

# THE BIG HEWER

Broadcast 18 August 1961, repeated 24 January 1962

## Singers

Ewan MacColl  
Bert Lloyd  
Isla Cameron  
Louis Killen  
Ian Campbell  
Joe Higgins

## Musicians

Peggy Seeger guit+banjo  
Alf Edwards conc+oc+trom  
Jim Bray dbass  
Alfie Kahn harm+clar+tinwhis  
Bryan Daly guit  
Dave Swarbrick fid

## Named Speakers

Ben Davies  
Dick Beamish  
Jack Elliott  
Johnny (Handle) Pandrich  
Mr P Weekes  
Mrs Thomas  
Mrs Cummings  
Mr Pickering

Evan Williams  
Ernest Black  
Rees Elliott  
Mr Earl  
Mr J Williams  
Mrs Crowther  
Dr D (Doc) Thomas  
Mr Baker

## Text

1

When you hew a lump of coal, you know that you are the only one that's have seen it. You are the first one to see it. And there's a difference every day underground. You go today, you've got a prop in. You go tomorrow, that prop has broken.

A legend, told by the men of the coalfields of South Wales, the Midlands, Northumberland and Durham, and set into song by Ewan MacColl.

The Big Hewer.

As a boy, four five six year old, I remember my father talking about this legendary figure Temple - Temple, the big hewer. Whether he was real or purely legendary I never knew even to this day. Earl.

2

Out of the dirt and darkness I was born,  
    Go down.  
Out of the hard black coalface I was torn,  
    Go down.  
Kicked on the world and the earth split open,  
Crawled through a crack where the rock was broken,  
Burrowed a hole, away in the coal,  
    Go down.

Oh, that was Jackie Torr, from Derbyshire.

In a cradle of coal in the darkness I was laid,  
Go down.

Down in the dirt and darkness I was raised,  
Go down.

Cut me teeth on a five foot timber,  
Held up the roof with me little finger,  
Started me time, away in the mine,  
Go down.

Oh yes, you can find umpteen stories about Isaac Lewis in the anthracite.

On the day that I was born I was six foot tall,  
Go down.

And the very next day I learned the way to haul,  
Go down.

On the third day worked at board-and-pillar  
Worked on the fourth as a long wall filler,  
Getting me steam up, hewing the seam,  
Go down.

Yes, oh yes, this Towers well, he couldn't be beat this George Towers - Robert Towers - Bob Towers. My he was a big man. Could you imagine? He was 18 stone. No fat. No fat. Eighteen stone of man. What they call the County Durham Big Hewer. Like a machine when he was hewing, you could hear the pick pick pick pick as regular as that clock. Never used to seem ever to tire.

I'm the son of the son of the son of a collier's son,  
Go down.

Coal dust flows in the veins where the blood should run,  
Go down.

Five steel ribs and an iron backbone,  
Teeth that can bite through rock and black stone,  
Working me time, away in the mine,  
Go down.

When I see a miner I mean a chap whose roots... are right down through the earth.

I felt it was a great thing to be a miner, as a boy, to go down the pit and come up, and ee I felt that I was a brave man and all the rest of it.

What is it makes a young and a likely lad go down?  
Far from the light of day, what sends him underground?  
To win his bread in the dark of the mine,  
Where the rain never falls and the sun never shines,  
What makes a man go down?

As my old mother used to say to me, what's bred in the bone, you cannae knock out of the flesh.

That's all my father told me. Get on your toes and, and the manager is approaching you now. And if he asks your name reply sharply your name, and stand on your toes, show that you are tall and willing to work. And that's what my father advised me.

3

**Schooldays over, come on then John, time to be getting your pit boots on,  
On with your shart and moleskin trousers, time you was on your way,  
Time you was learning the pitman's job and earning the pitman's pay.**

I was 14 when I first went down the mine. November 5th, Guy Fawkes night, on a Monday.

**Come on then Jim, it's time to go, time you was working down below,  
Time to be handling a pick and shovel, you start at the pit today,  
Time you was learning the collier's job and earning a collier's pay.**

I was 12 when I left school. And as soon as I reached the age of 14 I went to the pit. The pit was the place.

**Come on then Dai, it's almost light, time you was off to the anthracite,  
The morning mist is in the valley, it's time you was on your way,  
Time you was learning the miner's job and earning a miner's pay.**

When I was a boy, we all thought of the mines. When I was in school, I used to parade wearing my long trousers, and parading with my, my naked lamp on the road in the night, as colliers - months before I had a job, you see. Oh yes.

**Come on then John.**

Why aye.

**Come on then Jim.**

Righto.

**Come on Dai.**

Yes bach.

**Off you go today, off to earn your pay in the mine lad.**

You know I'll never forget that day. Never will not as long as I live.

4

Now don't be late, you've got your bait, you've got your cold tea in the bottle, now you're every inch a miner.

My mother didn't want me to go to the pit.

You're a miner.

You're a pitman, you're a collier, you're a miner.

I hated it. I hated the first day, I...

Now let's have some of that pitman's swagger when you walk.

And let's have some of that real pitmatic when you talk.

I'll bet that you don't feel so spry,

Down in the darkness there inbye the Beaumont seam.

In a three-foot face of coal.

Starting at 14. Knowing that you're going to go down a big pit. It is a little bit frightening.

But you're away, you're bound below, and your pit boots ring and clatter as you go, making sparks fly.

You're on your way,

To the pit bank where men riding cages wait

Where the rusty cables lie,

Where the broken picks and shovels, where the heap of waste and rubble rises up against the sky.

To the pit bank. To the pyramid of slate.

Where the banksman gives and takes the signals at the gate.

Now off you go and punch the clock so just you wait there in the line.

Don't let 'em see you feeling scared.

Put your cap back in the rack and follow at the back of others as they cross the yard.

You'll soon be underground you're almost there.

Now to the token cabin get your lamp and check it that's your best friend in the mine.

Mind you always treat your lamp with care.

And it's still said today and I'll always say it, that the oil lamp is a miner's best friend. It'll never let him down.

5

You're at the pit bank. You're waiting for the cage to come. And take you down.  
To a world that you have never seen, go down.

The pits have a magic all of their own.

To a place they call the Beaumont seam, go down.

At last you can see it. I was going to see what lay below.

*Pit-bank noises, voices, whistle...*

There's the signal bell, now the cage is coming.  
To take you down with the men of the morning shift, all the different kinds of miners.  
There are hewers.  
And there are putters.  
And there are brushers there are bratticemen and cutters.  
There are hauliers and creeper lads and rappers.  
There are drawers there are benchmen there are strappers

*Voices...*

There are pillarmen and clippers there are trammers, wagon-tippers  
There are pulley-men a-going down the hole.  
There are timber men and strippers fitters shacklers and rippers  
All are miners and they help to get the coal.

Now it's into the cage and wait for the onsetter's ring lad.

The onsetter of course is generally a sour-faced bloke. He's got to be to control them all.

There are brakemen there are spragmen there's back-end and wagon-way-men  
There are firemen and stonemen there are heading-men and roadmen  
There's a bell-man and an overman a cog-man and a waterman  
All miners and they help to get the coal.

And the signal is rung, and the cage is away lads.  
There are lashers-on and fillers  
There are packers there are drillers  
There are deputies and hitchers and the dilly-bottom lad  
Hookers-on and tally drivers haulage lads and bogie-riders  
And the others  
From this day on these men will be your brothers.  
We're away!  
Go down!

6

Oh dear the experience to go down the pit in the, in the first instance. It was a terrific experience to me. I, I wasn't shaken or, or nervous at all, but excitement of it all. And my little oil lamp you know, put on the belt, and we were hoarded in this square cage, and I think it contained about ten people, or twelve. Down we'd go, the banksman would pull a lever and down the cage would drop.

**Down in the dark through the Pinchin seam,  
Through the Red Vein, through the Black Band seam.**

Everything seemed to close in on me. Could feel the drums in my ears just ringing, as though they was going to burst.

**Down through the Five-Quarter, Shield-Row and Brass-Thill,  
Maudlen and Low Main seam**

But, after you descend half way down the pit, the most peculiar feeling - you seem to be coming back up again. And I said 'Dhu', it's a feeling to go down. I realise what was happening now. Heavy cage was slowing slowing slowing and the pressure was coming against you.

**Down through the Soap the White, the Peacock  
Trig Loin and Lower Vein  
To the deep pit bottom.**

Oh dear complete new world. Strange world entirely, although it was well lit. Electric light at the pit bottom. But once we turned our backs on the pit bottom, and going into narrow places, now down into the darkness, then the experience comes so horrible and terrible. I was frightened now. I didn't know where I was going.

**You're going to a place in the earth where the hard rock heaves and boils.**

It boils out. As you open the road, so the road closes in again.

**You're going to the coalface where the Big Hewer sweats and toils.**

You can't visualise this seam like a mat stretching beneath the earth, layer of a cake. Till you can see it, and all the tunnels following you all over the pit. There's the seam it's always there.

And the smell of horse manure. That went through everything. I thought it was wonderful. It was common to everybody whether you were an old collier working your last day or a boy working your first.

**There's where the earth bears down on the four-foot spars.**

Wonder how long it took, all this earth, this thousand and odd feet, to get on top of that coal. Must have been a small place the Earth.

**There in the world that never saw sun or moon or stars.**

The silence in the pit - it's, it's like infinity, or the bottom of the ocean. It's, it's peaceful, and yet it, it's sometimes frightening. You could be driven to panic with it I think. You've never known absolute blackness. Always there's stars at night and there's always a moon. But there there's nothing. And you can feel this pressing on you, the darkness. You can feel this darkness.

**The world where a man is always a stranger,  
Where the miner works and lives with danger.**

You see you've got the smells and, you've got your luck, and you, you put your hands behind you, you'd feel the rough surface of the stone, you see, you feel the dust and the props, the bark that was on the props. You used to visualise things happening. In the blackness.

**Here is the place where the big hewer earns his pay, go down.  
Here is the place he battles with night and day, go down.  
Spits on his hands cracks rocks and boulders,  
Bears up the world on his own two shoulders,  
Digging a hole out, getting the coal, go down.**

There was much to learn you see. Specially in the case of a young boy, he wants to fill the shovel every time, and he wastes a lot of energy in filling the shovel, you see. Whereas, the old craftsmen used to teach us to take what was on the shovel, and find a way of a shovel to fill itself.

7

**Why aye I'm doon the pit, I'm working in the Beaumont.  
I'm the trapper that's the name they give the door boy.  
And it's a queer job, all on your tod,  
Just sitting watching the trams go by.**

You open the door, and this ghostly shape comes past, the horse, and he's shouting and you see your lamp go past.

And in the dark and away down it seems as if it's ooh hundreds of yards away.

And then you've got putting.

**Ah'm on me way inbye I'm working as a putter,  
Shifting tubs from flats and partings to the hewers  
They're light at the flat but coming back  
You'd swear each tub weighed a thousand tons.**

Of course, that brought up your muscles as well for face work, because putters began to grow huge leg muscles because, when you're pushing along past 12 hundredweights.

**Ten hours a day you're doon that hole,  
You're working coal you're breathing coal,  
You're talking coal you're dreaming coal,  
Now you're a miner!**

I think if I cut my fingers and it bled it would just come out black.

And the coal you've got the dirt and rock  
The tons and tons and tons you've shot  
Would stretch from here to China.  
Hauling, mauling, striving, driving,  
In the mad race, at the coal face,  
Work and sweat, that's all you get  
When you're a miner.

8

So now you know how the coal it is got,  
You're champion at drilling the hole,  
You're a dab hand at stacking, you're champion at packing  
The roof when you're shooting the coal,  
    It's the toil and the sweat wins the coal that you get  
    When you're working away in the hole.

You know how to hew and you know how to fill,  
Cut the skirting without any trouble,  
Set a good pair of gears and crawl on your ears  
And use both the pick and the shovel.

    If a roof or a wall sag and threaten to fall  
    Then you know how to move at the double.

The work it is hard and the wages are low,  
And the rises get smaller and fewer.  
If you want to keep eating  
You'll have to be beating  
The work of the Durham Big Hewer.  
    Then away with you man, and see if you can  
    Do the work of the Durham Big Hewer.

He kept himself for the job. Yes, yes. Pride in his work. Pride in his work. Big man. Phew, he was as good as two men, there's no doubt about that, he was as good as two men. He didn't even have to set the standard, the drilling standard, to drill a hole. He wouldn't set it between the top and the bottom. He'd stay with just his foot and hand to brace it. Man and a half.

When you're talking of skill, with the pick or the drill, he's the greatest the champion the chief.

He knows how to tell when the roof's going to fall  
Though the crack be as thin as a hair,  
When the odourless gas  
Comes along in a mass

**He can smell it before it is there.**

And that's the sort of thing that you look for in a mine. Any mine. It's a queer sort of feeling in... it's a danger do you see. The fear, that that you know it's going to happen.

**It's your only defence and they call it pit sense and your life may depend on it there.**

You hear a prop creak. And you, in your own mind you can see that little part just move that quarter of an inch. You know what's going to happen.

You're not working with a piece of land. You're working with the world.

But down the pit, you've got to have that in you to, to sense hidden dangers. You know full well that she can be a nasty bitch when she likes. She can be real nasty. She's just like an angry woman. She just throws her weight about. And if you're not sharp enough, and get out of the way of her, she'll kill you.

9

**Jimmy come back. Jimmy, come back.**

**It's a long way down. The mine is deep.  
Never relax man, there's danger.**

Watch yourself.

**The earth is sly, the flesh is weak.**

Hold it, hang on a minute. I think the top's working.

**Keep an eye on your roof and mind that you watch your timber.  
Watch for the creeping cracks where the roof is working.  
See where the strain is greatest. See where the strata's plainest.  
Inbye...**

Just get the hell out of there.

**Listen to the rock's dry whisper through the cracks.  
For the first faint rumble.**

You find that as the strain is put on everything, the top begins to trickle a bit and you get a few nodules of slack come down on top of your head, and then a few bits a bit bigger and then you begin to wonder how heavy the next lot's going to be. Whether it'll be a two pound chunk or a half a ton.

**Wait for the trickling slack in the faulted vein where the rock is crushed and crumbled,  
Ground to powder.**

Up in Durham when she's been tinkering on a bit. Bit stone been dropping. And I heard - that crack. The timber just been going like pistol shots.

**Watch where the floor swells up like a festered boil  
When the timbers crack.  
And the girders buckle and twist  
And the roof at your back is gathering might a threatening fist of rock  
The whole weight of the earth.**

**Come back! Come back!**

10

Yes. He was working next to me. And a huge stone came down, and killed him.

He was killed in the pit. He was killed on a Friday morning, on a Good Friday morning. I shall always remember. A stone fell on him. And they brought him home.

**By Clyde's bonny banks where I sadly did wander  
Among the pit heaps as evening drew nigh.**

I shall always remember he was killed in the pit.

**I spied a young woman all dressed in deep mourning  
A-weeping and wailing with many a sigh.**

Then they bring him in. I see him now. Brought him in and brought him on a stretcher on the floor, there. In his pit dirt. And the men bathing him like on the floor.

**Hyem from the mine in his pit dirt they bring him.  
The neighbours they stand by the door.  
The fire will gan oot and the bairns will gan hungry.  
He'll walk to the pit no more.**

I was under a fall when I was 16. Fall of stone, big fall it was too. I was lucky that time. Props started to crack and I made a dive to get out. The whole lot come on top of us. I was fast, by the legs. And old Jim Roberts, Yankee Jim, he come and pulled me out. Two minutes after they got me out, it closed as tight as a box.

**Many's the time I've sat by the fire, and thought how the coal is won.  
Waiting to hear his step at the door, when another day's work was done.  
Many's the time I've listened and trembled, to hear that warning bell,  
Dreading to hear that knock on the door, and dreading the news they might tell.**

But I couldn't stick that knock on the door. I think all miners' wives they live in a world of nerves.

They're black diamonds but bought at a price, oh, price of lives isn't it?

But a man that works down the pit, a miner. You know, it's a long way down as the saying is.

**It's a long way down. The mine is deep.  
Never relax man, there's danger.  
The earth is sly, the flesh is weak.**

I lost a good man.

11

And yet it's good to come from the pit. Specially after you've been working there, you're tired, and specially in the summer. You say to yourself, life's good. You really feel good to be alive.

Another thing of course in a mine community is that you must respect the capacity for beer. Very important. Every Saturday night at the Penny Wet on the wet beer of the counter, the faces propped up, the shots are fired, the coal's filled off and they get their belts bunked up and all the new chocks in. All on the wet beer of the counter.

**I can judge a shot of powder to a sixteenth of a grain.  
I can fill me sixteen tubs though the water falls like rain.  
And if you'd like to see me in the perpendicular vein,  
It's when I'm setting timber in the bar room.**

**In the bar room, in the bar room, oh that's where we congregate,  
To drill the holes and fill the coals and shovel back the slate,  
And for to do a job of work I am never late -  
That's providing that we have it in the bar room.**

12

**Three hundred years I hewed at the coal by hand, go down.  
In the pits of Durham and East Northumberland, go down.  
Been gassed and burned and blown asunder,  
Buried more times than I can number,  
Getting the coal, away in the hole, go down.**

**I've scabbled and picked at the face where the roof was low, go down.  
Crawled in the seams where only a mole could go, go down.  
In the thin-cut seams I've ripped and redded  
Where even the rats are born bow-legged,  
Winning the coal, away in the hole, go down.**

We had a cavil, I'll never forget this, for five years. Twenty two inches high, mark you. Used to measure the props from your elbow to your doubled-up fist. That was the height. Eighty yards

long, and you used to have to trail up and down it - it was wriggling, the swimming we used to call it, and if all the yards had been reckoned up that we've cut, we could have been from here to London.

**I've worked in the Hutton, the Plessey, the Brockwell seam, go down.  
The Bensham, the Busty, the Beaumont, the Marshall-Green, go down.  
I've lain on me back in the old Three Quarter  
Up to the chin in stinking water  
Hewing the coal, away in the hole, go down.**

With 15 inches of water. we're using alligators for ponies where I'm working.

I'd sooner have dust, or bad roof, anything, as water. All your clothes are wet, everything that you handle's wet. I think that's the worst thing in the pit. You cannot handle your tools properly. When they're stuck up with small coals, and it, eurgh. No you cannot work down the pit where there's water. Not properly.

**I'm leaving the North, it's time I was on my way, go down.  
Leaving the worked-out seams, they've had their day, go down.  
The anthracite is hard and shining -  
I'll try my hand at the hard rock mining,  
I'll dig me a hole, away in the coal, go down.**

And I would term the anthracite coal as a beacon of life. It's a beacon of light and life. It gives you the light, the colours, and it gives you that necessity which we call heat. 'tis a beacon of life.

13

**Down in the dark, through the Peacock seam,  
Through the Big Vein, through the Black Band seam.**

The Peacock, the Middle, and the Lower Vein, are the best anthracite veins in the world.

**Down through the Four Foot, the Cornish, the Nine Foot,  
The Bryn and the Welsh-Vein seams.**

Now the seams in South Wales crop from the surface. And there was very little need for capital to get into the seam. What was really needed was muscle and sweat.

But in the 1920s came machine cutting. That wasn't very acceptable to the workmen in the anthracite. And there was years of trouble and strife to get these machines working. The workmen had a natural fear of displacement of employment, and in those years it was so. The machines were put in, not so much to hew the coal better and cheaper, but to displace employment, and the men were very right in their fears.

**Times were bad and labour cheap.  
Women on the waste pits scrabbling for coal,**

**Cutters on the coal face, colliers on the dole.  
If you don't fight then you don't eat.**

We've had a record of militancy that has been born out of our struggles.

Now from 1926 almost to the 1930s it was terrible in this area. Ay, I was the only man working out of a street of houses. Forty houses. You daren't answer the bosses back. Because you know what's happened, there's plenty of men waiting for your job.

14

**In Durham and Northumberland I'm sorry for to say  
That hunger and starvation is increasing every day.**

And those were the conditions that men had to endure, it was just blooming filthy. You was treated almost like blooming animals.

**In every village in the Rhondda  
Children cry for want of meat.  
Throughout the land their fathers wander  
Singing for pennies in the street.**

I had a sister living in the valley at that time, and oh, what a sight was to see, the pride that was there and yet, they were on the verge of starvation.

All they had was their pride. And oftentimes where there was the greatest need there was the greater pride. And an unwillingness to go and seek assistance of any kind. The miner has always had the pride thing - he thinks, well if he can't make his living by the muscles of his arms and his legs, well he just doesn't want it.

That is the reason why miners are so militant in their own cause. They've been taught it from the cradle. I was taught at a very early age that it was like hitting out with a hammer of hate on the anvil of bitterness. Every knock had full power of hate, into it. You want to struggle for every penny that was coming to you.

***Onllwyn miners singing Sospan Fach.***

15

The miner has to possess that sense of humour. A glum face underground takes you nowhere, and the gloomier and the glummier you are, you've got to join in, with your wit, whatever you possess, showing that you are alive and that you are forgetting the outside issues.

I can't think of anything underground without the humour.

**We can work and we can fight, we can sing and tell a tale,**

**Whether we come from Durham or Northumberland or Wales.**

**Let the cage go down.**

**Come on and try the local brew, join with us and have a few,**

**St down and tell a tale or two, and if the story isn't true**

**It's neither here nor there**

**Let the cage go down, let the cage go down.**

So one of the overmen says just a minute Jack he says, I want to see thou. So Jack says what's tha want to see me about like? He says, have thou got some parsnips? In the garden? He says aye. Bye lad he says, pretty big 'uns. Now look Jack, he says, would thee mind takking them up like? Jack says why? Cos he says the roots is coming down that far they're coming down through the roadways in the pit, the ponies canna get past. Blackie.

An old mate of mine, Dai Maddy they called him, was driving a big horse in a low seam, in a low level. So when the fireman came around the top was very very hard, and the fireman said, well what you want to do is to cut a bit under his feet, so that the horse could go lower. So Dai looked at him and muttered something under his breath, and the fireman went on his way. Came past that way about an hour later, and he saw Dai banging like blazes at the top. He said what on earth are you doing there Dai? I told you to cut a bit under his feet. He said, look mate you can't kid me, he said, it's his ears are catching, not his feet.

**When Isaac Lewis passed away, what do you think they done?**

**Sold him off for anthracite at twenty pounds a ton.**

He had a good remedy for a bad roof, Isaac Lewis. He told the manager that he had a remedy. Leave the coal under it.

**Let the cage go down.**

**Come on and try the local brew, join with us and have a few,**

**St down and tell a tale or two, and if the story isn't true**

**It's neither here nor there.**

**Let the cage go down, let the cage go down.**

I worked in a pit in America. And just give you an idea of the size of it. The winding-up men. I went into the engine room, and he was fast asleep. So we woke him up. Good God, are you sleeping? There are men on the rope. He said, what day is it? Oh we said Tuesday. Oh it's all right he said, they're not due up till Thursday.

**Let the cage go down.**

**Come on and try local brew, join with us and have a few,**

**St down and tell a tale or two, and if the story isn't true**

**It's neither here nor there.**

**Let the cage go down, let the cage go down.**

Coal is a thing that's cost life to get. You may be holding a piece of coal in your hand, and turn round and say, I wonder how that coal was got. Was there any blood shed in getting that coal? Was there any man's life lost in it? And there's many a one in this country put a coal on the fire that there's been a man's life lost in it. You're not burning coal, you're burning blood.

There is a question of safety. There is a question of health.

**Ten hours a day you're down that hole.  
You're working coal, you're talking coal,  
You're eating coal, you're breathing coal.**

Dust.

It's always dusty.

The dust was so abnormal that you couldn't see each other. You were just feeling your way about.

Dust he had.

The curse of underground is the dust. Dust is the giant killer. But it doesn't strike all at once. But he likes his time. And he do takes his time, and he stealthily walks into your human system. Into your lungs. He is the real enemy, so minute in its form, yet so strong in its ravaging powers.

You can feel it getting into your eyes and your throat and you come out of the baths, you're blowing it out your nose, and spitting it out.

Terrible cough, wastes away.

I have seen victims of this terrible curse, this dust, I've seen victims of it, reduced to nothing. Couldn't breathe - no lungs to breathe. Only the beating of the heart, waiting for the time to be called away.

He couldn't walk any more than ten yards, and he had to stop for breath. Pitiful to watch him. Heaving sighs. Ten yards.

You can get up in the morning when the fog's thick and heavy. And your mind flashes back to old Tom Powell, old Bill Jones, old Jack Johnson, old Dave Jones, and say well, wonder how old Tom Powell feels this morning. You know bloody well how he feels. He's got a concrete slab of coal round his bloody inside. That's what he's got. He's probably a chap of sixty year old, he's worked down the pit since he was 15 year old, 12 year old, 13 year old. That's coal dust that he's inhaled while he worked down there. And he's worked every day, for five days a week, ten hours a day. He's got inside his lungs a good tombstone. Of solid coal dust.

He died from dust.

When we recorded in this coalfield, as we did last year, over 300 deaths from pneumoconiosis, well

we say if all the, these our comrades died in one day, then you'd get the press of Fleet Street with its headlines, major disaster, you'd get Lord Mayor's funds and what have you, to assist the widows and the dependents. But because they die separately in their own little cottages, just surrounded by their own little families, then there's no press lines, no Lord Mayor's funds, and no sensation.

And there is no compensation for it. No compensation can be paid for such a thing as this. Because it is beyond repair. No money will repair it. And it have destroyed an army of the miners.

My husband died from dust. Silicosis.

Death from the dust. It is a legacy from the past, but now we have to run the mines, first thing, they must be safe.

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Today, safety is the prime factor in the working of a mine. It's a very costly business, it's costly in manpower and equipment.

**Down in the mine, in the Peacock seam,  
In the Big Vein, in the Trigloin seams,  
Down in the Four-Foot, the Blackband, the Nine-Foot,  
They're working with new machines.**

It was a novelty to me. I'd never seen a thing like it before. But eventually the day arrived when the cutter came there, and the conveyors. The whole paraphernalia arrived in trams down into the pit, and was erected, lined up, and the cutter a-dragging itself, seems to be moving on its own. Making its place into this small little seam. And dragging itself along. And once it was put into action to cut the coal, it was coming down, down slowly and cutting, the coal until everything was boiling out, like a wave from a sea. Everything was loose and that's all you had to do, was to fill this coal into the conveyor which was moving behind you, gliding along, taking your quota along with it, and we were there about 19 men.

**There are changes on the way,  
Underground, underground,  
You can see them every day,  
Underground.  
There are cutters at the face and they're speeding up the pace,  
And you'd hardly know the place  
Underground, underground.  
You'd hardly know the place underground.**

**Bob Temple he is there,  
In the mines, in the mines,  
In the coalfields everywhere,  
In the mines.  
He is still the same Big Hewer with the courage to endure,**

**And he drives a Meco-moore  
In the mines, in the mines.  
And he drives a Meco-moore in the mines.**

I think what people forget very often when they talk of coal mining. They seem to think of it as a factory you can lock up at night and leave for the weekend. Well it isn't that of course. The whole thing is moving all the time. A coalface moves on all the time. All this expensive machinery has to be moved forward at four feet six or five feet per day. A mine breathes, it changes all the time. The ground is moving all the time, you can hear it moving. Especially in the deeper mines. That's the sort of factory you're dealing with.

**For the men who win the coal,  
Better days, better days,  
Gone the margarine and dole,  
Better days  
There's still dirt and toil and sweat, and the coal's still hard to get,  
And there's dangers with us yet, there's better days, better days.  
And we'll beat the danger yet, better days.**

To compare the old days to the present day working, like changing two worlds. Or if you'd like to compare a miner, I'd say in the old days he was a mole groping in the dark, burrowing in complete darkness. But today by comparison he's like a peacock able to see almost next to daylight. And he's very proud of himself, as proud as that peacock.

Oh, it's different altogether. The conditions are better, the pay conditions, the working conditions are different, but mind it, they're not what I'd say soft or owt like that, it's still the pit.

18

Deep down in a man's heart he feels he loves it, he loves the earth. Everything that you use in this world comes from the earth. Your own self comes from the earth. The water you drink comes from the earth. The food you eat, in some shape or form, the tools you use, the wood you use, the mats you use, the chairs you sit on, they all come from the earth. When you die, you go back there.

**I've travelled east, and I've travelled west,  
From the Rhondda to Kirkcaldy,  
Winning my bread in the dark of the mine,  
Working as a collier laddie.**

I think a good pit is like a good woman. You feel that you owe an obligation to both. It's been my life's love. To serve the men that work in the pit and to mix with them, because I find that they are real men.

**I've worked me shift, deep mines and drifts,  
And I've starved in Tonypandy.  
I've seen men die in the dark inbye.**

**Working as a collier laddie.**

It's man and nature, that's what it is. You're down there, you've hewn it out, your race has hewn it out, and nature's round you all the time. It's like this master figure, only instead of a person, it's Nature.

**I'm leaving the western pits, I'm on my way,**

**Go down.**

**To the frontier where the North Sea meets the sky,**

**Where the seams of virgin coal lie band under shining band,**

**And these two hands that hewed a billion tons of coal under valleys, fields and mountains,**

**Will hew again and again and again under salt sea sands**

**And reap a bumper harvest planted these twenty million years.**

You're not working with a piece of land, you're working with the world.

Whether he was real, or purely legendary, I never knew, even to this day.

**Out of the dirt and darkness I was born,**

**Go down.**

**Out of the hard black coalface I was torn,**

**Go down.**

**Lived in the shade of the high pit heap,**

**I'm still down there where the seams are deep**

**A-digging the coal, away in the hole, go down.**