

ARTIST PROJECT

**PETERLEE
REPORT**

FOREWORD

The Artist Project in Peterlee is a different approach to the Artists in Residence Schemes which are becoming common throughout the UK.

Stuart Brisley is a consultant with Peterlee Development Corporation working on a set project in a set time span. It would be encouraging to see more such opportunities outside a teaching situation for artists to enrich the society.

The exhibition of the Peterlee Project was first shown in the Northern Arts Gallery, Newcastle, during October and November 1976.

PETER DAVIES
Visual Arts Officer,
Northern Arts.

THE ARTIST PLACEMENT GROUP

STRUCTURE IN EVENTS and the APG : CONTEXT AS HALF THE WORK

The APG came into being in 1965-66, and centred round an original Concept that was implicit in the work of several individuals using different media. This Concept might be summarised as a recognition that the EVENT is more permanent than the OBJECT, or, in terms of the later formulation, that 'TIME' extendedness is of greater structural relevance than 'SPACE'. The movement in this direction is a main feature in 20th century art. The implications are seminal and of greater significance than might at first appear.

Individuals forming the nucleus of the Group are listed in its REPORT & OFFER FOR SALE document of 1971, which introduced for APG's ART & ECONOMICS exhibition at the Hayward Gallery London the concept of TIME-BASE. From the position outlined here 'the economic' and 'art' came into a new relation that had not so much to do with money as with the point where money ceases to be a measure of value.

In the USA at the same time the engineer William J. Kluver together with Robert Rauschenberg had launched ART & TECHNOLOGY associations and a few years later Maurice Tuchman in Los Angeles set about a version of the art/industry relationship. Recently the APG approach has been reaching America. In a letter to the Group's co-ordinator Richard Linzer has commented: "The breadth and commitment evident in APG represent a significant difference from the U.S. approach, or lack of approach . . ." Many of the current artist-in-residence schemes appearing in the U.K. lately might identify themselves similarly with the U.S. approach.

The point at issue is the status and orientation of the individual, and more especially the question put by this issue, viz: What can one say to be going on that this 'society' produces 'artists'? A Time-based framework,

APG will maintain, can show a coherent answer to this question whereas on conventional (space-based) hypotheses the approach will inevitably be hazy, and peripheral. It is this conventional orthodoxy of the day, with its multiplying limitations and difficulties, that the APG specification is out to challenge in any context and in the open. The radicality of the formulation is such as to underpoint the orthodoxies West and East, both being dominated (in this view) by space-based formulations from which there seems no escape. As Donald Macrae has put it, "Only the established may innovate. Only non-innovators are established."

Practical Data, 1975-76

A Civil Service Department study on APG in 1972 resulted in a Memo addressed to Government Departments, which drew attention to the potential relevance and role of the contemporary artist.

The approach to Peterlee was part of a general one to New Town Development Corporations† Many expressed interest but so far only Peterlee has taken up the idea that the artist should develop his own work programme out of a feasibility study on site, and be engaged then to carry it out. These provisions themselves took a year before a satisfactory agreement could be reached.

Associations are in progress with the Scottish Office, and the Departments of Health and Environment, where an Inner Area Study team in Birmingham still works on the extensive results of an association completed in 1975. These associations have a direct link with government policy and as such are subject, until complete, to the Official Secrets Act.

exhibit references

Civil Service Memo of 1972
John A. Walker piece in April Studio Inter
APG Offer for Sale
Time-base & Determination

† Introductions came via the Town and Country Planning Association.

BACKGROUND

Comment from Peterlee Development Corporation

An artist can be as important in building a community as an architect or planner – that is the belief of Peterlee Development Corporation which led to the appointment of Stuart Brisley as Community Artist for the town.

Peterlee's interest in involving art in the town goes back more than 10 years when Artist, Victor Pasmore was commissioned by the Development Corporation to work with the town's architects in a unique experiment to design complete housing areas. The areas he was involved in are the most popular in the town with tenants and have excited the interest of architects and planners throughout Western Europe.

Art, however, is not confined to the formal – paintings, sculpture or even house design – and when the Artist Placement Group of London approached the Development Corporation Chairman, Dennis Stevenson, suggesting a different type of artistic involvement the Corporation decided to look into what was being offered

The Artist Placement Group specialises in placing artists for limited periods in industry, government departments and with local authorities. The role of the artist is not to draw, paint or sculpt but to look at the organisation and the people who work there – or, in the case of a town, the people who live there – and suggest how improvements could be brought about by using art to increase people's interest and involvement in what is going on around them. It all sounded rather nebulous to a hard-nosed Development Corporation conscious of the need to justify their spending from the public purse, but agreement was reached that Stuart Brisley would spend a month in the town, working for a little more than his expenses, and produce a report outlining what he thought he could do in Peterlee.

Stuart Brisley's report covered many areas but the main point he identified was the feeling of the people who lived there that Peterlee, as a new town, had no history before its inception in 1950. Yet the town is set in the centre of a mining area steeped in history and tradition and the people of Peterlee are these same mining people who are part of that history and tradition. So Stuart Brisley suggested to the Development Corporation that here was a project worth tackling — to give the people of the town an opportunity to find out why Peterlee is there, to demonstrate the very real links between the new town and the old mining communities and to build up an awareness of the community within the community expressed through art in a photographic and written history provided by the people themselves.

Peterlee Development Corporation, seeing the possible social benefits, decided to try it and granted the artist a year's consultancy to work on his project.

So far the interest in the project by the people of Peterlee and the results — the collection and display of photographs and memories going back over 70 years — appear to justify that decision. Peterlee is recording its living history, learning to look back to understand the present and prepare for the future.

THE PROJECT

The Artist Project Peterlee came about through an initiative by the Artist Placement Group made to the Peterlee Development Corporation in 1974. I was one of several artists who were approached by APG to consider the possibility of working in Peterlee. Eventually through the agency of APG I was engaged by the Corporation to make a month's feasibility study in Peterlee in July 1975. The results in the form of a proposal were presented to the Corporation, which after some amendments was agreed upon, and I began a 52 week period of consultancy to the Corporation on January 5, 1976.

STUART BRISLEY

ARTIST PROJECT PETERLEE

100 Eden Hill Road, Peterlee, Co. Durham.

Personnel:	Jane Bennison) engaged through the Man-
	Karen Carr) power Services Commission
	Pat Gallagher) job creation scheme.
	John Porter) Consultant to the
	Stuart Brisley) P.D.C.

Area

Peterlee Newtown — 1946
 Easington Village recorded c. 900 A.D.
 Castle Eden pre-industrial village.
 Shotton Colliery Pit commenced 1840, closed in 1876 and re-opened by Horden Collieries Company Ltd. in 1900.
 Horden Pit sunk in 1900, first coal extracted in 1904.
 Easington Pit sunk in 1899, first coal extracted in 1910.
 Blackhall Pit sunk in 1909, first coal extracted in 1915.

The project covers the period within living memory, i.e. currently from about 1900. It involves two major developments in the area.

1. 1900–1946

The sinking of 3 mines in the coastal area and the consequent development of housing settlements surrounding the pits – the industrial villages. The Easington Coal Co. Ltd. was responsible for the development of the Easington Colliery pit, and the immediate housing for miners and their dependants. The Horden Collieries Ltd. opened the Horden and Blackhall pits, was responsible for housing developments surrounding both pits, and was also responsible for the re-opening of the Shotton pit.

2. 1946–

The development of Peterlee Newtown intended a population of 30,000. The proposals for the new town arose from consideration by the Easington Rural District Council of the need for further housing within the villages in the late 1930s. The principle of centralized development was adopted by the Rural Council in 1944. The report 'Farewell Squalor' a design for a new town, and proposals for the redevelopment of the Easington Rural District (population in 1946 of 80,000) compiled by C.W. Clarke, engineer and surveyor to the Council, was published by the Council in 1946.

1900–46

In concluding the report 'Farewell Squalor' C.W. Clarke with some feeling, indicated the effect on the environment through the exploitation of coal in the area in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

'Let us therefore close our eyes on the 19th century degradation and squalor, and let us look back with unseeing eyes on the sordid existence of the first decade of this century (e.g. Blackhall, Horden, Easington Collieries), let us blind ourselves to the septic and ugly building wens and ribbons perpetrated and planted upon us between the wars, and let us open our eyes and look brightly forward to the new town, the new living ... Peterlee.'¹

¹ *Farewell Squalor*, author's note page 87

INDUSTRIAL VILLAGES

People were attracted to the area by the prospect of work in the new and re-opened mines in the first decade of this century. They came from the local and regional area i.e. Ryhope, Monkwearmouth, Hebburn, South Shields, Lancashire, Staffordshire, Cornwall and from Scotland, Wales and Ireland. They inhabited the new colliery company-owned houses, moving into them as they were completed street by street – 1st Street, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th Street and so on.

C.W. Clarke describes the social character of the villages as they evolved under the aegis of the colliery companies. "The social character of the area can best be described as 'Traditional of a Mining District'. To say that the area possesses no social character is misleading – rather should it be said that the social character has been shaped by the conditions existing in the past, is peculiar to the older mining areas and is evident even in the newly developed areas. These conditions – low wages, the uncertainty of the coal market upon which the whole community depended, the 'natural' dirty nature of the industry, the inherent dangers attached to the miners' occupation, the insipid fear of loss of earnings caused by injury, and the miserably low compensation rates, the dread of nystagmus and to a lesser extent in this area, silicosis, the preponderous spoil heaps dwarfing the villages, the three shifts system, and most important of all, the absence of alternative industry, all tended to concentrate the attention of the people on the pithead gear. There was no escape from it; it was coal all the time."²

An examination of the industrial structure in the area in 1929 as revealed by the Ministry of Labour statistics ... shows the dependance of the area on coal mining absorbing 88.69% of the total insured population in employment ...

Between 1929 and 1939, coalmining lost very little of its overwhelming dominance accounting for 75.71% of the total insured population in employment in this district in 1939.³

² *Farewell Squalor* by C.W. Clarke, 'Social Character of the district' page 11.

³ *Farewell Squalor* by C.W. Clarke, chapter 8 'Economic Character' page 52.

The colliery companies owned the mines in which the miners worked, and many of the houses in which they lived. It was possible to be fired from the pits and simultaneously evicted from colliery company housing. Some men were fired and evicted for speaking their minds. Speech was inevitably suppressed in the furtherance of the companies' interests. Some people were reduced to living in crees (cabins or huts) in the gardens or allotments. It is reported that up to 32 families were living in the allotments in Horden in the 30s. Others were reputed to have lived in caves along the beach between Easington Colliery and Blackhall.

The significance attributed to the absence of alternative industry in the area in being contributive to the social character of this district suggested by C.W. Clarke, is open to question.

The form and character of the physical and social environment of the pit villages resulted largely from the outcome of the development of interests concerned with the creation and acquisition of excess wealth. In the process of the realisation of excess wealth, mines were sunk, wage labour was bought (pit sinkers, miners) and housing built. The miner sold his labour power to temporarily alleviate the basic needs of his living. This necessary association of interests produced to a large extent the shape and character of the environment.

Lewis Bunt, a miner, and grandson of Thomas Bunt, first miner M.P., says "My grandfather used to describe miners' houses as reflecting what coal owners thought of miners."⁴

Outside the pit the miners were left to develop "their own resources for their social life and amenities — and on what profit the colliery company cared to plough back in the form of inadequate houses."⁵ And on what they were required to contribute by law.

"Coal-mining is one of the few industries in which the provision of leisure facilities by employers is required

⁴ *Picture Post*, Dec. 4, 1948. 'A miners' town to end squalor' by David Mitchell, page 36. Published by Hulton Press Ltd.

⁵ 'New Town for Old'. *The Peterlee Social Survey*, Helen Rankin, Editor, *Current Affairs* No. 75, 1949.

by law. The Mining Industry Act of 1920 established a Miners' Welfare Fund. A Miners' Welfare Committee was constituted at the same time to administer the fund. "... For purposes connected with the social well-being, recreation, and conditions of living of workers in and about the coal mines."⁶ The income of the fund was to be provided from a levy of a penny per ton of saleable output — the so-called 'Miners' Magic Penny'?"

"The outstanding feature of the community emerging from these conditions is the communal spirit shown. In what other industry is the same camaraderie shown between the people to the same extent as exists in the mining villages? Where else is shown the same sympathy in bereavement, assistance in necessity, or rejoicing in good fortune between members of a community?"

NEW TOWN 1946

Farewell Squalor — A design for a new town arose from the bitter industrial and social experience of the previous fifty years. It was an internal initiative intended to create a means for the transformation of the whole district through the development of a new town, as the focus of the district.

It coincided with the Distribution of Industry Act of 1945, containing provisions for the encouragement of new industry towards 'development areas', including the North East; and with the New Towns Act of 1946, in which the Minister responsible for Town and Country Planning was empowered to designate new towns, and to institute development corporations to be responsible for the construction and management of new towns.

It resulted in the designation of Peterlee, and in the formation of the Peterlee Development Corporation in 1948.

⁶ *The Mining Industry Act 1920, Section 20(1)*.

⁷ In 1934 this was reduced to a 1/2d because of the poor conditions of the industry. 'Coal is our life'. An analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community by Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter. Tavistock Publications, 1956.

⁸ 'Farewell Squalor' *Social Character of the District*, p. 11, by C.W. Clarke 1946.

EVIDENCE

The project is concerned with the collection, collation, and presentation of accounts and experiences of work, and the social, domestic and personal life of people who live, or have lived, in Peterlee New Town, and the six surrounding villages. It is collecting photographic material as an essential feature of the programme.

If there is a principle involved, it is that people should be afforded opportunities to record their views, attitudes, and memories of the circumstances of their lives.

Gradually, through the accretion of material, an hierarchy of attitudes and views might materialise as a 'collective' contribution to historical perspectives.

It is not a social survey, nor intended to become primarily an archive of local history.

There is no 'end-product' planned as such. The process of an assembly of views, memories, and photographic material is conceived to be continuous, the evidence from which should be re-integrated into the community both institutionally and non-institutionally. It is seen as the formation of a social tool, an open ended proposition, the perimeters of which will be determined by:

1. Its use.
2. The capacity of the project to re-assess and re-form itself.
3. The expectations and requirements of the funding body.

It is optimistically regarded as a prototype (still in formation) which might be applied to other communities as a contribution to the development of a community's awareness, its historical formation, present structures and future needs.

STUART BRISLEY

Some of the collected **EVIDENCE**

Mrs. LOWDEN, 4 LANGDALE PLACE, PETERLEE.
10th AUGUST 1976

I came to Horden one November morning, I think it would be 1905, and I came from Sunderland where my father had worked at Silksworth Colliery and was walking every day from Sunderland to Silksworth. And it was travelling, you know, for him ... So anyhow, he came to Horden. Well the carts or lorries, whatever you might call them, came at three in the morning, you see, and you had to be up and dressed ready to be on your journey. Well, my youngest sister and I, walked from High Barnes in Sunderland to Sunderland Station and we got the train which brought us into Horden at eight o'clock in the morning. There was only two trains into Horden and out of Horden at that time, eight in the morning and six at night. That was the only two trains. So I had to go with my father and youngest sister, at eight in the morning, my brother and sister cycled and my mother had to wait of the furniture getting away and she came on at six. Well, we arrived at the Station and then you had to come up, and where Blackhills Terrace is now, but it wasn't then ...

INTERVIEWER — The Dene.

MRS LOWDEN — Yes, it wasn't there at all. But it was a long walk then, there were no short cuts. So you came up all the way and my father said stay ... we went to the colliery and my father said we must stay there while I go and collect the key for the house and don't move. So that was it. But at that time all there was was huts which were alongside where the Church Hall is now, Eighth Street — they were sinkers huts. And the sinkers, I think a lot of them remained on and went into ordinary mining you see.

But when the Church Hall took us all you could tell there wasn't many children there at all.

INTERVIEWER — And which street, which house did you move into in Horden? Do you remember the street?

MRS LOWDEN — Yes, but we were only there three weeks, that was Second Street, but just the first half, the top half hadn't been built just as far as where the official union club is now ... but in three weeks we moved because my father became a colliery official and we got a better class house. So we just stayed there three weeks.

But nobody knew anybody else at all because the people had come from Staffordshire where they had worked in the potteries, and Lancashire where they had worked in the mills and other people from all the counties round about Durham. Well, these people that came from Lancashire and Staffordshire they came with just ... well, to put it bluntly tin trunks, I don't think anybody had cases, unless you were wealthy people in those days — tin trunks.

And there was a porter at Hartlepool station shouting, "Over the bridge to Horden and take your tin trunk!" that's where that saying came from. So that's all they had. And when they arrived, well, they arrived just as they were. And you helped them out, with a cup and saucer, or a knife and fork or something like that. And they had no furniture, they had no carpets on the floor or anything like that, but in those days people were extremely kind to one another. And when you saw people that even lived at counties far away their lorry arrived which was no other means of travelling ... You would say "Come in and have a meal," you didn't know them, and they didn't know you, but they would come in and have a meal and it was a jolly good meal, such as was known in miners' families. There would be meat, and pease pudding and apple tarts, or sandwich cakes, all homemade. So we really made friends at once, no matter what county you came from. And usually, I have heard my father say that if a man went into the colliery offices for work, and he had five or six sons, which was fairly normal in those days ... he got work at once, even if he had a muffler on and all his sons had mufflers on, they got work, because it only took one colliery house. But if a man came himself, well, it was questionable, if he had a collar and tie on and very tidy ... But it was taken into consideration, the housing situation, there was plenty there, in a way, but that's what happened.



2nd Street, Horden, circa 1910.

Mr and Mrs HARRISON, 24th MAY 1976

MR HARRISON — When I was a lad, going to school, my mother had a washer ...

MRS HARRISON — My mother had a huge thing, I remember ...

MR HARRISON — When it was washing day every fortnight, my mother used to wash on a Monday. We had to be up, there was me and my older sister, and I had to get that washer in a certain place where she washed. And the tap was in the street, and I had to carry water and fill a bath in the yard and have so many pails standing for her to use while I was at school. And they had a big washing pan and they put it on the fire, see, to boil the water. And when I come home at dinner time, of course there was no school dinners, I had to fill them baths again, and if there was any time left I had to turn the mangle. And at night, you never got out. Now on a Friday night, I had to swill the yard, that had to be done, I didn't get out. On a Saturday morning there was steel fire irons, fenders and tidy betty. Do you know what that is? It's used to fit round the bars to keep the ashes in. And I had to clean them, and they were steel, and that steel bar, by — that was a buggar!

MRS HARRISON — Terrible to clean.

MR HARRISON — And you didn't get out till you'd got them done, you had to do them.

MRS HARRISON — The housework took hours and hours, you know.

MR HARRISON — Lads had to do work same as girls, you know.

INTERVIEWER — Really? I thought there was this tradition that the boys would have sort of boys work and the girls would do all the household things.

MRS HARRISON — Yes, mainly that's true, but as Bob said carrying water and such like because they had to carry every drop of water. And there was a custom, you see, the stairs used to run up, and underneath the stairs there was a small cupboard, and nearly everybody had in that cupboard a small wooden structure with a bowl of water on. Now there was a clean bowl of water put in there, say in the morning, and everybody just went into that little cupboard and washed. And the water wasn't changed as often as it should have been, because there was no running water. But, you see, when you think back, there wasn't any hygiene, you know, because there wasn't the facilities.

MR HARRISON — I can remember you know, the washaway toilets was only put in in 1926, before that there was earth closets. And I've seen flies, my mother had a line (washing line) it was like two

staples knocked in, and a painted clothes prop, all the colliery houses had them, I've seen in the summer time, that line black with flies. There was that many flies you couldn't sleep when it was hot for flies about your face.

MRS HARRISON — You'll have seen the pictures probably of these lines, which used to be on pulleys, have you seen those? The people used to pull those down and put their clothes on, you know, to wear, and pull them back up again. But that was a feature of a lot of the linen rooms then. Because it wasn't... there wasn't any big places, and bathrooms were unheard of.

MR HARRISON — No bathroom.

MRS HARRISON — Mostly you had what you called a kitchen house, a back kitchen and your bedrooms, and after that when the families got bigger you progressed, and you moved into what you call the sitting room house, there was no bathroom.

MR HARRISON — The men disappeared on a Saturday night so the women could get bathed, because you had to get bathed in front of the fire in a big bath, you see. And I can remember, when a chap was killed at the pit, you know, the day of the funeral, the band and the banner was always turned out, with a black drape on the top of the banner. Now I was telling these that were here last week about 'bidders', do you know what a 'bidder' is? You see, when anybody died, we'll say somebody died in this street, maybe the chap next door would go round and say "Mr Harrison, so and so's buried tomorrow, gather at two (o'clock)". And in them days, you know, you used to put two chairs outside the house and put the coffin on and you used to sing hymns.

MRS HARRISON — Oh, it was awful, terrible.

MR HARRISON — That was stopped during the war, though, it stopped the crowds, you see.

MRS HARRISON — The baths, you know, which they had, and which you'll have seen pictures of, when they've been hung outside, have you seen them hung outside the kitchen doors? They used to have this big tin bath, and when it was finished with they used to stand it outside the kitchen door. But there was one period where they brought in what they called a 'kitty'. It was a wooden thing, wasn't it?

MR HARRISON — Wooden kit, mind that's going back a long way.

MRS HARRISON — But still, it's a feature of the village life.

MR HARRISON — About this funeral... the bidders, when the funeral set off from the house, you seen the bidders, two men used to walk in front, two women behind carrying the wreaths, then when the chap had been buried and they were all coming out of the

church yard, the bidders used to stand at the church gates and ask you for your tea, of course in those days, everybody went back. Now I know a certain man, he's dead now, he was always in ten o'clock shift, he used to go to all the funerals because he used to get his tea, you see. I tell you what, is your gran still alive?

INTERVIEWER — Yes.

MR HARRISON — Well ask her about Rutter, old Rutter at Wheatley Hill or Thornley, either Wheatley Hill or Thornley, tell her about him going to all the funerals, she'll chance to remember him.

INTERVIEWER — They went in for mourning for a long time, didn't they?

MRS HARRISON — Oh, yes, you wore black for six months, easily. Ridiculous, you know, the customs when you look back on them.

MR HARRISON — Then that did away with, black suits, did away with and you used to wear a black arm band round your arm for a certain period. And everybody had a black tie, you didn't go to the funeral without a black tie, but they go with anything now. But that was the custom in them days, you see.

MRS HARRISON — And there was a custom when all children were christened, you know, I don't know whether I've told you this before. If you had a boy child, and you had someone, one of the nanas, grandmas to carry them, you took with you what you called the three things, and it was a box of matches, and some salt and something else, have you heard of this custom?

INTERVIEWER — Yes.

MRS HARRISON — Yes, and you gave it to the first child which was the opposite sex, and also you, always after you'd had your baby and you sort of got up and got out, the first three houses you went into, your baby was given three things. And if ever a mother, a young mother went into a house and had forgotten, this was supposed to be terrible, unlucky. Oh dear me, that was a black mark against the occupant of the house, but they were always given three things, which was salt, matches, what was the other thing?

INTERVIEWER — Piece of cake?

MR HARRISON — Piece of cake?

MRS HARRISON — Well, the piece of cake was taken to the christening.

MR HARRISON — And then a woman didn't go out very far ...

MRS HARRISON — You were in the house nearly a month, my mother used to be very strict about that, it was terrible if you went out after you'd had a baby, under a specified time. And you had to lay in bed ten days always, you know. Ten days, this was a custom and it was just an accepted fact. The medical

profession and everything of course, I mean even learned people ... it wasn't just a matter of being a custom through ignorance, it was a custom of the times, wasn't it? You were in bed ten days, and being very careless if people got up and went out, you used to get very black looks off them. Ridiculous customs, you know, but this was so, but people stayed in a month after they'd had a baby. And when you were pregnant, you weren't supposed to, sort of show yourself, you had to go out for a walk late at night when nobody could see, yes this is so. You weren't supposed to go outside during the day and such like, you know. The old women used to love ... it wasn't the done thing at all, so you went for a walk late at night when it was dark.

INTERVIEWER — They probably had a very strict code of morality, did they? Things that weren't talked about?

MRS HARRISON — Yes, yes, this was it.

Mrs. HOLMES 18th August 1976

I was at Miller's cake shop until I was married, when I came to Horden. And I was married in 1913. Me marriage lines are in the drawer, November 13th, 1913. Why, after I was married, well, the war broke out, 1914, then we ... Mr Holmes went to the war, see. And then we had a, got a colliery house, we were living in a colliery house, rent free. Goes and starts the coke ovens, when they started to build the coke ovens, 1915, when they started building the coke ovens.

INTERVIEWER — How did you come to start the coke ovens, Mrs Holmes?

MRS HOLMES — Well, these two men come, Bill Pacy and Turner, Mr Turner come and they were going to start some coke ovens. And this policeman come up and he says to me and Mrs Lee sitting on the step in Second Street, he said "We want some women, we're gonna (going to) build some coke ovens, tomorrow. We want about twenty women to start." "Well, what have we to do?" I said. "Oh, wheel barrows, and stack the bricks and empty the trucks, and get ready for the ovens." So we went along and knocked at this cabin door and said, "Well, are you starting some coke ovens, are you starting some women?"

He said, "Er, yes." Well, I said, "Me and Mrs Lee wants a job then." so this big fella is standing, with his hands in his waistcoat you know. And he says, "Oh, why, you come in the morning, you're the first two set on." When he shut the door, I says to Betsy Lee, "By, he's a big bugger, isn't he? He's German." And he opens the door and says, "No, I'm not German." "Oh", I says, "He's a big 'un, isn't he?" (That's the man on the back of the photograph there.) And he says "No, no, I'm not German." I says, "Oh aye." Well, I came back home, there was Mrs Timmins, Mrs Mathews, and Mrs Catlow and different ones, they had all been out for a drink, and I didn't drink, see. And when they came, "Oh, we're going to start the ovens tomorrow." I says, "Aye, none of you gets a job before me, I'm first." (Laughs) And we went and started the ovens and we started the ovens in 1916, and I was there till 1919, I worked all the time on the ovens, I was the first started on, and I was the last off to finish, because they were leaving and leaving, the men were coming home from the war and the ovens was finishing. And when I was finished, when Mr Holmes came home, I wanted to finish, but no, I had to stop till the ovens were finished.



Horden Colliery Coke Ovens Ladies' Football Team 1915 (Mrs. E. Holmes bottom right).

Mr and Mrs ALLEN, BLACKHALL.

12th JUNE 1976

MR ALLEN — Big flat tables, big set pots, boiling pots, carrots, turnips and what have you, cut up out of the allotments and that put a great big ... there used to be the big set pots, and they stirred around with a big stick handle you know, what they used to use more or less for doing the clothes with there, and they used to be stirring it round, and you'd be standing there with your basins — it was like the Pied Piper you know — Oliver Twist (laughter) in the queue waiting to come in the pouring rain, and if you got half a slice of bread you would dip it in, you didn't eat the bread, you sucked it. Peas and everything used to be coming in.

INTERVIEWER — From the allotments you said.

MR ALLEN — Well this was, you see the people had the allotments you know, all around, what we call around the mile at Hesleden. You see, and that a lot of it used to come ... and of course, this was all issued, was paid for, mind, by the unions and that — you know — was paid for, and then of course then again it was maybe a 1/2d for a cabbage, a cauliflower or anything like that. Or anybody who wasn't working at the pit and had to work elsewhere you know, then they used to chip in and that — and this used to come, and mind there used to be about 4 to 6 great big — what we would call cauldrons now, big doings with fires underneath and there used to be wood out of the dene. Hesleden was handy to get wood, you couldn't coal, but you got plenty of wood out of the dene. You used to shove it underneath, and we used to go there and queue well, I just had to walk from here to the privet hedge — to the Parish Hall. But my mother wouldn't let me go at first, but we had to go at the finish.

MRS ALLEN — We wouldn't go at first but ...

MR ALLEN — We wouldn't go at first and that.

MRS ALLEN — Well of course, for quite a while you could sort of manage.

MR ALLEN — Some you know, who had big families why they had no other choice.

MRS ALLEN — No other choice, you had to go. It was no good saying, because sometimes it was the only meal, hot meal you could get, because on this voucher that you got, there was very little meat you know, and I mean that was where the old saying came from — "Hands up those who wants the dip" I don't know whether you know what the dip is. Well that's bacon fat. You know, hands up those that wants the dip, because your father's going to have the bacon. And that's where the saying originated from, because that's what they used to do.



Easington Colliery Soup Kitchen Staff, 1926.

**Mr & Mrs DAVE & RUBY LARMER & ROSE
2nd MAY 1976**

Now my older brother was working with him and he got his clothing caught, and he couldn't get loose, he was shouting, "Stop the creeper", and my brother was trying to stop it, and he was yelling ... and he was trying to get him loose, and he got pulled through the creeper ... he got an arm torn off ... he got a leg torn off, and then he fell forty feet, and I remember as if it was yesterday when they brought him home from work ... I can remember the doctor trying to push my mother out of the front door when we lived at Lumley. I can remember as if it was yesterday taking a running kick ... and kicking the doctor on the shins because he pushed my mother out of the front door. Now my other brother that was working with him, he got pneumonia with shock ... and he never lived very long after it ... he died when he was 26 years old because he was continually getting pneumonia. He got pneumonia about 6 times.

ROSE — And how old was your brother? About 14?

DAVE — On his first pay day ... he never saw his first pay ... 14.



Bathers at Hart, 1930s, (David Larmer bottom row centre).

DAVE — I always worked in a low seam. When you were coal hewing you had a little stool — in old fashioned Durham — 'cracket' ... Now that (hewing while sitting on a cracket) my mother's first husband was killed doing that. That's what they call curving a judd, underneath you see, (undercutting the seam of coal). The curve underneath on that photograph (photograph of miner hewing coal), he'd have one foot underneath him and that's what they call curving the judd, you see, he chips all of that out of there, chips it all out, and he gets as far back as possible, (cutting under the seam as far as possible) and then when he comes to the corners — he knocks his pick off, and he reverses it, and he puts it back on the shaft, so he can get an inch or two further into the corner (so he can get an inch or two further under the coal seam) otherwise it would be rounded. He reverses that pick on his shaft, he gets right back into the corner so he gets a proper square, and they drill holes in there, and in there (regularly into the coal face) and you pack them with ----- powder.

INTERVIEWER — That was the deputy's job wasn't it?
DAVE — Yes, he then ... what you call a copper ... it had to be copper because copper didn't conduct sparks ... you see ... ram a ramming rod about six feet on pole ... see, with a copper end. It was about that long with a little round thing, and he got this powder, and he put a couple of sticks of powder in, and then he'd got another one, and put the detonator in, and then shove it in, and then shove that up, right up to the other one, and put another stick of powder in ... and he'd have clay, and he'd ram the clay into the hole, and bang it up tight. And he'd go back away from the place, and his job was that if there was any roads to this place he had to put a "No Road" board on it, or he had to post a man to see that there's nobody trespassing ... see. And then he had a long cable with an electric battery, and tested ... and turned the handle and bang used to go that, you see. And then they used to fill that away. Unfortunately my mother's first husband — he was trying to get right back you know, (curving the judd) the carry on came right down on top of him.

RUBY — The stone fell on you though, didn't it?
DAVE — Yes the stone that hit me was 7'6" long and 4' across, I was in 3 feet (a three foot high seam) and I was working by myself and I had a pneumatic pick you know, and it came on top of me. I had the pick like that and it (the stone pressing down from above) was shoving the pick through my stomach. Now to get that through, it was thrusting me, because I could feel the bones breaking in my leg, all the time like that ... and then it threw me down like that, but fortunately I had one of those crash helmets on and I had a lot of coal lying like that, and there was a big portion lying that ... and I lay there, and I wasn't unconscious, and I didn't know what to do ... so I started to think, so I started scratching with my fingers, scratch so as to get my chest into it, and I got one arm out ... and I got my arm around a prop ... and I started pulling myself out like that, and I lay there, but my leg was smashed, and I was pulling myself out like that, you know, and I could hear the bone, the doctor said it was broken into hundreds of pieces ... and I pulled myself out like that ... I can remember my lamp was hanging up like that, and my bottle next to the lamp, and me bottle with water, I lay there drinking water and blowing it up a height, so it came down like rain on me and blowing it up, and I lay there for ten minutes. And then the putter came in to take the tubs away you see, and I shouted to him, and he went and brought another 3 fellows. And then I got splints on me, I had to tell him what to do. I had my

first aid ticket, and the chap, he was a much older man than me, that I worked with, I said "Now get my scarf, and tie my legs together, use one of the legs for a splint. Tie me at the knees. Tie two feet together. My leg is broken and my foot." So they did, they fastened me with tokens, scarves, and all the kinds ... Got the stretcher — put me on the stretcher. And I've many a time laughed about this since. It was very low, you know, they had to carry me to get onto the main road way you see. And they were carrying me like that you know, and it was horses work, and when they got to where it was a bit higher, where the main haulage way (road) you only had a little narrow path like that to walk on because the sleepers used to stick out you know, they were in such a big hurry to get me out ... they were hurrying me, and one caught his foot on a sleeper, and they threw me off the stretcher right in front of the tubs that were coming in.

ROSE — Nearly killed you as it was.

DAVE — They had to drag me out like this and push me on to the stretcher again, and then out on to the train and whipped me away. Well, they had the motorised ambulance then you know, and it was standing waiting for me at bank, it whipped me away straight to the hospital. Well her (Ruby's) father was a boss, and he asked for me and they said "We are going to amputate his foot", which they nearly did. I was lucky.

ROSE — You were lucky they didn't have to amputate.
DAVE — See how the bones (of his foot) are smashed at the back. Now that knuckle was flattened as well you see. Now my foot never touches the ground. See that, look where I wear a hole in my slippers, that never touches the ground now, because I couldn't bend my ankle at all you see. Now my heel bones in there — can you feel it — just like a cow's hoof. And I walk there.

INTERVIEWER — How long did it take you to walk again?

DAVE — Well I was on crutches for a long time. Plaster ... and then I walked on 2 sticks.

ROSE — You were off work altogether four years — weren't you Dave?

DAVE — Four years. I never got started at the pit, and then I went and got it smashed again in a car accident.

