CHAPTER 3

Scabs, Pickets and Camaraderie: Words and Memories of East Midlands Coal Miners

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1 Introduction

In Nottinghamshire, the majority of miners did not join the nationwide UK mining strike of 1984–85. This has given rise to almost 40 years of verbal and written debate playing out especially in the media. As Hunt and McHale state, "most people would agree that the media is important in shaping people's attitudes and beliefs, but we need to go further than that and recognise that memory and identities are also shaped by the media" (Hunt and McHale 2008: 52). The media can be a strong influence in how certain struggles are perceived, as has been demonstrated with regards to the metaphors of "war" and "enemy" within the 1984–1985 miners' strike in the United Kingdom (Hart 2017). The language of "war" continues to affect Nottinghamshire miners and their memories to this day. On one side are the strikers, who still regard the betrayal by those who did not join the year-long action as the main reason for the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) split and subsequent terminal decline of deep coal mining in Britain. Conversely, the working miners still regard the strike as unconstitutional, with the tactical influx of flying pickets who entered the Nottinghamshire coalfield from the start of the strike. They believe that opinions were forced upon them and regard the forcing of the strike as instrumental in the union split in 1985, when some Nottinghamshire miners formed a separate organisation, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM).

For my research on "pit talk," the distinctive language of the East Midlands miners, we interviewed former miners from around the region. These interviews were primarily about the language that the miners used in their daily work, job descriptions, practices and locations, above and below ground. Though the interviewers did not explicitly raise the subject, half of the interviewees, miners on both sides of the conflict, brought up the strike, its repercussions and the relationships between miners before, during and after the events of 1984–5. This indicates the ongoing importance of this conflict for the community.

This chapter discusses the main themes, keywords and narratives in the interviewees' discussion of the strikes. It first provides a brief background of language, memory and oral history before providing contextual information about the strike in Nottinghamshire. It then discusses the project's methodology, followed by a narrative analysis of the interviews. While it cannot review all aspects involved in the multifaceted interaction of language and memory, it touches on some key features in spoken recollections of civic contention, as well as useful research practices involved in the oral history research of gathering spoken recollections and helping communities to reconnect.

2 Memory

The act of remembering, if not the physical process, is a social construction (Gill 2012; Halbwachs 1992), as what and how something is remembered are the products of group life. As such, remembering is never just an individual but also a social activity (Berliner 2005, 200). In a culture, individuals adopt a set of beliefs (or myths, Gill 2012) based on a shared past (McDowell 2008). These beliefs form the basis of both collective and individual identities, as they are used by individuals to augment group identity and to fit their own lives into the narratives of collective memories.

Memories, which are always selective, can be affected by pressures of group identity, as well as by changing information, forgetting details and altering stories (Hunt and Robbins 1998, 59). Portelli (1992) argues that past events can be remembered in either a communal or personal mode. In the communal mode, the emphasis is on how particular times and events were experienced by the larger collective. In Halbwachs' (1992) conception, collective memory defines the relationship between the individual and society to enable a community to preserve its self-image and transfer it to younger generations over time. In this model, although there is one history, there are many collective memories. Individual recollections can change over time, for example because of social change or when perceptions of the past are altered through the media. Furthermore, Hunt states that collective memories ensure continuity, as members of the community share a sense of unity and allow them to construct their personal and social identities (Hunt 2010, 105). The concept of "cultural memory" (Assmann 1995), where memories for specific events (in the case of the miners we interviewed, the strike) are maintained through cultural formation is important to consider. In the case of the East Midland coal miners, these include, for example, discussions the miners have about the strike

and their life before and after it, as well as how the strike was represented more widely by the media. The negative portrayal of miners in the media during the strike (see for example Hart 2017), which included the concept of the strike as war and as enemies of the state, persists as a harmful representation.

While official history can shape individual remembrance, personal memories can also come to shape national, "official" histories. According to Berliner, memory ultimately is "the reproduction of the past in the present, this accumulated past which acts on us and makes us act" (Berliner 2005, 201). Research shows that memory is an active part of the meaning-making process, rather than merely a passive depository of facts (Thomson 2010, 82). The importance placed on personal memories changed over time. From the time of the first written histories to the early nineteenth century, the memories of those who participated in events were considered invaluable sources. However, their witnessing status came to be obscured by archival records when history became a professional, academic discipline (Green 2010, 97). After the Second World War, oral history came to once again complement these resources.

3 Language and Memory in Oral History

Various scholars have noticed how "[o]ral history rose to prominence in a particular context, becoming a mass practice in the climate of the 1960s" (Hamilton and Shopes 2008, VIII; Ritchie 2010, 6). It is a method for uncovering unknown stories or giving a voice to people who are not usually heard. Some scholars criticise the value of oral history as history, because memory can be distorted by physical deterioration and nostalgia in old age, the influence of collective and retrospective versions of the past, and the bias of interviewee and interviewer (Thomson 2010; Thomson 2012, 80). In their memory, people may construct stories that satisfy a need to provide a coherent narrative. We can assume that these narratives are systems that are used to make sense of the self and one's community (see also Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008, 378). However, it has been suggested that the value of oral history partly lies elsewhere. Hunt and McHale (2008, 46) propose that oral history draws together memory and history by recognising that individual memory is a worthy repository. Oral histories can be seen as counter-history, necessary to challenge official discourse (Briel 2013, 28). How we remember the past and give it meaning helps us to make sense of the the present; providing a way in which the present influences recollection of the past (Thomson 2010, Thomson 2012, 85, 90; Ritchie 2010, 12).

I have argued (Braber and Davies 2016, as have others, such as Roller 2015), that linguists and oral historians should work together more closely as both parties could be enriched by such collaboration. Exploring concepts of identity in people's life stories may include, for instance, looking at particular linguistic features used to express identity (Perks and Robinson 2005). Linguists can also use oral history interviews to collect important data. We can examine which parts of their lives interviewees want to discuss and what they choose to remember. Individuals view experiences as worth remembering if they are relevant to the groups in which they are immersed, and studying such narratives may reveal how communities and individuals make sense of a troubled past (Ritchie 2010, 14). This proved an important aspect of the narratives produced by the miners in the pit talk project. For instance, the idea of a strong community and support network was a crucial element of life for our miners, and this was reflected in many of the interviews and discussions.

The language used by people when they are remembering something can express the different ways in which they try to understand the upheavals and changes they experienced in the past (Thompson 2015, 34). Aspects of language usage include emotional register and pace of voice (Thomson 2012). For example, slowing down may mean greater emphasis or difficulty talking about a topic whereas acceleration can suggest ease or glossing over (Portelli 2015). Facial expression, body movement and mode of talking (Thomson 2012, 345) can also be important. Also worthy of analysis is the use of non-standard language, dialect, silence, tone of voice and volume (Portelli 2015, 50). Portelli adds that the exact length and position of pauses has an important function in the understanding of the meaning of speech. Regular grammatical pauses tend to organise more regularly, whereas pauses of irregular length and position accentuate the emotional content, and very heavy rhythmic pauses recall the style of epic narratives. Some of these linguistic features are not reproducible in transcripts, hence the importance of actual recordings.

Dialectal forms may crop up in digressions or anecdotes, which may coincide with the more personal involvement of the narrator or the intrusion of a crucial memory. They are also sometimes used to quote others when standard varieties are used throughout the rest of the interview. Robinson (2018, 203) notes that emotional language is used far more freely when speaking of the immediate community or the vernacular heritage that taps into memory and is a constituent of a wider narrative of identity (see also Figes 2015). We can also look at the particular pronouns, like 'I' or 'we' and who speakers who use these words are including with these words (Briel 2013, 39). Norrick (2005, 18) suggests that in memory, we construct rather than recall dialogue. We store

the meaning, but not the precise form of speech, so the precise wording may be misremembered. We use words and meanings that allow us to construct memories we are comfortable with or to remake memories that feel unsafe to us (Thomson 2012, 344). Thus, it makes sense to look at particular word choices. Briel (2013, 36), for example, recalls a recording where the interviewee discusses where they have lived and mentions they "moved" to another location, while this move was a forced repatriation. Briel comments that this choice for more neutral, rather than emotive vocabulary, is quite telling. Such word choices were also important in my interviews, as we can consider words like 'scab' which feature heavily on social media, but are rarely used within my interviews.

4 The Mining Strike and Its Aftermath

In the 1970s, coal lost its biggest customers due to severe cutbacks in the iron and steel industry (Franks 2001, 66). Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher believed the coal industry should be self-supporting and privatised (Griffin 1989, 188–9). In 1981, it was announced that 50 pits and 30,000 jobs would disappear to meet government targets. Three years later, Thatcher announced the privatisation of the mining industry with more closures; she stated that "the coal industry had come to symbolize everything that was wrong with Britain" (Freese 2003, 240).

The mining unions sensed worse to come (Freese 2003, 241) and decided to take action. The resulting miners' strike of 1984–85 across Britain was a major industrial action aimed at preventing closures (Gildea 2023; Paterson 2014). It was led by Arthur Scargill of the NUM against the National Coal Board (NCB), a government agency. Opposition to the strike by the Conservative government was led by Thatcher, who called the strikers and organisers "the enemy within" (Gildea 2023, 213). The NUM was divided over the action, and many mineworkers, especially in Nottinghamshire and other areas in the East Midlands, worked throughout the dispute. They did not follow the national strike because Scargill had called the action without a nationwide ballot, which was deemed unconstitutional (Griffin 1989, 201). The refusal to strike and the setting up of a new union, the UDM, weakened the position of the NUM (Critcher et al. 1995, 13). The main strike started on 6 March 1984 with a walkout at Cortonwood Colliery, which led to the NUM's Yorkshire area's sanctioning of a strike on the grounds of a ballot result from 1981 in the Yorkshire Area. The union's strategy was to cause a severe energy shortage, which had won victory in the 1972 strike. The government strategy was threefold: to build up ample coal stocks, to keep

as many miners at work as possible and to use police to break up attacks by pickets on working miners.

Violent confrontations between flying pickets and police characterised the year-long strike, ending on 3 March 1985. In some mines, when miners returned to work, striking and non-striking miners had to work together. The "most bitter industrial dispute in British history" ended with a decisive victory for the Conservative government and allowed the closure of most of Britain's collieries (BBC News.[1]) At its height, the strike involved 142,000 mineworkers. One journalist covering the strike estimated that "it has no real parallel – in size, duration and impact – anywhere in the world" (Milne 2004).

The dispute continues "to haunt the present" in many ways: economically, socially and emotionally (Simpson and Simmons 2019, 8). Unemployment figures in the affected regions rocketed (Coates and Barratt Brown 1997, 8, 20). Relations among miners continue to be strained and were further tested when Kellingley, the last deep coalmine in Britain, finished production in December 2015. At the subsequent wake, several participants split from the main crowd and ceremoniously burned a makeshift banner with the painted words "UDM Scabbing Bas**ards!" In 2022, British television drama *Sherwood*, set in north Nottinghamshire and based on real-life murders and a community divided by the strike, resulted in increased media attention for the region. Following this programme, BBC Radio Nottingham included features on the meaning and background of the word "scab." Recent books dealing with the strike include Gildea (2023), the first oral history account of the strike across Wales, England and Scotland (and contains interviews with miners and their wives from around Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands as well as examining already existing interviews) as well as Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson (2023) with the first national coverage of women and the miners' strike (and also contains interviews with Nottinghamshire and East Midlands women). Abusive messages on social media continue and look set to increase with the advent of the anniversary of the strike in 2024. These social media messages tend to be aimed at those who worked during the strike and can be found on Facebook and Twitter (now X), and others. The specific language usage of these has not yet been investigated. Gildea argues (2023, 25) that memories can be influenced by such interpretations of the strike and that the story of the strike is an "interplay between individual stories and shared stories."

1 See: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/low/dates/stories/march/12/newsid_3503000/3503346.stm

5 The Pit Talk Projects: Methodology

Over five years, we conducted several projects to record miners from around the East Midlands to examine the specific language used by coal miners for tools, job descriptions, and locations above and below ground (Braber et al. 2017; Braber 2022). Interviews with a variety of miners from the different mining communities around the East Midlands were needed to examine to what extent there were local differences between Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire, as well as differences between language used in the East Midlands and other mining regions in the UK. Applying the method of "snowball sampling" (Milroy 1987), we allowed the miners we recruited to suggest others to take part in the study.

My work with mining heritage groups is ongoing, to preserve and educate about mining heritage and examine the importance of linguistic heritage as an intangible aspect of this. This work continues to strengthen relationships between mining heritage groups and individuals and me. In our projects, art, music, creative writing and photography have proven effective ways of dealing with the difficult issue of ongoing enmities after the strike. However, things do not always run smoothly. Some mining groups are still unwilling to collaborate with each other or with anyone with certain former political affiliations. For me, acting as a 'neutral' go-between is very important and I always try to ensure both sides are involved with any projects or events we run (Braber and Amos 2021). Our current collaboration is with the Coal Authority, where we are using a selection of photographs from their archive to inspire interviews within mining groups. Not only will such information enrich the meta-data the Coal Authority has on these photos, but the photos and recordings can also be used with the wider local community to learn more about miners' lives.

The data provided below is based on a qualitative linguistic and content analysis of interviews, which were set out in such a way that similar data could be collected while keeping the situation more like an informal chat than formal questioning. To ensure anonymity, the miners will be referred here by using their initials. After recording, the interviews were transcribed orthographically. Each interview was analysed for particular words and themes. In total, we carried out around 70 interviews, and of those, 34 raised issues around the strike, working conditions before, during, and after the strike, and the effects of the strike on the miners and their families. This chapter focusses on the miners' narratives and considers the issue of spoken language as a specific medium. Some recurring themes are the strong sense of community between the miners, and how this was seen as a very positive factor in their lives. This is reflected

by the occurrence of keywords, such as camaraderie (but not comrades) and infrequent usage of words like "scab."

Many miners raised camaraderie, stating that miners were like brothers and that no other occupation (other than the armed forces) had a similar relationship. The strike was not specifically raised as a topic by the interviewers, but it was left to individual miners to bring up; quite a large proportion did this and spoke from both sides of the divide. An important aspect of this project was that the interviewers were all female non-miners and two out of the three were not from the East Midlands. This proved helpful as we were seen as 'neutral' by the miners, who did not have to worry whether we had been part of the NUM or UDM. The discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider (Foster 1996) versus being an outsider (Rasbridge 1996) of communities is interesting, but in our research being an outsider was certainly a bonus as we were not partisan.

6 Themes

Our interviews differ from other oral histories on this subject (Gildea 2023, Suthcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson 2023) because they were not solely about the strike. The miners were able to raise issues around working conditions and the strike if they chose to do so – almost half did, even though this occurred forty years ago. Furthermore, the discussion of camaraderie and community is so important, as the terrible situation during their daily working lives can tell us about the importance of belonging to such a group.

All miners started their interviews with a short description of their mining history, where they worked, what they did and whether anyone else in their family had been a miner (which was the case for many). At this point, many interviewees mentioned not only that previous male generations in their family had been miners but also that mining was often seen as a job for life and one which many had entered easily when looking for work (especially in cases where family members already worked within a mine). BW explains that the collieries could find a job for "anyone" and "that everyone had a job." BP says that getting a job in the coal industry was straightforward and often seen as being a career for life. He states:

> I left school in 1981. The Coal Board was a big employer at the time the Coal Board would generally take on, I mean the year I started was a typical year where they took on apprentices you see. So if you couldn't get a

> job anywhere you were pretty much assured you could get one at the Coal Board. So I left school and tried for loads of jobs. I got offered one at the power station but Staythorpe was at the time ear-marked for closure and they said they could only guarantee us four years, when I went to the pit the guy who interviewed us said you've got a job for life, 30 years, basically if you want it

This topic is raised by several miners; coal mining was often seen as a stable and well-paid job, especially compared with work in factories.

7 The Use of the Word 'Camaraderie'

Generally, the interviewees emphasise the importance of community among miners. Park comments that the toughness of the work below ground meant that miners needed to be able to rely on one another above ground and that this was also often linked to strong political militancy (Park 2000, 223). One of the main themes in all 70 interviews is the strong sense of camaraderie among miners, and the word 'camaraderie' is frequently used. This is a theme seen in other research on mining communities (Gildea 2023, 6). There is a lot of talk about how much they enjoyed their time working in the collieries. MW states that "[e]very miner if you said he could go back, he would. Because the camaraderie down the pit is second to none." AD declares, "it was absolutely brilliant," that there was a real community and the men not only worked but also socialised together through sports clubs and events at the welfare clubs. BB explains that going to the pub together was a big part of life. For many, this camaraderie was crucial because of the harsh working conditions and the dangerous environment that they encountered daily. KC says, "[l]ife down the mine was rough, it was depressing. The only thing that actually kept you going down the pit was the camaraderie with your friends and your workmate down the pit." DC adds "[i]t was hard, it was hard, it was very dangerous. I carried three of my mates out that had been killed. We had some good laughs." BH says:

> people talk about camaraderie, it's not just camaraderie cos it didn't finish in the pit. You came out of the mine, and you drank with the men, you went on trips with the men, it was more family than anything, you were literally like brothers, you always got somebody watching your back, you know, I've seen, to be quite honest, I've seen people go down the road, have an argument, go down the road and knock three bells out of one another and come back and that's it, passing a prop, job done. Miners

> never ever carry stones, because you never know what's going to happen tomorrow.

The reasoning behind the use of a word like "camaraderie" is never mentioned, it is assumed to be understood and a perpetual part of being in this industry.

Another frequently mentioned aspect of camaraderie was the "banter," consisting of jokes and playful exchanges. DJ says "it was a constant jibing and piss taking, and it was part of the camaraderie that was down there." Being able to deal with this was an essential part of a miner's life. RG explains "you have to be able to take it because if you didn't it was a waste of time you being down there. That was part of the fear factor it took away the fear of what you were doing because you knew you was under strain, you was under pressure, there was a danger there as well so you still had to be semi-serious in what you were doing. You're not just looking after your life you're looking after somebody else's life at the same time." MM, the canteen worker we interviewed, states that:

> [t]hey were like brothers you know, it was one big family. Because everybody had somebody, it was uncles, it weren't just fathers and sons, it was uncles everybody seemed to be related in some way and because of the difficulty with going down the pit and obviously they knew that every time they went down it was a big risk to their health and to survive really. They had to trust each other especially when they worked closely with each other. And they built that up because they worked the same shifts.

It is mentioned that when miners got older or were injured, jobs were frequently found to ensure they could continue working. Helping each other was a common theme, BB says "if you were struggling, someone would come and help you, if they were struggling you'd go and help them. There was no, you know, like lay and struggle. None of that. Or if you've seen a tub off the rails, used to go and help pick and put it back on. You'd never walk by. You'd never see anybody struggle." SF explains "we all look after each other. When we are underground we look after each other. If someone is struggling you help them and that's how it is. You wouldn't get by without looking after each other. The closeness of it."

BP comments that "everybody spoke to each other, so the camaraderie everyone said 'you all right mate' in fact you used to get a dry throat from saying hello as you used to walk in and walked out, that went when the old miners went that part camaraderie went." DA adds "[o]ver the years you've known literally thousands and thousands of men. And every one of them because of that turnover has got a story, you know summit had happened and they had

a story to tell." This camaraderie is something that many interviewees miss in contemporary life. PR says:

> I miss the friends. Because the comrades that you have down the pit are like, I would imagine it's very similar to sort of friends and comrades that you'd have in the army or something. Because everybody trusts each other and watches each other's backs. You could have an argument with somebody, an almighty argument with somebody but two minutes later it's forgotten about and working together again.

KS adds "They were brilliant. You could fall out with each other but if anybody was in trouble they were there." The issue of camaraderie is frequently raised at the very beginning of the interview, forming a focus of many of the stories told. This close connection between miners and the strong bond they felt formed a part of almost all of the interviews conducted as part of these projects. For many it was the most important aspect of not only their working life, but life in general.

PR's account offers an example of use of the word "comrade," but overall in the interviews this occurs only occasionally. Very few miners use the words "brotherhood," "comrade" or "solidarity," and "camaraderie" and "community" are preferred. This could be linked to the fact that for many, terms such as "brotherhood" and "solidarity" are more politically loaded, particularly left-leaning politics. These interviews did not foreground political affiliation, and very few were active members of the union. Although several miners interviewed did strike, the word "scab" is rarely used. This is likely to be very different in other regions of the UK, where striking was more prevalent and very strong feelings still hold to this day about the Nottinghamshire region. In much of the social media discourse surrounding the strike, the word "scab" is very common and a frequent derogatory statement made about working miners. Within these interviews, even those striking miners rarely use this word. It appears to be seen as a word mainly used by more militant miners and dispreferred in face-to-face conversations.

8 Talking about the Strike

When talking about the strike, many interviewees start at the run up of the strike and what was happening to them during this time. BP explains "they said the following week they was going to have a meeting, a union meeting and we'd have a vote on it. We voted at the time that the Midland section which ended up being UDM we're not voting for the strike we're voting for a vote and

once we've had a vote we'll vote on it but Arthur said no we're not having a vote." This idea of not been given the vote to strike is an issue raised by many interviewees who ended up working throughout the strike period.

Some of the miners interviewed explain how they could not strike because of their position, either as apprentices or managers. BP explains:

> we all got a little badge with a photo on it as an apprentice so that I could get through the picket lines because apprentices weren't allowed to go on strike. If you did you lost your apprenticeship so I had to keep going through so even since then I've spoke to miners still tarred with that brush for being a working miner. I was an apprentice at the time so there's not an awful lot I could have done about it because they would have sent you off the training centre anyway.

NC says:

> I was in Forest town then, '84, but I had to work 12-hour shift at Clipston. I had to take the part of a deputy, 'cause with being management staff, the deputies were on strike as well you see. Some of the men wasn't, and they wanted to keep turning coal. Management staff had to go and do deputy's jobs, which I did. They thanked us, you know, coal board, hierarchy, but I didn't like taking part in it, 'cause I were on strike in '72 and then after strike I went on staff, I went to be a deputy.

LM explains that as mechanic he was nominated by the NUM to work, but he got a lot of abuse from his friends and the picket line for crossing it. BB says that as a surveyor he had to go to work, but after an initial crossing of the picket line, where miners tried to overturn his car, they realised who he was, "and every day after that when I went to work they just saw me coming and they went away and just waved to me as I went by."

The situation was fraught in Nottinghamshire and other parts of the East Midlands coalfield which did not strike. BP says "it ended up being martial law in Nottinghamshire they called it Highland Nottingham cos you couldn't get in or get out so everyone was being pulled up." GB explains "[f]ortunately at our pit there weren't so many on strike because it was south, south of the border [with Yorkshire], but north of the border, miners there was lots of them. I can remember watching and the news and thinking what's happening is crazy. I mean it's like the breakaway. I was in the NUM but then I went into the UDM." ABS who was union secretary for the NUM states that "all our phones were bugged, I can tell you that for nowt. [...] All the lads on the NUM I worked

with went out on strike and they all finished, they didn't get back. It's like the '26 strike, there were no victimisation – bunkum! There was victimisation." DC relates "when I was on strike I broke my leg playing football and a television crew came up to me and asked me, off the record, they wasn't filming, how I'd broke my leg and I told them a police officer had kicked me." Tension between communities was high and continued for many years. Relationships changed. The strong sense of camaraderie that so many mention seemed to change during this time. BP explains that "it set man against man."

There are real differences in opinion on who was to blame. MC explains:

> everybody says the Notts miners broke the strike. Notts miners on average were out on strike, take Cotgrave for instance there were over a hundred Welsh people working only three of us were on strike. Most of the Scots were working, Yorkshire most of them were working so the actual Notts miners it's a fallacy when you say the Notts miners broke the back of the strike. It was these gypsies, like I was a gypsy we were up from Wales. It was all the different nationalities that broke the strike.

The role of Scargill is often raised (especially by those who worked; this is also a theme raised by Gildea's interviewees), GB comments "[s]ome of the UDM were [on strike], but not all. They took away, Arthur Scargill said you will go on strike, and we were democratic. It were just not right what he was doing. He was still living like a king." DC also believes that Scargill's behaviour was the cause of many miners not striking. He says:

> before any strike we would have a national ballot to see what the miners wanted, if they said no we wouldn't go on strike, if they said yes, we would. He decided he wanted a strike but he wouldn't have a ballot, because he knew, even his own men wouldn't go on strike. So there were a lot of bully boys about, hard cases if you like, very militant miners, and if you didn't go on strike they would intimidate them, one way or another, smash your windows, smash your car, intimidate your wife and kids till you did go on strike. That was in Yorkshire, that was. And so it was an illegal strike basically really and he wouldn't give us a vote so we said if you are not giving us votes and of course they came down in their masses, flying pickets, while you was at the pit smashed by these pickets, you stuck your fingers up and said 'Sod you,' if you are going to come and do this to us, it made you more not go on strike, you know what I mean.

AW feels that both sides were making promises to get miners on their side, "I think we could have stopped it. There was a year of that and we could have stopped it. We got a strike mandate eighty odd per cent and didn't use it. Got bought off with a load of lies." Still to this day there is a very strong feeling on each side that they behaved in the correct way and that the other side was wrong. Those who worked through felt they needed a ballot to be able to strike, whereas those who did strike felt that the Nottinghamshire miners were to blame for the closure of the mines.

9 Life after the Strike

Once the strike ended and many miners' working lives resumed, working and striking miners had to work together again. Many friendship groups changed depending on which of their friends and colleagues had joined the strike or not. DC says "[a]fter the strike, all the people I knocked about with, they worked all the time, and I'd been on strike so I had a new circle of friends." GB comments that these were interesting times as the "dialogue had gone" between people and that there was little talking. LM mentions similar sentiments: "[t]hey all carried on in their own way. For an example at Markham we had lots of problems. We had about eight coal faces at the time and they wouldn't work with each other so we had to keep them in the teams they were in before. Which made it from a management point of view and for control, a bit awkward. The men used to rule in those days, to a degree anyway." AB finds the working situation had changed:

> I mean, after the strike there were a bit of aggro, with people who worked and people who didn't work, like. I remember going back, first day I went back, and I saw somebody and I said, aye up so-an-so, and somebody says to me, you're not talking to him are ya? He worked all the time and I didn't know. And then you were underground and that hostility were there like, all the time.

DC comments that the camaraderie completely changed after the strike.

AW elaborates "they came from all over NUM, UDM you'd employ people and they'd say I'm not working with UDM. I used to say you are British Coal miners you work where you are told or you don't work, get on with it. There weren't many like that but there were some." In AB's experience, working

relations were poor and it was felt by some that managers supported the working miners. He explains:

> we were knocking off, off of days, about half past one, and afternoon shift were coming in, and they were three what had worked. They were three scabs. And I says, oh, scabs are here. And overman said, you can't call them that. I said that's a shovel look, that's a ringer [an adjustable spanner], and that's a scab. But they started saying you couldn't use the word scab, but I forget what we used to call them then. Meaning the same thing, we called them another word, like Rupert or something, you know, and everyone knew what Rupert meant. If gaffer heard you calling them scab you got your hand smacked.

Here we can see an example where the scab was seen as a swear word by many and as a word which needed to be avoided. Many who had gone on strike had to move pits as some miners refused to work with them. BP explains "[t]hey'd throw buckets of piss on him on the pit bottom, spit on him and it got to the point where most of the strike breakers, black legs they called them, or scabs ended up in a Nottingshamshire coalfield cos they couldn't work there." GB describes changes that were hard to deal with:

> When they announced the pit closure, my pit, I were devastated, absolutely devastated 'cause my way of life had gone. My kids had never wanted for nowt, 'cause I worked hard and I played hard and they took it all away. We still had to turn up for work, so we'd go, I travelled to Cotgrave with my snap, get to work, and they'd say no, we don't want you. Even though you've been a loyal employee for all them years, no go home. That's how they'd speak to us and we were devastated. I couldn't eat for 4 days, 4 days without owt to eat because I was numb. Mortified.

Most interviewees echo such sentiments. One of the exceptions, MC, states that "once you got on the job it was so dangerous that if someone was working there you were watching. Even after the strike. You had no worries about your safety, you put that aside." RC adds "[e]ven before and after the strikes we didn't have any troubles." BP comments that miners should not fall out because the powers above had destroyed the mining industry. He says "because at the end of the day Scargill did what Thatcher wanted anyway so she actually had a reason to close all the pits down. The strike finished in 1985 within 18 months they started shutting the Nottinghamshire pits down and they said they would look after you." BW also mentions that Thatcher got rid of the mines and this

destroyed mining communities. ABS explains "[t]he '85 strike it was a tragedy in the sense that a lot of decent fellows fell out and that. The writing was on the wall after [...] Because once she won, there was no messing about and bang. It all went very quickly." DC adds "[w]e had 36,000 miners in Nottinghamshire, and we've got about 400 now. 36,000 before the strike, 400 now after, so you can see the knock-on effect in the area." These effects were long lasting. MC talks about falling out with his father-in-law because of the strike, "[w]henever we had a family do we never spoke we just avoided each other, we went to the same parties but we never spoke and it was hard for me wife." DC talks about a father and son who fell out over the strike:

> So there were a lot of miners in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire who did go on strike and it caused splits among the families. Now you had the father who had more sense, went to work and I'd see them up Moorgreen pit, the father would tell me, walk through six pickets, but his son was on the picket line and spitting at his dad! Coz the young lad, he was full of beans and didn't understand the situation as much as his father did. And it caused, I've spoken to the young lad since, well he's not young, he says he was wrong and he never talked to his dad again and his dad died.

The overwhelming feeling was that the strike had changed the camaraderie and brotherhood of the miners and that the situation before the strike never returned. Only a small minority reported good relations between miners after the strike and it was also felt that by falling out the miners had given the Conservative government what it wanted and allowed them to destroy the mines and their communities.

10 Conclusion

Narratives can assist attempts to develop a coherent memory of the past and make sense of our lives. Although individual recollections can change (due to media influence for example), the discourse of our miners remains stable, even after forty years. They often recall the camaraderie in and around the mines, and the destruction of these relationships after the strike of 1984–85. Many of these themes have clearly been discussed before, often between miners. Such discourses can change memories, as the individual fills in fragmentary impressions with aspects of others' recollections. Therefore, many of the interviewees agree with each other and conclude that, for them, life changed after the

strike. However, the changes following the end of coal mining in the region were even more far-reaching than the strike, as communities were destroyed, and this probably had a profound influence on the individual as well as on the communal memory of the interviewees, which made the recollection of the camaraderie from their working lives even more poignant. Although the main focus of these interviews was on pit talk, the continuing importance of the strike and the camaraderie that formed part of life and community remained of utmost importance to these former miners. Concepts of identity can change throughout one's lifetime (Tarrow 2013, 142), and for many of these miners, the effect of the strike on camaraderie was difficult to discuss, as it affected the more nostalgic feeling of belonging which epitomised the sense of being a miner. In the same way, many avoided using the word "scab," although it features strongly in other representations of this time.

In a "community of memory" (Irwin-Zarecka 1994), individuals bond with others based on shared experiences. This affects many of the interviewees, who seem to have a 'rose-tinted' view of the past, specifically regarding the sense of camaraderie they experienced under the harsh working conditions. The interviews showed that all miners felt that there had been a very strong sense of camaraderie and brotherhood that epitomised life as a miner. For many, the strike destroyed such relations, and life was never the same. Even forty years after the strike, feelings of resentment and anger remained on both sides of the strike. However, it seems that for many, the strong sense of camaraderie and community which was at the heart of being a miner has remained, even after forty years. The use of these words signals the strong sense of affinity miners experience with each other and the sense that no one outside their community could understand this feeling of belonging together and relying on one another for their personal safety underground. It seems that "camaraderie" has a symbolic resonance (see Tarrow 2013, 194) that few other words have – it has come to mean what it is to be a miner and to belong to this group who understood the dangers underground and what it takes to survive.

Certain recollections are also very definitive, leaving little room for dialogue or disagreement. To quote Gildea's interviewees (2023, 368): "It's not going to go away" is followed up by "and we're not going to forgive either." The miners in these interviews are keen to remember the very strong camaraderie, but for many this was destroyed during the strike and pit closures. With "the pits gone" and "we all believed we were right," almost insurmountable words and unmoveable images are passed down the generations and forms of enmity seem to have become formulaic in their discourse. So much so that both sides – workers and strikers – are unlikely to be able to meet, never mind discuss their collective memory. Unless, of course, we give them a helping hand.

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