

# NOTES

## SLADE-NAMES IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

### INTRODUCTION

There are no major settlement names in Buckinghamshire containing the element *slade* (OE *slæd*), but it appears in substantial numbers of field- and minor topographical names. It survives in local use to the present day. This note examines what links the various slade-names, geographically and over time. The creation of a field-name database is of course a work in progress, and any conclusions may be subject to alteration in the light of future research.

Generally interpreted as “valley”, slade has several meanings, although the senses are related. OE *slæd* (pronounced ‘slad’ with a short ‘a’) seems to have few Continental Germanic cognates. The OED records modern dialect equivalents in Norwegian, ‘slope, hollow’, Danish ‘piece of level ground’ and Westphalian ‘dell, ravine’.<sup>1</sup> The early Germanic word *\*slada/sleda* meaning ‘valley, gorge’ is at the root of the latter, but, as in England, seems to give rise to minor names.<sup>2</sup> There seem to be few settlement-names containing *slæd*, and they occur from Westmorland to Kent.<sup>3</sup> (Note that Linslade is *not* an example of such a name, deriving from OE *hlinc, gelād* ‘passage/path by the slope/hill’.) The boundary clauses of Anglo-Saxon charters contain a scatter of examples, often in simplex form, which have mostly been interpreted as ‘valley’ by their editors. The only local example is *Ebbeslade* in the bounds of Upper Winchendon, which incorporates the personal-name *Æbbe/Æbba*.<sup>4</sup> It lies on low ground next to the river Thame, where the sense ‘marshy ground’ seems appropriate.

A.H. Smith appears to ascribe the meaning ‘valley’ to *slæd* in pre-Conquest sources.<sup>5</sup> Examples from Anglo-Saxon charters in nearby counties include *water slæd, morsled, hrysc slæd* and *hreod slæd* (respectively water, marsh, rush and reed slade).<sup>6</sup> Following the OED, Smith says

that Middle and Modern English names containing *slad* and *slade* (from OE nominative singular and oblique cases, especially the dative) have a variety of meanings, including ‘low, flat marshy ground’, ‘breadth of greensward in ploughed land’, ‘broad strip of greensward between woods, generally in a valley’. While this list includes all of the senses of ‘slade’ as found in a variety of countries, it does not indicate why this element was chosen in any particular location instead of another from the extensive corpus of name-forming words.

Margaret Gelling pioneered the detailed study of the landscape significance of place-names, and suggested that a possible original meaning of *slæd* may have been a short valley lacking the bowl-shaped end of a *cumb* or a *hop*.<sup>7</sup> She subsequently modified this somewhat to take account of the various known meanings of *slæd* giving the meaning as ‘flat-, especially wet-bottomed valleys’, qualifying this by saying that it had been used in OE and modern times for a dry valley.<sup>8</sup>

To summarise, most place-name scholars seem to have followed the evidence of the charters and favoured an original meaning of ‘valley’ of whatever kind, assigning the alternative meanings to later periods. It remains to see what can be gleaned from a study of Buckinghamshire slade-names.

### SLADES IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Discounting duplicated references, 287 slade-names have so far been recorded in 112 parishes, 55% of the total. More names will be added, so this must be regarded as an interim statement, and its conclusions tentative. The data already reveal some interesting patterns. Far from being uniformly distributed across the county, these names display a tendency to cluster in a certain parishes.

Half of the parishes where slade occurs have a single example, whereas twenty-two have two slade-names and eighteen three or four. Together,

they represent 86% of parishes with such names, but only 56% of slades. The remaining parishes have between five and thirteen examples. It should be noted that there is some evidence that slade-names changed over time, and that several slade field-names may refer to the same linear feature in the landscape. The figures below refer to field-names recorded over long periods, and not to the number of valley features in what are often quite small parishes. For example, Gutter Slade in Great Linford appears on a map of 1641, but is replaced by Stanton Slade in 1678. Both refer to the valley of the Stanton Brook along the western boundary.<sup>9</sup>

Slades	Parishes
5	Loughton, Padbury, Soulbury
6	Maids Moreton, Shenley Church End, Sherington, Wolverton
7	Shalstone, Swanbourne
8	Bradwell, Stewkley
9	Mursley
11	Great Linford, Thornborough, Westbury
13	Newton Longville

All of these parishes lie in the Vale of Aylesbury, many in the far north of the county in the Great Ouse basin. Indeed, only eleven parishes in the Chiltern region and six on the Thames terraces in south-east Buckinghamshire have slade-names so far, totalling sixteen and seven, together comprising only 15% of parishes and 8% of slades (Fig. 1). Many slade-names in strip-parishes whose territory straddles the Chilterns and the Vale lie in the latter; only a handful are on the chalk. Old English *slæd* and its Middle and Modern English successors are, like many name-forming elements, common but not ubiquitous, suggesting that the element relates to features of a specific kind.

Although the collection of field-names will always be a work in progress, it is nevertheless useful to examine the chronology of names in terms of their earliest record. Many have occurred only once or twice, and many have been lost as a result of enclosure, building development and so on. Equally, a name may have been in existence for centuries before appearing in the written record.

Date	Number	Date	Number
1200–1300	62	1601–1700	61
1301–1400	20	1701–1800	34
1401–1500	3	1801–1900	48
1501–1600	31	1901–1980	28

*Slade* continues to be current as a topographical name in Buckinghamshire. The large number of names occurring in the thirteenth century reflects the fact that detailed manorial records first appear at that time. The upsurge in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is caused mainly by the tithe surveys and maps, while most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century examples are based on oral testimony collected by the County Museum Archaeological Group in the 1970s and early-1980s.

Eighty-two slade-names (29%) in sixty-two parishes appear in simplex form (*i.e.* Slade, The Slade), with no qualifying element, together with a few in the form Sladmore, rather than Morslade. There are seventeen Waterslade names (6% of the total), all but three of them simplex in form. In both cases, examples occur throughout the period 1200–1980, but with a marked tendency to increase after 1600, and especially after 1800. Of the Slade-only names, thirty-four appear purely as Slade, half of them preceded by “The”. Eleven are distinguished by a variety of prefixes, such as Great, Upper, Lower.

None of the place-name elements used to qualify slade in the remaining examples occur frequently. The most common are “rush” (6), “foul well/spring”, “long”, “green” and “moor [marsh]” (4 each). There are three each of Marsh and Mill Slades. Fourteen slades refer to places other than the parish where they are situated, some, but not all on a boundary. There is a handful of more unusual names: *cotman* (Bletchley) refers to a class of medieval cottager, though it is not on record until 1807; *tunstall* (Chicheley, 1350) is an Old English word denoting a settlement site;<sup>10</sup> *inlond* in Salden (Mursley parish, c.1252) denoting the ‘inner’ part of an estate (cf. *demesne*), often privileged.<sup>11</sup> OE *port* (Bradwell and Maids Moreton) refers to the local market towns of Newport Pagnell and Buckingham respectively.<sup>12</sup> Generally, personal-names are rare in slade-names, with only nine examples, of which three are OE in origin: Wulfhere in Maids Moreton, Ælfgar in Thornborough, Æbbe/Æbba in Upper Winchedon and Ludewyn in Boarstall. *Segelowslade* (Great

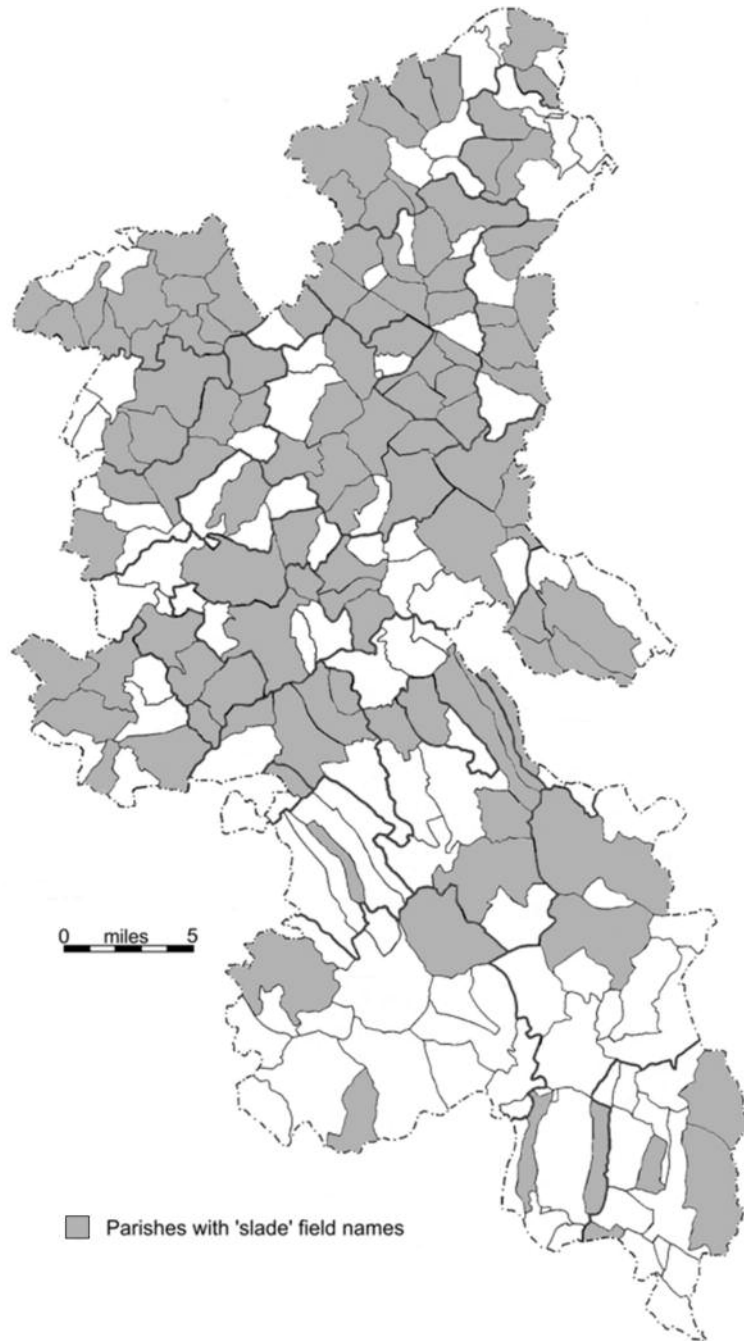


FIGURE 1 Distribution of 'slade' field names in Buckinghamshire

Linford, 1349), refers to the mound in central Milton Keynes that was the meeting-place of Secklow Hundred. It may contain the name \**Secgga* or OE *secg* ‘warrior.’<sup>13</sup> *Serlohweslade* (Stewkley, 1203), is a similar name, whose origin is unclear. Priestslade in Radclive (1639) refers to glebe land.

The precise location of the many slade-names recorded prior to 1600 can only be identified if the name survives into the era of maps. To date, eighty-nine slade-names can be located (31% of the total), thirteen dating 1970–80. In some cases, two or more fields with slade-names relate to the same landscape feature, for example in Westbury, Thornborough and Winslow. Seventy-seven names (86%) refer to valleys, many of them shallow features. Although many contain streams, under-draining since 1800 has left many apparently dry. The prevalent meaning of *slæd*/*slade* in Buckinghamshire is evidently ‘valley’. Some display the bowl-shaped end cited by Margaret Gelling (note 7). Most slades are minor, side valleys, containing some of the multitude of minor tributaries found in the basins of the Great Ouse and upper Thame.

Of the twelve slade-names not obviously related to valleys, most occupy localised flat areas in the areas where surface drainage is often poor, and where ‘hollow’, ‘piece of level ground’, ‘greensward’ is appropriate. At Eton and Ickford, field-names in slade are immediately next to major watercourses.

## CONCLUSION

The corpus of slade-names so far collected in connection with the field-name database for Buckinghamshire are both geographically concentrated and predominantly related to valley features on minor streams. They are pre-eminently found north of the Chiltern escarpment. Their distribution is not, however, uniform, and many parishes have yet to provide an example. Conversely, several parishes

contain clusters of these names, by no means all related to the same stream. Localised fashions in field naming are not uncommon, but it is clear that local people have understood from at least the twelfth century to the present day, those landscape features to which *slæd*/*slade* applied.

Keith Bailey

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11. R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (Leicester, 1997), chapters 2 & 3 for a full discussion of this complex subject.
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# LAY RECTORSHIPS – WHERE THE PAST CATCHES UP WITH THE PRESENT

The office of ‘lay rector’ is an historical relic which has tended – until recently – to be of academic interest, unlikely to impact on the lives of the current generation. But this is about to change. Because, unexpectedly, the rather anomalous position of lay rectors has become a potentially significant liability.

The position of lay rectors in England and Wales derives from the medieval past, when Rectors of churches who benefited from endowments of land and the right to collect tithes within their parish were responsible for the upkeep of their church chancels, while the parishioners were responsible for the upkeep of the rest of the church. This position continued for many centuries and applied in about 5,200 parishes wherever ecclesiastical Rectors had land and a church with a chancel.

In almost all cases Rectors of parishes today no longer hold their ancient rectorial land. Most tithes were commuted to a rent charge by the 19<sup>th</sup> century and any remaining charges were finally abolished in 1977. Over the years their land has been transferred to the local diocese and Rectors were given a stipend in place of the income it generated. And, generally, the dioceses have then sold the land to lay people.

But this change of ownership has not, in law, removed the chancel repair liability attached to the land. The legal position was clarified by the *Chancel Repairs Act 1932*. The new owners (‘lay rectors’) have often inherited the liability formerly held by their predecessors (‘ecclesiastical Rectors’) to pay for the upkeep of the chancel of the church.

The most frequent examples arise where prior to the Reformation medieval monastic orders acquired the right to appoint clergy; they were also able to ‘appropriate’ the Rector’s income, installing a Vicar instead. The Vicar often kept only the ‘small tithes’ and was expected to perform the Rector’s pastoral functions with a smaller stipend. When Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries these ‘Impropriate Rectories’ became Crown property, much of which was given or sold over the next century to the higher clergy (bishops and deans), to

university colleges, but mainly to laymen. Hence land and tithes that had existed to support the Rector fell into lay hands, but their origins were not forgotten.

It is less clear as to whether a chancel repair liability exists in cases where ecclesiastical Rectors disposed of or exchanged their land after the Reformation but prior to the early twentieth century. The Law Commission’s Report of 1985 stated that it was unclear as to whether a chancel repair liability would attach to such former rectorial land.

Many potential lay rectors may be unaware of their position. In most cases they could have tried to check the legal position when they acquired the former church property, but in many cases they or their solicitors failed to carry out this check or, if they did, failed to establish the true position. It has not always been easy to establish which land counts as former church land or whether tithes were paid in a parish, although with research this can generally be established.

In 2003 the House of Lords dismissed an appeal from a Mr and Mrs Wallbank against an assessment for £100,000 made by their local Parochial Church Council (PCC). The nature of their appeal hinged on whether the charge was compatible with the *Human Rights Act 1998*; the Lords found that it was.

The court expressed concern about the impact of the Act, describing the situation as an anachronistic and even capricious area of property law, and suggested that it should be reformed. However nothing has since been done to change the legal position.

But in 2013 a legal deadline will be reached – which is bringing this historical anomaly firmly into the present. Under the *Land Registration Act 2002* PCCs have until 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013 to register a caution at the Land Registry against land which they believe carries a chancel repair liability.

This puts PCCs in an invidious position. Many are struggling to raise funds for repairs, for which their main source is voluntary donations within their parishes. PCC members are trustees under Charity law and must seek to do their best for their

church – which includes the collection of any liable payments that may be due to the parish.

If a lay rectorship is registered and leads to a charge most lay rectors will certainly find this at best unwelcome and at worst impossible to pay. Repairs to ancient buildings tend to be expensive. Even without a charge, the uncertain liability may reduce the value of their property or make it difficult to sell.

Some property owners have taken out insurance to cover against this possible liability, although in most cases insurance has been offered only when the insurer was fairly confident that no liability existed.

In the 2003 House of Lords judgment it was noted by Lord Scott that there may be circumstances where a PCC may properly not seek to enforce a liability; for example if this would cause

excessive hardship or damage the mission of the church in the parish.

PCCs, concerned at the ‘random’ nature of the charges – church repairs are difficult to predict and their costs difficult to estimate in advance – and their impact on individual parish members, have the difficult task of weighing these matters in what are often likely to be stressful circumstances affecting neighbours.

- This is an arcane area of law which emanates from a period when society and the church were very different from today. This brief Note should not be taken in any way as being legally authoritative in an area where the law is in many cases uncertain.

*Jeremy Howarth*

# MY LIFE AS A HEWER OF COAL!

## 1944–1948

*Editors' note: The following account of Alan Dell's time as a Bevin Boy during World War II was submitted to Records after his death in January 2012. Although not connected in any way with Buckinghamshire, it is of interest as one young man's account of his experiences in a part of the story of the war that has been largely untold until fairly recent times. In addition, the Editors have agreed to include it as a posthumous tribute to a much-loved and respected member of the Society.*

It is now 65 years ago that I joined a group of young men in their late teens at Paddington Station en route to a new life within the coalfields of South Wales. I, along with forty-eight thousand others between 1943 and 1948, had been chosen by ballot to become one of the lost generation known as Bevin Boys, for it has only been in the last ten years or so that their very existence has been acknowledged and partially appreciated.

Although the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War in Europe was then only six months away, the shortage of manpower in the pits had been a growing worry to the authorities. Many younger coal miners had taken the opportunity of joining the forces or seeking better-paid war work elsewhere. Indeed, some had been called up themselves before the consequences of this major mistake by the Government had been appreciated.

Teenagers, as we now call them, had been “encouraged” to join a cadet force of one kind or another. I had been a Boy Scout and this was also considered to be a worthwhile movement prior to joining the forces but now, after almost four years of war, the call-up of youth had been brought to a fine art. At seventeen and thirty-nine weeks, registration took place, which was coupled with a medical. If passed fit, all was ready for a call up exactly on attaining eighteen years of age.

All I recall, the medical was a puzzling commotion with a bulky boy shouting that he wanted some privacy and wasn't going to undress along with all the others. He was swiftly hustled away into a back room. For many years I wondered why he was mak-

ing such a fuss but now think perhaps he was trying to hide the fact that he was missing a vital piece of evidence, so to speak. I never did to this day know why men were told to cough during a particular part of a medical; I had led a very sheltered life up to then, as subsequent events were to prove.

At the interview, before a portly red-faced army officer, he asked what were my hobbies “Walking and hiking”, I replied. What a brilliant answer! I cowered at the gleam in his eye, as he no doubt thought, “the Infantry for him!” I was just another number and that, in retrospect, was my downfall, so to speak, for the ballot was said to have taken place each month by the simple method of the extraction of two numbers, one to ten, from a bowler hat at the Ministry of Labour. If either of those two digits coincided with the last number given at registration, compulsory direction into the mining industry followed.

The journey from Paddington to South Wales seemed unending. After changing trains at Newport, the journey to Oakdale, the training colliery for South Wales, continued via the famous now-demolished Crumlin viaduct. The four weeks' instruction was divided between lectures, physical training, surface work and visits underground; accommodation was in a hostel. Many of the lectures concentrated on how coal was formed in the year dot but little on how it was extracted; surely the whole point of the exercise. The so-called surface work consisted of shovelling one pile of slack coal to an adjacent one. At least we had the opportunity of getting to know one end of a shovel from the other. About week four came the dreaded first descent “down the ‘ole” as the song the lads sang had it and the full extend of what was to come was revealed. I never became reconciled to that first plunge downward and I have never recited the Lord's Prayer to myself so many times in the three or so years, and well over five, and nearer six, hundred days I worked below. The cage was usually packed with many dozens of men and fell like a proverbial stone into the void. It was little consolation to be told that the descent and ascent was

slowed down when the workers were involved compared with the speed with which coal was raised.

At the end of the training period, a choice of a pit within the area was offered and I opted for one with a pithead bath. This was Markham in the Sirhowy valley, about five miles south of Tredegar at the head of the valley, which is not to be confused with Margam, a steel town near Port Talbot, Neath.

To those who do not know the area, the valleys in South Wales run like the inverted fingers of a hand, from the high Brecon Beacons to the north down to the plain on which the cities of Newport and Cardiff stand on the estuary of the river Severn. Communication both by road, and at that time by rail, ran north to south down the valleys but there was very little movement possible across to the next valley, east and west, other than by walking: the roads were, with some exceptions, very little more than mountain tracks. This led to a certain amount of isolation within communities and the Welsh language was not universally spoken in this part of what was then Monmouthshire (now Gwent), as it was in other valleys of South Wales.

There were strangely English sounding names as well, which appeared to be somewhat incongruous to the newcomer, amongst which were Blackwood, Oakdale, Charlestown, Crosskeys, Newbridge, Hollybush, and Rock. We could cope with Bryn and Mawr but were fooled when it came to Ynysddu lower down the Sirhowy valley.

I can honestly say that, in the three years in South Wales, I only met one person amongst my fellow workers who was positively obnoxious to me and I coped with that by keeping out of his way. I soon learned not to be too much of what, in their eyes, was a toff. Naturally quietly spoken, I blush now to admit that I had what were gentlemanly manners. After all, I had been in branch banking for over two years prior to being called to serve the King, even if he was only Old King Coal, and it would hardly have been seemly or indeed wise to have addressed customers other than in a courteous manner. Abusive or foul language was unknown to my family. I can only recall being sworn at once by my father, and this was when I once provoked him beyond measure and thoroughly deserved it. However, I am sure he would have been used to hearing Anglo Saxon being spoken in the factory in which he worked all his life.

I am beginning to sound as if I was a teenage Little Lord Fontleroy; far from it. But I had led what

might be called a sheltered home life, although two and a half years of evacuation had generated a certain independence away from hearth and home.

Miners were generally very sympathetic towards the Bevin Boys. They were reconciled, albeit reluctantly, to their lot in life; after all they had NATIONALISATION to look forward to, when all their troubles would be over and the bosses in their present shape and form would be banished for ever from their lives. This promise of El Dorado had been fed to them over many generations by well meaning politicians, and the mistrust between the miners and their employees had been built up, from an outsider's viewpoint, to an extraordinary degree; no one trusted each other and, while not wishing to dwell on this to any great degree all these years later, I am sure that the miners had experienced the wily ways of their employers in the past and that was at the root of this mistrust. It did form part of daily life in the pit and has to be mentioned to give a balanced view of the times as I saw it.

Everything relating to production, and consequently payment, had to be verified by both sides. In other words, a union official was present during every stage of the proceedings to check that there was no possible discrepancy or argument as the trams of filled coal went over the weigh-bridge at the pit head. The same applied to all additional work undertaken below; every pit prop inserted to support to the roof where coal had been extracted was paid for and, once a week, the colliery and union officials came along to note down what a particular worker had done. Because one wooden pit prop looks very much like another, and once recorded could hardly be identified again, a marker was used on it. This took the form of a hand-held scraper or scarab that cut deep into the bark of the prop and could not be removed or obliterated. Any attempt to do so, usually by rubbing coal dust into the marks, was a disciplinary matter and if proved, resulted in dismissal.

Another offence, resulting in a similar fate, was that of smoking underground, which was completely banned for obvious reasons. Consequently a few men chewed tobacco but, unlike the saloons in all good Westerns, there were no spittoons to get rid of the unwanted surplus and sometimes... I will say no more! Anyone found with matches about their person was also dealt with very severely. Tobacco itself was not banned, as I have said, but matches were. There were occasional surprise spot searches of men at the bottom of the pit as they



stepped off the cage at the beginning of a shift. This was again a joint effort by both sets of officials, supposedly to avoid any subsequent dispute. It was undertaken at the pit bottom for if contraband (as it was cryptically called) was found on a person before going underground, it could be argued that he was about to throw the matches away or had forgotten he had any with him. I have no knowledge as to whether alcohol in any shape or form was also treated as contraband, but I am sure that it was.

The much-vaunted El Dorado took place on the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1947; the first day of the year was not then a holiday. All those on the early shift gathered at the pithead to witness the raising of the blue National Coal Board flag with much rejoicing and speech making from those present. The hated managers and their toady hangers-on would be cast out for evermore and the mine would belong to the workers. In fact what happened was that the managers and over-men (the equivalent to foremen in other organisations), instead of being employed by the various coal companies, became the employees of the Board from day one. This was a nasty shock and disappointment to many who had hoped to see changes, but was the only practical outcome of nationalisation. Who could run and manage the place, other than those who had previously done so? It was many months before any changes, however small, came about, but hopefully a better spirit of co-operation was heralded on that cold January morning.

I return to the question of work itself. I have read quite recently that Bevin Boys were never at the coal-face, but were employed below in other ways including haulage. This was not my experience, for on my very first day I joined a man whose name was Glyn, as his assistant. I should explain that there were two ways of earning a living in this particular pit which was still working with picks and shovels with pit ponies collecting the trams of coal.

There was a minimum wage (the Min) functioning of £5 a week for men and £3.50 for boys (under 21) and clearly no one was going to work themselves to a standstill for this sort of wage. This meant that, provided the men were at their place of work and appeared to be working and filling one tram of coal a day, the minimum had been attained. There was, of course, other essential work that had to be done, such as filling up the void from where the coal had been taken with stone brought from above and shoring-up the roof as the coal face

advanced; certainly no one exerted themselves too much on the “Min”. On the other hand, those who wanted to earn more on piece work, either for holidays or at Christmas time, aimed to turn out vastly more than one tram of coal a day and made sure that everyone knew and co-operated; a quick turn-round was essential in such cases. The haulier, with an empty tram, had to be on hand and was then required to remove the filled one as soon as possible. Normally there was a long wait for the removal of coal out of the workplace but not so if the collier was “having a go.” Then they undoubtedly earned their piecework, although this was between the collier and the management. I never knew the going rate for the extra coal hewed by the butty, as the boy was called. He was only rewarded over and above his “min” for the extra work as the collier decided.

The pit in which I worked those three years operated a stall and heading method of production. A heading, a single passage, was driven into the coal-face, the roof being supported by pit props and a tramway laid down. Off the heading subsidiary stalls or passages were driven into the seams of coal, and were then developed in the same way. As the coal was extracted, the space left by its removal was filled up with stone, the roof supported at intervals, and the tramlines extended accordingly. Thus the coal-face was moved forward by extraction at a uniform rate, with men working on either side at regular intervals, but within their own patch.

Tools were not carried to and from work (none of this “Hey! Ho! Off to work, we go”, lark) but were left duly locked together on site. They consisted of picks, shovels, sledge-hammers and metal wedges, the latter being used to prise out coal which was too hard to deal with in any other way. Very infrequently a charge would be used; clearly not dynamite, which would have brought the whole place down, but a carbon-based explosive of some kind.

I have talked about the use of pit ponies, a subject that has always brought a tear to the eyes of the sentimental English bourgeoisie. Ponies were still being used in the 1940s, and were looked after by hauliers who were in many ways very different from the average miner and consequently highly thought of by all concerned – the men not the ponies! They would not go with their animal into any place of work that was not completely free of obstruction. The ponies wore large collars that determined whether the tunnel or passage was high enough for them to pass along. If the collar rubbed

in any way against the roof, it became a no-go area for the pony and his handler until some of the roof had been chipped away.

Once down below, did the ponies ever again see the light of day? The pits closed annually for two weeks' maintenance and I understand that at one time the ponies stabled below were brought to the surface for their holiday. It seems that the taste of freedom was too much for some of them and they were very hard to control once they were back at work. Consequently some remained housed in their underground stables all their working lives. Pass the tissues around, please.

Most coal mines worked three shifts. Where coal cutting machinery was installed, work consisted of cutting the coal, shovelling it on to a moving conveyor belt, supporting and packing the void left where the coal had been extracted and finally moving the conveyor belt forward, all in 24 hours. Then the operation would start all over again. As I never worked in such places it was always the morning shift for me. This meant rising just before five and snatching a quick cup of tea and a bite to eat before catching the bus for the three or so miles to the pit. The pithead baths were arranged so that one came in ordinary clothes and deposited them in a numbered locker. Then one walked with towel and soap and nothing else, apart from one's snap box and the locker key, through the baths themselves into the dirty locker section where one dressed in working clothes. When the shift was over the process was reversed with a shower before moving on to the "clean side."

Most men appreciated this arrangement so that their working lives could be divorced from the grime of the job, but there were a few of the older generation who either by habit or personal sensibility within a communal bath, preferred to continue the age-old practice of bathing at home. This small minority had to travel on transport set aside for them. Carriages on the workman's trains had wooden seats with no upholstery to be dirtied: similarly, special buses were retained for such journeys. Men in their working clothes were only allowed to travel on the regular carriage bus service with the agreement of the conductor, and they always had to stand; nor were they welcomed there by the average passenger.

On the few occasions I missed the bus and had to travel by train to work, the carriages were of particular interest. They were very ancient and had

previously been used on a LMS London line. So, apart from the fading photographs of West-Country beauty spots that adorned the carriage walls, which in themselves seemed most incongruous, there was a map of the railway line, which led out to the north-west London suburbs with which I was well acquainted. I felt quite at home travelling in these carriages, even if their lighting was still by gas!

Once dressed for work there was a long walk from the baths towards the pit itself. Each miner was issued with a numbered metal disk which, at the beginning of each shift, was exchanged for a lamp which had been charging in the lamp shed until it was needed. It had a certain life but would go back on charge when handed in at the end of the shift, when the identity tag would be returned. The tag also served as a tally of who was down below at any one time; an important factor in the event of an emergency.

Work started on the morning shift at 7am and men were expected to be at their places of work by this time. Half an hour was allocated between 6 and 6.30 as the men were lowered to the bottom of the shaft with another half an hour allowed actually working to the work place. There was always a crush of bodies as late-comers tried to get on the last few cages descending, for there was a very strict rule that no one could get below after this deadline. All pleading to be allowed down was to no avail, even if only a couple of minutes after "last winding" had been called, and those left were sent home without pay. The obvious answer was not to leave it so late, but human nature being what it is, someone had to be last. The other reason for this strict rule was that walking along the underground passages "after hours", so to speak, could be dangerous, as traffic to and from the pit bottom was incessant. The official route to work was through a series of old workings where coal was no longer being extracted. This was thoroughly disliked by the men but it served its purpose.

Ventilation in a coal mine was, and still is, an essential necessity. Basically it operates on a two-shaft system, fresh air being forced down one shaft, circulated through many miles of workings and finally extracted through the second shaft. This means the down-draught where the air comes in is considerable and in cold weather certainly bracing, but towards the end of its progression through the pit it becomes positively foul.

Mention of cold weather brings to mind events

in particular which stand out in my memories during the three years as a Bevin Boy. The first was the winter of 1947. It was so severe that the valleys were cut off for three days. All transport was at a standstill, including the railways. A train was marooned overnight in a snowdrift in the Surhowy Valley and roads were blocked. It started snowing in the evening and about nine o'clock I remember looking out to find a pile of snow of about eighteen inches against the front door of the lady with whom I lodged, with a little twirl of snow whipped by the wind rather like the top of a cornet ice cream. Eight hours later, when I opened the door again, the pile had grown to shoulder high with the twirl still in position. Never before or since had I seen such conditions. No encouragement was required to retire to my bed! Later in the day, fool that I was, I ventured out for a walk along a road which had been partially cleared to the village of Bedwelty. This was a hilltop place with an ancient Norman church after which, and until more recent time, the Parliamentary Constituency was named. A snowplough had been at work and a path cleared up to the mountain crossroads. There the work had ceased and the six feet drifts continued as far as the eye could see, obscuring both the lane and hedges. When the transport position eased on the main roads we returned to work within three days, but the freezing weather continued for the next three months and pedestrians on snow-packed hill roads were able to look in the upstairs windows of adjacent houses. All in all it was quite an adventure, and we were paid for the three days off work!

The other event which remains clear in my mind was the election of 1945 when the government of Mr Attlee was returned with such an overwhelming majority. Then the voting age was 21, so my interest in politics at 19 was very marginal. My family could hardly be called political (apart from always voting Labour!) so at least in that respect I could be said to be at home in South Wales. But with the contrariness of youth, when one-sided political discussion was raging amongst my fellow workers, I tended to take a contrary view and was a considered to be a Liberal traitor or even (wash your mouth out) a Tory. But as I did not have a vote, it mattered little. At least in those days, folks tended to care and no doubt the percentage of those voting was considerably higher than now; to be exact it was 73%.

By now in my mining career I had learned mostly to keep my own counsel and opinions to

myself in an effort to blend into the background as much as possible. The phrase 'mining career' was written with intended irony but on one occasion I was offered the prospect of promotion, although frankly it was the last thing I wanted. It happened in this way.

As I have said before the over-man, in mining terms, was the equivalent of a foreman and his periodic rounds once or so a day were anticipated and dealt with accordingly. It was post nationalisation, to which previous mention has been made, and on this particular day some high official came around. I don't know to this day who he was, but he was of some importance, as not only was the over-man with him but also 'God', in the form of the colliery manager and a bevy of hangers-on that included the official who was the so-called Bevin Boy welfare officer. Pause for hollow laughter for he was, in my humble opinion, the least suited person to work in welfare than could possibly be imagined. Be that as it may.

As he passed by, Mr National Coal Board stopped and asked where I came from. I assumed the Welfare Officer had pointed me out as one of his. When I mentioned, quite in passing, my Secondary schooling (in those days the progression from the local Council School), Mr NCB started to tell me the excellent prospects of advancement for someone like me, where both practical experience plus a certain amount of further education would stand me in good stead. "Why hasn't this man been made aware of his prospects before?" asked Mr NCB of the colliery manager, who mumbled some thing like "Come to my office and we will talk it over." My friendly Welfare Officer, whose only contribution to date was to tell me that as a junior bank clerk I was in a 'dead man's shoes' job, suddenly appeared to become friendly as if he really had my well being at heart.

As the cortège passed on down the coalface, my fellow collier demanded to know what "that lot" wanted and what had been said to them. Even with this normally rational and pleasant young man, suspicion had been roused and that I was hobnobbing with the bosses and toadying up to them. Needless to say, I never did have that "chat" with the colliery manager and was only too happy to look forward to my return to a 'dead man's shoes' job in the not too distant future.