

*Where is my valley*



*An Essay by Norman Greenstade.*

WHERE IS MY VALLEY?

AN ESSAY

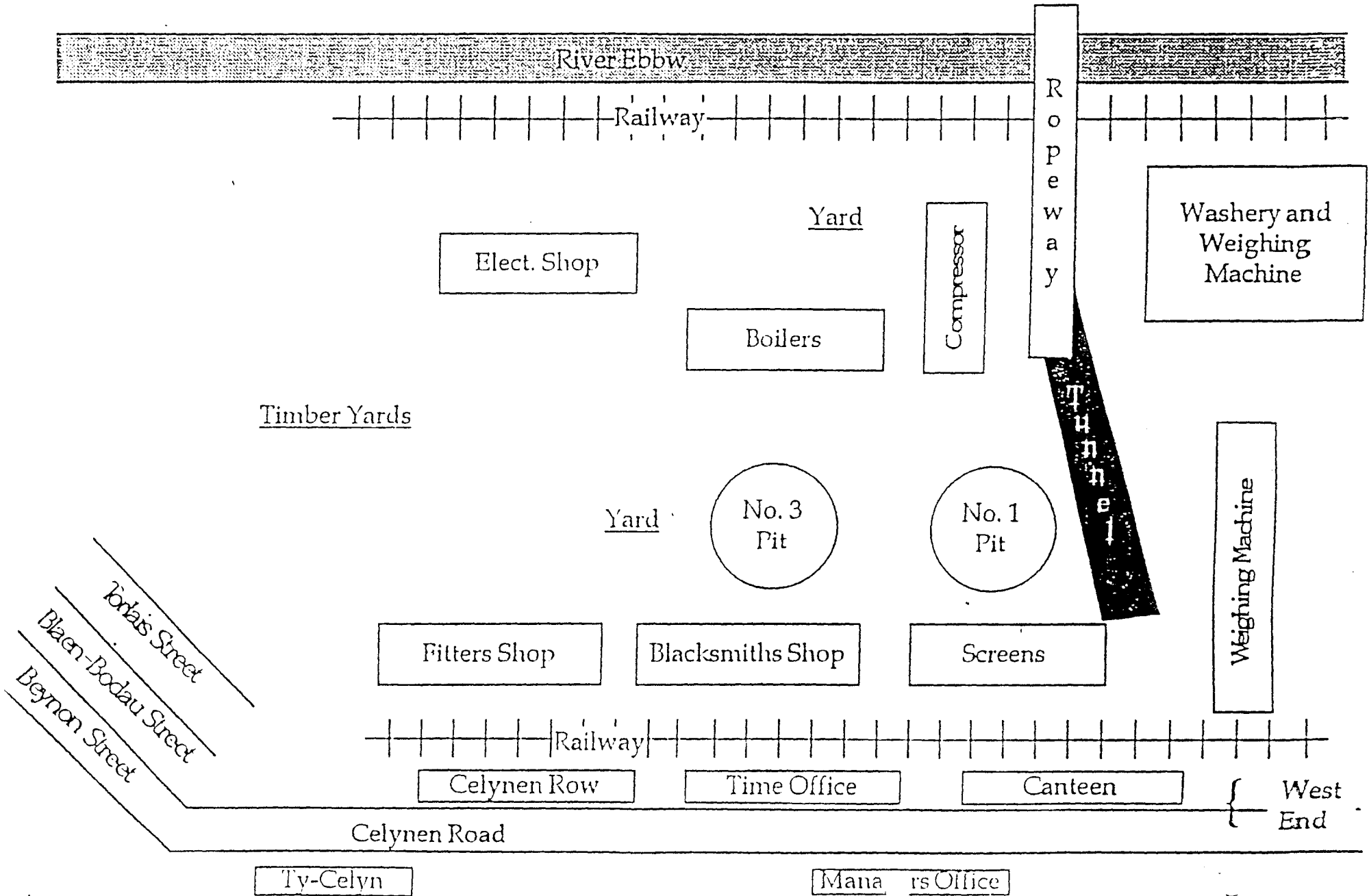
BY NORMAN GREENSLADE

Dedicated to my family and friends for their love and loyal support and to Len Derrick.

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# Map of Relevant Part of Newbridge and Celynen South



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## INTRODUCTION

When you read my story, you must understand that I am not a writer, nor an author in the true sense of the word. Neither am I good with words. I write as I speak and have always spoken. You must try to imagine that you feel as I do, about my beloved 'Valley' and Wales. I feel passionately about Gwent, its people, its culture and above all its spirit and love of life.

Come with me and I will take you on a journey that is filled with all that's good in life and all that's bad. A story of real men and women, whose only crime was to live in an area no longer economically viable. To be cast aside by Politicians, who neither care nor know the meaning of pride or have felt the love of true comradeship. Read on, use your imagination, come dream with me of those times past but not forgotten.

## CHAPTER 1

My home was Newbridge, born at 18 Torlais Street. That is where I spent my childhood years. Poor, yes we were poor, but what we lacked in wealth we were rich in family love. Yes I had friends, in the truest sense of the word. They knew without being told when I needed them the most. We had respect in those days, for our parents and for Authority. People were expected to behave in a suitable manner.

It was not a crime to be old in those days, or to be sick. People looked after their own, no-one was lonely, there was always someone to talk to. If someone was ill, there was always someone to help and share the load. If there were things to be shared, no asking, they were shared.

No need to lock your doors at night, you were safe in your bed. Our women, your mum, your sister, your Auntie were all safe to walk the streets day or night, night or day!! Touch a child at your peril .... you would only do it once!!

This is the Newbridge that I remember and love.

The day I went back was bright and sunny and I decided my first walk would be from the bottom of Beynon Street, and along the Celynen Road to the pit, or to where it had once stood. I looked to my left where the railway sidings and Timber yard had stood, where had they gone? All I could see were grass and shrubs. Then I realised that for the first time in my life I could see the other side of the valley. What a transformation, green, green grass, trees and above all light. The people on both sides of the valley were now joined as one.

Then I thought, what of the blood, the sweat, the tears and the death it had taken to build the giant tip that had stood there and was now gone. Remember how it used to catch fire and light up the night sky with its angry glow; perhaps it was a glimpse of the hell it had taken to build it in the first place - I wonder.

Looking to the right, Ty-Celyn is still there, as imposing a house as it ever was. The 'Manager' had always lived there. When as children we went 'scrumping' for apples, or pinching vegetables to make a stew, in a tin of course, over a smoky stick fire, that was one orchard and garden that was strictly out of bounds. That was the 'Manager's House'. He had complete control over your Dad and Brother's future at the pit, we dare not risk it.

On down the road, the wall was still there on the right. I wonder if the blue tits are still nesting in the hole in the wall, under the lamp. The lamp is gone, so I expect are the blue tits, what can you expect? Past the woods, start to look to my left for signs of Celynen Row. Alas no row, but can make out the signs of foundations where it had stood. Nature doing a good job of reclaiming what was hers in the first place. Good for her, cover it well. No doors, no windows, no stone washing slabs. All gone, just a shadow on the ground.

Remember the toilets, perched on the wall at the bottom of the gardens. The Leaning Tower of Pisa had nothing on these toilets. Often wondered why they didn't drop off the wall onto the railway below. When the steam locos went past, they would be engulfed in clouds of steam and smoke. They say the vibration was such that if you just sat on the toilet it was an instant cure for constipation, no need for a laxative. My imagination now took over. How many boys had learned to smoke, had sung many a song, had discovered his own sexuality whilst sat on that little wooden seat. Girls daydreaming who would they meet at the Memo (Memorial) Dance on Saturday? Would it be Mr Right? All the time surrounded by clouds of billowing smoke and steam from the trains below. Happy, happy days.

When the boys and girls had finished and it was time to leave their private little corner, not for them the comfort of Jeyes Medicated Toilet Sheets. That could not be afforded, only the cutting edge of the 'Daily Herald' (now The Sun), 'The News of the World', 'The Sunday Pictorial'. How many snippets of valuable information had been gathered? How many half read stories had been started but not finished. Where is the other piece ....Oh what the hell!

Before mounting the throne, there would have been the usual row about whose turn it was to carry a bucket of water to flush the toilet. The only flush toilets I knew about in Newbridge were at Dr Greggs', the Manager's and Mr Wilkinson the Dentist's houses.

I only knew about this because 'Acker Manning' who took the Sunday papers around had seen the miracle, but never used it. It's funny, whenever you talk to anyone, the conversation always comes back to the subject of toilets and bodily functions!!

Come on, let's get on with our journey of discovery. We still have a long way to go. Let's see if I can remember who lived in the row.

I know the Fletchers lived in the big house in the middle. There were the Wilkes family, two lads if I remember. The Maddens, Tommy was a good singer, and his brother too. The Harris's, I think it was Dad who was Chairman at the Labour Club. What about the Lamberts, your memory goes as you get older, have you noticed? I try hard to remember.

Now the names are coming - the Williams, Attwells, Pattersons and don't forget the Salisburys. What about the Gadds, Cliffs, Gordons, yes and the Ormonds. One family stands out - the Edwards. The boy that fell to his death down Number 3 pit. He was in the 'Boys Brigade', good old Leslie, at peace now. No matter how I try, cannot remember any more names. Sorry, so sorry. Good-bye Celynen Row.

I wonder does a road have a memory like us. Can it store them up for another day. As the hymn says, "... and did those feet in ancient times ..." If it could remember, then the sounds of the colliers hob nailed boots that clattered for a hundred years along Celynen Road would still be heard. As they pounded the road, they were almost like an orchestra. In perfect time, a steady beat, towards the pit! Can you imagine these men, some in deep meaningful conversation, others laughing and joking. A flicker of light where someone lights up a fag for a few last drags before they reached the pit. We didn't call them cigarettes in those days, a fag was a fag. I can still hear snippets of conversation. "Good picture at the Grand." "Good fight at the Memo Dance." "Salvation Army woke me up on Sunday." As these sounds keep flooding back to me I ask myself will these sounds, will these memories be lost forever? I believe they are stored somewhere and one day we will hear them again. They are too precious to be lost aren't they?

Come on, we are nearly at the pit now. Hello, the Manager's office is gone. Just a mark on the side of the road. What momentous decisions were made there which affected all of us. What Managers can I remember? Mr Austin, a great Manager, Mr Thompson, a musical genius, but above all Mr Nash, I was so proud of the speech he made from on top of the old canteen. Remember, under the arches before the new one was erected. It was once the bicycle shed. He made the speech when the pits were nationalised in 1947. Mr Nash was a very tall, pale-faced man ... yet he spoke with a passion that belied his appearance. "Today", he said, "is the day that at last we throw off the shackles and the yoke of the private mine owners and we are now free, to be treated with dignity and respect, not as animals." These words certainly stirred me, and all the others present! Heralding a new dawn, which has now turned to a permanent sunset. The sun will not rise again. Or will it?

Ivor Smith, the Manager's clerk, Will Gabutt whose beautiful italic writing and figures were a joy to behold, Ernie White the ambulance man, good bloke at First Aid, saved many a life. No sign, no notice, just a mark on the side of the road. What a way to treat people who gave their lives not for, but to their Country. They should be remembered.

Come on, don't hang about, it gets even worse. Let's go to where the new canteen once stood. Not getting easier, nothing is left. Hang on a minute, my patience is rewarded, I have found a handle off a mug. Could I have used it? No tables, no chairs, just a mug handle. What a waste. Wonder where Mrs Morgan and the rest of the girls are now. They really looked after us.

Remember the sandwiches - Corned Beef, Cheese, sometimes boiled Ham. All kept in old biscuit tins. The sausage and mash, the damp fags (still won't call them cigarettes). If you were lucky with the fruit cake you had the thick crust off the end. It was delicious. We had good times in the canteen, jokes, laughs, clouds of fag smoke, and tea that would make your hair curl! And above all friends. Real friends, real comrades. God bless you girls, wherever you are.

Quick walk now, more of a stumble, over to where the Time Office had stood. Where thousands of calculations had been made, all done in the head, no calculators then, only pen and ink. A biro pen was too dear, they were at least £2-10-0d (£2.50 today) each.

Lionel Grey and Ernie White (a timekeeper now) and a young John Roche, I could even imagine myself back at my old job as surface timekeeper, still wondering how the boys could clock each other on and off without me catching them! Happy, happy days.

How do I get over to where the Pit Head baths stood? Must keep my walk in order. They have even taken the bridge away, what a shame. I know, I will go down to West End and walk up that way. Here I go, the going gets rough, whoever did it didn't make a good job of cleaning the site. What a struggle through the trees. The weighing machine stood there to receive coal from the screens, Harry James was in charge, the best dressed man in Newbridge and quick as lightning on the scales - well done Harry. So the baths must have been over there. Good, I am in the right place. There is no notice to tell me. Now my imagination starts to run riot, I must keep control, but I feel sure I can hear the hum of the mechanical boot cleaner in the entrance of the baths, it gets louder as I approach, then it stops!

Slight change of plan, the corridor would have been here between the time clock and the lamp room on my left. What Artists the boys were who worked there. Their fingers were cut and gnarled by the sulphuric acid they had to use to replenish the electric lamps. These were not the new cap lamps, just the hand-held electric lamps and boy were they heavy. It was a continuous production line, even Henry Ford would have been proud of them, lamp on Magnet ... opened ... checked ... put on charge!! Check the levels - bulbs OK. Non-stop until the hundreds of lamps had been checked and put away ready for the next shift. Extra care was always taken with the oil lamps, lovingly cleaned, the brass polished, wicks checked and trimmed, gauzes OK and then carefully filled with fresh Colza Oil. Why the extra care? Will Hemmings could proudly tell you my butties lives depend on these lamps .. "It's the gas you know". Horace and Tom would work like Beavers. What about Gassy James, the finest back row forward Newbridge ever produced. He was lost to Rugby League. No wonder he was so fast with the speed around the lamp room floor. Newbridge could do with him now!

I tried many times to catch them out: ask them any number of any lamp, and they could give the name of its user, never failed. When you think at that time Leslie Welsh was paid a fortune as a memory man, but he wasn't in the same class as these boys.



Come on let's imagine we are now moving on again, along the corridor. Next on our left we have the toilets and the private bath suite. You must remember the private bath suite. This was reserved for the boys who were badly scarred by accident or industrial disease. They could bathe in complete privacy, as it should have been - scant reward for all their suffering. Remember the toilets, they were spotless and each one had a supply of real toilet paper (back to the same old subject!!). Far better than squatting on the banks of the Ebbw, complete with shovel. The river was so dirty it did not matter what you threw into it in those days.

Must take care now, the steps that led down to the baths would have been about here. Take care not to slip, especially if you had hob nailed boots on - what a noise. The steel lockers would have been on the left. Each locker allocated by number, plus key of course. Do you remember, they always seemed to give the short men the top lockers which they could hardly reach, and the tall men the bottom lockers which made their backs ache!! The baths were a great leveller of men because we all stood before our maker as we had come into this world, completely naked and unashamed. All shapes: fat, thin, round, squat, square, tall, small, you name it they were all there. There was nowhere to hide but nobody cared what you looked like. All that mattered was another shift over and we were all safe and well.

Come on let's turn on the showers, clouds and clouds of steam and an almost jungle heat. Shouting, laughing, singing, joking, "watch your towel", "where's my soap", "cut it out boys", "enough is enough". The spotless floor and gleaming white tiles would soon run with black rivulets of coal dust. No fancy shampoos, no conditioners, just plain soap and water, usually a big lump of fairy soap. You started at the top of your head and worked your way down, that was the proper way. One thing was important and that was the 'grain' of your towel. A word not used today in the age of automatic washers. Towels were boiled to get them clean and you hoped your towel would pass your work mates scrutiny.

The highlight of many of my showers was to hear Dick Ross burst into song with dulcet tones and complete clarity. How could a man of such small stature have such a powerful voice. I could have listened all day. My favourite was 'The Old Rugged Cross' and going right through all the old hymns but with all the other boys joining in the chorus of 'Abide With Me'. Once I heard Dick and my father sing a duet - 'The Church on Yonder Mountain'. No need to ask for order, complete silence until they had finished. Then the shouts of "more, more". Do you remember how all the noise, the clanging of lockers, the clouds of steam disappeared and silence would take its place as quickly as it had started. Then the baths would be empty, ready to be cleaned for the next shift and the rivulets of black coal dust where did they go? Who remembers the name of the Baths Superintendent? Use your brains. He had a beautiful car, a red Austin Atlantic, with white leather seats. Why did I think of that?

Up the steps now, and out into the fresh air. Number 1 pit would have stood there. What can I remember about it? Wait a minute, I can still see the outline of the rails that were laid alongside Number 1 Winder. Up these rails the little green steam engine would shunt its loads of steel rings and Norwegian timber. Do you remember who would be driving it? It would be either Messrs Darke or Warren. King Pins, they were, engine drivers. Reg Warren was a very florid faced man with a volatile temper. He would explode in a second, then as suddenly as it started it would subside and pass. Then with a broad grin on his face, and with the loudest noise you have ever heard he would break wind. "Just wind", he would say, "just wind". But one never knew which smelled the worse, the little steam engine or Reg Warren. OK so I forgot to tell you about the Latcher, Harold Hemmings, like quicksilver on his feet. A speed he took with him into the Boxing Ring as a great amateur Boxer. No wonder he was fit running alongside the loco all day.

Now back to Number 1 Pit. I can remember watching that great bull of a man, the banksman, Ralph Townsend and Brocket Davies who drove the Winder. They were like poetry in motion, the way they worked together. Raising two trams of coal at a time and despatching two empty ones to the depths below. No room for error, men's lives were at stake below. Up down, up down, signal up, signal down, release the cage by means of the giant release lever. On, on, on, it would make your head spin. Until Mother Earth had finally given up another load of black diamonds.

You had the same at Number 3, only single trams for them, but with the same clock like efficiency - Jack Monks in the Winder, with a young Noel Smith as banksman. Noel could have been a politician. Ice cool in an argument, who used truth like a thrust of a rapier, to rip you apart. Did he go into politics? Yes! Found out he had become a local councillor. A good one so I am told.

Do you recall those two fearless men who kept the shafts in good repair, both Number 1 and Number 3? Two men who rode and tamed the steel device we called the cage, who worked inside and outside to carry out their business. They did not know the meaning of fear. Stand up and be counted Jigger Manning and Ivor Belt. How many men owed their lives to their vigilance and skill. No sign, no notice to say thank you. Why?

The heart beat and the pulse of the South must have been the compressor house, with the giant steam pipe fixed to the outside wall. Pump, pump, pump. Regular, constant, the perfect beat. Day and night sending clouds of steam into the air. When conditions were right, it would fall back to earth as a gentle, warm rain as it condensed, soaking everything around it.

From one end of the valley to the other you could hear its constant beat. They used to say that when you could hear it loud and clear it was a sure sign of rain. I never seem to remember too much rain in those days. I never knew if the saying was right or wrong. What do you think?

My greatest love was the 'Pit Hooter'. Always blown at the correct time - morning, afternoon or night. Whoever was responsible must have had a good watch. No wireless to listen to, nor to check with. Wonder what they gave him when he retired. Hope it was something he needed. Knowing the boys, I expect it was a clock!!

Come on, let's move on, back across the colliery yard, towards that obscene invention - the 'Aerial Ropeway'. Whoever decided to site it where they did had no regard or respect for the beautiful hills of Gwent and for its people. Fancy taking all that dirty, dusty, wet rubbish from the bottom of the mountain to the very top. Dumping it for everyone to see. Spoiling the breathtaking views, the Panoramic landscape for ever. What a legacy for our children. Somewhere else could have been found with just a little thought. Perhaps in the forecourt of the House of Parliament? But it did not matter you see because only we the people lived here. Who were we? We were not even economically viable!! It was our views and our landscapes, who cares?

What about the boys that filled the buckets from the giant concrete bunkers? The rubbish never stopped arriving: by tunnel from the screens; by hoist from the colliery yard; by elevator from the washery; never ending like a carousel at a fairground. Sometimes nature took a hand and gathered all her winds to blow the buckets out like clothes on a line. She said enough is enough as they were forced to stop this madness. Do you remember Mr Sherwood who used to walk the ropeway cable, no circus entertainer was ever as brave. Who remembers the fitter killed in the tunnel from the screens, I do and you do, but there is no notice to tell anyone else that he gave his life to a futile cause. Why? Why? Why?

Before I go on with my story you may think it odd the sparse use of names. I can hear some of you say he must have known so and so. Apart from lack of space to list all the names, I have another reason which is not so obvious. I want you the reader to think for yourselves. You put the names to the places mentioned. We must not forget. If I can get you to remember there is a good chance the names will live forever. As it should be, passed down the generations.

This is where the steps would have been, down to the bunkers, the washery coal laboratory and the weighing machine. Who did you know? Horace Richards, Ray Woodford who worked the weighing machine, Mr Morgan the Chemist. Horace would entertain us for hours with his monologues and Ray with his fine tenor voice. It made the long shifts pass far more quickly and pleasantly than they may have done. Remember Brian Jones, the coal sampler? He was a good centre, went on to play for Newport and Wales. He would practice the side step, darting here, darting there and everywhere to collect his samples. What a great player he became.

The rest of the operation was governed by Mr Edwards who held court in his cabin every day. His word was law. As the rest of the lads filled the waiting wagons with nut, pea and bean coal and the very best washed small coal. Can you remember Mr Edward's first name? This coal went all over the country and was in great demand. Wonder why they don't want it today. Perhaps someone did not try hard enough to sell it, or were they told not to find orders? Quite a mystery. Or are we bringing the same coal from South America and like countries. Cut and hewed by slave and child labour.. Funny world, we fought to do away with this type of exploitation.

Let's continue on our walk, the River Ebbw on our right, but what's wrong, the river is not the filthy torrent of water it used to be, it is now crystal clear. I swear I saw a fish jump. Not like it used to be when the only fish you would ever see would be one printed on the side of an empty discarded tin of pilchards. One difference I totally agree with. No railway tracks left now, just a blur on the ground. No trace of the great hoppers that had received coal from the South and North. Celynen and the wonderful coal received from Craig-Fawr. They have made a good job of removing the bunkers.

Up the slope, still keeping the river to my right, still marvelling how crystal clear the waters are. I can see some boys having a paddle, they wave as I go by; take care little ones. If they had paddled in the Ebbw of old they would have gone down with typhoid. Showed how much they cared about us in the old days. The smell of the river then was disgusting to say the least.

I measure my walk, difficult with the trees and shrubs, I should be where the boilers stood now. Few pipes and tubes about, feel sure I am in the right place. Come on now, who remembers the boilers when they had the open type of furnace; before they were converted to the self-feed type. Remember the boys with their long iron rods who used to stir up the heart of the great furnaces. Those furnaces with an insatiable appetite for coal and more coal. Shovel after shovel full, doors open, doors closed. Placing every piece of coal in the exact place in the fire with consummate skill, born of continuous practice. The stokers always had red faces, their cheeks and foreheads reddened by the heat from the furnaces. Drinking gallons of tea to replace the sweat. Their eyes seemed to lose their colour from continuous exposure to the heat; dull and lifeless.

But it had to be done. Steam was needed to drive the winders, compressor, and the myriad of engines and machines that made up the life of the pit. Both day and night. Yes the prince of power. Steam, why oh why did we do away with it. You don't kill princes. The man who controlled the men and the giant steam boilers was George Leader. Rest well George.

It's coming back now, the electric shop stood there. It was only a small shop, very compact and well organised. Electricity was really still in its development stage as far as the mining industry was concerned.

Remember the brothers Lou and Reg Davies? Clem a good cricketer, who went to live in South Africa, my brother, Wally Greenslade who was promoted to Unit Engineer at Oakdale. Bernard Eynon, a bag of nervous energy, who is now an accomplished organist? A young and ambitious Ray James who went on to realise his ambitions outside the South. A young Glen Roche who had the looks of a film star (Rock Hudson maybe?). And of course, Morgan the Magnificent, never seen in a whole pair of overalls, yet he went onto a high position with the Coal Board.

The blacksmith's shop would have stood just there. If you went in out of the daylight it would take some time for the eyes to adjust to the gloom and acrid smoke. The forges would glow red, then white hot as the compressed air was applied to the coals to heat the iron and steel until it was soft and malleable. They made and repaired all manner of metal objects. Not big men, but pale faced from lack of sunlight. Lithe, but not heavily muscled, they could swing a sledge hammer all day without a rest. No need to lift weights or 'pump iron' as they do today. These lads were super fit. Let's recall some of the names, can you do the rest?. Ron Stephens, Bill and Alex Hughes, Ray and Reg Dowdon, Ted Selaway, Les Edwards ....

Do you realise the thousands of men that depended on them for their safety each and every day. Why? Because these were the men who inspected the winders steel ropes, did the splicing; checked and replaced the shackles from which the cages were suspended; maintained the safety gates and so on. We salute you brothers for keeping us safe. It is therefore ironic, that Les Edwards should fall to his death while carrying out some checks at Number 3 Pit.

Out of the blacksmiths shop now, the fitting shop would have been there. What a find, just kicked over a few old nuts and bolts and a very rusty fish plate. As soon as you entered, two things were noticeable immediately. It was more brightly lit than the blacksmiths and there was a pungent smell of oil and grease. Everything was tarnished by it - lathes, drills, machines in for repair, machines being built, nuts, bolts, iron and steel everywhere. Watch your step. Plenty of lights everywhere, overhead, on the walls.

"We need them", Doug Roberts would proudly announce. We work to very fine measurements in here. I remember Doug, he had the whitest teeth I had ever seen. Funny what you remember. Arthur Fellowes was the Engineer but in the fitting shop Glen Holland was the boss. Good cricketer Glen, but with a very wicked sense of humour, died not so long ago. Glen once trained a man, who will have to remain unnamed, to run in the mile race at the North and South Collieries Gala, to be held at the Welfare Ground. To get a regular step he got him to measure his stride by running on the railway sleepers. When it came to the race, Glen's runner came last. He could not increase his stride, thus speed. He could only run at the speed at which he had been trained, as if he was running on the sleepers. Well done Glen, we all lost our bets.

Then there was that giant of a man Doug Dando. Great rugby player, played for Newbridge then poached by Newport who proudly announced they had discovered a new talent. What a cheek, what's new. Who will ever forget Doug's tackle of Leo Bennett at the Welfare Ground. Getting too depressed to remember any more of the fitter's names. Will you help me out?

A thought has just struck me. What happened to all the talents and skills these people had, why were they not passed onto the next generation. Some day we will need them again when this economic madness collapses. But who will teach them. Who? Who?

To continue the next part of my journey took a lot of courage on my part, to visit the site where the screens had stood. This place had always terrified me. If ever there was a hell on earth this was it. When colliers were no longer fit to work underground, they let them go to work on the screens. Even those dying of dust. What a way to reward them, what a place to send them.

On top you had the tumblers which never seem to stop, disgorging tram after tram of coal onto the grills. The small coal would fall through the grills into the wagons below, for despatch to the washery. The lump coal plus all the stone would descend onto the steel belts below. Clouds and clouds of thick, choking dust, with a pitiful spray of water trying to suppress it. Either side of the belts would stand these heroes of the Devils Cauldron, sorting through the piled up belt to pick out pieces of stone, etc. mixed with the coal. This rubbish they would throw down steel chutes into the waiting rubbish wagons below. Sometimes there was more rubbish than coal, but no one seemed to care.

The belts would not stop until each journey from Number 1 and Number 3 had been handled. It would take days for the dust to settle. Boys who worked the belts, always reminded me of galley slaves. All that was missing was someone with a whip. The man in charge of the process was a huge man. He had a massive pair of hands, I swear he could have held down a hundred pounds of coal in each hand. His name was Harold Jones, but what a gentle giant he was. He really cared about the men who worked under him. Remember his son Ginger? He was a mason at the pit and he was 'six feet seven inches tall' - a big family you could say!

The lump coal when it had been sorted fell into the wagons that waited below, then was sent to be weighed and despatched to destinations all over the country. We are now back to Harry James again, and I can still see him talking to Herbert Saunders, the Prince of Storytellers. I hope its the one about his South African Boots. The soles on his father's South African boots which never wore out. When he passed them down to Herbert he could not wear the soles out either!! In the end Herbert made the soles into brake pads for his horse and cart. "They were so tough", he said, "that they wore out the iron rims on the wheels without a mark showing on the soles".

You should hear some of his other stories!!

## CHAPTER 2

Now a different track, we will have a slight change of direction, let's go down, down very deep into the gloom below. Snippets only, but they will jog your memory. My thanks now to Len Derrick that 'Rebel Without a Cause'. A long time before James Dean was ever heard of. Such a rebel that the management decided that it was better to have him on their side, than on the other, so they promoted him to the staff (as told to me by Len).

At present Len is not too well, but like the good old South Ceiyren lad he is, he is still battling on. Well done Len. But he does miss the company and the comradeship. Don't we all. You only found it at the pit.

I could write page after page on the next two gentlemen. I always had a lot of time and respect for them. Cool and calculating in any argument, they did not know the meaning of the word defeat. Make an enemy of them at your peril. They allowed no-one to rock the boat. 'Unity and Loyalty' were the only words they understood. What other words mattered? Unity and Loyalty forever. Those two gentlemen were Idris James, our Lodge Chairman and Reg Devenport our Lodge Secretary.

There was hardly a man or boy whose working life had not been affected by these two. Always vigilant, always fair, but before they would take on your case you had to be completely honest with them and with yourself. Is there any other way than the honest way? Idris and Reg would not be cowed no matter what the seniority of the management opposition. Right was right, no matter whose fault it was. God bless you both for fighting for me and the rest of the boys. You did a good job.

At any Welsh pit you always had Father and Son, or Brother and Brother combinations, and all kinds of family ones. What about the 'Twinny' Eversons, coal cutter men supreme. One would use the pithead baths, the other wouldn't.

The one Twinny that did not use the baths was walking home along the canal bank. He was going home to bathe and go to bed from the night shift, carrying a 'Six Foot Norway' for firewood when he met someone on the way to work. He did not know him. They exchanged pleasantries and passed on. The next day Twinny was told to report to the office at the end of the shift. He was faced by the man he had passed on the canal bank the previous day. The man he faced was Mr Morgan, the new Under-Manager. With a straight face he told Twinny to return the 'Six Foot Norway' the next day or face the sack. A threat to be heeded. Needless to say Twinny did not return the Norway, nor did he get the sack. He was too good a cutter man!

Fred Roberts was a good fireman, one of the old school. Very conscientious in his duties. Never late, always on time. But Fred had two sons who had a wicked sense of humour. They would play all manner of tricks on their father ... drinking his water .. eating his food. hiding his clothes, etc. If Fred got annoyed with them for any reason they would threaten Fred with telling tales to their mother. This usually had the desired effect. The boys would be forgiven. But what a pair these boys were. It wasn't all fun and games though as my next story will show.

Who remembers Walter Case? He was in charge of the 'Elled' which was worked above the 'Black Vein' seam. The shift had begun well and things were going according to plan. But in any colliery this was not always a good omen. Walter Case, so I am told, had an uneasy feeling that all was not well. An impending sense that something was about to happen. He told everyone he came in contact with, including the fireman to take extra care and be extra vigilant. Still the shift went well, but Walter remained uneasy. His fears were soon realised when he heard a sudden rumble and a trickle of dust and rubble fell onto this safety helmet. He was approached by the fireman who said, "there is a heavy fall, near the cutter". Walter scurried away to see for himself what had happened and to take stock of the situation. His worst fears had come true. What a mess, a tangled jargon of rock, props, wood and steel, dust arising like a cloud of steam, as if one were walking through a prehistoric landscape. How could men work in these conditions? Who would want them to? Walter was too experienced to panic. Quietly he carried out a well-worked out set of 'rules' that had improved and matured with practice (too much practice I fear). Take a count, see who was safe, were there any injuries? If so get the first aid man to attend to their needs. Delegate someone to phone pit bottom. Notify the surface. Walter had now established that nine men were missing. They were trapped behind the fall. A very big fall.

No need to look for volunteers to help, everyone was there: colliers, hauliers, fitters, electricians, men and boys. The true spirit of the miners came to the fore, as it always did. I wish Mr Hesseltine and the rest of his Conservative cronies could have been there. What a lesson they would have learned.

Walter Case organised the attack on the pile of rock and steel interwoven with great splinters of wood. All had to be removed, piece by piece, rock by rock, put into trams to be speeded away. "Take Care", all the time Walter was encouraging, goading, driving the men towards greater efforts. Our boys, our comrades, our friends were trapped. We must get them out, we must get them out, no time to lose, lives were at stake.



The Manager and Under Manager arrive to help, but Walter Case is the one in charge. He will guide and control the operations. They were his men. At last, contact is made with the trapped men, they are all OK and in good heart. They even held a concert while waiting. A way is cleared for them to crawl out, one by one they emerged, each one saying his own personal word of thanks to Walter Case for his skill and dedication, in release them from their living hell. God bless you Walter Case.

Who remembers Gilbert Cox? Good solid Overman, one of the best coal technicians the South ever produced. He knew his craft and coal mining is a craft, and we should never, ever forget it, nor let other people forget. Gilbert's son served in the Air Force in the last war, as did my brother, Clifford. They were both killed at about the same time in a war to free the world from oppression and fear. At the end of the war they sent a sales rep from Germany to introduce a new kind of prop. Remember it? It was called the Union Prop. We soon forgave the Germans didn't we. How insensitive can you get? They asked Gilbert to give this German a guided tour of the South. Gilbert of course, with a few choice words, refused. Quite right to. His son would never have forgiven him. Well done Gilbert. It is easy to forget, but why is it so hard to remember?

Who stands out as Under-Manager in your day? Two did for me, they were Howard Brace and John Moxham. Complete contrast these two. Howard Brace, quiet, thoughtful, a deeply religious man who brought his religion to the work place, where religion should be, not hid away in churches. He practised what he preached, a deep love for his fellow man and a true belief in common decency. No foul language for him, yet when it was your turn to be dressed down, the choice of words used was immaculate. You were battered and bruised but always, yes always, he would pick you up afterwards and dust you down. Somehow you felt better for it.

John Moxham was flame haired with a temper to match. One of the younger element. A brilliant student, who could actually apply the theory to practice. Not always the case. This boy had everything. Here was a man with the confidence of youth, not afraid to tackle any job, or try to solve any problem, using hard headed logic. Hard headed for someone so young. You always felt a puff of wind would blow him away. There would be your first mistake. For such a slight man, he was immensely strong and tough, both mentally and physically. Never tell him a lie, he had an uncanny gift of spotting one before you had even told it, so beware. He was destined and marked to go a long way in the mining industry, which he did. He went right to the top. But the top is now the bottom, so it really doesn't matter any more, or does it? What do you think?

Enough of the staff for the moment, what about some of the other characters that worked at the South. You must know hundreds, come on stir yourself, get a piece of paper and jot a few down. You will surprise yourself by the number you can remember. Come on, have a go

OK, I will start you off. What about Tom Thomas, a protégé of Mr Austin. Same time as Harold Nash. He went to Blaenserchan Colliery where he upset quite a few, one man even held him hostage in the office with a loaded gun - it was in all the papers.

Another character must surely be 'Atcher Salmon', the nearest thing you could get to a white 'Dali Lama'. Remember the eyes? When he was the 'Ref' at any of Newbridge United's matches they always lost. They were laughing at his antics too much to play. Who remembers his brilliant mind reading act that he performed in Newbridge Labour Club. He got every single answer wrong!! Sleep well old friend, we still love you.

Let's have a selection of good old colliers. The salt of the earth. They were friends worth having and were comrades supreme. Stand up and be counted, George Beard, Trevor George, Gerry Clarke and dear old 'Bumble' Evans. The coal you cut went all over the world. Nice to be famous boys.

Now a man, who at one time if you ever went to the Memo Dance on a Saturday, would have touched your life in some way. A man with a battered boxers face, cauliflower ears and fists the size of melons. He stood about six foot four inches, and weighed about seventeen stone. A figure not to be trifled with at any time. Here was a man who would stand no nonsense, cheek or bad behaviour from any one. As hundreds found out when he was on the door of the Memo Dance as a bouncer. One wrong move, one bit of cheek or nonsense and you were out in the street with your ears well and truly boxed. That was your lot for that Saturday night. I wonder how many fights did he stop, by getting the combatants together and making you shake hands and forget your differences. If you didn't he would bang your heads together, which was far worse.

Remember the little stamp he would put on your hand when you went out to the toilet to show that you had paid? Have you guessed who I'm talking about? Wyndham Price, the best 'Doggy' Haulier in the South. Some of the stories he would tell were hilarious, but you had to listen hard to get the point. Hope you are controlling the dances up above Wyndham, make sure God has a stamp on his hand if he has to leave for any reason.

Another giant of a man was Jack Beech. A man whose whole purpose in life was the care and welfare of our beloved Pit Ponies. What lovely animals they were. So gentle, so trusting, yet each with a character of its own. Even in the dark, dank smelling place they called home, with only artificial light, they would know by the sounds and sight of different people what time of day it was. They would never shirk their duties. Always ready and willing. Beautiful animals with bright eyes and slick coats from regular and loving brushing, and regular doses of Linseed Oil. They had an inbred sense of danger and would soon warn you if there was trouble ahead.

I will only start you off with a few names, you must remember the others for yourselves. Jack Beech will never forgive you if you don't. Here we go. What about 'Scotch', a real character. He did not have a Scotch nature, but was generous to a fault. And he really enjoyed a chew of twist. What about 'Thunder'. He only had one eye, but he had the Wisdom of Solomon and greater vision with his one eye than a thousand 'gurus'. Then that mighty animal 'Trojan'. He had the strength of three horses. For a big job send for Trojan. What about 'Snowy'. No need to tell you why he was called Snowy. In such a dirty and dusty environment, how could Snowy's coat keep as white as it did? Do you think he was secretly bathing in Persil? Another gentle friend, sadly no more, but if there is life after death and I feel sure there is, then these old work horses are surely in the best stables and fed the best quality oats. They loved you Jack. Well done.

So come on, put down on paper all the other names!! Who remembers those two pit bottom moles of No 1 and No 3 whose energy and love of life and their jobs was infectious. There was always great competition between them to be first to the surface, with time books and registers for those in work that day. To rush these books to the waiting Time Keepers, Messrs White and Grey, so they could produce the daily figures needed by the Manager. Have you guessed? Yes it was George Brewer and Dai Shiner.

On count I believe that Dai Shiner was first in the Office with the books, on most occasions. What about the count boys? What a job they had. How did they manage? Even the firemen and overmen could not catch the boys who moved their roof marks, of a paint made of stone dust and water, from their original mark. They all know it was happening, but none could find out how it was done. All for 1/6d a yard (or in new pence, 7½p). These count boys usually moved on to become firemen, overmen or even Under Managers if they stuck it out until manhood. Now a few more names to round off this story. I do hope you are helping as well. I keep on telling you, you must try to remember. We must not forget.

Those men who really knew the pits were the men who had come up from the ranks, usually colliers, firemen then to overmen. Just a few names for you to conjure with: Hubert Simmonds of the afternoon shift, not known for his generosity, but quite a good amateur conjurer. Tom James, the burley senior day shift Overman with the little black moustache. No nonsense with Tom, work was work. That doyen of the twilight shift, Tom Greenslade, who was sacked more times by Mr Austin at the end of the shift than anyone else I know. Then he would receive a note from Mr Austin telling, not asking him, to report for work that night!! Steve Barter also worked nights, different from all the others as chalk and cheese. Not laid back, but a strict disciplinarian, yet with a wicked sense of humour. Solid and dependable, but what a man to have with you during any kind of crisis.

I salute you all and all the others I have not had room to mention!

## CONCLUSION

Well I have done my best to recall some of the good times and bad times of my valley. I can only write as I speak but how I really feel is a different matter altogether. How do you feel about what has happened to your valley? What have they done at the Beynon Street End. They have constructed a monstrosity of steel and concrete, a bridge to carry the relief road to by-pass Newbridge. Why did they need a by-pass? Could another way not have been found? Why is it necessary to dump that huge mound of earth at the top of Hill Street, surely not.

It is another case of anything will do for the people of our valley, I feel a protest is in order. But enough is enough. They must stop now; we must stop them. The removal of the Great Tip I agree with, so now we can see across the valley with some nice playing fields taking the place of spoil and filthy waste. Harvested by blood, sweat, tears and death. Now the view is to be spoiled again by thoughtless planners. How could they be allowed to get away with this!

What of the rest of my valley, which only existed for me from West-End to Newbridge. What have they done!! What have they done. As an act of thoughtless revenge for the unity shown by the South Wales Miners, in standing against injustice and the right to decent working conditions and a living wage. Food on the tables and a decent education for our children. Was that too much to ask? I fear it was. Our penance was to see vengeance exacted in a most uncaring way by uncaring Politicians. You led the way Mr Hesseltine. Close it down, destroy it, wipe it from the face of the Earth. That was our reward, for many lifetimes of service and dedication. In a few days our beloved South was closed and raised to the ground by blind and ignorant men.

They tried to rip the heart out of our valley, but the heart still beats, it will not die, and we will not let it die! Because, deep down below the surface in the enchanted labyrinths that the bulldozers could not reach, the ghosts and spirits of our past, friends and comrades lie sleeping, waiting for a call to awaken from their long sleep. They will be needed again. They will be needed again.

Our Valley will not die.

Thank You

Norman Greenslade

One Final Note:

The List of Shame

So you don't forget, here is a list of the orgy of destruction reeked on our beloved country:

Celynen South      1985

Celynen North      1985

   Markham              1985

   Rose Heyworth      1985

   Bedwas                1985

Marine                1988

Six Bells             1988

   Oakdale                1989

Thank you for the promised support Mr Hesseltine.

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