

## BRADWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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### Up-coming events

We entertain one of our members, Jerry Youle, for the May talk. His title is 'Navio – What did the Romans do for Brough?' Jerry writes: *The Romans built a fort in the Hope Valley in 80AD. They stayed for another 270 years. Why did they come here and what was it like? A timeslip and a ghost story will be thrown in.*

The third Tuesday in the month falls on the 19<sup>th</sup> May and the meeting will be in St Barnabas Church starting at 8 pm. As usual you will be able to park in the school playground.

### The continuing adventures of Charlie Bland underground

For several months we have been following Charlie Bland's account of life as A Bevan Boy after World War II. We can now pick up his account at his proviso that what he now describes was true 'if nothing went wrong'.

... On the other side of the cage the Onsetters's job was to load the full tubs onto the cage. He always had two tubs held by 'dicks' which were triangular pieces of wood like wedges held under the wheels. When the cage arrived he reached into the cage, released the catch to let the empties out, kicked away the dicks, letting the full tubs run onto the cage pushing off the empties.

Around 2:15 pm the miners began to congregate just outside the pit bottom, their lights visible in the distance. At 2:30 pm prompt the top onsetter would ring three bells for the end of the shift. The stampede began. Nobody came into the pit bottom until 'Over' was rung then every one rushed to the shaft bottom. I am sure that if you fell down in the rush they would trample over you. Then two orderly queues formed on the plate and were well behaved until the onsetter gave the word, then he had to almost fight to get his arm across to stop the rest. Just like a referee at a boxing match. He seldom had the correct number of men on the cage.. But not all of the men behaved badly, usually the older men were prepared to wait and some preferred one cage to

another. I was still moving tubs when the rush came, so naturally I ended up with the more 'genteel' men.

Going up the shaft didn't feel as bad as descending. We set off fairly gently, and it seemed to take longer to reach half way when the other cage passed us. But as we slowed down we realised how far it was to the bottom of the shaft. By the time we reached ground level we were moving at a slow walking pace. I always said a little prayer at this stage, and a general 'thank you', when the chocks were securely under the cage. Few men talked much in the cage, but they soon made up for it when they were safely back 'on land'.

For me travelling up and down in the shaft was the most dangerous part of mining. Perhaps working in the pit bottom didn't help. There was the constant banging of the cage on the bottom of the shaft, the occasional overwind, when the pull chains crashed down the sides of the cage, only to be snatched up again ready for the next draw.

I staggered down the steps, handed in my token, fixed my lamp battery for charging, and made my way to the baths. Was I dirty? There were sweat lines down my black face, and my clothes were covered in stone dust. I locked my dirty clothes in one locker, and made my way to the showers. There were dozens of men, all completely naked, wandering around. Fortunately the dust did not take a great deal of effort to remove and I was soon clean and tidy and making my way to the canteen for a third of a pint of milk and a pork pie. I had earned them!

Working at the pit bottom was quite an adventure particularly when things went wrong. Sometimes the manager or an injured man was travelling in the shaft, then all the tubs had to be removed and winding was slower. Sometimes the winding engine ran out of steam and we had to wait for a new head of steam to be built up. On one occasion an over-zealous haulage lad forgot to remove a rope clip and several tubs were pushed into the pit bottom, just as the cage arrived. There was a sickening crash, the cage wedged between the two decks, the tubs were smashed and the coal was everywhere. Being near the shaft I ran for my life. Often when work stopped, the lads from the bottom deck would throw 'stone dust bombs' at the lads on the top deck, and of course we would reply, disappearing when the deputy arrived! I suppose it was one way of spreading the stone dust which was used to neutralise the coal dust and reduce the risk of an explosion.

To be continued