excellent position the Yorkshire miners were in following the repeal of the Combination Laws. The cost of living remained low. An 'abundant' harvest in the summer of 1825 led to a further fall in the cost of living.⁶⁶ The 1825 strikes were again offensive actions that took place to capitalise on the favourable position the miners found themselves in.

We can profile one of the Sheffield strike leaders. Ephraim Sellars was listed as a collier at Sheffield Coal Company's Sheffield Colliery on 24 March 1820.⁶⁷ We do not know what happened to him after the strike, but it is entirely plausible that he was refused work at the colliery and was forced to find work elsewhere. It seems he moved to Barnsley because an Ephraim Sellars baptised a daughter at Barnsley Wilson's Place Primitive Methodist Church in 1834.⁶⁸ And, if it is the same man, it seems he continued to live in Barnsley: his daughter Mary died in the Huskar Disaster of 1838 aged 10 and a man with his name was killed in the Oaks Explosion, England's worst mining disaster, in 1866 aged 63.⁶⁹ Unfortunately it is impossible to trace the other individuals who were sent to the House of Correction.

The strike was coordinated by the 'Coal Miners Union' of Sheffield. We do not know when this union was first established but the first reference to it is almost contemporaneous with the strike. It was overtly a trade union. Rule 8 stated that:

The members of this Union shall contribute 3d. per week, for the purpose of accumulating a fund, to be applied to the purposes of obtaining and maintaining an equitable price for labour; which sum of 3d. shall be collected at the respective

⁶⁵ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, pp. 35-36.

⁶⁶ *Sheffield Iris*, 30 Aug. 1825.

⁶⁷ Sheffield Archives, M.D. 3629 Sheffield Coal Company Memorandum Book.

⁶⁸ Sheffield Archives, Barnsley Wilson's Place Primitive Methodist Church Register (MF).

⁶⁹ *London Dispatch*, 15 July 1838; http://discoverdearne.org.uk/oaks-disaster-victims/?victim-name=Sellars&address=&place_of_birth=&county_of_birth=&age=&burial_place=&submit=Search Accessed 19.04.2018.

collieries weekly, and paid into the hands of the managing committee in Sheffield every month, or forfeit for each neglect the sum of 3*d.* per month.⁷⁰

Certainly this evidence brings into question the conclusion that trade unionism was confined to the skilled aristocrat of labour.

Most scholars recognise that the boom broke just before Christmas 1825 and a depression quickly followed.⁷¹ The coal trade in Yorkshire presents a mixed picture. The Sheffield Coal Company, who conceded the miners' demands, reduced wages at the Manor pit in May 1826. There is no evidence of a strike taking place to resist the reduction.⁷² At Middleton Colliery there was a minor reduction in the cost of 'straightwork' across 1826-1827. In November of the former year, 1*s.* 6*d.* was paid per yard in the Gosforth Pit; in the same pit in February of the latter year 1*s.* 4*d.* was paid for the same work. The amount paid for 'coals hewing', however, remained consistent with the piece-rate of 1*s.* 3*d.* per dozen (1825 prices) of coal.⁷³ Despite their nominal wages being slightly reduced their real wages increased. In the spring of 1826 there was a dramatic twenty percent drop in the price of provisions.⁷⁴

Most collieries continued to prosper through 1826. According to John Baxter, the demand for coal 'was broader than that for iron and other industrial products and the

⁷⁰ *Report from the Select Committee on Combination Laws Particularly as to Act 5 Geo. IV. C. 95* (London, 1825), p. 51.

⁷¹ Inglis, *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 233; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*, pp. 160, 210-11; Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 128.

⁷² Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 36.

⁷³ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/145 Middleton Colliery Pay Book 1825; WYL/899/146 Middleton Colliery Pay Book 1826; WYL/899/147 Middleton Colliery Pay Book 1827.

⁷⁴ *Sheffield Iris*, 7 March 1826.

industry was less subject to the same sort of depression in production in slump periods'.⁷⁵ The standard of living for most colliers was, therefore, very good. Wheat prices remained lower than 1825 levels. In January the *Iris* reported how '[c]oal continues at its former high prices, and the present severity of the weather will doubtless maintain it'.⁷⁶ At Earl Fitzwilliam's Lawwood Colliery high wages continued to be paid throughout 1826. Twenty-one general labourers were recorded working in the pit for the eighteen days preceding 21 January. The lowest daily wage of 1s. 4d. was paid to David Frost and he still took home £1 4s. at the end of the period. Most workers earned 2s. 4d. daily, or a total of £2 2s., if they worked the full period. Some earned more.⁷⁷ Although we have no breakdown for the amount individual colliers earned, we can confidently assume above what general labourers and ancillaries in and about the pit were earning.

High wage rates continued to be paid at Lawwood Colliery as the financial crisis began to impact on other industries. For the fortnight before November 1826 only six out of twenty labourers earned less than £1 8s. The majority earned between £1 8s. and £1 16s. whilst a small number earned in excess of £2.⁷⁸ All those who worked in and around the colliery were, quite evidently, earning substantial wages during the trade depression. Furthermore, evidence from Elsecar New Colliery shows how expenditure on coal getting increased (albeit with a minor setback), rather than decreased, in the months after the crash. This, again, reveals that the coal trade at some Yorkshire collieries continued to prosper. In the case of the Yorkshire miners, it is hard to accept John Rule's conclusion that there were

⁷⁵ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 317.

⁷⁶ *Sheffield Iris*, 24 Jan. 1826.

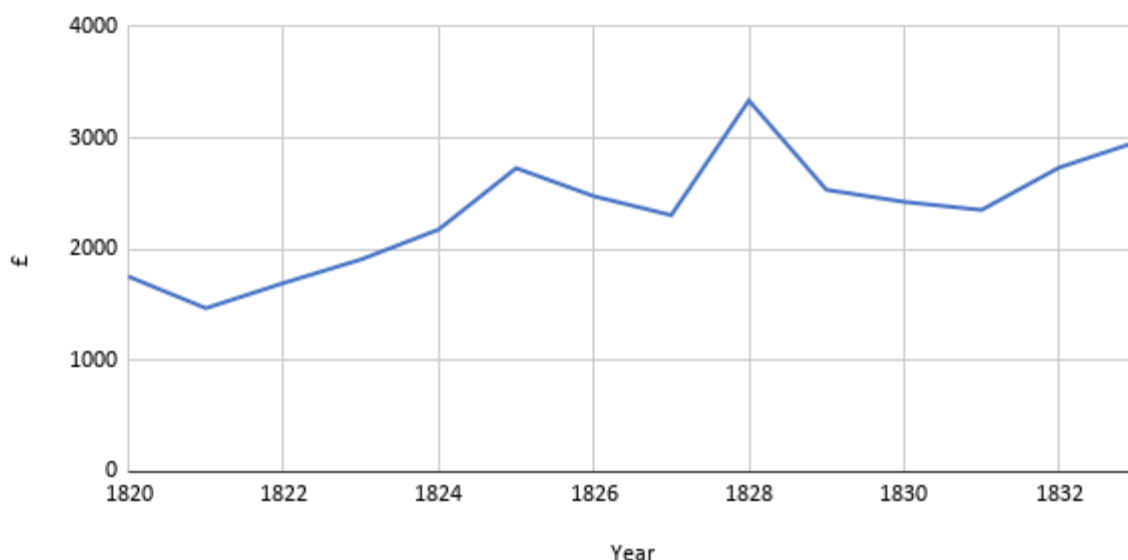
⁷⁷ Charles Barwick, for instance, was paid 3s. daily; Thomas Parkin was paid 3s. 4d. daily and, the highest earner, Joseph Cooper, was paid 4s. daily.

⁷⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/A/1584 Lawwood Colliery Fortnightly Cost Account 1826. Similar wages were being paid at other collieries in Scotland. The *Sheffield Iris* (31 Oct. 1826) reported how at Glasgow, the 'colliers, on the approach of winter, are all fully employed, and earning 4s a day'.

‘dramatic short-term increases in unemployment amongst industrial workers’ in 1826-27.⁷⁹

Likewise, Flinn and Stoker’s assessment that there was a ‘low level of demand’ for coal following the 1825-26 financial crisis cannot be accepted.⁸⁰

Graph 7:4. Wage Expenditure (£) on Colliers for Coal Getting (per annum) at Elsecar New Colliery 1820-1833



Source: Sheffield Archives, WWM/A/1573 Yearly Statements (Elsecar New Colliery).

The colliers took advantage of the prosperity and struck for a wage increase at one unknown Barnsley pit. General Byng wrote to the Home Secretary, Hobhouse, stating that in the town there was: ‘much distress, many out of work – but no disposition to disturbance [has] yet manifested, except at a Colliery, where the Men (earning 4s per day) had turned out for higher wages, and the proprietor not yielding, had some property set on fire –

⁷⁹ Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, p. 39

⁸⁰ Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume II*, p. 401.

supposed to be maliciously done’.⁸¹ This is the only reference to the strike and it was not reported in the local press. The reference to the colliers turning out for higher wages, however, indicates that this was offensive strike action. Unusually this strike took place in early summer highlighting the extensive demand for coal across 1826.

Prosperity continued into 1827. In May Biram wrote to Newman stating that ‘we have a good Demand for coal at Elsecar new Colliery’.⁸² Further north around Wakefield, evidence suggests the same was true. A pit was being sunk at Ardsley in August of the same year when a man named Thomas Tattersall was killed by an unexpected explosion of gunpowder.⁸³ At Middleton Colliery hurriers’ piece-rate wages were marginally increased across 1826-1827. In the Gosforth pit of the colliery, in early February, 2s. 7d. was paid per score corves for hurrying; this had been increased to 2s. 10d. per score corves by mid-September 1827.⁸⁴ The standard of living remained high because of the low cost of provisions. Wheat was plentiful and cheap and prices remained stable.⁸⁵

The growing prosperity of the coal industry and high standards of living meant colliers continued to take opportunistic strike action to capitalise on their favourable situation. Miners at Dore House in Sheffield struck over work dresses. The *Sheffield Iris* reported how:

Mr. Sorby, of Dore-house Colliery, summoned a number of men for suddenly leaving their employ, whereto they were bound by their agreement. The men complained that certain flannels (colliers’ work dresses) which they had been promised, had not been given them. The magistrate, consulting the “bond,” but not finding the flannels mentioned in it, told them that any promise made to them beyond their agreement could not be enforced by the bench, and that they must either return to their work,

⁸¹ TNA/HO40/19/f. 408. Byng to Hobhouse 11 May 1826.

⁸² Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/7/vi/123. Biram to Newman 4 May 1827.

⁸³ *Sheffield Iris*, 14 Aug. 1827.

⁸⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds), WYL/899/146 Middleton Colliery Pay Book 1826; WYL/899/147 Middleton Colliery Pay Book 1827.

⁸⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 1 Aug. 1827.

or stand committed. After some altercation, they preferred the former, and the summonses were dismissed.⁸⁶

The fact that colliers were willing to take strike action over what they were wearing suggests that they were confident of success. Additional evidence proves the coal trade in Sheffield was booming. In 1828 an editorial of the *Sheffield Iris* complained that the road leading to the Deep Pit was in an 'indifferent state of repair' due to the regular carriage of coals from the colliery into the town. The paper declared that 'There are at least 200 cart loads of coal per day drawn past the Deep Pit Gate, (No 1,) which carts will average seven corves each, or about 18 cwt. of coals in each load'.⁸⁷ If these calculations are accurate it means that 200 tons of coal was being brought from the Deep Pit into Sheffield every day. In 1829 Earl Fitzwilliam noted that 'the sale of coal from Rawmarsh Colliery, is prospering indeed'.⁸⁸ In April Messrs. Stansfield and Briggs sunk a pit at Emroyd, near Wakefield.⁸⁹ At the end of that year Milton wrote to Biram and discussed the 'increased demand for coal' and concluded saying '[t]hings look well'.⁹⁰ At Elsecar New Colliery the price per waggon of coals was advanced across 1829 and 1830. In the former year 14s. 2d. was charged; this was increased to 15s. in the latter year.⁹¹

The year 1829 was calamitous for many West Riding industries, but not for coal.⁹² A downturn in trade at the beginning of the year led to high unemployment in many textile

⁸⁶ *Sheffield Iris*, 18 Sept. 1827.

⁸⁷ *Sheffield Iris*, 8 Jan. 1828.

⁸⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/4/vi/29 Fitzwilliam to Biram 12 July 1829.

⁸⁹ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 24 April 1829.

⁹⁰ Sheffield Archive, WWM/StwP/4/vi/31 Milton to Biram 18 Dec. 1829.

⁹¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/A/1573 Elsecar New Colliery Yearly Statements 1798-1836.

⁹² Hobsbawm and Rude describe it an 'entirely disastrous year'. See Hobsbawm and Rude, *Captain Swing*, p. 62.

trades. In Barnsley the linen industry was particularly badly hit.⁹³ In late August matters reached a head. Riots broke out when master weavers attempted to further reduce wages. The houses of Messrs. Cordeux and Sons, and James Coe, were surrounded and pelted with stones. The weavers then travelled *en masse* to the house of master weaver Thomas Jackson and succeeded in breaking an entry. Chairs, tables and books were piled up and burnt; 'every article in their reach' was destroyed. The 3rd Dragoons were summoned; the weavers, however, escaped before they arrived.⁹⁴ Further north around Huddersfield trade remained depressed. In Halifax and Bradford it was noted that 'the workman does not receive adequate remuneration for his labour'. In Leeds and its immediate hinterlands it was said that 'many are out of employment. In Wakefield 'many, willing to work, can find no one to furnish them with labour and are consequently suffering great distress'.⁹⁵ What is clear is that the Yorkshire miners were not affected by trade depression because the winters of 1828 and 1829 were severe which sustained the demand for coal.⁹⁶ Some members of the labouring classes stole coal in desperate attempts to keep warm. In January 1829, for instance, Francis Bamforth and Abraham Bennison were caught by Mr. Dun at the Deep Pit Colliery in Sheffield with a horse and cart 'busily employed in filling a load, with the intent of

⁹³ The *Sheffield Iris* reported how 'Weavers were seen strolling about in parties of six, eight, twenty or more, with their hands in their pockets, and their faces to the ground, as though hope itself had departed from them'. 'There needed no ghost from the grave', it continued, 'to tell that trade had there long languished, and is still languishing – that wages were at their lowest ebb – that employment was scarce, and that the labouring classes were in such circumstances as not to afford them a sufficiency of food and raiment'. See *Sheffield Iris*, 1 Sept. 1829.

⁹⁴ *Sheffield Iris*, 1 Sept. 1829. For an in-depth analysis of the Barnsley riots in 1829 see Kaijage, *Labouring Barnsley*, pp. 325-340.

⁹⁵ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 24 Dec. 1829.

⁹⁶ As Carl Griffin has suggested the 'prolonged cold' forced the labouring classes to increase their expenditure on coals. See Griffin, *The Rural War*, p. 69. J.R. Sanders, in his study of the West Riding textile districts, similarly argues that 'The working population of the West Riding suffered greatly during the long, harsh winter of 1828-29'. See J.R. Sanders, *Working-Class Movements in the West Riding Textile Districts 1829 to 1839, with Emphasis on Local Leadership and Organisation*. Unpublished University of Manchester PhD thesis (1984), p. 128. We cannot accept this interpretation in the Yorkshire miners' case.

carrying it off for their own use'.⁹⁷ Yorkshire colliers' high wages also meant that provisions remained affordable.⁹⁸

In April 1830 Fitzwilliam noted approvingly that there had been a 'fair sale of coals' from his collieries.⁹⁹ The spring of 1830, however, was the end point of the coal boom. From late summer onwards the Yorkshire miners' position deteriorated but protests did not break out. Hints about a reduction in colliers' earnings had been made in the Autumn of 1829. At a large meeting of weavers in Barnsley, Edward Baines, stated that 'that colliers are doing one-sixth part more for the same wages at present that they did before'¹⁰⁰ but we have no hard evidence that wages were reduced until into the 1830s. In the summer of 1830 Earl Fitzwilliam employed his colliers in ground work on his estate: 'about 3 acres has been levelled and trenched', Newman wrote, 'and work has thereby been given to a number of poor men who otherwise would have been in great distress'.¹⁰¹ Paternalistic action, and perhaps support from the (by now well established) colliers' trade unions may have staved off poverty and hunger and maintained their standard of living above poverty levels.

There was a reduction in colliers working for Newton, Scott and Chambers at Thornccliffe. On 4 August 1827 the fortnightly reckoning of the truck shop listed seventy-two colliers.¹⁰² By December 1829 this had fallen to fifty-seven colliers. The number of colliers remained relatively constant through the first half of 1830 but had fallen dramatically by the second half of the year. On 18 December 1830, at the best season for the coal trade, only thirty-two colliers were recorded underlining the significant impact of the depression. The

⁹⁷ *Sheffield Independent*, 17 Jan. 1829

⁹⁸ *Sheffield Iris*, 8 Sept. 1829.

⁹⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/vi/34 Fitzwilliam to Biram 17 April 1830.

¹⁰⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 3 Oct. 1829

¹⁰¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G44/19. Newman to Fitzwilliam 13 May 1830.

¹⁰² Sheffield Archives, TR/355 Shop Purchase Book 1827-1829.

number of miners enumerated by Newton, Scott and Chambers had essentially halved over three years.¹⁰³ In September it was recorded by Chambers that '[t]rade (if such it may be termed) is much depressed'.¹⁰⁴ Over the Pennines in Lancashire colliers struck for a wage increase. The dispute turned violent, property was destroyed, and working miners were thrown into canals. Only in Bolton did colliers get a wage increase.¹⁰⁵

Substantial debts were accrued by the miners at Clarke's Silkstone Colliery. Because the miners were only intermittently employed, their usual wages did not reach sufficient levels to clear their truck shop debts. The only way to clear their debts, therefore, was by undertaking extra work on Clarke's estate. Between 5 June and 20 November 1830, a coalminer named Joseph Hallam purchased mutton twenty times, and on the 11 August he supplemented this with a purchase of 6lbs. of brisket, and on the 18 September he bought an additional 4¼ lbs. of beef. And, across the same period, he regularly purchased tobacco. He managed to pay his shop debts, however, by undertaking extra work. He thrashed 14½. load of wheat for 1s. 4d. a load which subtracted . 4d. from his debts. Later he thrashed 5 loads of beans at 1s. a load, and 5 loads of rye at 1s. 4d. a load taking another 11s. 8d. from his debts. Richard Bower, another collier, also settled his debts through other work. In July 1830 3s. 4d. was taken from his shop debts for spending a day repairing an old wall. On 24 July in the same year he had a substantial £1 7s. 6d. taken from his bill for 8¼ days work 'walling new pits'. This continued for the rest of the year. At the end of November, 6s. was deducted from his bill for spending two days 'repairing the pine house'.¹⁰⁶ No doubt work,

¹⁰³ Sheffield Archives, TR/336 Shop Purchase Book 1829-1833.

¹⁰⁴ Sheffield Archives, TR/153/46 W.P. Chambers to Newton, Scott and Chambers 16 Sept. 1830.

¹⁰⁵ Kirby and Musson, *The Voice of the People*, p. 181.

¹⁰⁶ Barnsley Archives, CR/44 Workman's Ledger 1830-31.

and therefore a form of wages, would have been welcomed by the Silkstone colliers when trade was depressed.

Despite the precarious state of employment for colliers we have no evidence that this engendered protest in Yorkshire. Although Hobsbawm and Rude list a fire at Elsecar Colliery on 26 December 1830 as a Swing incident, we can be relatively sure that it was not an act of arson.¹⁰⁷ The press reports simply misled the public and, it seems, future historians. The *Leeds Intelligencer* reported how:

The extensive and valuable colliery at Elsecar, near Barnsley, was discovered to be on fire on the 26th ult., and is at this time (Tuesday evening) vomiting forth smoke and flame. The ropes and everything that could be readily destroyed, have fallen a sacrifice to the devouring element. This said calamity, (sad indeed in its effects,) which will throw nearly 150 workmen out of employment at this most inclement season, is supposed to be the work of some ferocious incendiary. Yesterday there were upwards of a thousand men at work conveying water from the Elsecar Reservoir into the shaft. The colliery is the property of Earl Fitzwilliam, and his Lordship and Lord Milton were both present assisting the men in extinguishing the flames. Several persons from Staffordshire we hear are in custody.¹⁰⁸

A London press report collected by Francis Place reproduced the same report verbatim which possibly explains why Hobsbawm and Rude misunderstood the true nature of the incident.¹⁰⁹ The *Sheffield Independent*, however, reported how ‘we have read a communication from Lord Milton, the owner of the mine, who was present at the fire in which he distinctly says: “that there is no cause whatever to suppose the pit was fired by design, and that its burning must be attributed to those natural causes which so frequently

¹⁰⁷ Hobsbawm and Rude, *Captain Swing*, Appendix III p. 21. Hobsbawm and Rude did not refer to the fire in the main body of text which is somewhat understandable given the multifarious examples of Swing they were dealing with from the south of England.

¹⁰⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 Dec. 1830.

¹⁰⁹ British Library, Francis Place Papers, Reel 32. Cutting dated 1 Jan. 1831; *Sheffield Iris*, 4 Jan. 1831.

produce combustion in mines”’.¹¹⁰ Far from being an act of incendiarism it seems that the fire was accidental and that because it occurred at the height of the Swing disturbances it was (mis)reported as such. Furthermore, there is no further reference to the ‘persons from Staffordshire’ who supposedly fired the pit. They do not appear in subsequent press reports or in the quarter session rolls. Given the severity of punishment for arsonists at the height of Swing it seems likely that some additional evidence of their actions would have survived. However, the absence of arson by colliers should not surprise us. The Yorkshire miners had other (more sophisticated) ways of expressing their grievances in the form of trade unionism. By the early 1830s trade unionism was well established in the coalfield and the miners continued to organise throughout the 1830s and beyond.

The Return of Prosperity: 1831

It is well documented in trade union scholarship that there was an upsurge in union organisation in the early 1830s.¹¹¹ Most of this scholarship has, however, focussed around John Doherty and Robert Owen and the attempts at ‘General Unionism’, or the well-documented case of the Tolpuddle Martyrs.¹¹² The developments in trade unionism in other industries have attracted less attention. J.F.C. Harrison was correct in his assessment that ‘[t]he complex story of the development of British trade unionism in the years 1831-34 has

¹¹⁰ *Sheffield Independent*, 15 Jan. 1831.

¹¹¹ Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 113; Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*; Musson, *British Trade Unions*; Browne, *The Rise of British Trade Unions*; Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism*.

¹¹² G.D.H. Cole, *Attempts at General Union: A Study in British Trade Union History, 1818-1834* (London, 1953); Kirby and Musson, *The Voice of the People*; R. Sykes, ‘Trade Unionism and Class Consciousness: The Revolutionary Period of General Unionism, 1829-1834’ in Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism 1750-1850*, pp. 178-199; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, ch. 16; Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, ch. 5; J. Marlow, *The Tolpuddle Martyrs* (London, 1971); T. Scriven, ‘The Dorchester Labourers and Swing’s Aftermath in Dorset, 1830-8’, *History Workshop Journal*, 82:1 (2016), pp. 1-23.

never been satisfactorily unravelled'.¹¹³ This section, and the subsequent chapters, will attempt to reconstruct the continuing developments in trade unionism amongst the Yorkshire miners into the 1830s and beyond.

According to the Webbs, in April 1831 a delegate meeting at Bolton 'representing nine thousand coalminers of Staffordshire, Yorkshire, Cheshire, and Wales' resolved to join John Doherty's National Association for the Protection of Labour (NAPL).¹¹⁴ I have been unable to find out anything more about the Yorkshire colliers' role in the NAPL and can only conclude that their presence was marginal.¹¹⁵ The absence of any further evidence suggests that the Yorkshire miners were not interested in joining 'general unions' of all trades. David Ridley's conclusions that colliers were a 'major force' within the NAPL should be treated with caution.¹¹⁶ Malcolm Chase's assessment that it was 'doubtful' whether colliers had any real awareness or interest in the NAPL is nearer the mark.¹¹⁷

The depression that hit the Yorkshire coal trade in the second half of 1830 was short lived. In 1831 the Northumberland and Durham miners, led by Thomas Hepburn, took strike action in protest against truck shops, 'the fourteen-hour day underground for boys, and eviction without process of law'. The coalowners resisted and locked their miners out on 5 April 1831.¹¹⁸ The Yorkshire coalfield prospered as a result, and coalowners quickly

¹¹³ J.F.C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America* (London, 1969), p. 208 cited in Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 136.

¹¹⁴ Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 123.

¹¹⁵ Malcolm Chase has shown that the NAPL was overwhelmingly Lancashire-based and that '[c]ontributions from the whole of Yorkshire barely reached £20' a sum that 'comfortably exceeded' by 'small industrial townships' in Lancashire. Chase adds that despite the resolutions of the colliers, only two groups actually made a financial contribution to the NAPL and both of these were from Blackrod, near Wigan. See Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, pp. 140-141.

¹¹⁶ D. Ridley, *Political and Industrial Crisis: the Experience of the Tyne and Wear Pitmen, 1831-32*, unpublished University of Durham PhD thesis (1994), p.81.

¹¹⁷ Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 142.

¹¹⁸ Page-Arnot, *The Miners*, p. 36; Ridley, *Political and Industrial Crisis: the Experience of the Tyne and Wear Pitmen, 1831-32*; Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*.

exploited markets previously enjoyed by the North-Eastern owners. By the end of April 1831 the *Leeds Intelligencer* stated that '[t]he well-known adage of "sending coals to Newcastle" has at length been verified. A ship load of Yorkshire coals were sent from Goole last week to Newcastle, to supply pressing wants of the people of that town, occasioned by the long strike of the colliers in that neighbourhood'.¹¹⁹ In April, in an attempt to capitalise on the favourable situation, colliers at the Button Hill and Greystone pits near Sheffield struck. Little can be discovered about these strikes.¹²⁰

The Northumberland and Durham miners, however, were eventually successful and won a twelve-hour day for boys and numerous other concessions. In August the pitmen elected Thomas Hepburn the president of their union.¹²¹ The North-East coalfield, however, continued in a disturbed state as the owners prepared to smash the union in the summer of 1832. This precarity allowed Yorkshire coalowners to continue to send coal to previously inaccessible markets. As trade prospered there is clear evidence that union organisation amongst colliers in Sheffield continued. In November,

Two young men, named Jonathan Kitchen and David Vernon, colliers, were charged with assaulting and threatening David Froggatt, to force him to join the Colliers' Union. The complainant stated he was in the employment of Messrs. Booth and Co. of the Park Colliery. On the 9th of November last, the two defendants came to him, and asked if he would join their Union. He declined doing so; on which Kitchen struck him and said that he would kill him. Vernon also said that he would think as little of killing him (Froggatt) as he would of killing a bull. He then took up a collier's pick to strike him with, but he struggled with him, and got it from him. Two other witnesses, named Bransby and Naylor, fully corroborated the evidence given by the complainant. – The magistrates sentenced the defendants to be committed to th

¹¹⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 28 April 1831.

¹²⁰ *Sheffield Iris*, 12 April 1831.

¹²¹ Page-Arnot, *The Miners*, p. 36.

[sic] Wakefield House of Correction for three months, and to be kept to hard labour.¹²²

Machin's conclusion that '[t]here is no [...] evidence, at this time, that any miners in Yorkshire were organised' can hardly be considered realistic.¹²³

High wages continued to be paid for colliery labour in 1831. Henry Hartop wrote to Lord Milton revealing how much the Fitzwilliam colliers were earning compared to other colliers in the region and elsewhere. In an earlier discussion in London Hartop confessed to Fitzwilliam that 'the wages each person [at the pits], might not be very much more than was paid in the neighbourhood' and that from his own 'observations above ground I thought there were often two men and in some cases more, to do the work of one man'. When he returned to Yorkshire Hartop investigated earnings of the Fitzwilliam colliers and was shocked by the vast difference in their wages compared to other West Riding colliers. He found that 'at the present prices paid for coals getting &c, by the Waggon, a fair average workman fully employed during the usual working hours, would earn 25 to 26s pr week'. At Fitzwilliam's 'immediate neighbours and opponents in the Coal Trade', they paid their colliers 'about 16s pr week'. He added that 'from the best possible authority' the 'coaliers in the North [i.e. Northumberland and Durham] had returned to their work at prices affording them 16s pr week'. In the Black Country 'the great Iron making districts similar workmen were getting only 13s pr week'. Hartop calculated that his 'present information bears very much the appearance of 62½ pr Cent being paid more at your Lordships Coaleries than at any other'. He added that the Elsecar colliers 'cannot long work' at 'near 63 pr Cent more'

¹²² *Sheffield Independent*, 21 Nov. 1831.

¹²³ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 36.

than their proximate competitors 'for the same position of work performed'.¹²⁴ Malcolm Chase shows how the weekly remuneration for an average handloom weaver of either sex in the same period was 6s. to 8s.¹²⁵ The Fitzwilliam colliers were, therefore, earning triple the earnings of their contemporaries in the handloom weaving trades. And, based on Hartop's statement, other Yorkshire colliers were earning double the wages of a handloom weaver. Such high wages would have serious repercussions for the Elsecar colliers when Fitzwilliam tried to establish a foothold in the London market, especially when Hepburn's Union collapsed in 1832 and the North-East coalowners once again began sending coals to the capital.

In December 1831 Joshua Biram recalled how '[t]he good Demand for the Swallowwood coal continues'¹²⁶ and that thirty-six boats were loaded with coals during the fortnight ending 17 December.¹²⁷ Adverts were put out for colliers. 'THIRTY GOOD WORKMEN', it was stated, were needed at Intake Colliery. 'Wages are Liberal', the advert continued, 'the Benks Dry and Comfortable'. Additional benefits of working at Intake were stated: 'A number of sober, steady men may have each a House with a Garden, and a reasonable quantity of Land for Potatoe [sic] Ground, at a moderate rent, adjoining the colliery'.¹²⁸ On Christmas Eve Benjamin Biram informed Lord Milton that 'The demand for Swallowwood coal continues to increase, and doubt not would be still greater were the means of supply more efficient'.¹²⁹ On the last day of 1831 his father noted how '[t]he sale of coals at the New Works and at Elsecar new Colliery continues good'.¹³⁰ The prosperity

¹²⁴ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G44/23 Hartop to Milton 15 Aug. 1831.

¹²⁵ Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 133.

¹²⁶ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/25 J. Biram to Milton 18 Dec. 1831.

¹²⁷ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/26 J. Biram to Milton 22 Dec. 1831.

¹²⁸ *Sheffield Iris*, 20 Dec. 1831.

¹²⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/27 Ben Biram to Milton 24 Dec. 1831.

¹³⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/27 Joshua Biram to Milton 31 Dec. 1831.

continued into the New Year. More adverts were put out for colliery labour in Sheffield. At Dore House Colliery colliers would 'meet with regular Employment at liberal Wages'.¹³¹

Before we study the impact of the Durham and Northumberland strike of 1832 on Yorkshire, we need to examine a strike at Earl Fitzwilliam's Elsecar colliery. This was, however, not a strike over wages but a strike over safety concerns related to underground supervision. Nevertheless, it was the first time that Earl Fitzwilliam's colliers attempted to influence a management decision through combination.¹³² Despite a recent investigation into the industrialisation of Elsecar by Nigel Cavanagh the strike has merited little attention.¹³³ The strike is useful because it provides us with a lens to understand the processes of negotiation between the colliers and management. It shows us how ideas about safety at work were played out against a backdrop of the right of paternalistic control, authority, and resistance

The colliers at Elsecar struck because they did not want to be supervised by an underground steward named John Winter. In the early months of 1831 the colliery at Elsecar did not work - almost certainly because of the fire damage – but there is no evidence whatsoever that the fire was the cause of the colliers' grievance. (Indeed, we noted earlier how the colliers assisted in putting out the fire). When the colliery was 'repaired and ready for Work' Biram wrote to Fitzwilliam stating that he was 'disappointed by the men refusing to go down to work and Joshua Cooper [another steward] and John Winter not succeeding in getting the Men to work came to complain to me on Tuesday Morning'. Biram added that he 'had no Hopes of argument prevailing with them, therefore I sent them back to tell them

¹³¹ *Sheffield Independent*, 21 Jan. 1832.

¹³² Mee, *Aristocratic Enterprise*, p. 176.

¹³³ N.A. Cavanagh, *Industrialising Communities: A Case Study of Elsecar Circa 1750-1870*. Unpublished University of Sheffield PhD thesis (2017), p. 68.

all to go Home'.¹³⁴ Lord Milton wrote back approving Biram's decision to send them home: 'I think you have managed your matter very well with the colliers', he declared, 'but what was the cause of their hesitating about working had they any objection to John Winter or had they any fear about the state of the air in the pit[?]'.¹³⁵ Despite Biram attempting to get the colliers back to work they remained steadfast for the next week. Lord Milton subsequently tried to get them to go to work. He explained to Biram how he had 'passed several hours at Elsecar for the express purpose of hearing what complaints were to be made against him [John Winter]' and that 'those complaints' he declared, are 'of a most trifling character'. Nonetheless Milton decided that 'he ought to be replaced as underground steward'.¹³⁶ We do not know precisely why the colliers refused to work under Winter, only that they felt unsafe. Lord Milton in a letter to Biram, however, hinted that Winter had previously been suspended for an unknown offence and this may go some way to explaining why the colliers resisted:

They [the colliers] must also recollect that he was suspended for an offence against me and that if I chuse to forgive him it is no concern of theirs; - his suspension had nothing at all to do with any mis-conduct in the pit; or towards them and that if they call for his dismissal, they must state particular and new facts upon which to grant their request. If they continue [pretensions?] after this representation, you must hold yourself high, for I am sure that the employment is so important to them that they cannot long persist in their demand unless it is much better founded than I am satisfied it is.¹³⁷

Henry Hartop, the ironworks manager, identified the ringleaders of the strike. He wrote to Lord Milton highlighting how he 'found it reported that the Coopers were the main

¹³⁴ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/6 J. Biram to Fitzwilliam 21 Feb. 1831.

¹³⁵ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/4/vi/56 Milton to Biram 23 Feb. 1831.

¹³⁶ He was demoted – not sacked.

¹³⁷ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/4/vi/57 Milton to Biram 1 March 1831.

instigators to the whole transaction, so much so, that it was publicly talked of, that two of them had offered to subscribe five pounds each, others thirty, and twenty shillings each, for the encouragement of the Colliers to persevere in their attempt'. Hartop added that 'Jo^{ua} Oxley, the blacksmith at Elsecar Furnace, and Uncle to the Coopers',¹³⁸ was also responsible; indeed a subsequent letter hints that Oxley was the main instigator. Milton wrote saying '[y]ou have done quite right in discharging J. Oxley as I conclude he was making the other colliers dissatisfied'.¹³⁹ The men returned to work shortly after. Biram wrote to say that 'I have not had one complaint from the Elsecar colliers since I ordered John Oxley to be discharged, and hope the Lesson they have already had will cause them to consider well before they make any farther attempts in the same way'.¹⁴⁰ Hartop added that the strike was 'doubly aggravating' because of the paternalism displayed during the period immediately before the strike when 'your Lordship having kept the whole of them in regular work during so long a period of the pits stoppage, and which had only got to work a few days before the turn out'.¹⁴¹

The 1831 Elsecar strike reveals the complex way paternalism, authority, and resistance were contested in paternalistic colliery communities in the early nineteenth century. The colliers evidently had some aversion to John Winter and this possibly could be because of his transgression against Lord Milton – but we will never know. If this is the case, then this could be read as an overt demonstration of loyalism to their employer rather than a challenge to his authority. Evidently, however, Lord Milton did see the strike as confrontational and was quick to highlight how he, and only he, made managerial decisions

¹³⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G44/21a-b Henry Hartop to Fitzwilliam 3 March 1831.

¹³⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/4/vi/58 Milton to Biram 4 March 1831.

¹⁴⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/8 Biram to Milton 3 March 1831.

¹⁴¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G44/21a-b Henry Hartop to Fitzwilliam 3 March 1831.

on his estate. Power on the Wentworth estate was tightly bound in hierarchies which Milton wanted to maintain. Nevertheless, we should remember that the strike was an instance of protest. As much as the strike can be read as a loyalist act, it could also reflect the growing influence of trade unionism amongst colliers and the benefits derived therefrom. (Certainly the offering of subscriptions is a key component of trade unionism). There is no doubt that the concept of combination continued to mature amongst the Elsecar colliers. By 1836, as we shall see, they were once again on strike.

Reactions to the North-East Lockout: 1832

In the spring of 1832 the Northumberland and Durham colliers were again locked-out over their refusal to be bound.¹⁴² By May 1832 North-Eastern coalowners were obtaining labour from across the country and the West Riding was no exception. At the beginning of the month the following advert was printed in the *Leeds Intelligencer*:

TO COLLIERS. – WANTED to Work at the Collieries near Sunderland, in the County of Durham, a number of able-bodied MEN and BOYS. The Seams are 5½ to 7 Feet in height, and there has never been any Fire Damp known in those Pits.

At the present Prices, a Hewer or Getter of Coals will earn Five Shillings per Day of *Eight Hours*, and a Putter or Hurryer will earn 3s. to 3s. 6d.; Boys of 12 to 13 Years of Age will have 1s. 3d. and younger Boys 10d. to 1s. per Day, for opening Trap Doors.

Comfortable Houses on the spot, Rent free, and Firing found, working Gear also provided by the Owners. Individuals or Families with their Furniture will be removed free of Expense. Every required Information may be had on Application to Mr. C. Slater, Sheepscar, Leeds.

Leeds 3d May.¹⁴³

¹⁴² See Chapter 2 for a discussion of employment contracts.

¹⁴³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 3 May, 10 May 1832.

The demand for blackleg labour continued to be printed throughout May and each advert offered more lucrative terms to get men into the collieries and break Hepburn's Union.¹⁴⁴ However, it is clear that the Yorkshire miners were aware that the pits were being picketed by the locked-out colliers. One advert stated that 'in order to remove any unfavourable impression, the Owners of the Collieries will convey by Coach, to and from the Pits, free of Expense, any Four Men, which the great Body may properly delegate, to report to them the result of their Inquiries'. The advert concluded stating that 'Every required Information may be had on Application to Mr. Slater, Sheepscar, Leeds; or the Hole in the Wall, Briggate' and that colliers from Dewsbury could attend 'the Man and Saddle Inn' in that town where they could 'enter into Contracts'.¹⁴⁵ As we will see below the Yorkshire miners did not ignore these adverts.

The Northumberland and Durham coalowners were determined to break the pitman's strike. At a meeting of coalowners on 5 May 1832 they unanimously resolved that 'no Colliery should employ any Union Man'. John Buddle, who attended the meeting, noted they were already 'sending for Lead miners and for Colliers from Yorkshire Lancashire and Staffordshire, and some are thinking of sending to Ireland for Labourers'.¹⁴⁶ Towards the end of May the *Leeds Intelligencer* reported how

Great numbers of colliers have passed through this town from Derbyshire and the adjoining counties, during the past week, and, we understand, many hundreds are on the way to take the places of the "sticks" at Hetton, highly delighted with the prospect of being enabled to earn a competent living for their families. Mr. Slater, of this town, has undertaken the arduous task of collecting this immense body of lead-miners and colliers together, and which there can be no doubt will very soon convince the turn-outs that they have turned matters to bad account. Many have

¹⁴⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 12 May 1832

¹⁴⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, 5 May 1832.

¹⁴⁶ Ridley, *Political and Industrial Crisis*, p. 185.

gone back to fetch their wives and families, who are now on the road, and others have sent for theirs.¹⁴⁷

This did not go unnoticed by some Yorkshire miners. In an instance of proto-solidarity with their striking counterparts, some colliers from Leeds refused to allow the strike to be broken.

It is worth quoting the press report at length:

Last Thursday evening, between seven and eight o'clock, a disturbance took place in Leeds, occasioned by a number of persons endeavouring to prevent a party of colliers who had been engaged in Derbyshire to supply the places of the "sticks," or turn-out colliers at Hetton, near Durham, from proceeding to their destination. Whilst the men were taking refreshment at the Hole-in-the-Wall Public-house, Briggate, a crowd collected together, and on their proceeding towards the North Tavern to take the Courier coach, they were pursued by the multitude through George's-court, Call-lane, the Central Market, and Kirkgate, where a most violent attack was made upon the colliers, the constables, and Mr. George Smith, the agent of the colliery. Several of the colliers had their bundles, containing linen, &c. taken from them, and were much injured. Mr. Keighley, the constable, had his head severely cut by a brick-bat, and Mr. Smith lost his hat, and had his coat torn off his back, leaving only the sleeves. Some of the colliers contrived to get into the North Tavern, in front of which a great number of persons assembled, determined to oppose their being put on the coach. Mr. James Robinson, one of the division constables, in endeavouring to keep the peace, was rushed upon by scores of men, by whom he was knocked down and kicked with great violence, and his constable's staff taken from him. Several of the colliers were nearly denuded of their clothes, and with difficulty effected their escape from the violence of the multitude. On the following day warrants were issued for three of the offenders who had been identified, of the names of Thomas Chadwick, John Anderson, and Samuel Crabtree. On Saturday, they underwent an examination at the Court-House, before T. Beckett, Esq., and R. Markland, Esq., when the former two were distinctly proven to have assaulted a man named Joseph Wildman, and were fined in the full penalty of £5 each and costs, and in default of payment were ordered to be committed to the House of Correction for two calendar months. It was not proved that Crabtree had

¹⁴⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 May 1832.

struck any one, though he had incited the mob to violence, and he was consequently discharged with an admonition.¹⁴⁸

Although there is no definitive proof that this protest was organised by a colliers' union, the fact that miners were mobilised to meet at one place at the same time suggests some degree of prior planning. Given the undoubted existence of miners' unions in the West Riding at the time it remains an intriguing possibility. In the West Riding, resentment towards blacklegs continued to fester as the dispute progressed. On 20 June John Mitchell was charged with having 'thrown stones at some colliers who were proceeding to Hetton Colliery, whilst the coach was standing at the Rose and Crown yard end, in Leeds'.¹⁴⁹ Despite the frequent references to Derbyshire and other regions in the local press it is certain that a few Yorkshire miners went to the North East as blacklegs. The *Sheffield Independent* reported how two boys, Robert Wragg and John Hoby, aged between fifteen and sixteen, were apprehended 'at Hetton Colliery, near Durham, at which place they were employed'. Both were 'apprenticed to work as colliers' for Mr. Booth at his pit in Attercliffe but 'in May last absented themselves without leave or notice'. They were ordered 'to return to the service of their employers'.¹⁵⁰

In late June it was reported how '[d]uring the week, large bodies of colliers from *Hallamshire*, Derbyshire and a few from Nottinghamshire, have passed through this place, to the Newcastle collieries, to take the place of the turn-outs. The collieries are yet guarded

¹⁴⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 7 June 1832.

¹⁴⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 June 1832. A John Mitchell struck in 1833. See chapter 8. It is possible this was the same man.

¹⁵⁰ *Sheffield Independent*, 22 Sept. 1832; *Sheffield Iris*, 25 Sept. 1832.

by peace officers, and continual skirmishes occur'.¹⁵¹ Additional proof of the Yorkshire miners blacklegging comes from interesting sources. The *Leeds Mercury* reported how

A swindler, under the pretence that the relations o[f] two families resident at Seacroft and Scholes, in this neighbourhood, [Bradford] had received fatal injury by accidents at Hetton Colliery, contrived, on Monday last, to obtain the wearing apparel of the mother of one of the supposed sufferers, who had hastened off into the county of Durham, to ascertain the nature of the injury sustained, and whose consolation for the loss was, that the report was wholly unfounded, and that her son, as well as the son of her neighbour, was in perfect health, and in good work.¹⁵²

Furthermore it was stated that in 1832 'many colliers, hired to proceed to the Hutton [sic] collieries' lodged at the Exchange Inn in Sheffield.¹⁵³ There can be no doubt, therefore, that colliers from the Yorkshire region travelled north to work as blacklegs.

During the course of the North-East strike the Sheffield colliers continued to organise. Reflecting the growing influence and power of the union, the coalowners agreed not to let any members into their pits. 'We understand', the *Wakefield and Halifax Journal* stated, 'that the proprietors of several of the coal mines in the neighbourhood of Sheffield, have resolved not to employ men to what is termed the Union'. The increasingly precarious state of the market compelled coalowners to reduce wages 'and, in consequence, the necessary notice has been given, and a number of hands are under warning, or have left their employment, rather than submit to the terms of their masters'. The coalowners recruited labourers to work in the pits at lower rates of wages but it was noted that 'the old hands declare they will not allow them to work'. The Sheffield coalowners clearly feared that

¹⁵¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 30 June 1832. My emphasis.

¹⁵² *Leeds Mercury*, 30 June 1832.

¹⁵³ *Sheffield Independent*, 20 Feb. 1836.

disorder could break out: 'The pits have been watched by persons with loaded guns, as it is feared something of a determined nature will be attempted by the workmen who are out'.¹⁵⁴ In late August Hepburn's Union capitulated and the north eastern colliers were forced to return to work.¹⁵⁵ The low prices of Newcastle coals began to undermine the Yorkshire coal industry. To remain competitive more of the region's coalmasters reduced wages. Their standards of living, however, seem to have been marginally affected because of the stable price of wheat.¹⁵⁶

In the midst of the northern strikes the Reform Bill passed through parliament. There is little evidence that the colliers had any real interest in parliamentary reform. (We saw in the last chapter how their role in Radicalism in 1819 was practically non-existent). The Yorkshire miners in the early 1830s were more concerned with trade unionism than with pressing for political change. We have not one piece of evidence of the colliers playing a direct role in demanding parliamentary reform. The fragmentary evidence we have of colliers participating in reform celebrations in June 1832 suggests that the impetus for a celebration came from the coalowners and not from the colliers themselves. For instance, Abraham Greaves, a Dewsbury coal master, gave his men dinner and 'plenty of beer' upon the passage of the Reform Bill.¹⁵⁷ The most telling evidence, however, comes from Sheffield. A procession to celebrate the passage of the Act took place in June. Along with the various Political Unions and Reform societies there was a strong contingent of trade societies and their banners.¹⁵⁸ The colliers were not among them.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 4 May 1832.

¹⁵⁵ *Sheffield Iris*, 21 Aug. 1832.

¹⁵⁶ *Sheffield Iris*, 11 Sept. 1832.

¹⁵⁷ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 15 June 1832.

¹⁵⁸ Such as: The Opticians and Powder Flask Makers Society; Filesmiths' Society; Scissorsmiths' Society; Brush Makers' Union; United Society of Carpenters; Comb Makers' Union; Letter Press Printers.

In late 1832 the North East once again began to dominate the market. At some pits the demand for Yorkshire coal declined. In December 1832 Benjamin Biram wrote to Lord Milton stating that '[t]he demand for the Strafford Main coal¹⁶⁰ is not quite equal to the quantity they could draw. I think some customers are holding back in hopes they [i.e. the price of coals] will be again lowered'.¹⁶¹ In December Milton consented to a reduction in the price of coals to try and keep the collieries competitive.¹⁶² Elsewhere in Yorkshire prices were reduced. In October Flockton coal was sold for between 19s. and 19s. 3d. per ton. By Christmas Eve it was sold for 17s. per ton. In the former month Silkstone coal was sold for 19s. 6d. per ton; by December this too was sold for 17s. At the same time Newcastle coals were being sold for as little as 15s. per ton.¹⁶³ Indeed, this evidence suggests that John Baxter was correct when he argued that Yorkshire miners 'shared in the general stagnation' affecting other industries in the early 1830s.¹⁶⁴ It was, however, a short-lived recession. In and around Wakefield some collieries continued to make a profit, and it is in this context that the miners struck. The strike, and the strength of miners' trade unionism in this area, will be examined in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Between 1820-32 the Yorkshire miners were hardly the docile 'proletarians' as Baxter suggested. In the early years of the decade, friendly societies cushioned miners and kept

¹⁵⁹ *Sheffield Iris*, 19 June 1832.

¹⁶⁰ Swallow Wood coal. The name was changed to make it more marketable. See Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/38 Ben Biram to Milton 3 Nov. 1832; WMM/G40/39 Ben Biram to Milton 13 Nov. 1832.

¹⁶¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/45 Ben Biram to Milton 15 Dec. 1832.

¹⁶² Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/46 Ben Biram to Milton 26 Dec. 1832.

¹⁶³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/46 Ben Biram to Milton 26 Dec. 1832.

¹⁶⁴ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 350.

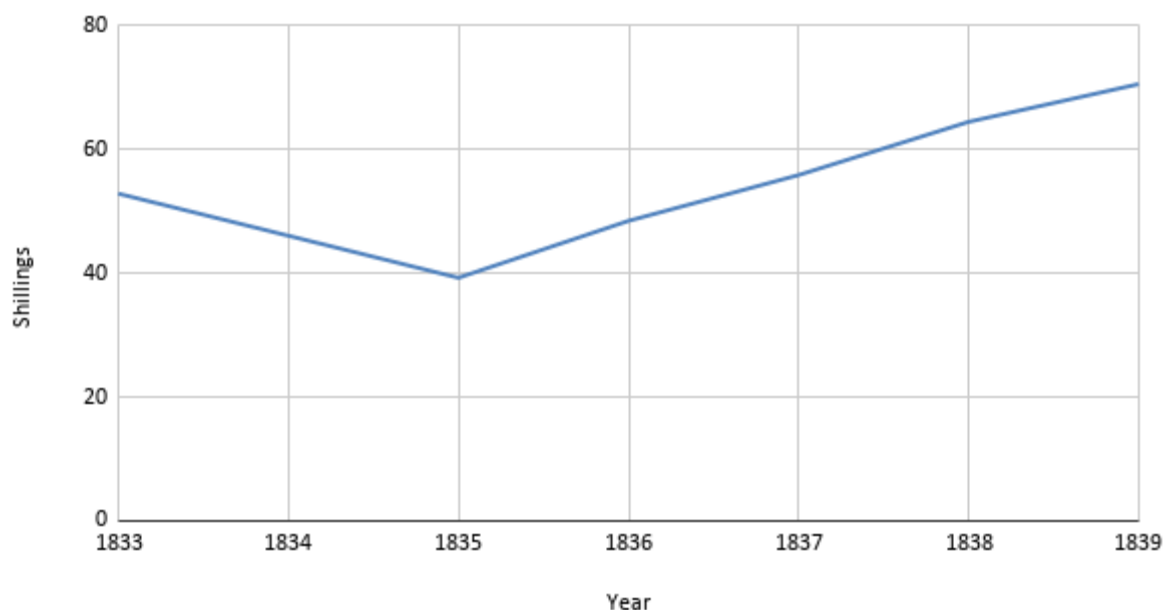
their standard of living above poverty levels. When trade revived in 1822, friendly societies disappeared because colliers were no longer dependent on their support, especially when wheat prices fell to their lowest level of the decade. For the next few years the coal trade prospered and this provided the basis for a more intense trade union organisation which flourished after the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1825. Furthermore, the depression which hit other trades in the winter of 1825 and into 1826 had a marginal effect on the Yorkshire miners. They continued to take strike action, as we saw at Sheffield in 1825, Barnsley in 1826, and at Dore House in 1827 to capitalise on the strong demand for trade. The low cost of living meant that each of these strikes was designed to raise wages and improve their standard of living. This level of organisation continued for the rest of the decade. The North-Eastern strike of 1831 and its economic benefits to the Yorkshire coal industry gave additional impetus for strike action. Colliers in Sheffield struck in April. Even when the pitmen of the northern coalfield had returned to work, we can be certain that organisation in Yorkshire continued; the trial in Sheffield of two colliers for intimidating a non-unionist in December 1831 attests to this. Furthermore, the fact that Earl Fitzwilliam's colliers struck in 1831 suggests that the idea of trade unionism and the potential benefits therefrom was beginning to be felt by colliers employed by the most paternalistic owner. By 1832 the concept of trade union solidarity had begun to develop amongst some of the region's colliers. Although we have no proof that such protests were organised and coordinated by a colliers' trade union, the fact that miners amassed in large numbers at the same time to stop the blacklegs indicates some degree of planning. In Sheffield, too, it is clear trade unionism flourished.

The Yorkshire miners were uninterested in parliamentary reform. Reform was not important because colliers had trade unionism; they did not want political change because it mattered little to them. Their demands for wage increases, which directly influenced their standard of living, could be augmented through strike action. Indeed, they began to increasingly flex their trade union muscles in the middle years of the 1830s. The strike of 1833 and the mid-late 1830s are the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 8: Confrontation in the Pre-Chartist Years 1833-1839

Extensive protest and confrontation took place across 1833-1839. Firstly this chapter will examine the 1833 dispute with Earl Fitzwilliam's colliers and the Wakefield strike. The Wakefield strike was *the* most violent coal strike in Yorkshire between 1786 and 1839. Secondly, this chapter will cast light on the disputes from the mid-1830s when the coal trade was at its most prosperous. Attention will also be paid to the enduring conservative loyalism of the Yorkshire miners. What this chapter emphasises is the depth and extent that trade unionism had penetrated to the Yorkshire miners in the pre-Chartist years. The years 1833-1839 witnessed a fall and then a steady increase in the cost of foodstuffs for many workers. The rise in the cost of foodstuffs from 1835, however, did not affect the miners and did not push them into protest. Their wages were *so high* that by the late 1830s they could easily afford the additional costs of wheat. Graph 7:1 shows the average cost of wheat per imperial quarter across 1833-1839.

Graph 8:1. Price of Wheat (per Imperial Quarter) 1833-1839



Source: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.

Their high wages, and their high standard of living, had been achieved by their commitment to trade unionism. By 1839 trade unionism was deeply woven into the fabric of the Yorkshire miners. Before we examine the instances of protest, however, we must assess the limitations in the historiography of miners and trade unionism; it is clear much more work needs to be done on labour history in the 1830s.

Historiography of the pre-Chartist Years: 1833-39

The 1830s has been neglected in the historiography of miners' trade unionism. Following the destruction of Hepburn's union in 1832, Robert Colls devotes one page to the 'inconsequential' developments of trade unionism amongst the North Eastern pitmen later

in the decade.¹ Raymond Challinor entirely neglects the period 1832-1841.² Nothing worthy of note was said to happen in Derbyshire in the decade.³ Frank Machin, in his fleeting coverage similarly concluded that there 'is no [...] evidence, at this time, that any miners in Yorkshire were organised'.⁴

Historians of trade unionism have drawn attention to a surge in strike action to take advantage of the upturn in trade' across 1832-34.⁵ Malcolm Chase posits that these years 'provided good ground' for more intensive trade union action.⁶ As with the 1820s, scholars have, however, restricted their analysis to artisan trades unions;⁷ this chapter will explore how the Yorkshire miners fit into this picture.

Protests at Elsecar and Wakefield: 1833

The state of trade remained precarious in the opening months of 1833. Early in the year a further reduction of the price of Newcastle coal adversely affected demand for West Riding collieries. 'The coal trade in this neighbourhood', Biram lamented, 'has received a severe blow, from a great reduction in the price of Coal made at Newcastle, by The Marquis

¹ Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, p. 267.

² Challinor, *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners*, pp. 28-30.

³ Williams, *The Derbyshire Miners*, p.

⁴ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 36.

⁵ Sykes, 'Trade Unionism and Class Consciousness', p. 191. See also Sanders, *Working-Class Movements in the West Riding Textile District*, p. 483.

⁶ Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 176.

⁷ Many early labour historians were keen to identify a connection between trade unionism and radicalism and proposed a 'pendulum theory' to explain shifts between trade unionism and politics. The 'pendulum theory' proposed that workers moved to trade unionism at times of good trade and to political radicalism at times of bad trade. It was soon discredited because historians were quick to point out that firstly the 'general' unions were formed during an economic depression and secondly that large sections of the working class were either indifferent to radicalism or in fact loyalist. Yet what emerged out of the criticism of the pendulum theory was the recognition that there was indeed a rise in strike action amongst the artisan trades. For proponents of the 'pendulum theory' see A. Briggs, *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959), p. 6; I. Prothero, 'London Chartism and the Trades', *Economic History Review*, 24:2 (1971), p. 204. For critics see Musson, *British Trade Unions*, pp. 37-38; Sykes, 'Trade Unionism and Class Consciousness', p. 181.

of Londonderry & Lord Durham' by 4s. per ton. He stated how the wharves were full of Yorkshire coal: '20 vessels of the Silkstone coal now at Keadby [remain] unsold' and added that Maxfield at Keadby 'has not sold coal coastwise for the last fortnight'. Biram concluded by saying 'I fear it will be ruinous for many coalowners'.⁸ Two weeks later prospects began to improve. 'There is a report that prices at newcastle [sic] are again advanced to the old standard, which appears confirmed by the improved sale we had for the last few days'.⁹ Despite the upturn in the markets it seems that Biram, and the new Earl Fitzwilliam, decided that a reduction in colliers was necessary to ensure their coal remained profitable.¹⁰ Biram wrote to Fitzwilliam explaining:

In my enquiries as to what possible reductions can be made in the expenses at the collieries, I find that the number of hands could be beneficially diminished, and that those who remained could earn better wages at a reduced price, by being enabled to send more coal. With this view I have given the men notice of sundry reductions intended to take place at a month's end and have also given notice to leave to ten of the younger men at Elsecar. Similar reductions can be made at Park Gate by dismissing some of those more recently engaged, and allowing the remainder to get a greater quantity of coal. This is the only way in which I can see that any reductions can be made in the colliery expenses; as at present, owing to the restrictions upon their gettings, the colliers are making very poor wages.

The number of hands at the collieries have a constant tendency to increase; little boys being engaged at a low wage to attend the horses, to shut air-doors & who as they grow older are appointed to more important posts – and all have the notion that if they behave properly at your Lordship's collieries, their employment is for life. The [collieries?] thus become overstocked with young men, and if it be found necessary to dismiss any of them, those upon whom the lot may fall think their case one of especial hardship. If therefore any reductions of hands is made, and which is the only way of making reductions of prices, your Lordship may expect numerous

⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/14/1/40 Benjamin Biram to Lord Milton 4 Feb. 1833.

⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/14/1/42 Benjamin Biram to [the new] Earl Fitzwilliam 16 Feb. 1833.

¹⁰ Within days of the death of the fourth Earl Fitzwilliam, the new Earl began to cut the numbers employed on the estate. The *Leeds Intelligencer* stated how 'Since the death of the venerable Earl Fitzwilliam, a considerable reduction has taken place in the establishment at Wentworth, both among the in-door and out-door servants; not fewer than fifteen stonemasons and a large number of colliers have been discharged. The painters, plumbers, carpenters, plasterers, &c. have all met with a reduction of sixpence per day.' See *Leeds Intelligencer*, 23 March 1833.

petitions from those discharged. I however wait your Lordship's sanctions, before any alteration is made wither in the number of hands, or in present prices'.¹¹

Fitzwilliam naturally approved of Biram's suggestions and wrote back explaining that '[i]t is very painful to dismiss persons already in employment, but the necessity of oeconomy is so great that we must do it, taking care to turn off those who (as you state) are of most recent employment. you sh^d also keep your eye upon another point, viz: that there be no favouritism in the arrangements'. He felt confident that '[a]ny dissatisfaction that may be occasioned and expressed at the diminution of the number of workmen will (I have no doubt) be soothed & counteracted by explaining to them candidly that their permanent welfare must depend upon making the works profitable, and that, to make them profitable, these measure are necessary'.¹² Towards the end of March the demand for coal began to decline again. 'Since Tuesday', Biram wrote 'I learn there has not been one vessel for Strafford Main Coals'.¹³ With no significant improvement in trade the colliers under notice were dismissed at the end of April.¹⁴ In May, Biram bewailed that the 'coal trade continues exceedingly flat, & from the low price at which Newcastle coal is now selling in London, I see little prospect of it mending'.¹⁵

¹¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/58 B. Biram to Fitzwilliam 18 March 1833.

¹² Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/14/1/55 Fitzwilliam to Biram 20 March 1833.

¹³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/59 B. Biram to Fitzwilliam 23 March 1833.

¹⁴ The *Sheffield Iris* reported how 'We regret to hear that many of the workmen employed at the Rawmarsh colliery [...] are either under notice, or about to receive the same, to quit, which, as might be expected, has cast a melancholy gloom over the hitherto happy faces, of the humbler classes of the neighbouring villages. We know not the circumstances which have given rise to this change of government in his lordship's estates, but as misery will be the consequence to many families, we home some means will be devised to remedy the evil'. See *Sheffield Iris*, 30 April 1833.

¹⁵ Sheffield Archives, WMM/StwP/14/1/65 Biram to Fitzwilliam 27 May 1833.

It seems that many colliers remained dissatisfied at being dismissed. At the beginning of July New Park Gate Colliery was fired. The *Sheffield Iris* reported how

Between the colliers' leaving off work on Saturday week and their recommencement on Monday morning, some wickedly disposed persons had, by means of what is called a Futterel,¹⁶ descended the main pit of Earl Fitzwilliam's colliery, at Rawmarsh, and actually contrived to set the works on fire. It appears, from the depression of the coal trade and other circumstances, that the establishment has lately been reduced in the number of the workmen, as well as a considerable reduction of wages made with regard to the rest; it is, therefore, supposed that from hence has arisen the provocation to this vile deed.¹⁷

Other contemporary accounts record that it was an act of arson.¹⁸ The fire was finally extinguished after a fortnight.¹⁹ We do not know whether anyone was ever prosecuted for firing the pit.

The firing of a colliery seems somewhat of a primitive act given the extent to which trade unionism had developed amongst the Yorkshire miners (even in Fitzwilliam's pits) by 1833. Perhaps after the discharge of influential organisers after the 1831 strike the colliers thought the only way to redress their grievances was through arson. Or perhaps the discharged colliers fired the pit because they had no recourse to the union which may have been the preserve of the longer-serving better-paid colliers who kept their jobs. In other words, the union route was closed off to the discharged workers; hence why they resorted to this 'primitive' act of protest. Nonetheless by 1836, when the coal trade boomed, the trade union of Fitzwilliam's colliers again demanded a wage increase.

¹⁶ Probably some form of adit or ventilation shaft.

¹⁷ *Sheffield Iris*, 9 July 1833.

¹⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/62 B. Biram to Fitzwilliam July 4 1833; Burland, *Annals*, Vol II., p. 31.

¹⁹ *Sheffield Iris*, 23 July 1833.

In April 1833 a protracted strike for a wage increase began around Wakefield. For most of 1833 the collieries in the Wakefield area had been making substantial profits, despite the competition from Newcastle pits. The cost of foodstuffs was steadily declining across 1833-1834; a nominal wage increase, therefore, would have significantly augmented their real wages. It was the longest and most violent dispute during the whole 1786-1839 period. And it appears to have had a great level of coordination and support from a colliers' trade union.

The strike originated at Messrs. Smithson and Co. where the colliers demanded an additional 3d. per corve when mining seventeen corves to the dozen.²⁰ Little is known about the first two weeks of the strike but it appears that the employers very quickly brought in blackleg labour from outside the region to work the pit which proves they still had markets for their coal.²¹ The colliers issued a statement through the local press. They declared,

we sincerely hope that our fellow-workmen, in every part of the Kingdom, will consider our situation, and whatever entreaties they may have from our masters, we trust they will not prove traitors in coming to deprive us of the means of getting our bread.²²

Three weeks into the strike, one of the regular colliers, David Brooke, visited one of the agents, James Andrews, and stated that he wanted to return to his work. Andrews agreed but told Brooke that he would have to work at the old wage rates - which Brooke refused. It seems that Messrs. Smithson & Co. decided to make an example of Brooke and summoned

²⁰ For a useful investigation into the Smithson family see J. Goodchild, *Wakefield's First Railway and its Collieries 1798 to 1880* (Wakefield, 2002).

²¹ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 3 May 1833.

²² *Leeds Mercury*, 20 April 1833.

him to the Quarter Sessions for breach of contract for not giving the required three months' notice. During the trial Brooke was represented by a solicitor, Sykes, which perhaps suggests that a union was funding his defence. In the proceedings Mr. Smithson stated that the striking colliers 'would not come back unless they were taken in in a body' which he refused to recognise. He added that he would only 'treat with them individually, especially as he did not now want half their number, having supplied the vacancies at great expense from a distance'. Sykes, on behalf of Brooke, told the court that the three months' required notice under Master and Servant Law also applied to masters as much as it did to the men; but unsurprisingly the jury (two of whom were coalowners) denied that this was the case. Andrews stated the 'unwillingness of his employers to proceed harshly' and 'offered to take the defendant again into employment' on his entering into a special contract to give proper notice on any future occasion'. Brooke agreed and 'thus avoided a month's imprisonment'.

Twenty other charges against Smithson's colliers were brought before the court. When the strike began, the colliers neglected, or refused, to 'deliver up all the tools in [their] possession'. The court resolved that the colliers had to either pay for the missing tools or face imprisonment for three months and pay costs for the proceedings. Smithson's colliers, in court, agreed to the former request.²³ They did not return to their work and remained out on strike.²⁴

In early May the strike for higher wages began to spread to other pits. It was reported in the *Wakefield and Halifax Journal* that:

There has been some stir amongst [the colliers] during the past week, they having, at most of the pits west of this town, turned-out for an advance of wages. We

²³ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 3 May 1833.

²⁴ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 10 May 1833.

understand that a good work-man has hitherto earned from 18s. to 20s. per week, and the advance required will be near 4s. more. At one or two pits the additional sum has been given, and the men at these places are at work again; but many of the masters say that they cannot possibly give the advance in consequence of the very low price of the Newcastle coal with which they have to come in competition. In some instances a slight advance in the price of coal has already taken place.²⁵

Abraham Greaves, a coalowner at Ossett Street Side, dismissed two of his men around this time. Within a fortnight 'all his hands left his employ'. 'There were about thirty men and boys' on strike at his pits.²⁶ William Walker, one of Smithson's colliers, was brought before the Quarter Sessions on the now-familiar charge of 'absenting himself from his work'. Walker admitted that he had been able to make £10 from being a 'beer-seller' in order to pay his contribution for 'being a member of the Union'. He too was ordered to return to work but we do not know whether he did.²⁷ When a collier from Dewsbury made an 'application for relief' stating he was 'out of employment' he was told to 'go to Messrs. Charlesworth's collieries, near Wakefield, where he would find plenty of work'. He replied stating he 'dared not go thither for fear of violence of the "turn outs" at that establishment'. The magistrates 'summarily dismissed the application, observing that there was ample work in the surrounding collieries for any good workman'.²⁸ Violence would later become a key characteristic of the dispute. Around this time the strike spread to Dewsbury. James Stead and John Mitchell, two hurriers employed by Mr. Job Hutchinson at Gomersall, were

²⁵ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 3 May 1833.

²⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 Oct. 1833

²⁷ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 10 May 1833.

²⁸ *Halifax and Huddersfield Express*, 27 April 1833.

committed to the House of Correction for one month 'for deserting their master's service without notice' by magistrates in that town.²⁹

In mid-May 'twenty-six more of Messrs. Smithson's turn-outs were summoned for unlawfully absenting themselves from their work'. The magistrate, Mr. Armytage, told the striking colliers that if the colliers refused to go to work they would be committed to the House of Correction. Smithson, however, 'expressed his wish if possible, not to proceed with such extremities if it could be avoided' and added that he 'was willing to take back at once all the men he could employ, and put himself to great inconvenience rather than see his workmen go to prison'. Again, the men refused to return to work. Sykes, speaking on behalf of the men, asked Smithson's agent Andrews to 'reinstate all the men as they were before the turn-out' to 'prevent the law from taking effect'. Surprisingly, Andrews agreed but the colliers changed their mind and refused to accept the settlement. 'One of them said "he could get kept for nothing, and he considered that was as good as working."' The magistrates subsequently reiterated that if all twenty-six colliers did not return to work they would be committed.³⁰ We do not know whether they did return to work; but given their obstinacy and their refusal to return without the increase it seems unlikely.

The strike continued throughout May and the local press lamented that the colliers' dispute was 'not yet settled'. Each member of the colliers' union carried a membership card that carried the slogan '*Justice, Liberty and Humanity*'. The union officials were listed on the card: Matthew Wormald (Grand Master); Jos. Killingbeck (Secretary); John Auty (Paymaster General); and William Squires (Deputy Paymaster).³¹

²⁹ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 3 May 1833.

³⁰ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 17 May 1833.

³¹ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 24 May, 5 July 1833.

By the beginning of summer the colliers were becoming increasingly angry that the pits were still being worked. Working colliers were targeted for attack. Three men named Thomas Ramsden, William Hartley, and Benjamin Heald were charged with robbing Thomas Westmoreland, a working collier, of £3 18s. 6d., when on his way to work. The robbery was 'not accompanied with any violence' because Westmoreland 'appeared to have been somewhat in liquor at the time'.³² Two striking colliers, George Westmoreland (perhaps a relation?) and Joseph Pease were charged with intimidating a working collier named William Richards. Richards, who had 'formerly worked in Staffordshire' was returning home after work with another working miner when they met George Westmoreland, Pease and two other 'turn outs'. The striking miners shouted "'Black sheep" and "Baa,'" and added "'If you don't get home, you -----, we will cut your black heads off.'" They then threw stones whilst using 'threatening language'. Pease and Westmoreland were subsequently imprisoned in the House of Correction with hard labour for a month.³³ Two more striking colliers, Thomas Hudson and Benjamin Ellis, were also charged with 'a similar offence' for intimidating Thomas Holmes. They too were imprisoned for one month with hard labour in the House of Correction.³⁴ The striking miners went to great lengths to intimidate the blacklegs. At the end of June six working colliers were sitting 'at a house' in Alverthorpe when George Ashton, a striking miner, 'suddenly fell against and burst open the door, affecting to be in a state of intoxication'. Ashton 'then fell on the floor of the room' but then whistled 'to some persons in concealment, on which six or eight men (turn-outs) rushed forward and commenced an indiscriminate assault' on the working miners. One of the men, Robert Hudson, knocked down a working miner named Joseph Naylor and with an 'oath said "Let's kill him."'. The

³² *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 21 June 1833.

³³ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 28 June 1833.

³⁴ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 28 June 1833; *Leeds Mercury*, 29 June 1833; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 29 June 1833.

others were told that if 'they did not give over working (for Messrs. Smithson and Co.), they would murder them'. One witness to the fracas declared that 'since the turn-out commenced, the most violent disturbances were going in every Saturday night in Alverthorpe' and that 'the peaceable inhabitants were not able to sleep in their beds, in consequence of the outrageous conduct of the turn-outs'. The magistrates concluded that more special constables would be needed to prevent further disorder.³⁵

It seems that the intimidation tactic gradually began to take effect. Both William Richards and Thomas Holmes, the two colliers who brought charges against the striking miners for intimidation, were subsequently brought before the magistrates on a charge of felony. It transpired that following the intimidation 'on Saturday night or early on Sunday morning they decamped, taking with them the bedding' that Mr. Smithson had provided for their use. They were apprehended in Barnsley for theft and committed to the House of Correction to take their trial at the next quarter session.³⁶

The strike undoubtedly had a substantial effect in reducing the availability of coal in the Wakefield area. At the end of June 'twelve women appeared on a charge of unlawfully taking coals from one of the collieries of Messrs. Charlesworth and Co'. The women 'expressed their contrition, and stated they did not know they were offending'. They were discharged in the payment of 24s. costs 'including the expense of printing a handbill' acknowledging their guilt and the 'lenity with which they had been treated'.³⁷

In mid-July the colliers' union issued their demands through the press. Their first demand was that 'all the Newcastle Colliers shall be sent home again'. Their second demand

³⁵ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 28 June 1833.

³⁶ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 28 June 1833.

³⁷ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 28 June 1833.

was that local blacklegs be refused employment in the pits. They declared that 'James Hudson, sen., Thomas Hudson, James Hudson, jun. and Joseph Naylor' be 'turned off' and 'not to have any work on the top or bottom [...] for the space of six months'. The colliers derided the fact that 'these very men' who 'are now settled at their work were among the first [...] who agreed to strike'. They lambasted them for going 'cringing to their work before the rest of the men can obtain anything like a reasonable agreement'. They declared:

Let it be remembered then that the men who have gone to their work in this canting cowardly way are now doing all that they can to starve a hundred men and all their families completely to death, perhaps not less than 300 souls in the whole. Those hundred men, and thirty or forty boys, have been standing out for fifteen weeks, while the other individuals are nicely settled at their work, and it is observable, they have great latitude now while the rest of the men are standing out; thus they are building themselves up by other people's downfall.

The union also rhetorically questioned what should happen to 'such knaves, such deceiving, such undermining, time-serving hypocrites' who 'deceive and injure their own fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, shop-mates, and fellow-countrymen?' 'Why should it be thought such a desperate thing for the Colliers to want them excluding'? they continued. The union also quoted from the striking colliers who went 'so far as to say they "wish the Almighty had taken away their life in the very first day they went to their work again since the turn-out took place"'. Their third and fourth demands stated that '[t]hat every man should come to the same job that he left' and '[t]hat the master should give a man three months' notice before he shall turn him off'. They concluded their letter stating that their wage demand

was reasonable and professed that 'fair play and protection for each other is all that they require'.³⁸ What mattered to the colliers was advancing their earnings.

The strikers celebrated the release of the imprisoned colliers at the end of July. The *Wakefield and Halifax Journal* reported how:

There was a procession of the turn-out colliers yesterday to give "the meeting" to some of their fellow labourers who were that morning discharged from the House of Correction. They paraded through different streets, accompanied by a band of music and a flag bearing the inscription "a just remuneration for our labour is our only aim. United to relieve not combined to injure. Go thou and do likewise."³⁹

Around the same time threatening letters were sent to colliery owners. Daniel Marsden, a coal-miner from Elland, was charged with sending the following threatening letter to Abraham Greaves at Osset Street Side in July. Greaves' colliers had been on strike for a wage increase since the beginning of May. Greaves was in the Strafford Arms Inn on the 22 July when he was 'called out'. 'On reaching the passage' Greaves was handed the following letter by Marsden who then walked away.

July 22nd, 1833. Mr. Abm. Greave, We as Coal Miners are informed that you have dismissed a few of your men, and if you do not imploy the same men in the Space of a fort Night, we shall be under Nessitty of calling the whole of your men out. By order of the Coal Miner Committee in the County of Yourkshire. Wakefield.

At the trial it emerged that Marsden had been selected to deliver the letter to Greaves because of 'his inability to wrote or read writing' meaning 'he could not be apprised of its

³⁸ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 19 July 1833; *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 5 July 1833.

³⁹ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 19 July 1833.

import'. Despite being defended by a solicitor it was to no avail as he was committed to the House of Correction for two months.⁴⁰ Intimidation of blacklegs continued to take place. At the end of July Robert Roberts brought a charge against two striking colliers, John Auty and Matthew Halfyard. Auty and Halfyard stopped Roberts on his way home and called out "'Oh, you black sheep, are you not gone out of the country yet,'" along with several 'threatening expressions'. Roberts ran away but was chased and caught by Auty and Halfyard who 'struck him and [his] boy several times'. Halfyard admitted that he was "'very fresh'" and that was only acting in self-defence as Roberts struck him first. Auty, on the other hand, denied that he was "'beerified'" and repudiated that he had committed the assault. Halfyard and Auty were fined 10s. and 5s. respectively and 28s. costs 'both of which were paid by the latter'.⁴¹ It is almost certain that this was the same John Auty who was 'Paymaster General' of the Union.

Intimidation continued to be successful. Three working colliers named Thomas Baines, Benjamin Ward and William Sharpe were charged with breaking a contract with Messrs. Smithson entered into in early May. The men alleged that 'they were afraid of fire-damp' despite refusing to work with, or being unable to afford, 'safety lamps'. The court heard that this was 'only a pretext'. They were ordered to return to work and pay the costs of the trial; but we do not know if they did so.⁴² The following week David Lawton, Robert Wood, David Pickergill, and David Riley were similarly charged with the same offence - breaking their contracts. At Riley's trial it was stated that he had entered into a contract but had 'scarcely got a single corf of coals after he had been engaged'. It transpired that Riley was anxious to

⁴⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 Oct. 1833

⁴¹ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 26 July 1833.

⁴² *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 16 Aug. 1833.

return to work and that he had only deserted his employment 'in consequence of being intimidated by the Union'.⁴³

The strike dragged on into early September. Smithson's colliery was still very much deprived of labour but continued to be worked. When two colliers, John Naylor and Benjamin Squires, were killed by a firedamp explosion at Smithson's Gawthorp Colliery, it was stated that the 'deceased were the only persons that had gone down into the pit'.⁴⁴ The same day of the inquest, a trial was held on two "'turn-out" colliers, named Benjamin Brown and John Broadhead' who 'violently' assaulted George Fisher, a collier in the employment of Messrs. Smithson. On his way home from work, Fisher met Broadhead who called him a "black sheep' and then 'challenged him to fight'. Fisher refused, whereupon Broadhead hit him. Brown came up and 'aided Broadhead' and knocked Fisher down whereupon they 'beat and kicked him in a most violent way, and afterwards pursued him'. In his defence Broadhead claimed Fisher had hit him first. Sir John Kay, (himself a coalowner) described it as 'a most aggravated case of assault' and ordered that Brown and Broadhead pay 40s. each plus expenses. It was stated that Fisher, who was from 'South Wales' had only been working at Smithson's pit a week before he was assaulted.⁴⁵ The strike continued at other collieries further afield. Three colliers from Rothwell, Aaron Land, Thomas Land and Joseph Sykes, all in the employ of Mr. Fenton, were committed to the House of Correction to be 'kept to hard labour' for absenting themselves without giving the necessary three months' notice, in mid-September.⁴⁶

⁴³ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 23 Aug. 1833.

⁴⁴ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 6 Sept. 1833.

⁴⁵ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 6 Sept. 1833.

⁴⁶ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 20 Sept. 1833.

We do not know the outcome of the strike. It seems to have endured into October; we know Abraham Greaves' colliers were still on strike in this month.⁴⁷ However, the significant expansion in trade in September makes it seem probable that some coalowners conceded to their colliers' demands. At the end of September it was stated that a 'further increase of 10s. per ton has taken place in the price of iron since our last'.⁴⁸ In October 1833 the *Sheffield Iris* commented on the brisk iron trade at Bowling and Low Moor near Bradford.⁴⁹ Whatever the outcome, it seems that by Christmas tranquillity was restored in Alverthorpe.

The 1833 Wakefield strike was an act of offensive trade union action. The miners once again flexed their industrial muscle for a wage increase because they knew the coalowners were making substantial profits. If the collieries in the vicinity of Wakefield were ailing due to the depressed state of trade and competition from Newcastle then it is hard to see why they went to such great lengths to import colliers from all over Britain to keep the pits working. The strike took place at a time of a declining food costs meaning a slight improvement in nominal wages would bring substantial real wage increases. There can be no doubt of the depth of feeling towards those who broke the strike from the local colliers. This was, without doubt, the most violent coal dispute in Yorkshire across 1786-1839. Its violence was more characteristic of the later disputes of the 1840s and 1850s than the 1780s and 1790s.⁵⁰ As Flinn and Stoker suggest, 'peaceful persuasion was capable of achieving only limited results' meaning 'a more threatening attitude' was required.⁵¹ The strike reveals the extent and depth of trade unionism amongst the Wakefield colliers. This

⁴⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 Oct. 1833

⁴⁸ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 27 Sept. 1833.

⁴⁹ *Sheffield Iris*, 22 Oct. 1833, 21 Jan. 1834. The latter issue commented on the 'improved state of the iron trade'.

⁵⁰ For the 1844 miners' strike in Yorkshire see J. Baxter, *We'll Be Masters Now* (Sheffield, 1986); Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, pp. 42-81.

⁵¹ Flinn and Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. II*, p. 403.

trade unionism would be brought to bear on coalowners to a greater degree as trade boomed across the mid-to-late 1830s.

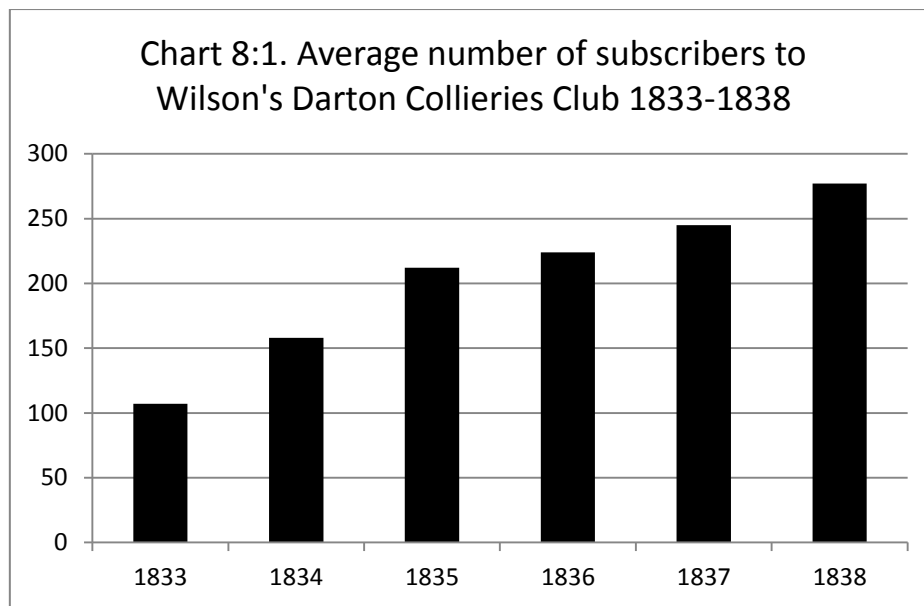
Economic Prosperity: 1835-1839

From 1833 the industry began to expand significantly. A friendly society for colliers at Darton near Barnsley was founded in 1833. There is no evidence to suggest that it was a trade union. Wilson's Darton Collieries Club was established on the 1 March 1833.⁵² Subscriptions were deducted from the wages of the men and the 'accounts were kept by the owner of the mine' and the club met 'at the Colliery'; highly unorthodox if this was a trade union.⁵³ Those who contributed the lower sum were entitled to 3s. 6d. per week relief when ill; those who contributed the higher sum were eligible for 7s. per week.⁵⁴ The average number of contributors per year is represented in the chart below. The chart is a good barometer to show the expansion of the industry once demand for coal increased in the mid-1830s. The number of colliers enrolling in the friendly society is surely indicative of an expanding, prosperous industry.

⁵² British Library, 8275.bb.4.(31.) *Rules of the Wilson's Darton Collieries Club, Held at Darton, Near Barnsley, Yorkshire*, (Barnsley, 1838).

⁵³ Rule VII stated that the neither the committee nor the subscribers were to meet in 'a public house or beer shop'). A collier whose wages were less than 7s. a week paid 6d. on entry and contributed ½d. per week. If his wages were above 7s. a week he was to pay on entrance 1s. and make a weekly contribution of 1d. The first rule stipulated that the Club would only provide 'a fund for the relief of its members during illness that has been caused by any accident happening to them while at work' provided the 'accident was not caused by their own carelessness or misconduct'. Relief would only be provided unless 'his illness shall have lasted one week'. Unsurprisingly contributors were not permitted to work when in receipt of relief.

⁵⁴ British Library, 8275.bb.4.(31.), *Rules of the Wilson's Darton Collieries Club*.



Source: T.S. Wilson, 'A Short Account of the Darton Collieries' Club' in *Notices and Abstracts of Communication to the British Association for the Advancement of Science at the Newcastle Meeting* (1838), p. 173.

Frederick Kaijage argued that the Barnsley miners in the mid-1830s had 'acquired a reputation of docility and subservience'.⁵⁵ They were, he added, 'late comers into the world of industrial militancy'.⁵⁶ Kaijage contrasted the colliers with the Barnsley linen weavers who had a reputation for industrial militancy and later showed how many linen weavers became Chartists. 'Unlike the linen weavers, the colliers in this early period lacked the numerical strength', he argued, 'to give them the confidence of victory'.⁵⁷ He declared, quite correctly, that '[t]here is no evidence of large-scale unemployment or drastic wage reductions in the coalmining industry'.⁵⁸ However, he failed to recognise that this made colliers *more likely to strike* rather than *less likely to strike*. Kaijage assumed, therefore, that strikes were a mechanism to prevent the further erosion of wages. He did not recognise that strikes could

⁵⁵ Kaijage, *Labouring Barnsley*, p. 370.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

be used in the opposite way to improve on already decent wages. The remainder of this chapter will cast light on the neglected strikes of the mid-late 1830s.

Prosperity continued throughout 1834 and 1835. In May 1834 Biram wrote approvingly about the increased demand for Elsecar coal.⁵⁹ Early in 1835 Biram wrote to Fitzwilliam explaining that there 'are vessels waiting for Park Gate coals & slack & for Strafford Main coals and slack'.⁶⁰ Coalowners took immediate action against those disrupting the productivity of the collieries. When a 'great number of men [were] thrown out of work at Holmes Colliery near Rotherham' John Watson, the engine tender, was summoned by Messrs. Chambers and Son for neglect of work. Watson argued that because he had been required to do other work' and had not had 'proper rest' he was unable to do the job effectively. He was committed to the House of Correction for two weeks.⁶¹ In 1834 Edward Parsons claimed that the expansion of mining around Beeston had 'destroyed its pleasantness and effected a disagreeable change in the character of its inhabitants'. He noted that the coal mines around Beeston 'have yielded a profitable supply of that invaluable mineral to the present day' and added that the coal pits at nearby Rothwell Haigh were 'immensely valuable to the owners'.⁶²

Throughout the 1830s political radicalism continued to have little impact on the Yorkshire miners. The conservative loyalism that characterised much of their attitude to politics endured. When Princess Victoria passed through Wakefield in 1835 it was reported how 'three jolly colliers, from Wakefield Outwood all "loyal" men, no doubt' went to 'have a

⁵⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/Stwp/14/2/2/24 Biram to Fitzwilliam 14 May 1834.

⁶⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/83 Ben Biram to Fitzwilliam 6 Jan. 1836.

⁶¹ *Sheffield Iris*, 28 Jan. 1834.

⁶² E. Parsons, *The Civil, Ecclesiastical, Literary, Commercial, and Miscellaneous History of Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield, Dewsbury, Otley, and the District within Ten Miles of Leeds Vol. 1* (Leeds, 1834), pp 180, 292, 181-182.

peep at the illustrious personages who passed through on that day'. Once they had gratified their curiosity, they retired to the Three Tuns, in North-gate, where they honoured the event by copious draughts of genuine "nut-brown." Things quickly got out of hand when they became 'very turbulent' and the constable and his assistants were summoned to take the miners into custody. The *West Riding Herald* lamented that 'for whatever might be their respect for royalty itself, they had but little for the King's servants'. The following morning they 'expressed regret at their conduct' and were released and fined £5.⁶³ Although evidence of party political affiliation is more circumstantial it seems that colliers supported the Tory Party during the Wakefield election of 1837. 'Blue houses', the *Leeds Times* stated, 'were kept open where navigators [navvies] and colliers, bargeman and draymen, mingled together'.⁶⁴

Prosperity continued into 1836. In February Benjamin Biram, Earl Fitzwilliam's steward, wrote saying that 'The Coal trade at Park Gate Colliery is unprecedentedly good'.⁶⁵ Later in the month he wrote saying how there was a 'great demand' and a 'scarcity of coal, all the coal yards being completely empty'. Many Yorkshire coalowners took advantage of this and raised their prices.⁶⁶ The coal trade boomed and the Yorkshire miners knew that strike action was likely to be successful. Earl Fitzwilliam's colliers were the first to demand a wage increase.

At the beginning of March 1836 (rather naïvely it seems) Ben Biram wrote saying 'I do not apprehend the colliers are likely to apply for an advance of wages at present, as they are

⁶³ *West Riding Herald*, 18 Sept. 1835.

⁶⁴ *Leeds Times*, 22 July 1837.

⁶⁵ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/86 Ben. Biram to Fitzwilliam 23 Feb. 1836.

⁶⁶ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/87 Ben Biram to Fitzwilliam, 29 Feb. 1836.

now earning from 4/- to 4/6 per day'.⁶⁷ Indeed, there can be no doubt that the Elsecar colliers were well paid. For working 10½ days in a fortnight Joseph Hirst earned £3 4s. 6d.; John Hunter earned £3; W. Boid made £2 19s.; and George Hobson was remunerated with £2 17s. Indeed, an average of the 12 colliers' wages we know for mid-March 1836 was in fact a staggering 5s. per day.⁶⁸ Biram continued

I am of opinion that if they would work 11½ days in the fortnight, good hands would with moderate exertion earn 30/- per week. They certainly are not in distress, for it is with the greatest difficulty they can be persuaded to work on the Reckoning Monday, & to day (Tuesday) though there are 12 boats waiting the men have all left their work by noon. Many of the men would work constantly, but unfortunately they are at the mercy of their more idle associates, for if a collier absents himself, it [is] useless his trammer attending, and if a trammer will not work the collier will soon be hemmed in with his own coals. This is only an inconvenience in the time of good trade, but it is at a time when fresh men are scarce, and when to discharge the irregular ones would be attended with great inconvenience.⁶⁹

However, less than a month later the colliers decided to strike for an advance of wages. 'The Colliers at Elsecar old Colliery', Biram complained, 'have thought proper to refuse to work'. The men struck over the amount paid for screening 'slack' coals; they argued that they were paid too little for the job. Biram added that 'I think they ought by all means to be resisted' and questioned whether 'would not be proper to give notice to quit to such as have houses, as they are under agreement to quit so soon as they shall refuse or discontinue working at the colliery'.⁷⁰ He lamented how 'without saying a single word to any individual that they had reason for complaint they all refused to work' and added '[i] am certain they are well

⁶⁷ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/89 Ben Biram to Fitzwilliam, 9 March 1836.

⁶⁸ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/90 Ben Biram to Fitzwilliam 15 March 1836.

⁶⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/90 Ben Biram to Fitzwilliam 15 March 1836.

⁷⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/92 Ben Biram to Fitzwilliam 13 April 1836.

aware they have no good ground for complaint, for not one of them have yet ventured to justify themselves'. Two days later the colliers capitulated: 'I am happy to say that the colliers see their error', Biram wrote, 'and are all anxious to resume their work. Most of them came to the colliery on Thursday morning'.⁷¹ However, the prospect of even higher wages loomed large in the minds of Fitzwilliam's colliers; so much so that within three months the colliers threatened to strike again if their wages were not advanced. The colliers' plan for a strike was leaked to Earl Fitzwilliam in a letter from two earthenware potters, Samuel Barker and George Green, who complained that owing to the high price of coal they could not afford to produce their goods competitively:

That it is an admitted fact [...] that the colliers on the strength of this advance [of the price of coals], are already founding a claim for an increase of wages, notwithstanding the perfect adequacy of their present rate, in relation to other classes of workmen. And it is also admitted that if their demands were complied with, it would not serve to encrease [sic] their Earnings, in as much as they would devote (according to their practice) fewer Hours in the week to labour'.⁷²

Sure enough, a fortnight later, the colliers issued their demand for a wage increase. A deputation of colliers from Elsecar met Biram on 20 July 1836 demanding 'an advance of wages'. He told them he 'could not listen to them for a moment'. He wrote to Fitzwilliam saying that on their current rates they 'will not now work ten days in the fortnight' and that 'any advance would only made them still more indifferent'.⁷³ It seems that a compromise was reached to get the men to continue in their labour. It was decided that an advanced rate would only be paid to colliers who worked the full 12 days in the fortnight and

⁷¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/93 Ben Biram to Fitzwilliam 15 April 1836.

⁷² Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/14/ii/111 Petition of Samuel Barker and George Green on behalf of Earthenware Manufacturers 4 July 1836.

⁷³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/G40/104 Ben Biram to Fitzwilliam 20 July 1836.

produced a high volume (what the high volume is we do not know) of coals. Earl Fitzwilliam wrote to Biram saying that 'I think your idea of giving an extra price upon an extra quantity of coals got by a collier a very good one, and I sh^d like to have it carried into effect [...] it must be considered only a temporary arrangement, for it is obviously not adapted to all times, but only to those of very good trade'.⁷⁴ The Elsecar cases here show how, in two instances, colliers attempted to make the most of favourable trade to win wage increases. We cannot accept the interpretation of Kaijage and others that, firstly, there was a total absence of mining trade unionism in the 1830s, and that trade unionism and strike action was a reaction to wage reductions.

In April colliers in the neighbourhood of Thurgoland near Barnsley struck work for a wage increase. Four colliers were charged with 'having assaulted a fellow-workman, named Leech' because 'Leech had not turned out'.⁷⁵ The *Leeds Times* reported in July 1836 that '[t]he colliers in Barnsley and the neighbourhood have given a month's notice to quit their work unless their wages be advanced by the masters'.⁷⁶ In August it was reported how 'the colliers in the employ of John Hopwood and Co., struck on Monday for an advance of wages, which the masters consented to give on Tuesday'.⁷⁷

The demand for coal outstripped local supplies of labour. In July 1836 it was reported in Barnsley that '[t]he coal trade of this neighbourhood continues uncommon brisk, but hands very scarce; Messrs. Field, Coopers, and Co., have sunk a new shaft, but they cannot meet with a sufficient number of workmen to supply their customers. The colliers at the

⁷⁴ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/14/ii/116 Fitzwilliam to Biram 22 July 1836.

⁷⁵ *Leeds Times*, 2 April 1836.

⁷⁶ *Leeds Times*, 9 July 1836.

⁷⁷ *Leeds Times*, 6 Aug. 1836.

New Silkstone Collieries are earning 4s. to 5s. per day'.⁷⁸ In June 1837 it was stated that '[the coal trade of] Barnsley and its vicinity is uncommonly brisk, so much so that a sufficient number of Colliers cannot be obtained to supply the demand'.⁷⁹ Indeed, high wages seem to have been paid at most collieries throughout the Barnsley area in the mid-1830s. The cost of living had only fractionally increased on the previous year meaning the miners enjoyed a very high standard of living. Wages at Clarke's Silkstone Collieries in the first week of June 1836 are indicative of this. The average daily wage for the first ten colliers enumerated in the wage book was 4s. 6d. for twelve days in the fortnight.

In December we know that high wages continued to be paid. At Clarke's Silkstone colliery across the fortnight of 9-22 December Charles Bostwick earned £3 12s. 3½d.; Joseph Barraclough earnt a substantial £5 12s. 1d. Although calculating an average daily rate in December is complicated because many miners took unofficial holidays it remains the case that for the days they worked they were remunerated well. For instance, William Lockwood was absent for 16-22 December 1836 but he still took home £1 3s. 4d. for his work between the 9-15th.⁸⁰

Indeed the evidence suggests that, despite the steady rise in the cost of foodstuffs, high wages led to absenteeism. In 1837 Benjamin Brooksbank, a Halifax collier, was 'charged with neglecting to complete, according to contract, a quantity of work'.⁸¹ Parish elites in Bradford complained in 1838 about the amount of colliers from the Low Moor Company regularly taking Monday off work.⁸² Coalowners, who were short of labour, became increasingly punitive towards absentee colliers. Charles Watson and Joshua Pollard were

⁷⁸ *Leeds Times*, 23 July 1836.

⁷⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 3 June 1837.

⁸⁰ Barnsley Archives, CR/31 Colliers' Wage Book 1835-1840.

⁸¹ *Halifax Express*, 5 Aug. 1837.

⁸² *Bradford Observer*, 31 May 1838.

charged by George Haigh, a Bradford coalowner with absenting themselves from, and thereby neglecting, their work as colliers. They were each committed to the House of Correction for a month in the spring of 1838.⁸³ Two Gildersome colliers, Jehoshaphat Hinchcliffe and Richard Ashton, were committed to the House of Correction for three months because they neglected to 'fulfil a contract'.⁸⁴ Luke Wheeler, a Sheffield collier, was likewise summoned by Mr. T. Booth, his master, for neglect of work.⁸⁵ And, we have other examples.⁸⁶

John Baxter has demonstrated that for many West Riding industries 'the downturn [...] began late in 1836 [and] continued until 1843'⁸⁷ and he adds that '[t]he coal industry was badly affected by the economic downturn'.⁸⁸ We reject this interpretation. The coal trade remained prosperous into 1837 and beyond. It was reported that the Wakefield collieries sent 'great quantities of coal' in barges 'from the commodious wharfs on the Calder, to Hull, Selby, Gainsbro', and other places'.⁸⁹ Indeed, adverts were placed in the local presses for labour. For instance, Messrs. Cameron and Barber, owners of Cortwood and Melton Field Collieries, put out an advert in the autumn of 1837 for '50 Good and Steady Workmen' who 'will meet with constant Employment and liberal Wages'.⁹⁰ From November 1837 profits began to be made at Caphouse and Denby Grange collieries in what was retrospectively described as a 'very prosperous' period.⁹¹ More adverts continued to be printed for labour

⁸³ *Bradford Observer*, 19 April 1838.

⁸⁴ *Leeds Times*, 17 Nov. 1838.

⁸⁵ *Sheffield Independent*, 24 Sept. 1836.

⁸⁶ *Halifax Express*, 30 Sept. 1837.

⁸⁷ J. Baxter, 'Early Chartism and Labour Class Struggle: South Yorkshire 1837-1840' in S. Pollard and C. Holmes (eds.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire*, p. 137. Other historians date the beginning of the depression from late 1836. See Rule, *The Labouring Classes*, p. 318.

⁸⁸ Baxter, 'Early Chartism and Labour Class Struggle', p. 153.

⁸⁹ W. White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of the West-Riding of Yorkshire* (Sheffield, 1837), p. 326.

⁹⁰ *Sheffield Independent*, 12 Aug. 1837.

⁹¹ J. Goodchild, *Caphouse Colliery and the Denby Grange Collieries* (Wakefield, 1983), p. 11.

throughout 1838. '[A] Number of steady working COLLIERS, to work the Low of Five Feet Bed of Coal at the above Colliery' were requested at the Geldered Road Colliery.⁹² Earl Fitzwilliam reflected on the sale of coals at his collieries. 'I agree with you', he wrote to his steward Biram, 'that there is no reason for reducing the price of coals'.⁹³

In 1839 wage data from Elsecar Old Colliery shows that ancillary workers in pits continued to be well paid right at the close of our period. Although the cost of provisions had increased steadily from 1836 the absence of further strikes suggests that the level of colliers' remuneration allowed them to absorb the price rises. Thomas Robertshaw, who worked the full fortnight between 11-24 January was paid the substantial sum of £2 6s. 8d. for working as 'labourer'. Likewise, George Eyre, who worked 12 days also as a 'labourer' between 11-24 January 1839 was paid £1 16s. These men earned 3s. 4d. and 3s. a day respectively; we can assume that colliers on piece rates in the pit earned substantially more than ordinary 'labourers'.⁹⁴ In mid-summer the pit ancillaries were working a day in the fortnight less. Ten 'Horse Boys' worked 12 days between 11-24 January and earnt between 10s. and 14s. for the fortnight. Likewise, nine boys worked 12 days between 17 May and 30 May. In contrast, between 26 July and 8 August, ten horse boys worked 11 days in the fortnight and were remunerated with between 9s. 2d. and 12s. 10d. By the winter months, however, they were back to working 12 days per fortnight.⁹⁵

⁹² *Leeds Mercury*, 6 Jan. 1838.

⁹³ Sheffield Archives, WWM/StwP/14/iii/48 Fitzwilliam to Biram 20 Feb. 1838.

⁹⁴ Indeed, the wages of these ancillaries were far higher than those working in a staple West Riding industry, wool, in 1838. An average woolsorter was expected to earn 17s 6d a week and a woolcomber 11s. 8d. a week. Robertshaw earned £1 3s. 4d. per week and Eyre 18s. per week; this perhaps gives some indication of the extremely high wages paid at Yorkshire pits at the close of our period. Table of weekly wages for the trades of Leeds reproduced in Hobsbawm, 'The British Standard of Living 1790-1850', p. 56. The average wage for a Kentish agricultural labourer in 1838 was around 13s. a week. This was considered a subsistence wage. See B. Reay, 'The Last Rising of the Agricultural Labourers: The Battle in Bossenden Wood, 1838', *History Workshop Journal*, 26 (1988), p. 93.

⁹⁵ Barnsley Archives, A3299/B/1/1 Elsecar Old Colliery Journal 1839.

Kaijage argued that '[d]uring the depression of 1839-42 the miners' earnings had considerably dropped'.⁹⁶ (He suggested that this explained the emergence of trade unionism in Barnsley in the mid-1840s). There is no evidence to support this interpretation. In 1840 the demand for labour was as brisk as ever. '*Constant Work*' was offered for colliers at Burton Colliery in January 1840.⁹⁷ Fifty-nine colliers were needed, one advert stated, at the Gomersal and Birkenshaw Coal Pits where 'Constant Employment' would be provided in the following October.⁹⁸ In 1841 it was stated that colliers in the Halifax region were earning 4s. 6d. per day.⁹⁹ If they are 'provident and economical' it was added, they live 'in comfortable circumstances'. If they happen 'to have large families, and these be steady and industrious, they are able to maintain a respectable appearance' an investigation concluded.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the roots of the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, which was founded at Wakefield on 7 November 1842, lay in these prosperous economic conditions for Yorkshire colliers and not in the depressed trade of the early 1840s.¹⁰¹ This is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

This leaves the question of Chartism. There can be no doubt that given the evidence of strikes, of wage data, and evidence of absenteeism, that the late 1830s were a prosperous time for the Yorkshire miners. It is doubtful that they needed Chartism as a political solution to failed industrial methods. The miners could get what they wanted through their trade unions. Furthermore, as Matthew Roberts has suggested, some of Chartism's support was derived from workers where the trades union method had been tried and failed in the

⁹⁶ Kaijage, *Labouring Barnsley*, pp. 376-77.

⁹⁷ *Leeds Mercury*, 18 Jan. 1840

⁹⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 3 Oct. 1840

⁹⁹ *Bradford Observer*, 21 Oct. 1841.

¹⁰⁰ *Bradford Observer*, 21 Oct. 1841.

¹⁰¹ R. Challinor and B. Ripley, *The Miners' Association: A Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists* (London, 1968), p. 7.

earlier 1830s.¹⁰² Historians have long recognised the indifference of the region's colliers towards gaining the People's Charter. John Field argued that the Barnsley colliers were 'untouched by the Chartist agitation that rooted itself so deeply among the rest of Barnsley's working people'.¹⁰³ John Baxter argued that Chartism was 'less effective among the small industrial communities in the central part of the region (including Rotherham) where coal mining and iron making were significant employers of labour'.¹⁰⁴ For Baxter, however, it was the 'wider social indoctrination [of] tightly managed communities where housing was a crucial employer's weapon' which prevented the 'political arousal among the collier population'.¹⁰⁵ A more realistic interpretation is that the Yorkshire miners did not need Chartism because they enjoyed a very good standard of living, and had by the early 1840s a well-established method of protest through trade union action. Even when strikes apparently failed they were costly for employers in lost sales, making other employers more likely to offer acceptable wages. A fuller, detailed investigation of the Yorkshire miners and Chartism, however, awaits its historian.

Conclusion

The Yorkshire miners were hardly 'late comers into the world of industrial militancy'.¹⁰⁶ A study of the 1833 disturbances at Elsecar, the protracted strike around Wakefield, and the subsequent developments into the mid-1830s when colliers truly went on the offensive, reveals that extensive protest and confrontation occurred in a supposedly

¹⁰² M. Roberts, *Political Movements in Urban England 1832-1914* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 46.

¹⁰³ J. Field, 'The Miners and their Unions in Victorian Barnsley' in J. Baxter (ed.), *The Making of Barnsley's Labour Movement 1740-1940* (Rotherham, 1980), p. 14.

¹⁰⁴ Baxter, 'Early Chartism and Labour Class Struggle', p. 136.

¹⁰⁵ Baxter, *The Origins of the Social War*, p. 309

¹⁰⁶ Kaijage, *Labouring Barnsley*, p. 370.

'inconsequential' decade. The firing of the colliery at Elsecar, a slightly abnormal act by 1833, perhaps reflected Earl Fitzwilliam's refusal to countenance trade unions - as we saw in 1831. Nonetheless, in other parts of the Yorkshire coalfield we cannot doubt the depth of support that colliers' trade unions had, best exemplified by the violent strike at Wakefield which took place to raise wages. The significant expansion in trade from late 1833 onward, and the shortage of labour in pits, placed the miners in a commanding position which they quickly capitalised on. Even at Earl Fitzwilliam's pits trade unionism was resurgent. Kaijage was quite clearly mistaken when he thought wage reductions or large-scale unemployment were the only factors encouraging strike action.¹⁰⁷ We know wages at some Yorkshire pits reached around 4s. 6d. or even 5s. a day. The absence of strikes after 1836, however, suggests that their high wages won for them by their trade unions mitigated the impact of the rise in the cost of living across what has been termed the 'hungry forties'. Indeed, Yorkshire miners' labour commanded a premium and this was often met with criticism from those outside the industry, such as the two earthenware potters, who argued that when colliers reached their target income they would work less.¹⁰⁸ This seems to be borne out by the fact that absenteeism became widespread in the mid-to-late 1830s. At the close of the decade the industry continued to prosper; even the ancillaries in pits were earning good wages. Throughout the period the Yorkshire miners maintained their conservative loyalism. There is no evidence that they supported the incipient Chartist movement despite the depth it penetrated to other trades in the West Riding. Perhaps this can be explained by their high standard of living. Their economic demands, which had the most impact on their quotidian life experience and conditioned their world-view, could easily be improved by strike action.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 374.

¹⁰⁸ Economists call this the backward bending supply of labour curve.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This thesis has explored the work, culture and protest instances of the Yorkshire miners between 1786 and 1839. A vast range of disparate and fragmentary primary source material was examined in order to fully make sense of why the Yorkshire miners protested across a period of seismic economic, social and political change. This thesis has brought together aspects of protest history, social history and economic history that have increasingly become divorced from each other in recent years. Only by bringing these three areas together can we fully make sense of the motivations (and aspirations) behind protest in the industrial revolution. For most of the period, with the exception of the post-war depression, the industry expanded which provided opportunities for more and more people to share in a high wage industry. Providing they escaped injury or death, employment was generally regular, and they were remunerated much higher than their contemporaries in other trades. These workers were not - with the exception of in 1819 - on the edge of starvation, unlike the poor stockinger, the cropper, or the 'obsolete' handloom weaver that we have heard so much about. In seeking out the most oppressed, those pushed to the very margins of existence, historians have skewed our understanding of the reasons for protest in the industrial revolution and we have, as a result, mischaracterised the motivations behind protest in the period.

For so long we have accepted that strikes were *defensive* actions; a reaction to *prevent* an erosion of wages. In contrast, this thesis has shown that strikes were *offensive* actions that, with the exception of in 1819, took place at times of good trade to increase their wage rates. Scholars have become adept at identifying trends in wages and using this data to construct an optimistic interpretation of the standard of living, but if we do not know how

the wages came to be so high in the first place, we miss a fundamentally important part of the picture. It is clear that the Yorkshire miners primarily struck to increase their wage rates and improve their standard of living. Strikes were coordinated by trade unions that became increasingly sophisticated across the period. The impact of trade unionism had on wage rates, therefore, is an integral part of the standard of living debate that has been neglected by previous historians. Through the study of the Yorkshire miners, this thesis has advanced the standard of living debate and has cast a new light on a way to make sense of the British society in the Industrial Revolution.

The Yorkshire miners between 1786-1839 have been almost totally neglected in previous works of economic, social and protest history. For too long scholars condescendingly depicted miners in the various coalfields in England as too few in number, too backwards-looking, and too 'primitive' to form trade unions. They were denigrated as 'late comers' to industrial militancy. Indeed, some historians denied that the miners had a place in early trade unionism; unions were reserved for the 'artisan elite'. Even detailed scholarship on miners' protest in the 1820s and 1830s described their methods of protest as 'pre-industrial'. This view was, however, convincingly exploded by Robert Colls in the 1980s. But the influence of Colls has meant that the north east coalfield has dominated our subsequent understanding of miners' trade unionism (as well as work and culture) in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Colls, however, neglects the 1820s and the later 1830s which were fundamental periods in the development of miners' trade unionism. Colls' omissions (and discontinuities) distort our understanding of the rise of trade unions. This study of the Yorkshire miners, therefore, offers a more detailed and fuller perspective

on the rise of organised labour across the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries than previous histories of miners.

Their high wages reflected the fact that the coal industry was generally prosperous across 1786-1839. Unlike cotton where technology improved, the only way to increase production was to employ more workers. Bonds stipulated high piece rates for coal getting. Parish apprenticeship provided a route into the high-wage economy when they reached twenty-one. Women and children came into pits in the 1820s and 1830s in higher numbers as their traditional way of contributing to the household economy declined. Furthermore, part of their high pay was compensation for accepting risk. All miners were subjected to three main hazards: explosions; falls of coal, roof or debris; and shaft/winding accidents. Supply and demand pushed wages up; but the trade unions played a crucial role in helping the miners negotiate a better deal.

The high wages and dangerous nature of work sustained two competing cultures of alehouse and chapel across the period. The examples from the Yorkshire coalfield challenge the dichotomous view of 'rough' or 'respectable' that has framed how social historians have understood working-class culture in the industrial revolution. Drinking in the public house often accompanied gambling, fighting, blood sports, and poaching. Alehouses also provide a meeting place for friendly societies and it seems highly probable that many of the Yorkshire miners' trade unions had their origins in the public house. Religion was fundamentally important to many colliers, and a significant number of Yorkshire miners had derived a reasonable education from the Sunday School. The chapel and Sunday school played an important role in the development of trade unions by providing colliers with the organisational and literacy skills necessary to manage money and men. The union leaders of

the 1850s and 1860s stressed that their success lay in the pulpit or the school room.¹ The growth of Yorkshire miners' trade unionism across the period occurred in the fertile ground of the alehouse and the chapel.

Trade unions became so important to Yorkshire miners because they were usually successful in increasing wages. In the 1790s, a culture of trade unionism was established at Middleton Colliery, which significantly improved the colliers' living standards. At other pits, too, evidence of a significant degree of organisation and planning is proven. Simply because rules or printed documents have not survived does not mean that trade unions did not exist. In any case, we can trace the continuing existence of trade unions in the experience of the colliers who, once they had tasted success, struck again. It seems logical to assume that strikes were the end point of a lengthy period of negotiation between the miners and the coalowner.² If coalowners complied with the miners' demands and increased wages it seems likely that strike action was averted. Owing to the fragmentary evidence base nearly all of the negotiations between miners and owners are lost to us. (We have one example of Earl Fitzwilliam's colliers asking for higher wages in 1811 which he agreed to). It seems logical that similar negotiations between workers and owners took place at other pits across the period. Miners must have been regularly demanding higher wages at times of brisk trade. Only when their wage demands were rebuffed once too often did the men come out on strike.

The Combination Laws of 1800-1824 did little to prevent combination. The rise in the cost of living in 1810 and 1811, but most significantly in 1819, pushed miners into strike

¹ Machin, *The Yorkshire Miners*, p. 411.

² Adrian Randall posits that 'pressure, persuasion and sanction' preceded 'overt' protests such as food riots. See Randall, *Riotous Assemblies*, p. 19.

action and, in the latter year, to organise on an unprecedented scale. In the post-war depression, friendly societies at some collieries maintained the standards of living of those colliers who were sick, lame or unemployed during periods of slack trade. From the 1820s the low cost of living meant strikes brought significant real wage benefits and substantial improvements to living standards. By this decade trade unions were deeply woven into the fabric of the Yorkshire miners. Many strikes broke out in the second half of the 1820s, especially in Sheffield, and by the early 1830s a trade union can be found even at the paternalistic Earl Fitzwilliam's pits. The prolonged struggle of the pitmen of the northern coalfield in 1831 and 1832, which benefited the Yorkshire coal industry, provided good ground for intensive trade union action. In 1833, a protracted strike took place at Wakefield which was characterised by violence. Blacklegs were imported from across Britain demonstrating how anxious the coalowners were to keep pits working and to break the colliers' union. In the mid-1830s a series of strikes broke out for wage increases and by 1837 colliers were earning 5s. a day. Their earnings were so high that absenteeism became a problem for some coalowners. The fragmentary evidence we have for the early 1840s suggests high wages were maintained. Thus, between 1786 and 1839, whilst the Yorkshire miners' experience of labour and culture remained static, their wages rose significantly. This was possible because the industry prospered, but achieved, due to their steadfast commitment to trade unionism. Trade unionism had the single greatest impact in improving the Yorkshire miners' standard of living in the industrial revolution.

The Yorkshire miners' conservative loyalism, too, endured across the period. They were working-class conservatives. For too long we have simply associated industrial militancy with radicalism: we need to rethink this conclusion. They had nothing to gain from

radicalism or political reform because they could get what they wanted through trade unionism. It was the trades that entered terminal decline, such as linen weaving, that produced most of the West Riding's radicals. The miners' loyalism to crown and constitution, therefore, can be best explained by the fact that their standards of living increased whilst those of some other workers decreased. They did not want anything to change this favourable position that they were in so they supported the status quo.

Emma Griffin headed one chapter 'Winners and Losers: Living through the Industrial Revolution'.³ The Yorkshire miners were unquestionably the winners across 1786-1839. They formed unions and struck at times of good trade for higher wages to maintain or improve their standard of living. The Yorkshire miners used protest strategically, and with growing sophistication, to pressure coalowners into wage increases. It was, in essence, a self-interested militancy. The Yorkshire miners between 1786 and 1839 were not class conscious; they looked after their own interests above anything else. In the subsequent years the Yorkshire miners' trade unions grew larger and stronger, but the level of arrogance with which they viewed their own industrial might persisted. The victories in strikes of 1972 and 1974, and the substantial wage increases achieved, gave the miners a feeling of invincibility. It was the dispute of 1984-85, ironically not about wages, which shattered the miners' belief of indomitability.

³ Griffin, *A Short History of the British Industrial Revolution*, ch. 9.

Appendix 1: Terms of Employment at Clarke's Silkstone Colliery. Source: Barnsley Archives, CR/148.

[A]rticles if agreement made and entered into by and between us, whose names are hererunto subscribed, being Artificers, Workmen, or Labourers of and for Robert Couldwell Clarke, of Silkstone Colliery in the County of York Coal Merchant of the one part, and the said Robert Couldwell Clarke of the other part, as follows, that is to say

We whose names are hereunto subscribed, do hereby for ourselves severally and respectively, contract and agree with the said Robert Couldwell Clarke, that he and his agents shall and may, from time to time, stop, deduct, and retain out of our respective wages and the wages of our Children, the Rent of any Tenements with their appartenances by him [?] to, or occupied by us respectively thereon reserved or to be reserved and also all such sum or sums of money as the said Robert Couldwell Clarke, or an of his agents, shall or may advance or pay for us respectively, at our request for or in respect of any medicine or medical attendance. and also the value of any Fuel supplied to us; or of any Materials, Tools, and Implements, to be by us respectively employed. and also all such sum or sums of money as the said Robert Couldwell Clarke or any of his agents shall, at our request, advance to any of us to be by us contributed to any Bank for saving, or Friendly Society (duly established according to law) or for relief in sickness or for the Education of our Children or any of them as witness our hands.

Charles Jubb [signed]

George Jubb X

Joseph Mann X

Jonathan Cooper X

James Mann [signed]

Thomas Jubb [signed]

Samson How X

Tho^s Healey X

George Beardshill X

James Batty [signed]

Jos^a Barraclough

George Hoyland [signed]

George Hollings [signed]

Joseph Hoyland [signed]

Tho^s [?] X

John Wright X

Will^m Carr X

William Depledge [signed]
John Parkin X
[Line left blank]
Sam^l Ellis X
Wm Taylor [signed]
Will^m Utley X
Richard Hilley X
Tho^s Knapton X
Will^m [?] X
George Stringer X
David Hoyle X
Tho^s Swift X
Henry Cook X
Mark Moss X
David Gleadle X
Michael Horne X
Will^m Padgitt X
Ben^j Marsden X
John Rusby X
Tim Hague X
Ben^j Turton X
Isaac Carr X
John Mosley X
Rich^d Padgitt X
Will^m [?] X
Henry Hollings X
Tho^s Kay X
John Padley [signed]
Mathew Swift X
James Wilson X
George Whomersley X
Joseph Tasker X
John Gelder X
John [?] X
Will^m Gothard X
Robert Parkin [signed]
George [?] X
Will^m Tordoff X
Joseph Healey X
John Firth X
George Firth X

Thomas Lockwood [signed]
John Godward [signed]
John Taylor [signed]
John Jones X
Joseph Hunter X
Jonathan Lockwood X
John Moore [signed]
John Haddy X
John Dodgson X
John Bedford [signed]
James Littlewood X
Charles Hurst X
William Beverley X
[?] [?] X
Ja^s Chisholm [signed]
Tho^s Allen X
John Bradley X
W^m Hollin X
Geo Hough [signed]
Charles Bostwick X
Tho^s [?] X
Joseph Newton X
Ben^j Lamb [signed]

Appendix 2: Collier's Terms of Employment at Denby Grange Collieries. Source: Goodchild, *Caphouse Colliery and the Denby Grange Collieries*, p. 16.

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT *made the*

Day of 18 *Between*

of _____ *in the County of York, Collier, of the*
one part, and _____ *of*

in the said County of York, Agent, for and on behalf of Sir JOHN LISTER LISTER KAYE,
of Denby Grange, in the County of York, Bart., and Colliery Proprietor, of the other
part,

WHEREBY the said _____ in consideration of the Wages to
be paid to him by the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye, and of the sum of One Shilling paid to him
by the said _____ as Agent to the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye, on the
signing hereof, the receipt whereof he doth hereby acknowledge, DOTH contract and
agree with the said _____ as such Agent as
aforesaid, to work for and serve the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye faithfully, diligently and
exclusively as his Servant, in the capacity of a Collier, at his Colliery in the Parish of
in the West Riding of the County of York, from the date hereof, until the expiration
of one of such Notices as hereafter mentioned, or until the said
shall be dismissed by the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye or his Agent, for misconduct, and to
obey the lawful commands of the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye and of his Agents at all times
during such service. AND that he the said _____ will not
absent himself from the employ of the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye at any time during such
his service without the consent of the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye or his Coal Agent first
obtained. AND ALSO that he the said _____ will not quit or
leave the service of the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye without first giving to him or his Coal
Agent Three Calendar Months' Notice in Writing of his intention to do so, nor until
the Three Months to be named in such Notice shall have expired, AND further that
he will carefully preserve all such Working Tools and Implements as he may be
entrusted with by the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye or his Coal Agent and deliver them in good
condition to the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye or his Coal Agent, and also leave his Colliery
Workings in proper workmanlike order at the determination of this Contract, AND
LASTLY that it shall be lawful for the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye or his Agent, in pursuance of
the Statute in that behalf, to stop and deduct from any Wages which may be due to
the said _____ such sum of sums of Money as may be due to
the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye from the said _____ for or in respect
of the Rent of any Cottage he may occupy under the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye, or for or in

respect of any Fuel, Mining Tools, Candles, Oil, or other Materials or Implements which may be supplied by the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye or his Agent to the said for the purpose of his occupation and employment as such Collier as aforesaid, AND the said as such Agent to the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye as aforesaid and in consideration of such faithful service by the said and of the proper performance by him of the stipulations shown above mentioned, hereby agrees that the said shall not be discharged by the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye or his Agent, without one month's Notice being given for that purpose, unless the said shall misconduct himself in his service, in which case the said Sir J. L. L. Kaye or his Coal Agent shall have the right to discharge him immediately without any Notice.

Witness the Hands of the Parties,

WITNESS,

Appendix 3: Parish Apprentice's Indenture to a Collier, 1821. Source: West Yorkshire Archive Service (Kirklees), KC72/17 Batley Parish Apprenticeship Indentures.

West-Riding of the County of York.

This Indenture, made the third Day of January in the Year of our Lord 1821 BETWEEN John Nussey Churchwarden and John Schofield and Edward Dean Overseers of the Poor in the Township of Batley in the said Riding, and Jonas Keighley a poor Child of the said Township, aged eleven Years, on the one Part, and James Smith of Liversedge in the said riding coalminer on the other Part, WITNESSETH, That the said Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor HAVE, by and with an order of Consent, Allowance, and Approbation of Michael Stocks and William Barstow Esquire two of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the said Riding, (*whereof One is of the Quorum*) bearing Date the third Day of January 1821 have put, placed, and bound the said Jonas Keighley as an Apprentice to and with the said James Smith with him to dwell and remain from the Day of the Date hereof, until the said Apprentice shall attain the Age of Twenty-One Years according to the Form of the Statute in that Case made and provided. During all which said Term the said Apprentice his said Master well and truly shall serve, his secrets shall keep, his Commands (being lawful and honest) at all Times willingly shall perform; and in all Things, as a good and faithful Servant, shall demean himself towards his said Master and all his Family. And the said James Smith for himself, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, doth covenant, promise, and agree, to and with the said Churchwardens, Overseers, and his said Apprentice, that he will educate and bring him up in come honest Calling, and in the Fear of God. And the said James Smith for himself, his Executors and Administrators, doth further covenant, promise, and agree, to and with the said Churchwardens, Overseers, and his said Apprentice, that he will find, provide for, and allow unto his said Apprentice, sufficient wholesome and competent Meat, Drink, Washing, Lodging, Apparel, and all other Necessaries, meet for such an Apprentice, during all the said Term. Provided Always, that the last mentioned Covenant on the Part of the said James Smith his Executors and Administrators, to be done and performed, shall continue and be in Force for no longer Time than three Calendar Months after the Death of the said James Smith in case he the said James Smith shall happen to die during the Continuance of such Apprenticeship, according to the Provisions of an Act passed in the Thirty-Second Year of the Reign of King GEORGE the Third, intituled "*An Act for the further Regulation of Parish Apprentices.*"

In Witness whereof the said Parties to these Presents have hereunto interchangeably set their Hands and Seals by the Day and Year first above written.

Sealed and Delivered in the Presence of Wm Gibson

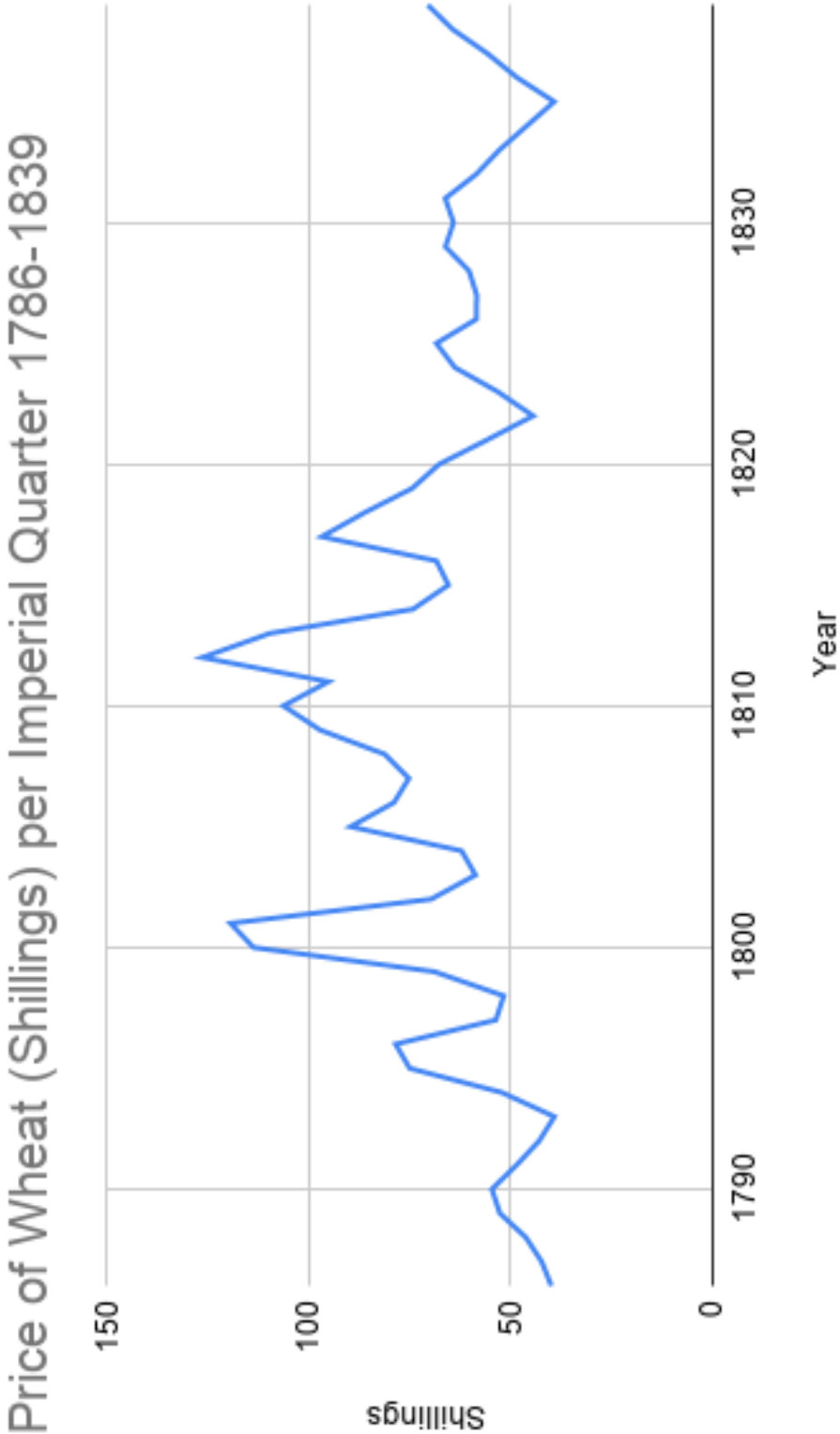
James Smith [signed]

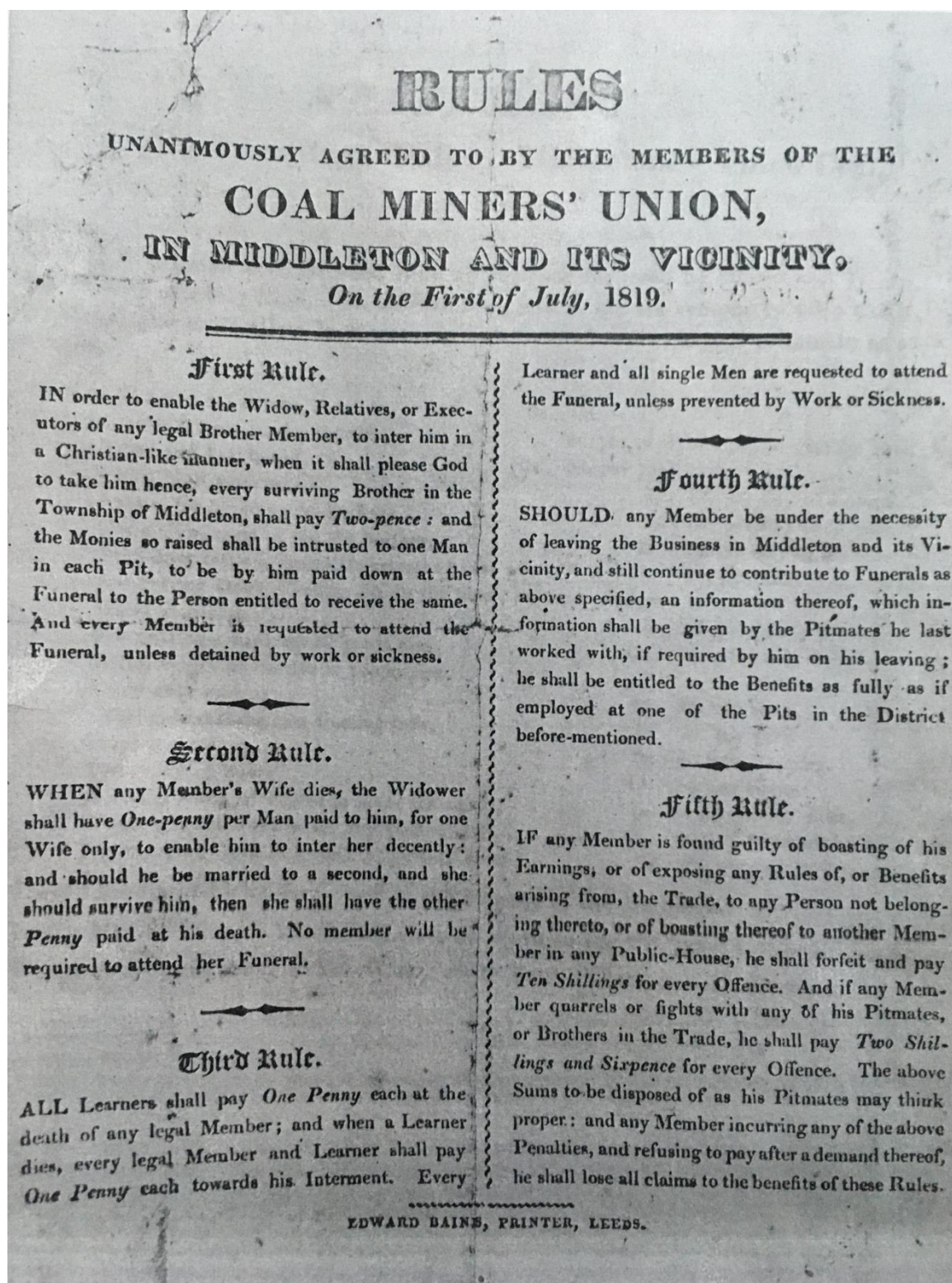
We, two of his Majesty's justices of the Peace, in and for the said Riding, do hereby assent to the Binding of the said Jonas Keighley Apprentice to the said James Smith

M Stocks [signed]

W Barstow [signed]

Appendix 4: Price of Wheat (Shillings) per Imperial Quarter 1786-1839. Source: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 488.





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 /G Correspondence

 /F Correspondence

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