

## BRADWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY



### NEWSLETTER No 54 August 2025

#### Up-coming events

Once again one of the major events in our calendar is now fast approaching as we prepare for the mounting of our stall on Beggar's Plot for Carnival on Saturday 2<sup>ND</sup> of August. We hope to set up our gazebo at 7 pm on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> August. Since it won't be secure those items we aim to sell: Books, Pamphlets DVDs etc will be laid out at about 11 am on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. In addition we will be offering our challenge to stick a pin in a map, this time returning to a Bradwell location. So any help you can give with setting up our new gazebo (which should be easier than the old) on Friday and its taking down at about 4 pm of Carnival day would be great. Coming along at some time between 12 noon and 4 pm to help steward the stall will also be very much appreciated. So please let us know when you will be able to come to help.

#### The continuing Autobiography of Charlie Bland

In Newsletters numbers 24, 26 and 49 we have posted the recollections of Bradwell born Charlie Bland as he described his early life on Bessie Land and his farm work as a youngster. These recollections took his career up 1944.

In 1943 Ernest Bevin the wartime minister of Labour and National Service drew up a scheme to increase the number of miners in the country. Under this men between 18 and 25 due to be called up for military service had their names added to a ballot and those whose names came out were sent to work in the mines. In 1944 Charlie Bland must have been selected as one of these (although he might have volunteered for the mines). It seems likely that he is describing Grassmoor Pit located in North Derbyshire.



I started my working life at the local colliery as an eighteen year old, very raw ex Grammar School boy. (*Probably he had been at school in Tideswell*). The first day I reported to the Pit I was early, as the offices did not open while 9 o'clock. I had time to explore the canteen with its third of a pint of milk bottles and its cheap half pork pies. I also wandered through the baths where the night shift were getting washed and changed ready for going home.

At 09.00 am promptly, things were done promptly in my youth, I was taken into the timekeepers office, given a card, and shown how to clock in. I was also reminded that miners start work at 07.00 am prompt.

After completing the formalities, I was told to go to the bottom of the colliery tip, and ask for Jodie. This was a bit of a surprise for a young miner, but as I was not yet too keen to go down the pit, I did as I was told. In the eyes of an eighteen year old, Jodie was an elderly man who walked with a limp and never wore his teeth, even when eating.

We set off up the tip alongside the conveyer which carried the stones etc from the screening plant, and almost under the buckets of the cable that carried the bulk of the rubbish from the pit. The further we got up the tip the colder it seemed to get, until I arrived at the junction of the two belts where there was a hut. Inside the hut was a huge stove which was fed entirely with coal picked off the belts.

I put my snap (lunch) on one of the beams. Jodie provided me with a large pointed shovel, and told me to start cleaning the plates underneath the conveyor belt, so it didn't become choked with debris, I started with plenty of enthusiasm, and was not long before I heard a shout from the hut. It was break time. I was quite cold despite the work I had been doing, and I was glad of the heat of the stove which had been poked into even more life.

In the hut were Jodie and two other 'elderly' men who had been working on the second belt, though I suspect that they had spent some time of the time in the hut, or collecting coal for the stove. I did not really blame them, as the second conveyer belt travelled along the more exposed part of the tip and it was much colder up there. I had fed well with pork pie earlier in the day, so I was not so hungry, I just sat and answered the questions of my 'elders'. I dared not ask them any questions. Eventually, after what seemed an age, we started to work again. I was not so enthusiastic this time as my hands were getting sore, and I was developing my first

blister. I soon learned that one worked towards the hut as break times came, so that one could have a longer rest, although I was always the last to sit down. I was also very hungry now, but as I reached for my snap I knew that something was wrong. Something had bitten a hole right through the paper, bread and cheese. My workmates laughed, and suggested I buy a snap tin as that was the only thing that would keep the mice away from my food. I also had to go back to the canteen, which meant crossing the railway sidings, and I was warned to be careful across the tracks. We finished the day at 3.30 pm. So we had to damp down the stove, lock up the hut by 3.15 pm ready for the mad rush to clock out. I was not ready for this onslaught, and was nearly trampled down in the rush.

*(The area that was Grassmoor Colliery is now a Country Park and the tips are lagoons.)*

To be continued.



Cotes Park Colliery near Alfreton showing typical spoil tips.