



# THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1989

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## NEWSLETTER FOR SPRING 2024.

### Chairman's Message.

**Welcome to Spring 2024.** We used Zoom for our AGM last year, which was quite successful and certainly a lot easier. We also had a Social Zoom just before Christmas.

Would any of you like to have a social get together on Zoom, perhaps in May or July? Can you ask your family if they can help you with this? If yes, email me with your email address and I will send you the log in details nearer the time.

I wish you all a Happy and Healthy 2024,

**Anne. (Lane)**

### MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY.

Welcome to the Spring with daffodil and crocus to herald the new year.

In the last newsletter I wrote of attending a Remembrance meeting at the local village hall where memorabilia from the two World Wars was displayed. My display from the Bevin Boys Association created interest and again I had the question, if the Bevin Boys were a boy band? NO!

Anne has given the news of new pictures of the Bevin Boys Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire. I still have a copy of the Service of Remembrance held to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bevin Boys at the Arboretum. Last year 2023 would have been the 80th Anniversary. The service was conducted by The Reverend Phillip Pearson (standing in for Rev Maurice Turner our Chaplain) trumpeter Dennis Sanders, Standard Bearer Tom Dunlop. The welcome address was given by David Childs Founder Director of the National Memorial Arboretum.

After the service the plaque unveiling and tree planting took place. The Oak representing England was planted by Lady Finsberg our President, Mountain Ash for Wales planted by Warwick Taylor, and a Scots Pine for Scotland planted by John Burgess our Chairman, all followed by a photo call. If you were there do get in touch.

Finally, sadly the Pit Pony Sanctuary at Pontypridd is closing down, Ray and Angela who have run it for 40 years are retiring because of ill health, recently they have taken in abused or abandoned ponies the last pit pony was from a small private mine in Wales. These will now be transferred to Hillside animal sanctuary in Norfolk, [www.pitponies.co.uk](http://www.pitponies.co.uk) where they will live out their lives with care and kindness.

Best wishes for a healthy and good year ahead,

Liz Todd secretary

### MESSAGE from the TREASURER.

I am pleased to say that although our overall balance is slightly less than at year end 2023, with little movement on our account, we are maintaining a healthy balance which will continue to support the Association's work for the foreseeable future. We are continuing to pay for Zoom so that the committee can continue to meet - albeit 'online' - and we also have social get togethers on Zoom at Easter and Christmas. The AGM for 2024 will also be on Zoom.

Since we are unable to meet now in National Reunions we have been subsidising meals at local reunions - even if that is just two Bevin Boys. If any members from other areas plan to meet up please let us know prior to the event as we can then help with the cost of the meals.

Barbara McElroy.

### ARCHIVIST

I hope that this newsletter finds you all well. We continue to keep in touch via Zoom and the newsletter and we still have queries from relatives and the media so that keeps us busy.

I have had an interesting correspondence with Catherine Clark from Albany Australia and she has kindly agreed to let us print her two letters in this newsletter. It turns out that my father, Les Raymond and her father were at Abbotts Road Mining Hostel in Mansfield at the same time, although neither remembers the other. It has been a good opportunity to exchange photos as well. I am sure you will all be interested in her father's memories which no doubt will strike chords with your own.

We are currently in communication with someone from ITN who is interested in mines and Bevin Boys from the North East. If anyone can help that would be helpful. I have found a comprehensive list of mines. We have had previous communication with someone from The Telegraph but not a lot to report there - just a brief mention.

We have had one or two other enquiries but as always we have to say unless that person was a member we are unlikely to have any personal information. It seems too that some labelled themselves 'Bevin Boys' if they were young and happened to be in the mines in the war.

My very best wishes to you all,  
Barbara McElroy

### MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT.

Sadly we now have 1898 names in the Book of Remembrance and 30 BB's who still receive the twice yearly Newsletter, as well as other friends and family.

It is lovely to receive so many letters of support for the Association and saying how much you all look forward to reading the Newsletters. With, of course, your subscription of £5 to continue receiving the twice-yearly Newsletter! I would also like to thank so many of you who have also enclosed a little extra for the general funds! Please would you write, telephone or e-mail me, to notify me of Change of Address and/or Telephone numbers and if you hear of any Bevin Boys, members or not, who have sadly passed away. See above for my address and Telephone number.

Anne Lane.

### Sales.

For all Sales, please apply to Mrs Anne Lane, Snipelands, Bourton Combe, Flax Bourton, Bristol. BS48 3QL. Tel: 01275 463703. for details of how to pay. We are thinking of changing our Bank, because of charges being made by HSBC.

**Please add £1-50 for the lighter items & £3 for the book, as it is expensive to post.**

Blazer Badge	@ £10.00	Digging Up the Past	@ £10.00
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Miners Lamp Keyring	@ £6.00	Bevin Boy Lapel Badge	@ £5.00
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Bevin Boy Banner Postcard, 1 Black & White postcard & 2 colour & 1 black & white prints of A4 size all from A Bevin Boy Remembers. **ALL POSTCARDS & A4 PRINTS @ £0.20 each.**

*Many Thanks to all our 'customers', as always!*

**Anne Lane.**

## AREA REUNION's for 2024.

I would like to thank the Area Reps, for all their hard work in arranging lunches etc.

**Cheshire, Lancs & North Wales.** Ring Liz Todd 0151 342 3703 for details and if you would like to join us, all are welcome. Liz will contact recent attendees.

**EAST ANGLIA** There is an area reunion planned in St Ives Cambridgeshire on May 13th 2024 If anyone is interested please contact Barbara McElroy on 01728 724533.

### Bevin Boys Association Website.

Just to remind you all that we have an **Official** Bevin Boys Association website.

Please go to:- <http://www.bevinboysassociation.co.uk> or to email [bevinboys1943@gmail.com](mailto:bevinboys1943@gmail.com)

Thank you to everyone who has submitted items for the Newsletter.

Any other memories and experiences of your time as Bevin Boys I am happy to print.

If you prefer to have access to the Newsletter online or email or have any input or news items for publication please contact me on Tel: 01275 463703 or e-mail: [alananne2749@gmail.com](mailto:alananne2749@gmail.com)

Anne.

## The Forgotten Conscript.

When the cage went down, I knew right then,  
That this would be my war  
Name drawn from a hat, and that was that,  
A war hero no more

A Bevin Boy, with my Davy Lamp,  
not a Tommy Gun in sight  
Down in the depths, of the cold dark pit,  
Those days just seemed like night

Friends off to France, crowds waving flags,  
Lauded by one and all,  
'Coward, draft dodger, deserter'  
Was all we'd hear them call

The older miners would curse at me,  
'It wasn't in my blood',  
Friends oversees, tired and scared,  
I'd be there if I could

No hero's fanfare, no medals or cheers,  
Whilst we all did our bit,  
For years, forgotten conscripts,  
Our war was down that pit.

A poem written by Carl Mee.

(A serving Police Officer)

Hello all fellow Bevin Boys.

My name is Emrys Hughes and I live in the village of Llanfairpwllgwygyl on the beautiful Isle of Anglesey. I was born and raised in the village of Rhostryfan near Caernarfon by my parents Polly and Bleddyn Hughes. I had two sisters – Glenys who died many years ago and Morfudd Arianwen who lives in Hawarden in Flintshire. I married in 1953 but, sadly, my wife, Annie, died in

1975. In 1981 I met my now wife, Pauline.

When I became of an age to sign up to join one of the forces, I took myself off and happily signed on to join the RAF. I was accepted and I left there a happy fellow. But, a few days later, I received a letter to say that I was not now going to join the RAF but had been assigned to go down a coal mine. I was bitterly disappointed and angry at this decision, but as there is no comeback and the only alternative being prison. This was the brainchild of the then Minister for Labour, Ernest Bevin. He had the insight to send the coal miners to war and to send young men like myself with no knowledge whatever of coalmining down the mines. In 1943 I was sent to the Llay Main colliery in Wrexham where I stayed working until 1947. This was not a happy time in my life. I stayed at lodgings with a Mrs Thomas and her husband, Llew in 118 Gardden Road in Rhosllanerchgrugog. There were two other young men staying at this address. One was Berlwyn Jones from the Caernarfon area and the other was Jack Peters also from the Caernarfon area. He married a girl from Johnstown, Rhosllanerchgrugog. He was originally in the Royal Navy and opted to come to the mines. We each had our own room to sleep. We were fed by Mrs Thomas. We left for our shift at 5.30am and carried by Williams' buses to the mine. We took along our packed lunches which were fine until we came to eat them. Then they began to be covered in coal dust which did not enhance their enjoyment.

During some of the evenings we took ourselves to the Miners' Institute in Rhosllanerchgrugog where we played snooker and enjoyed some entertainment. On some evenings, we would meet up with young men who had been in the forces. Of course, I was feeling a little jealous of them.

On our return home after our stint down the mine, we had to adapt to 'normal life'. It wasn't that easy either. On talking with some young men who had served in the forces it was a difficult procedure. When asked which branch of the forces I had served, I had to tell them I had served my time down a coal mine. Their immediate reaction was 'oh so you're a conscientious objector'! This was hard to take after the hard work and sweat involved in removing the coal. Of course, after joining the Bevin Boys Association, there were times which lifted my heart. I will come to these a little later in this contribution.

One of the best times of being a Bevin Boy was joining the Bevin Boys Association. My wife found out about it and put my name forward. Another truly amazing day was the day I received recognition by receiving a Badge from the then Minister of Energy, Mr Malcom Wicks. I received this in the Falcon Hotel in Stratford on Avon. Mr Wicks was a true gentleman and made us feel special and worth our efforts. I made many friends of Bevin Boys from around the country and am still in touch with a few. The Bevin Boys Association has meant so much to me and my wife. We have enjoyed many a get-together at various venues around the country. The organisers (Anne Lane, Liz Todd, Margaret Rose and Barbara McElroy) have made these get-togethers so interesting and such happy occasions for which I am truly grateful. I am fortunate to still be able

to attend local lunch meetings on the Wirral and am so grateful to Liz Todd for all her efforts in arranging these. I certainly enjoyed the Zoom meeting last December. It's so good to see people and have a little chat. Thank you again Anne for arranging these. I hope you all had a pleasant Christmas and, although a little late in the year, I wish you all the very best for 2024. I look forward to meeting up with a few of you some time.

Emrys.

Emails between Barbara McElroy and Catherine Clark daughter of Bevin Boy Geoff Keen (Tullin).

Dear Barbara,

I was just chatting with my father this morning, and he was wondering if the Bevin Boys Association was still going. I looked up the website and read the contents of the home page to him, and I mentioned that I should send to the association the only photograph my father had of his time in the mines, so that it can be added to the archives.

Dad was conscripted as a Bevin Boy under the name of Geoffrey Tallin, however he later changed his surname to Keen. Dad will be 97 years old this March, and he was wondering how many Bevin Boys are still living? Dad is still living in his own home in the coastal city of Albany, Western Australia.

The attached photograph was taken at the Abbott Road Miners Hostel, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, in September of 1945. Dad (Geoff Tallin) is on the far left, with Dickie Mathews (left front) and Joe (Joseph) Hart (right front). Dad can't remember the names of the other two men standing at the back to the left of him, though he thinks one was called John.

Dad was conscripted in early May 1945 and did his primary training at Cresswell Colliery in Derbyshire. He then worked at Blidworth Colliery in Nottinghamshire, doing varied jobs but mainly haulage. He talks about the pit ponies, and how some stables were underground and the ponies rarely saw daylight. However at Blidworth the ponies were put in the cage in the morning to descend into the mine, he said it would take several men to put the ponies into the cage as they knew what they had to endure for the day. At the end of the day, once unharnessed the ponies would run to the pit bottom and wait for the cage to descend, they would then run into the field kicking up their heels.

It's only in more recent years that Dad talks about the mines, he says it's all unpleasant memories and the only good thing was the comradeship with the other men in the hostel. The hostel was made up of Nissan huts, all joined together by corridors, and one could walk from their room to the dining hall without going outside. There were 10 or 12 beds to a room. Breakfast for day shift was at 4am and the colliery bus would take them to the pit and their shift would start at 6am underground (afternoon shift would start at 2pm) Dad said the cage would drop at break neck speed, taking only 35 seconds to reach the bottom, some 2500 to 3000 feet. Their lunch would consist of mainly fish sandwiches, which wouldn't last long in the heat, so Dad would eat his before he went down. Their sandwiches were put in a metal lunch box to keep the rats out. Their 9 pint metal water container was called

a "Dudley". At the end of the shift and after their shower, they would go to the canteen and be given a bottle of milk and soup. They worked the same 8 hour shifts as the miners. Dad made mention that some miners on leave wearing civilian clothing would be stopped by police and asked for ID, thinking they were deserters.

I might try and ask Dad for more memories, but like he said, they are all unpleasant.

Kind regards,  
Catherine Clark. (Daughter)  
Albany, Western Australia.

Dear Catherine,

Thanks so much for your interesting letter. I am copying in our Chairman Anne Lane and Liz Todd our secretary as I know they will also be interested.

Yes the Bevin Boys Association is still going -we currently have a membership in the high thirties but there will be more Bevin Boys alive as not all joined the Association.

The details of your Dad's experiences are extraordinary as my father Les Raymond was 97 in November 1944 and trained at Cresswell Colliery then moved to Abbott's Road Miners' Hostel. He too still lives at home on his own and is normally fairly independent although had a fall on Thursday so is staying with us. I will show him your letter when he feels a bit better as I am sure he shares some of the same memories. He was in Glapwell mine so that part differs. I will dig out a similar photo to your Dad's and send it to you. I wonder if they knew each other as Dad was there until January 1948. It certainly is quite a coincidence as there were quite a few training mines and there were two hostels in Mansfield alone.

We have a twice-yearly newsletter (I will send an electronic copy) and I wonder if you would be happy for us to include your letter in our next one as we are always looking for new material and our members enjoy hearing of others' experiences.

Although we had to give up annual reunions in 2021 we do meet virtually on Zoom and we could send you a link if your Dad would like to join in. We would need to choose our time carefully so it's not the middle of the night. Let me know if this interests you.

Please give our very best wishes to your father.

Kind regards,  
Barbara McElroy  
Archivist and Treasurer.

**Editors comment.** Please note that we do not edit contributions and as some are based on recollections, there may be alternative views and information.