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**Miners' Health and Welfare:
Care and Compensation in the Durham Coalfield,
1870 to 1920**

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Abstract

This dissertation looks at the relationship between industrialisation and welfare by asking what arrangements were in place for miners' financial welfare in the Durham coalfield between 1870 and 1920, in the event of work-related accident or injury. It considers changing attitudes to poverty and the ethos of self-help which prevailed at this time. This is contrasted with the assistance provided by the state. The degree to which the Durham miners were willing to make their own financial arrangements for welfare is assessed and compared with the relationships they formed and support they received from the local coalowners and their communities.

The impact of the extension of the franchise and its effect on the drafting of the Workmen's Compensation Act is considered. The implementation and impact of the Act on the miners of the Durham coalfield is assessed in conjunction with the relationship which formed between the Durham Miners' Association and the Durham Coal Owners' Mutual Protection Association. This study asks if the Act was of benefit to the miners and assesses if it made any changes to their welfare arrangements and if it had any impact on workplace accident rates.

Local colliery, trade union and employers' association records, parliamentary records and local newspaper reports are considered. The study concludes that a complex, often paternalistic, relationship existed between employer, employee and community. The miners preferred to take a proactive approach to their own welfare but accepted assistance from state legislation. Many miners benefitted financially from the Workmen's Compensation Act, which was effectively implemented, but did not reduce accident levels.

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Personal Statement

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. I have not submitted it, or any part of it, for any degree at the Open University or any other university or institution. Parts of this dissertation build on work submitted for Part 2 of the End of Module Assignment submitted as part of A825.

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Introduction

Coal mining in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dominated the landscape of County Durham and employed a considerable proportion of its population in what was inevitably a dangerous occupation. This study will ask what welfare arrangements were in place for miners and their dependents in the colliery communities of the Durham coalfield in the event of occupation-related death or injury in the period 1870-1920. It will consider how, and the degree to which, miners attempted to support themselves when unable to work, and how willing they were to accept the state aid which became increasingly available during the period in question.

The nature of the relationship between the coalowners and their employees will be explored, and the impact it had on welfare arrangements evaluated. The statutory provision of compensation to workmen or their dependents for work-related death or injury was a major element of the welfare legislation which was enacted during this period. This study will evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897 in the Durham coalfield and ask whether its provisions improved the safety and welfare of the Durham miners and their dependents. As the term welfare has several meanings, for the purposes of this study, it will be defined as relating to financial wellbeing and health in the context of employment and accident, rather than its social and leisure aspects.

Care and compensation in the Durham coalfield will be considered within the wider themes of Industrialisation and Poverty and Welfare. It is intended that

this study will demonstrate the close link between industrialisation and welfare and illustrate the extent to which miners of the Durham coalfield were able to influence their own welfare provision. It will be argued that Durham's miners benefitted from a better financial welfare situation in the event of injury than miners in other parts of the country, due to their relationship with the coalowners and the strong influence of the dominant trade union, the Durham Miners' Association, plus the innovative nature of local welfare provision such as homes for retired miners.

The Durham coalfield was chosen for the key role it played, both in terms of coal production and as an exemplar of welfare provision in relation to occupational injury. It covered north, east and central Durham, from the natural boundaries of the River Tyne and the North Sea, to Consett and beyond Bishop Auckland in the west, while its southern boundary ran diagonally from below Bishop Auckland across to the east coast, just north of Hartlepool.¹ Coal was mined from the fourteenth century onwards, but increasing industrialisation from the eighteenth century onwards meant it played a vital role in Britain's industrial expansion and economic growth. Coal production peaked in 1913 at almost 59 million tons and in 1923 there were 170,000 miners working in County Durham.²

The initial intention to limit study to primary sources relating to a small number of collieries in a selected area of the Durham coalfield has proven impractical.

Although plentiful, the physical condition of some records is poor, while others

¹ 'Coal Mining and Durham Collieries', *Durham County Record Office*, <<http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/article/10560/Coal-Mining-and-Durham-Collieries>> [accessed 8 May 2018].

² 'Statistics', *Durham Mining Museum*, <<http://www.dmm.org.uk/stats/index.htm>> [accessed 10 May 2018].

are closed due to data protection laws. Moreover, many records are not sufficiently comprehensive due to the nature of the industry, changes of colliery ownership and date gaps. In addition, some sources are arranged thematically, particularly those relating to compensation, and a focus on selected collieries would be unsatisfactory. An initial survey of records indicated that, although labour relationships differed between collieries and owners, the general experience of accident, compensation and welfare and the approach taken by the miners to their own support was very similar and consistent across collieries and communities. Therefore a range of records will be referenced from a limited selection of collieries throughout the Durham coalfield.

Archive material will be used from the estate of the Marquess of Londonderry, one of the major Durham coalowners, to offer insight into the complex welfare relationship between the coalowners and their employees. Many collieries kept meticulous records, which have survived, and a selection of entries from lodge minute books will be referenced to discern the miners' approach to their own welfare and accident insurance arrangements. Parliamentary records, including *Hansard* and reports from parliamentary committees will be analysed to assess the national and local approach to legislation, its implementation and effects on workers' safety and financial welfare.

Extracts from the extensive records created by the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) and Durham Coal Owners' Mutual Protection Association (DCOMPA) will be drawn upon to illustrate the complex negotiations which took place between the DMA and coalowners, particularly in the application of the Workmen's

Compensation Act 1897. These will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of compensation and ascertain the degree of co-operation which existed between the DMA and the local coalowners. Oral resources for this early period are somewhat limited and those which do exist often focus on family life and working conditions. Therefore in order to provide a more personal perspective of attitudes to care and compensation in a local context, reference will be made to reports from national and local newspapers.

Secondary sources will be referred to which cover different aspects of the research questions posed in this study. Historians including Lees, Pelling, Asher and Thane, looked at perceptions of poverty and the provision of state financial support, as opposed to self-help, in regard to welfare and asked whether state assistance was part of state power and debated whether the working class viewed this with suspicion or welcomed it as support. Benson examined insurance and compensation arrangements in a number of coalfields and argued that miners made considerable efforts to support themselves and their relationship with coalowners was not necessarily one of conflict and a struggle between classes, as had traditionally been believed. This study will refine this work and focus on the Durham coalfield, using the rich source of local DMA and DCOMPA records available.

Bartrip and Burnam assessed the development of workmen's compensation from 1836 to 1897 and considered the success of the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897 in providing for injured workmen, alongside its effectiveness in reducing work-related accidents. However, they took a national

viewpoint; this study will focus on the Durham coalfield, where records give more detail of the Act's benefits and drawbacks, and its particularly successful implementation. Moreover, it extends the examination of the Act's effects up to the end of the First World War to clarify if there were any longer term changes in accident rates as a result of its provisions.

A number of historians have considered labour relations in the nation's coalfields, particularly looking at strikes and conflict. However, comparatively little has been written about miners' experience of financial welfare provision related to accident or injury received from employment in the Durham coalfield and the working relationship which existed during this period between miner, coalowner and trade union and it is intended that this study will add to current research on this subject.

Chapter 1: The Self Help or State Assistance Debate

The rapidly increasing industrialisation which took place in Britain during the nineteenth century, together with the expansion of the British Empire, brought economic prosperity to the country as a whole, but did little to alleviate long-term poverty and the hardship that loss of work through injury or disability could bring to workers and their dependents. This chapter will assess the provision of state financial aid and its importance to the miners of the Durham coalfield, in conjunction with their own accident insurance arrangements. It will consider contemporary attitudes to poverty and ask whether miners preferred the independence that could be achieved through self-help, in its many forms, or the provisions of state-arranged assistance, beginning with the Poor Law and eventually encompassing the social support measures which were the foundation of the emerging welfare state.

Historians have considered how successive governments were obliged to find ways to deal with poverty, from the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834, which minimised the payment of out-relief and made it very difficult to obtain aid outside of an institution.¹ The later nineteenth century marked a shift in both public and governmental perceptions of poverty towards more recognition that it often had economic causes; assistance for the 'deserving poor' was considered acceptable and there was a gradual distancing from the receipt of poor relief, in both practical and psychological terms.² Lees identified a corresponding move towards self-reliance, particularly in the case of workers

¹ Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948*, digital print version (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 267.

² Lees, p. 295.

who were members of trade unions.³ Steven King said the New Poor Law was intended to stigmatise the poor and emphasise the shame of receipt of communal aid.⁴ Gareth Stedman Jones agreed that a shift in perceptions of poverty occurred during the 1880s as an honest and respectable working class was absorbed into the mainstream.⁵ It will be shown that these wider changes were reflected in approaches to welfare in the Durham coalfield.

Social reform and the receipt of state assistance raised further debate. Pelling argued that the extension of state power, in the form of welfare measures introduced by the government, were viewed with hostility by the working-class as a result of suspicion towards institutions which were expressions of national social policy.⁶ Indeed, Pelling said that there was no evidence that social reform was popular with the electorate until after it had been carried out.⁷ Thane highlighted Pelling's suggestion that this was derived from a deeply-rooted preference for independence and self-help and said that while friendly societies generally preferred self-help, some did favour state social reform in order to cope with growing need and fulfil the state's duty to help workers.⁸ Thane also said that social reforms, such as subsidised housing and old age pensions, won majority support at TUC conferences, and concluded that poorer people were grateful for any type of financial assistance.⁹ Asher said that early welfare programmes were little appreciated by the working-class, but that union

³ Lees, p. 299.

⁴ Steven King, 'The Welfare Debate' in 'Readings for Block 6', *A825 MA History Part 1* (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2009), pp. 5-29 (p. 8).

⁵ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 1st edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

⁶ Henry Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*, 2nd edn (London: the Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979), p. 2.

⁷ Pelling, p. 13.

⁸ Pat Thane, 'The Working Class and State Welfare in Britain, 1880-1914', *The Historical Journal*, 27, 4 (1984), 877-900 (p. 879).

⁹ Thane, 'The Working Class', pp. 884, 889.

leaders did support accident compensation legislation in 1897 and 1906.¹⁰ He added that workers were not homogenous in their views of the state and assistance to the poor and after 1880, workers and leaders in railway, mining and engineering trades moved towards a 'pragmatic and theoretical acceptance of welfare state policies'.¹¹

Industrialisation and particularly the coalmining industry had a profound effect on the population - between 1851 and 1891 the population increase in Durham was the highest in the country.¹² Migrant workers arrived from other parts of the country looking for work. Socio-economic inequality in other areas was considered the main reason for migration, with people moving to areas of good employment and wages, particularly the North, South Wales and London, from rural areas.¹³ In addition, difficulty in obtaining poor relief locally was undoubtedly a contributory factor to this migration. Beynon and Austrin said that migration was generally over short distances.¹⁴ However, the migrant influence on the workforce in numerous mining communities in the Durham coalfield was clearly highlighted in the 1881 census, where although many families were indicated to have originated from different areas of County Durham, of those stating their occupation as coalminer, many had travelled much greater distances.

¹⁰ Robert Asher, 'Experience Counts: British Workers, Accident Prevent and Compensation and the Origins of the Welfare State', *Journal of Policy History*, 15, 4 (2003) 359-388 (p. 372).

¹¹ Asher, p. 360.

¹² Huw Beynon and Terry Austrin, *Masters and Servants: Class and Patronage in the Making of a Labour Organisation* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1994), p. 18.

¹³ Dov Friedlander, 'Occupational Structure, Wages and Migration in Late Nineteenth-Century England and Wales', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 40, 2 (1992), 295-318 (pp. 295-296, 299).

¹⁴ Beynon and Austrin, p. 20.

Two streets of Old Park, in the parish of Whitworth in the 1881 census clearly showed the level and diversity of this migration, with people originating from London, Staffordshire, Wales, Ireland, Wiltshire, Scotland, Westmorland, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire and Cumberland.¹⁵ A full study of migration into the area is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but samples from a range of colliery communities showed that this pattern was repeated across many parishes of the Durham Coalfield. For many individuals, migration was an economic necessity, but the long distances families travelled to find work, and the evidence of complete changes in occupation in some instances, particularly from agricultural labourer to miner, showed many people took a pro-active approach to welfare, not just in Durham, but throughout the country.

Migration increased the local population, but many miners opted to emigrate to North America, Canada or Australia in order to obtain work at this time. Commenting on the newly formed Miners' National Emigration Scheme, the *Northern Echo* said that the pitmen had acted wisely, 'While philanthropists and theorists are dreaming of state organized schemes for emigration, the trade unionists of the country are establishing an independent Mutual Emigration Association'.¹⁶ A newspaper advertisement headed 'Notice to Miners', announced that the colony of New South Wales was looking for miners, especially those engaged in hewing coal.¹⁷ It added that miners were 'reaping a rich harvest, owing to the scarcity of labourers'. It offered good wages, a low cost of living and free coal and added that it was looking for 2000 miners. No

¹⁵ *1881 Census for England, Wales and Scotland*, Old Park, Whitworth, County Durham, RG11/4923, Folio 37.

¹⁶ *Northern Echo*, 17 October 1879, p. 3, *British Newspaper Archive* (hereafter *BNA*) <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>> [accessed 4 July 2018].

¹⁷ *Northern Echo*, 29 October 1888, p. 1, *BNA* [accessed 3 July 2018].

doubt this would have been seen as a very attractive offer at this time. This was a very practical form of self-help where the miners organised and implemented their own system of emigration, without waiting for the state to get around to setting up a scheme. The *Yorkshire Post* newspaper reported that 'the other day a joyful party set out from Durham station'. Apparently the pitman had sold everything but did not have sufficient money for his rail fare but a local agent made an agreement with the rail company for reduced fares for emigrants.¹⁸ There were obviously arrangements for local support and encouragement in place as part of the wider national scheme.

Emigration did, however, mean that local communities were suddenly without their most able workers and families. The writer from the *Yorkshire Post* continued, 'Where will this exodus from the Durham coalfield end?' Apparently 200 emigrants had gone from Langley Moor alone in the last couple of months and there was 'scarcely a colliery village in Durham' that was not 'thinner in population since the strike began'. He said he was worried for the 'great industrial county losing its population for want of fair wages'.¹⁹ In this case, emigration was a result of a six-week miners' strike. The writer was probably making a political point regarding fair wages, but clearly miners from the Durham coalfield were willing to take a risk and emigrate to a different country for better wages. Emigration was not always successful, however - in 1879 one report noted that of the Durham miners who had emigrated to Australia to remove pressure on the home labour markets, many had returned having found

¹⁸ 'The Durham Miners and Emigration', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 May 1879, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 4 July 2018].

¹⁹ 'The Durham Miners and Emigration', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 May 1879, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 9 July 2018].

the miners there on strike over a dispute with the owners.²⁰ In 1903 John Wilson, MP and General Secretary of the DMA, published a letter from the American Miners' Union, warning miners in Durham from emigrating to British Columbia since 55 miners had arrived from Durham to find they received considerably less wages than promised and were asking for assistance to come home.²¹ Again, the miners' self-help support mechanisms and networks in place made it possible for them to arrange their return home.

In the late Victorian period, avoiding the stigma of pauperism remained of key importance to working-class people. Davies said that the point of self-help was to achieve economic independence through savings or resources, along with the ability to be frugal and avoid debt.²² Thrift and self-help were intended to avoid the dependency of pauperism, rather than poverty, which for many working class people was a way of life.²³ Lees emphasised the themes of self-reliance and pride, which organised workers responded to in the late Victorian period.²⁴ This was certainly the case in the mining communities of County Durham, illustrated in an article referring to a meeting of the Durham Board of Guardians.²⁵ It reported that a board member said that there were no people who were so independent as the mining community. The principles of thrift and the feeling of independence and of seeking, above all things, to keep themselves outside the pauper class was a sentiment deeply impressed on the

²⁰ *Greenock Advertiser*, 4 November 1879, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 8 July 2018].

²¹ 'North of England Miners and Emigration', *Shields Daily Gazette*, 7 September 1903, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 8 July 2018].

²² Stephen Davies, 'Two Conceptions of Welfare: Voluntarism and Incorporationism', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 14, 2 (1997), 39-68 (p. 49).

²³ Davies, p. 50.

²⁴ Lees, p. 299.

²⁵ 'The Permanent Relief Fund', *Durham County Advertiser*, 15 December 1893, p. 7, *BNA* [accessed 4 July 2018].

minds of the mining community. The speaker continued that he was pleased to belong to a class which had such a 'deeply ingrained sentiment of manly independence to be as far as possible above pauper relief.' A response of 'hear hear' was reported at this point from those present; It would appear that the Board of Guardians not only recognised but approved of the miners' mindset of independence.

State welfare policies were set by the national government, but it was left to local guardians to enact them.²⁶ A resolution in parliament in May 1894 supported a bill to empower poor law guardians to grant outdoor relief to members of friendly societies, regardless of payments claimants had potentially received from their membership of a sickness society.²⁷ The speaker cited the example of the Hearts of Oak Society, which had complained that one of its members, who 'by his own exertion and thrift' had secured his old age pension of 4 shillings a week, would have that amount deducted from any assistance awarded by the guardians. It was said that the present state of the law would discourage thrift. During the lengthy debate, Sir Joseph Pease, MP for Barnard Castle, pointed out that in Durham most miners belonged to a 'provident society' and that the guardians recognised this and often relieved the claimant quietly, for instance by assisting his wife or a relative. Apparently it could be left to the discretion of the guardians, especially in country districts.

In his study of miners' compensation, Benson said that boards of guardians gave preferential treatment to those who were unable to be independent,

²⁶ Lees, p. 7.

²⁷ *Hansard*, Series 4, Volume 24, 9 May 1894, cols. 718-33.

despite their previous contributions to friendly societies, and considered only part of the allowance the miner received.²⁸ A newspaper report highlighted that representatives from two local collieries attended as deputations before the Auckland Guardians regarding the relationship between the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund and Poor Law relief.²⁹ The Chairman of the Guardians said the Board had always been careful not to take full advantage of the Miners' Relief Fund. They had to consider whether the 4 shillings received from the fund should be a free contribution and deal with each case on merit. The colliery representatives said they understood it had been the practice of the board to do something for those who had helped themselves. This revealed the existing situation in the Durham coalfield - not only the attitudes of the Guardians, but also the expectations of the miners. Clearly, in at least some areas of the Durham coalfield, self-help and state support could be employed simultaneously, albeit in an informal agreement, which it is noted was in place prior to the parliamentary resolution of 1894.

Benson said that the traditional view of English coal-miners during the second half of the nineteenth century was that they were notorious for their lack of thrift, and particularly for their failure to insure themselves against the risks of their industry.³⁰ He argued that this was not the case and that miners made considerable effort to insure through a variety of methods. Church agreed, and said that North East miners revealed a degree of prudent provision which was

²⁸ John Benson, 'The Compensation of English Coal-Miners and their Dependents for Industrial Accidents, 1860-1897', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1973), p. 50.

²⁹ 'Deputation to the Auckland Guardians', *Northern Echo*, 29 December 1893, p. 4, *BNA* [accessed 2 July 2018].

³⁰ John Benson, 'The Thrift of English Coal-Miners, 1860-95', *Economic History Review*, 31, 3 (1978), 401-418.

unique, even in comparison with other occupations.³¹ Benson argued that in all the major coalfields there was substantial evidence that there was support for local schemes of accident insurance and from 1890, one third of all English coal miners insured against industrial accidents through trade union general funds, although in Northumberland and Durham this figure was over 90%.³² In fact, the average miner subscribed to an array of local, regional and national self-help and insurance schemes, up to eightpence a week, which was a substantial sum.³³ A newspaper report following the Tudhoe Colliery disaster of 1882 illustrated this when it mentioned that, apart from aid from the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, 'many of the men who lost their lives also had policies with the Prudential Insurance Company' and the agents had immediately arranged payment.³⁴ It can be seen that the Durham miners were not only thrifty, they made thorough contingency plans and a system was in place to ensure prompt payment when required.

The increasing need for state financial support for miners on a national basis was highlighted in a *Northern Echo* article from 1882.³⁵ It used the colliery disaster at Trimdon Grange in 1882 as an argument for 'the adoption of the plan of mutual insurance by capital and labour we recently expounded'. The writer praised the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund as a help to the bereaved, adding that 'thanks to our wisdom and foresight there is a fund to fall back on'. This fund was reportedly sufficient to meet every claim on

³¹ Roy Church, *The History of the British Coal Industry, Volume 3, 1830-1913: Victorian Pre-Eminence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 598-599.

³² Benson, 'Thrift', pp. 413-414, p. 416.

³³ Benson, 'Thrift', pp. 417-418.

³⁴ 'The Dead', *Durham County Advertiser*, 21 April 1882, p. 6, BNA [accessed 30 October 2018].

³⁵ 'National Insurance', *Northern Echo*, 24 February 1882, p. 2, BNA [accessed 5 July 2018].

it and had already paid a considerable sum to the Trimdon relatives. However, the writer pointed out that the average of £15 per lost life was inadequate. In this instance, the article promoted what it referred to as a great principle, 'the co-operation of employers and workmen in alleviating the distress of accidents' and suggested a form of state insurance for all classes against all risks and for old age. The need for a form of state 'interference' was therefore well recognised, long before it was implemented.

The formation of the DMA in 1870 marked the beginning of a highly effective collective voice in the Durham coalfield – by 1876 it had 35,250 members in 213 lodges, and by the turn of the century it had over 100,000 members.³⁶ Beynon and Austrin noted that the first rule of the DMA was to raise funds for mutual support and in this it was very successful.³⁷ Wray commented that the DMA was a mini-welfare state in itself, providing a 'welfare institute in every community from subscription'.³⁸ Indeed, this community work complemented and enhanced welfare provisions made by colliery owners. The DMA promoted not only financial self-help through its membership subscriptions, but also encouraged its members to improve their social standing and educational attainment. At a second anniversary meeting of lodges, the Chairman urged members to establish a Miners' Institute, with a lending library, reading rooms and places for recreation and education.³⁹ This highlighted that the Victorian

³⁶ Beynon and Austrin, p. 53.

³⁷ Beynon and Austrin, p. 57.

³⁸ David Wray, 'The Place of Imagery in the Transmission of Culture: The Banners of the Durham Coalfield', *International Labour and Working Class History*, 76 (2009), 147-163 (p. 15).

³⁹ 'Durham Miners' Association', *Shields Daily Gazette*, 19 October 1885, p. 3. BNA [accessed 1 July 2018].

ideal of respectability, through self-help and diligence, was promoted by the miners' leaders.

However, as has already been noted, self-help was not always sufficient to offset the financial hardship which could occur following accident or injury. At an annual conference of Northumberland and Durham miners, the Chairman remarked that his bias was strongly in the direction of self-help, rather than state intervention.⁴⁰ However, he did not object to state intervention as long as it was developed properly. This demonstrated Asher's aforementioned point about a 'pragmatic and theoretical acceptance' of assistance; the miners enjoyed their independence but were wise enough to recognise the benefits of state assistance in the form of welfare legislation and compensation when appropriate.

The DMA's leaders recognised that one of the best methods of self-help for its members was to keep them at work and earning a wage. In order to ensure this, a good working relationship with the colliery owners was essential.

Considerable effort was put into this endeavour and the Joint Committee which was set up representing the Durham Coal Owners' Mutual Protection Association and the DMA to decide on liability and compensation as a result of the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897 worked well. A letter recalling miners' leaders of the past was printed by the *Northern Echo* in 1936.⁴¹ The writer recalled that DMA leader John Wilson, had been a friend of his father. His

⁴⁰ 'Opposition to the Mines Bill', *Durham County Advertiser*, 22 April 1898, p. 6, *BNA* [accessed 3 July 2018].

⁴¹ 'Durham Gala Memories, Miners' Leaders of the Past', *Sunday Sun*, 2 August 1936, p. 11, *BNA* [accessed 10 July 2018].

father had understood that any industrial dispute could be settled by arbitration and conciliation and the writer asked why these should not be substituted for deprivation and starvation. This presumption in favour of conciliation was part of the DMA's ethos and it proved very successful. The relationship was not always completely rosy, of course - one retired miner recalled that 'miners' leaders in those days were blacklisted', their names were hung up in colliery offices and it was difficult for them to move to other collieries.⁴² However, in general, state help in the form of compensation and self-help in the form of arbitration and conciliation clearly existed side by side.

A vigorous debate took place in the *Shields Daily Gazette and Shipping Telegraph* in 1883, which highlighted the contemporary difference of opinion regarding the benefits of state interference over self-help. A report indicated that the Liberty and Property Defence League had been trying to gather opposition to legislation which the League said threatened individual liberty and voluntary self-help.⁴³ Northern miners' leaders had proposed an amendment to the Employers' Liability Act 1888, aimed at preventing employers from contracting out of the Act. The writer of the report felt that the North had been targeted by the League because the miners there needed less protection than in other parts of the country. A response from the Secretary of the League, printed the following week, claimed that most miners attached more value to their old self-supporting arrangements than to modern legislation, with its

⁴² 'Persecution Memories', *Sunderland Echo*, 5 October 1932, p. 4, *BNA* [accessed 10 July 2018].

⁴³ 'A Suspicious Movement', *The Shields Daily Gazette and Shipping Telegraph*, 9 May, 1883, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 8 July 2018].

uncertainty and cost of litigation.⁴⁴ He claimed that miners would prefer a 'steady ennobling process of self-help'. A further response from the newspaper said that as far as self-reliance went, the balance was with the Act and whether or not the Act was compulsory it would not affect the Durham miners and opposing it would not teach other miners self-reliance.⁴⁵ There was not, therefore, a clearly defined move away from self-support and towards state intervention and opinions varied considerably according to vested interest.

State proposals for a contributory pension scheme were opposed by friendly societies in the latter decades of the nineteenth century because it was feared this would compete with their own scheme. Garrard argued that national health insurance eroded the vibrancy of working class society and damaged friendly societies and trade unions.⁴⁶ The Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund made its feelings quite clear on this subject, 'This Society does not desire at the hands of the state even so much assistance as might be offered to its members under some schemes of old age pension'.⁴⁷ Moreover, a letter to the editor of the *Eastern Evening News* in Norfolk complained about the actions of leading friendly societies in dealing with old age pensions.⁴⁸ He felt that the contributions were not used wisely and that they should learn from what he called 'the sturdy pitmen of Northumberland and

⁴⁴ 'Employers' Liability Act Amendment Bill', *The Shields Daily Gazette and Shipping Telegraph*, 17 May 1883, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 8 July 2018].

⁴⁵ 'Self-Help and Self-Reliance', *The Shields Daily Gazette and Shipping Telegraph*, 17 May 1883, p. 2, *BNA* [accessed 8 July 2018].

⁴⁶ J. Garrard, *Democratisation in Britain: elites, civil society and reform since 1800* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp.189, 211, 282, cited in Bernard Harris, 'Social Policy by Other Means? Mutual Aid and the Origins of the Modern Welfare State in Britain During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Journal of Policy History*, 30, 2 (2018), 202-235 (p.203).

⁴⁷ 'The Miners' Permanent Relief Fund', *Durham County Advertiser*, 11 January 1895, p. 2, *BNA* [accessed 8 July 2018].

⁴⁸ 'Self-Help or State Aid', *Eastern Evening News*, 10 June 1895, p. 4, *BNA* [accessed 3 July 2018].

Durham' and their very successful relief fund which only cost about 15s per year. The writer asked if the state could do more than this and said that it was better that the miners should have to practice self-restraint to keep up their subscriptions. Although the Old Age Pensions Act was not yet in place, opposition to and suspicion of state interference was marked, while self-help was the ideal as long as it was properly implemented.

In the early twentieth century, despite considerable social legislation being in place, including Old Age Pensions, Workmen's Compensation and National insurance, there was evidence that self-help remained not only popular but a necessary supplement to miners' income, both nationally and in the Durham coalfield. A question asked in parliament of the Secretary to the Treasury in 1913 regarding membership in 1910 of the largest friendly societies - those with over 100,000 members - revealed that the aggregate membership of friendly societies and societies with branches was 6,710,383, with the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund having 202,109 members and showing a steady increase. The Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity, which included northern members, had 759,488 members, which was a considerable sum in view of the state support which was available by this stage.⁴⁹

The self-help versus state assistance question was therefore far from clear cut. Self-help as a means of survival and social progression was a mindset deeply entrenched in the workers of the Durham coalfield. It was integral to the

⁴⁹ *Hansard*, Series 5, Volume 47, 23 January 1913, cols. 628-629.

community set-up and was viewed by most as a matter of pride. This was probably not peculiar to the North of England, but the close-knit and paternalistic nature of the relationship between worker and coalowner, plus the dangerous nature of the mining industry undoubtedly enhanced its importance. Pelling's argument that there was hostility towards new welfare measures was partially correct, but this was not universal. The opposition encountered from some friendly societies was undoubtedly to protect their own interests but the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund remained strong and popular long after state support was available. In addition, it is likely that state assistance via the Workmen's Compensation Act was seen as morally legitimate, the right and due of a workman injured through his occupation, whereas relief via the Poor Law for pauperism was viewed as somewhat shameful. In the Durham coalfield, miners had the benefit of a strong voice through the DMA, which fully endorsed the importance of self-help but was only too aware of the dangerous work its members performed and therefore acknowledged the necessity of state assistance through its social support policies.

Chapter Two: Support in the Community

It has been established that the miners of the Durham coalfield made considerable efforts to support themselves and plan for the eventuality of work-related accident and injury. This chapter will evaluate how these measures compared with support provided by the coalowners and the community, and the nature of the welfare relationship which developed between them. Labour history and the often-hostile relationship that miners had with coalowners throughout England and Wales have been discussed by many historians. Challinor noted that the Lancashire and Cheshire coalowners were not inclined to arbitration and were opposed to trade unionism, while Herbert and Jones pointed out that the relationship between miners and owners in South Wales was one of confrontation rather than co-operation.¹ However, Benson argued that the classic class-conflictual view of miners in dispute with self-serving owners is not borne out by the clearly co-operative nature of the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund movement in England.² Moreover, Beynon and Austrin described the coalowners of the Durham coalfield as paternalists, with a position of honour and respect within society.³ This chapter will use a range of archive material, including records relating to the Seaham Colliery Disaster of 1880 and minutes from Usworth Colliery Lodge Committee, to extend Benson's argument and conclude that miners in the Durham coalfield benefitted from a reasonably supportive welfare relationship with many coalowners, but that this

¹ Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones, eds, *Wales 1880-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), p. 5.

² John Benson, 'Coalminers, Coalowners and Collaboration: the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund Movement in England, 1860-1895', *Labour History Review*, 68, 2 (2003), 181-194 (p.101).

³ Huw Beynon and Terry Austrin, *Masters and Servants: Class and Patronage in the Making of a Labour Organisation* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1994), p. 25.

support was enhanced considerably by the miners' own provisions and community unity.

The Durham coalfield consisted for the most part of close communities of colliery villages, plus a number of larger urban settings, mainly along the River Tyne. Many of these were firmly established, due to the long history of coal mining in County Durham. Others originated in order to service local collieries, for instance the village of West Cornforth developed alongside Old Cornforth to house workers for nearby Thrislington Colliery, while the community of Seaham Harbour was founded in 1828 by the Marquess of Londonderry to facilitate the shipment of coals from the family's collieries.⁴ Colliery ownership was mixed, with many owned by local landowners and aristocracy. For instance, in 1896, the Earl of Durham owned 14 mines and employed 8,654 men, while the Pease family owned 15 collieries and employed 6,151 men.⁵ However, there was also considerable business investment such as Messrs Bolckow, Vaughan and Company Ltd, which owned 19 mines and employed 11,533 men, and a number of smaller concerns owning perhaps two or three.⁶ This does not give the full picture, however, for coal mining was a dynamic industry and ownership changed frequently as coal seams became exhausted and new ones opened up, and business interests and partnerships were often interlinked.

Coalowners were in a commanding position at this time, due in part to the paternalistic precedent which had been set by the Miners' Bond system, a long-

⁴ Robin Walton, *A History of Thrislington, Cornforth and West Cornforth* (Coxhoe: The Coronation Press, 1991) p. 69; 'Seaham Harbour', *Forebears*, <<http://forebears.co.uk>> [accessed 2 October 2018].

⁵ 'Mines', *Durham Mining Museum* <www.dmm.org.uk> [accessed 2 October 2018].

⁶ 'Companies', *Durham Mining Museum*.

established, very unpopular custom of tying a workman to a particular colliery for a set period, which essentially meant that the village and the mine was one unit.⁷ Although the bond system was abolished in 1872, its abolition did not end the influence of the coalowner over the colliery village. Many coalowners supported their associated communities with institutes, schools and other public buildings. One such owner was Messrs Pease and Partners. The Pease family were noted Quakers and philanthropists, as well as industrialists. When a new school opened at Esh Colliery, it was noted by the local newspaper as being a 'Model Colliery Village' and described as the gift of the owners, Messrs Pease and Partners⁸. The same article also described it as the 'prettiest, cleanest and healthiest colliery village in all England', fulsome praise which was probably indicative of the overall influence of the Pease family. A precedent had been set for this type of model workers' village during the Industrial Revolution, and later by paternalist industrialists, such as Sir Titus Salt, whose Saltaire village was built between 1850 and 1875.⁹ Community provision of this nature served to emphasise the welfare relationship between employer, employee and village.

A key feature of the relationship between coalowner and miner in the Durham coalfield, which differed from other coal-producing areas, was the long-standing tradition of workers being provided by the colliery owner with a free house and coal. Northumberland and Durham had 96.9% of all free colliery housing in

⁷ Beynon and Austrin, *Masters and Servants*, p. 51.

⁸ 'The Pease Family', *Quakers in the World*, <www.quakersintheworld.org> (2018), [accessed 10 September 2018]; 'Opening of a New School in a Model Colliery Village', *Northern Echo*, 10 August 1874, p. 3, *British Newspaper Archive* (hereafter *BNA*) <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>> [accessed 4 July 2018].

⁹ Sidney Pollard, 'The Factory Village in the Industrial Revolution', *The English Historical Review*, 79, 312 (1964), 513-531 (p. 517).

Britain in 1913 and by 1914 there were 48,791 colliery houses in the Durham coalfield, accommodating 261,703 people.¹⁰ In other areas, for example Wales, a payment of rent or even ownership by the miner was the usual arrangement, although this was reflected by the wage levels being higher in Wales.¹¹ Daunton argued that the provision of free colliery housing in Durham was part of the wage bargain.¹² However, a letter written by a DMA official to a colleague, demonstrated that the houses were viewed as an important part of the welfare provision.¹³ The writer explained that miners received houses and coals for 6d per fortnight, a custom which had prevailed 'from time immemorial'. He continued that although older houses were not very good, those that had been built in the last 20-30 years were very good and that the system worked well for them but was not found anywhere else. Many of the owners therefore made the effort to build homes to a decent standard. The DMA formalized the arrangement, whereby married workers or widowers with families were given either a free house or a rent allowance, with the coalowners in 1900 after a 'long-standing dispute'.¹⁴

Unfortunately, this system meant that retirement from work generally meant loss of home and free coal, and before the introduction of old age pensions in 1908, miners could be left with very little income and, in some cases, incapacitated due to old injuries but not eligible for state compensation. The founding of the

¹⁰ M.J. Daunton, 'Miners' Houses: South Wales and the Great Northern Coalfield 1880-1914', *International Review of Social History*, 25, 2 (1980), 143-175 (p. 144).

¹¹ Daunton, p. 164.

¹² Daunton, p. 174.

¹³ Durham County Record Office (DCRO), Durham Miners' Association Records, D/DMA Acc 2157, Compensation Letter Book, Vol. 161, p. 509.

¹⁴ John Wilson, *A History of the Durham Miners' Association 1870-1904* (Durham: J.H. Veitch & Sons, 1907), p. 308.

Durham Aged Mineworkers' Homes Association (DAMHA) in 1898 aimed to address this problem. The initial idea came from Joseph Hopper, a miner and lay preacher, who believed that a man who had served for years in the mines deserved better than eviction from his tied colliery house.¹⁵ From its inception, the movement was an excellent example of collaboration and with a small weekly, voluntary levy from miners, plus land and materials from the coalowners, the homes could be built and let free of charge. Speaking at the opening ceremony for the first homes, John Wilson MP, one of the leaders of the DMA, said that the Durham miners were showing the government how to deal with the problem of poverty in old age, adding that for 25 years they had given the old men 4s 6d from the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, and now they wanted to add a house to it.¹⁶ Clearly while this was a welfare issue locally, social and financial provision for the elderly was an increasing issue for national politicians.

Many of the coalowners gave practical assistance in the form of land, and homes continued to be built in all parts of the Durham coalfield. The first 12 homes at Shincliffe Colliery were valued at £300 and were given by local coalowners, Messrs Ferens and Love, with a further 60 homes planned.¹⁷ In an obituary notice, John Wilson credited a donation of £4,000 to one of the chief directors of the Harton Coal Company for homes in his district.¹⁸ In other areas, it was noted that Messrs Bolckow, Vaughan and Co Ltd sent a cheque for £100

¹⁵ 'Our History', *Durham Aged Mineworkers' Homes Association*, <<https://www.durhamhomes.org.uk>> (2018) [accessed 26 September 2018]

¹⁶ 'Durham Miners' Homes-Sir Lindsay Wood' *The Times*, 6 November 1901, p. 11, *The Times Digital Archive* [Accessed 17 Nov. 2017].

¹⁷ *The Times*, 6 November, 1901, p. 11.

¹⁸ DCRO, *DMA Monthly Circular*, no. 13, May 1916.

and Lord Londonderry for 50 guineas, although it was also noted that Hetton Miners' Lodge increased their contributions to wipe off a bank overdraft.¹⁹ Support was not restricted to coalowners and miners. Lee noted that the Church lent its weight to practical ways of helping those in need and gave influential assistance to the development of Aged Miners' Homes in Durham, in cooperation with other denominations and the DMA.²⁰ This certainly was the case – the Ecclesiastical Commissioners donated land for houses and the Bishop of Durham sent a personal donation of the cost of a home, approximately £21.²¹

The DAMHA was very successful in its attempt to provide homes for retired miners, and indeed continues its work today. It demonstrated the miners' proactive approach to their long-term welfare, along with recognition of the housing problem on the part of the coalowners, The Bishop of Durham felt that Durham had shown the way for the rest of the country, adding that the enterprise was 'representative of two great principles – wealth and health and co-operative sympathy.'²² However, one local newspaper article reported that the owners of Wearmouth Colliery had donated £1,000 to the movement, but pointed out that most of the money had been raised by the Durham miners who had supported it from the start and they deserved the credit.²³ This would appear to be the case for although the majority of coalowners contributed, the

¹⁹ 'Durham Aged Miners' Homes', *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 15 December 1916, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 4 September 2018].

²⁰ Robert Lee, *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield, 1810-1926* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), p. 151.

²¹ 'Bishop of Durham and Aged Miners', *Western Mail*, 18 July 1899, p. 7, *BNA* [accessed 4 September 2018].

²² 'The Durham Aged Miners' Homes', *Northwich Guardian*, 1 November 1899, p. 6, *BNA* [accessed 4 September 2018].

²³ 'Aged Miners' Homes in Durham', *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 12 February 1904, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 4 September 2018].

miners paid the majority share from their meagre income. As Welbourne commented, 'to the North Country Miners' Unions is due the first successful attempt to provide on a large scale for the pensioners of industry', adding that the miners were happy that when they were old they did not lose the free house and coal on which their domestic economy had been based.²⁴

In the event of a large-scale accident, an immediate aid response was critical. The response to the Seaham Colliery disaster on 7th September 1880, when an explosion claimed the lives of 164 men and boys, demonstrated the complex relationship one key coalowner had with the community. The colliery and the land on which the community was built was owned by the Marquess of Londonderry. A newspaper cutting from the *Newcastle Daily Journal*, reporting on a public meeting held one week after the disaster, had been pasted into the disaster committee's letter book.²⁵ The local minister, Reverend Colling, who chaired the meeting, while expressing sorrow for the loss of life, highlighted that the disaster had 'fallen hard' on the Marquess, in a moral sense as well as a pecuniary one. It was emphasised that the Marquess had donated £200 to the disaster fund and the Marchioness £50. Viscount Castlereagh donated £25 and asked that a relief fund be set up and eventually passed to the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund. Clearly the Marquess had great influence locally, and quite possibly over the newspaper itself, for the article took care to point out that he had always supported the Permanent Relief Fund and had found houses and coals for those affected by accidents.

²⁴Edward Welbourne, *The Miners' Unions of Durham and Northumberland* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1921), p. 303.

²⁵ DCRO, Londonderry Estate Records, D/Lo/F 698/1 Minutes and Accounts of the Explosion Fund Committee.

The Marquess' support for the dependents and his donation following the disaster had a high public profile, but it was the Committee of the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, to which all but four of those killed had subscribed, which acted promptly to assist the families of the deceased. The Fund was formed in response to the Hartley Colliery disaster in 1862, in which 204 people died, and was undoubtedly one of the most effective means of community support for injured miners and their dependents. It issued a public notice on 2 October 1880, barely one month after the accident, declaring it was its duty to publish a list of the men and boys lost and the number of dependents left chargeable to the fund.²⁶ The dependents of the four non-members of the fund were also taken care of by the donations raised by the community. It indicated that the Seaham accident brought a liability of about £30,000 for 10-15 years, subject to reduction as children grew up and widows left the fund. This document also noted that £35,000 of the fund's income had been contributed by coalowners in the shape of percentages on payments of their employees, a point that was frequently made in the records of the time – following the Trimdon Grange Colliery disaster it was reported that the owners were 'convinced of the wisdom of the miners providing a fund for the widows'.²⁷ The motive here was probably not entirely altruistic, for a miners' fund would reduce the colliery owners' liability but they would still gain public recognition for their contribution. However, it does confirm Benson's argument with reference to the co-operative nature of the relationship which had developed.

²⁶ DCRO, EP/NS 52 Seaham Explosion and Miners' Permanent Relief Fund.

²⁷ 'Fearful Explosion', *Newcastle Journal*, 18 February 1882, p. 4, *BNA* [accessed 17 August 2018].

In addition to contributions from the coalowners, there was clear evidence of both a national and local public response to appeals and donations in the aftermath of mining disasters. The notebook of Seaham's local minister showed that the affected families were certainly cared for within that particular community.²⁸ Reverend Colling recorded the findings of a visit he made after the disaster to check the needs of the affected families – for instance, he noted that Mr Ward and his family received £5 from the fund and 26s per fortnight, and that his daughter attended the colliery school. Interestingly, it was noted that Mr Ward also received £10 from the Oddfellows Society, therefore although help was received from the disaster fund, that particular miner had also subscribed to the Permanent Relief Fund and taken out private membership with a Friendly Society. The permanent nature of the relief fund was indicated by a letter dated 23 March 1922, asking for an extra payment of 1s per week to the widows, who were now only 5 in number, due to the increased cost of living since the allowances were agreed.²⁹ Indeed, it was only in 1930 that the funds were finally transferred back to the Permanent Relief Fund as there was only one widow left. This type of ongoing support was clearly reliable, and therefore of considerable benefit to dependents

In the event of non-fatal (and therefore lower profile) accidents, the situation was somewhat different. Medical care for miners injured at work varied depending on the colliery and owner. The *British Medical Journal* at the time noted that in many collieries, workers were compelled to pay a subscription to a

²⁸ DCRO, D/Lo/F 701, Reverend Colling's Reports on Visits to Families.

²⁹ DCRO, D/Lo/F 698/1.

surgeon, while in other places they were provided free.³⁰ Many coalowners ran sick clubs and most retained the services of a doctor. It appears, however, that arrangements were not always satisfactory. A letter to the Editor of the *Daily Gazette*, from a coal hewer from Lanchester pointed out that 'we as miners pay a contribution to a doctor we seldom or never see'.³¹ He continued that the doctor usually serviced 2 or 3 or more collieries and was appointed by the owners. The writer did note, however, that miners were not legally compelled to pay towards a doctor. A further letter, from a different miner but in the same newspaper, said that 'it is well known that the miners pay sixpence per fortnight towards a doctor, and for the last three years 6p off each boy'.³² Miners also paid a regular contribution for their care to the County Hospital at Durham and at the Annual General Meeting of the hospital, the Mayor asked if an ambulance could be kept at the hospital to transfer men from the mines and pointed out that this could mean the difference between life and death.³³ The DMA had given £20 towards this and the Mayor was going to ask the coalowners to fund the remaining £60.

It is evident that some coalowners did more than others to help their communities and this was particularly the case with the land-owning aristocracy. The Marchioness of Londonderry founded her District Nursing Association at Seaham and other collieries owned by the Londonderry family to provide trained

³⁰ 'Masters and Servants (Wages) Bill', *British Medical Journal*, 1 June 1872, p. 598 <<https://www.thebmj.com/archive>> (2018) [accessed 12 October 2018].

³¹ 'The Miners' Doctor', *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 30 July 1891, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 20 August 2018].

³² 'Miners' Doctor', *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 7 August 1891, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 20 August 2018].

³³ 'Durham County Hospital', *Durham County Advertiser*, 7 February 1896, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 20 August 2018].

nurses for the sick and injured.³⁴ The cost of a nurse was £25 per year, with the Londonderry family providing £25 per year at each of their collieries, plus a furnished house. However, it was also intended that the men would contribute one halfpenny per week to the scheme. In addition, Lady Durham established a relief fund for old and disabled miners of the Earl of Durham's collieries. At an annual general meeting of the fund, the colliery manager was praised for helping to deal with a fever outbreak at the colliery.³⁵ Each man was provided with an attendant to look after them and their groceries were paid for. It was commented at the meeting that at Lambton Collieries they saw capital and labour working together for their mutual benefit. There was loud applause at this point so there must have been agreement. It was noted that there were 261 members in the fund. The fund was still in operation nine years later when it was noted that sick payments to life members amounted to £224 and temporary sick payments £616.³⁶ Although members contributed to this fund, it does appear to have been run to the mutual benefit of miner and owner.

This study concentrates on positive aspects of the relationship between the Durham miners and the local coalowners but there was also conflict, both philosophical and practical. It has already been established that the miners were very independent and preferred to make their own accident insurance arrangements rather than rely on assistance from their employers or the state.³⁷ However, Victorian ideals of charity and philanthropy towards the deserving

³⁴ 'Lady Londonderry's Nursing Association', *The Durham County Advertiser*, 26 May 1893, p. 8, *BNA* [accessed 28 July 2018].

³⁵ 'Lambton Collieries Relief Fund', *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 17 January 1890, p. 7, *BNA* [accessed 28 July 2018].

³⁶ 'Newbottle Collieries Relief Fund', *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 25 January 1899, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 28 July 2018].

³⁷ This is covered in detail in Chapter 1, pp. 11-12.

poor (those who were willing to work) plus religious or political views held by a number of coalowners, such as the Quaker beliefs of Pease and Partners, resulted in a conflict of philosophy in some instances. Due to economic necessity, the class structure of the time and the undeniable power of the coalowner, the miners had little choice but to accept assistance. In addition, there was frequent conflict in the labour relationships between some coalowners and their employees. For example, in 1891 Lord Londonderry evicted a number of his employees and their families from their colliery houses because the men were on strike.³⁸ This was in contrast to the Londonderry family's reaction to the aforementioned Seaham Colliery disaster and demonstrated the tension in the relationships between employer and employee were complex and fluid.

Although many coalowners made considerable provision for the welfare of their workers, the miners formed their own close network of support within their communities. The lodge committee minutes of Usworth Colliery 1902-03 provide insight into this network.³⁹ Discussion had taken place regarding the Aged People's Treat Fund, which was intended to provide an outing. Bearing in mind the number of contributions which miners were making from their wages to their own welfare provision, they were still willing to contribute 1s per man and 6p per boy to the fund. It was emphasised that there would be 'no public canvassing' and eligibility would be applied strictly to any person receiving their old people's money and who had severed their connection with the colliery eight

³⁸ 'Silksworth Evictions', *Northern Echo*, 9 March 1891, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 25 November 2018].

³⁹ D/DMA 332/7 Usworth Lodge Committee Minutes.

weeks prior to the date of the outing.⁴⁰ The lodge therefore not only took care of its own former members, it also encouraged its young workers from an early age to consider seniors, strengthening the sense of mutual support and community and demonstrating the ethos which was so effective in the work of the Durham Aged Mineworkers' Homes Association.

Usworth colliery's sick fund was clearly still thriving in 1902, even though the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897 had been in place for some five years, in fact at its December quarterly meeting, it was agreed that 'owing to increased expenditure we subscribe 3s per man each fortnight for this quarter'.⁴¹ At each meeting there was a recommendation for a couple of new members to join the sick fund, hence it was not an automatic enrolment and they were not compelled to pay, however, a search of the Mining Durham's Hidden Depths database revealed that between January 1902 and December 1903 a total of 33 men paid entrance fees to the colliery sick fund.⁴² Reference was made in the minutes on another occasion to a deceased miner's widow and children, along with the resolution that 'we as a committee are prepared to discuss any scheme to raise funds for the deceased'. Clearly these miners were confident not only in their ability to help themselves, but also in their willingness to support others and carry out acts of charity, without the influence of or interference from their employers.

⁴⁰ D/DMA 332/7, April 13 1904, p. 202.

⁴¹ D/DMA 332/7, 20 December 1902.

⁴² 'Mining Durham's Hidden Depths' *Durham County Record Office*, <<http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/article/10531/Search-Durhams-Hidden-Depths>> [accessed 10 October 2018].

Beynon and Austrin said that miners in colliery villages had a deep sense of occupational and community identity and Usworth Lodge clearly demonstrated this.⁴³ The committee minutes noted that an appeal had been received from the Yorkshire Miners for assistance and it was agreed to send £1. This type of reciprocal support was commonplace within mining communities - on 18 September 1880, the Rector at Castle Eden donated £50 from a church bazaar, which had been intended for church funds but instead was sent in aid of the Seaham miners.⁴⁴ A band contest and sports day held in support of the Throckley Colliery sick and accident fund.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, on another occasion, old, superannuated miners and their wives were taken on a trip to South Shields by railway. This trip was on a grand scale, with 200 in carriages specially supplied, and included dinner and tea and was organised by the local colliery workers.⁴⁶ Since many people who lived in the communities of the Durham coalfield worked at the colliery, or were connected to its ancillary industries and were therefore dependent on it to some degree for their livelihood, the level of mutual support was not surprising.

In conclusion, clearly many of the coalowners of the Durham Coalfield continued to exert a paternalistic influence over their workers. It is important not to exaggerate the benevolence of the coalowners – from a point of view of labour relations, there was often conflict between employer and employee and some of it was bitter indeed, with protracted strike action taken. However, from a welfare point of view there was considerable co-operation and assistance

⁴³ Beynon and Austrin, p. 368.

⁴⁴ DCRO, D/Lo/F 698/1.

⁴⁵ 'Local and District News', *Jarrow Express*, 26 June 1903, p. 8, *BNA* [accessed 18 July 2018].

⁴⁶ 'Aged Durham Miners at South Shields', *Shields Gazette*, 29 June 1895, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 18 July 2018].

from coalowners, with contributions to the relief fund, schemes to assist injured workers, free colliery housing and coals and donations of land and funds for the aged mineworkers' homes. Undoubtedly self-interest was involved in many of these schemes and the contributions were relatively small in comparison with the coalowners' wealth and coal mining profits, but they should be seen in the context of their time period and in comparison with welfare support from coalowners in other parts of the country, which was often poor. In many instances, the coalowners showed genuine compassion and a desire to help their workers and some reasonably good relationships developed. However, on balance, the Durham miners proved their preference for self-help and continued to contribute much more than the coalowners to their welfare provision, in many cases paying to the permanent relief fund, a doctor, a colliery sick fund, union funds and a number of compassionate collections of different natures. In addition, the contribution from the miners' own and wider communities and the support of the DMA should not be underestimated in the overall welfare picture.

Chapter 3: The Workmen's Compensation Act, 1897

Having focused on the welfare support provided by coalowners and local communities, and the provision made by the miners themselves, consideration will be given in this chapter to assistance received from the state in the form of compensation for work-related accident and injury. A number of key pieces of legislation enacted during the scope of this dissertation were of major benefit to the miners of the Durham coalfield in dealing with the hardship caused by loss of work due to injury or old age. This chapter will concentrate on the piece of legislation which had the most important and immediate impact on the miners, the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1897. Under this Act, miners gained the statutory right to compensation from their employer for work-related injuries, regardless of any fault being attributed to the employer.¹ This chapter will examine the effect of local political representation in parliament and the influence of the DMA on the clauses of the Act and its implementation. It will ask if the Workmen's Compensation Act was responsible for any improvement in the welfare of Durham miners in the event of accident or injury, and if its provisions lowered the rate of mining accidents in the Durham coalfield.

Historians have debated whether the ethos of the Workmen's Compensation Act was fair compensation for injured workers, or a means to effect improved workplace safety. Lester said that parliamentary debates revealed that the discussions centred on the need for greater workplace safety.² On the other hand, the bill's promoter, Joseph Chamberlain, believed that it was most

¹ P.W.J. Bartrip and S.B. Burman, *The Wounded Soldiers of Industry, Industrial Compensation Policy 1833-1897* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 1.

² V. Markham Lester, 'The Employers' Liability/Workmen's Compensation Debate of the 1890s Revisited', *The Historical Journal*, 44, 2 (2001), 471-495 (p. 474).

important that workmen received some payment for their injuries, while Liberals and the workers themselves wanted a system which would force employers to provide a safer workplace and thus prevent accidents.³ The resulting Act was criticised because it applied only to certain workmen and had a 14-day qualification period.⁴ It was described as being badly drafted and leaving the way open to extensive litigation, a 'political compromise which satisfied no one'.⁵ On the other hand, Lester said that overall employers and workers seem to have been satisfied with the new scheme, and that a leading member of the Labour Party said that the Act, even with its defects, had proved to be one of the best pieces of social legislation placed on the Statute Book in recent years.⁶ Mallalieu added that although the Act was not radical, it put into law the wishes and practices of enlightened employers.⁷

In their study of workmen's compensation, Bartrip and Burman said legislation had little impact on reducing accident rates and cited other factors which had encouraged greater attention to workplace safety, including inspection and education.⁸ They pointed out that protective legislation and inspection regulations had already been in place for some years and this was particularly the case in the mining industry.⁹ Moreover, unreliable reporting of accidents and the effect the prospect of compensation itself had on reporting meant it was

³ Lester, p. 474.

⁴ Bartrip and Burman, p. 208.

⁵ J.H Porter, Review of P.W.J. Bartrip and S.B. Burman, *'The Wounded Soldiers of Industry. Industrial Compensation Policy 1833-1897 in The English Historical Review*, 101 (1986), 1017-1018.

⁶ Lester, p. 486.

⁷ W.C. Mallalieu, 'Joseph Chamberlain and Workmen's Compensation', *The Journal of Economic History*, 10, 1 (1950), 45-57 (p. 46).

⁸ Bartrip and Burman, p. 53.

⁹ Bartrip and Burman, p.53.

difficult to ascertain the exact effect of the Workmen's Compensation Act.¹⁰

Lester agreed and said that there was strong indication that worker safety did not improve as a result of the Workmen's Compensation Act – it offered modest financial compensation but did not improve safety on the whole.¹¹ Historians generally agreed, however, that the Act was beneficial from a financial viewpoint, rather than a safety viewpoint. Lester concluded that it was the goal of trade unions and the Liberal Party to improve safety through increased employer liability, but that this was sacrificed for minimum, but generally guaranteed, compensation payments.¹²

Parliamentary records, including *Hansard* and committee reports, will be used to demonstrate the involvement of local MPs and other representatives in the drafting of the Workmen's Compensation Act, and later in the investigation of its progress. Minutes and reports of the Joint Committee of the Durham Coalowners and DMA, letter books and local newspaper reports, will be drawn upon to assess the local reception of the Act, and to argue that strong local representation in parliament, followed by effective local implementation of the Act, benefited those Durham miners who suffered injury during their employment. It will be demonstrated that the Workmen's Compensation Act contributed significantly to the financial welfare of miners, but it was not instrumental in improving safety or reducing accident rates in the Durham coalfield. A short case study will indicate the successful application of the Act in a compensation claim in Durham.

¹⁰ Bartrip and Burman, p. 53.

¹¹ Lester, p. 495.

¹² Lester, p. 495.

In every coalfield, accidents of a non-fatal nature were far more frequent than the disastrous explosions which caused multiple fatalities and attracted national attention and donations. The type and severity of accidents and the injuries received as a consequence varied, but could be debilitating and long-term. At East Howle colliery, for instance, in 1882, 29 injuries were reported.¹³ The causes were described mainly as being from falls of stone or coal, pony kicks or crush injuries from coal tubs. The injuries ranged from bruises to dislocation of the hip and concussion of the spine, and affected all ages from 14 to 52.

Sampling from a number of other collieries in the coalfield showed proportionately similar numbers and injuries reported in the registers.

Moreover, many accidents of a relatively minor nature, in an era before antibiotic treatment, became more serious through infection and led to longer periods of incapacity or even death, for example the 1887 Mines Inspector's Report noted that M Greenwell of Rainton Colliery 'died today from blood poisoning caused by a wound to his hand received in April last from a fall of stone'.¹⁴ Although miners preferred self-help in the form of personal insurance and support from the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, a formal arrangement for statutory compensation became increasingly necessary.

The Representation of the People Act of 1884 extended the franchise to counties and rural districts, enabling many miners to vote for the first time and giving working men in the Durham coalfield the opportunity of a representative

¹³ Durham County Record Office (DCRO), North of England Coal Owners' Mutual Protection Association Records, D/DCOMPA 352 Register of accidents, January 1881- January 1888.

¹⁴ 'In Memoriam', *Durham Mining Museum* <<http://www.dmm.org.uk>> [accessed 3 June 2018].

voice in Parliament.¹⁵ Miners were the foremost representatives of liberal politics within the working class and the DMA at this time was dominated by liberal ideology.¹⁶ From 1885 to 1915 the miners were the most successful occupational group to send their representatives to parliament.¹⁷ Workmen's compensation was therefore discussed at a time when there was an increased labour vote and both Liberals and Conservatives vied to attract the support of the working man and it was this political pressure rather than political philosophy that dictated the terms of the Act.¹⁸ In addition, many coalowners, including those from Durham, were also MPs and had a significant vested pecuniary interest in the arrangements for compensation. Chamberlain was inevitably required to find a compromise which would satisfy politicians, workers and employers.

One of the most prominent and eloquent advocates of the Durham miners in parliament was John Wilson, Liberal-Labour MP for Mid-Durham, 1890-1915. He was also General Secretary of the DMA and a firm believer in co-operation and arbitration but stated that by preference he was a Labour member first and then a Liberal.¹⁹ He argued that workmen should not be deluded into thinking they were getting a gift from their employers as ultimately the producing power of miners themselves would pay for any compensation payments.²⁰ In one debate, Sir James Joicey, MP and major Durham coalowner, proposed an

¹⁵ Huw Beynon and Terry Austrin, *Masters and Servants: Class and Patronage in the Making of a Labour Organisation* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1994), p. 84.

¹⁶ Lewis Mates, 'Rank-and-file movements and political change before the Great War: the Durham miners' Forward Movement', *Historical Research*, 87, 236 (2014), 316-343 (p. 319).

¹⁷ Beynon and Austrin, p. 91.

¹⁸ Lester, p. 485.

¹⁹ 'Mr John Wilson and the Compensation Act', *Northern Echo*, 5 November 1897, p. 3, *British Newspaper Archive* (hereafter *BNA*) <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>> [accessed 21 September 2018].

²⁰ *Hansard*, Series 4, volume 50, 12 July 1897, cols. 1616-1617.

amendment which would require free rent and coals, or smart money, to be taken into account when calculating compensation.²¹ Smart money was described as being midway between charity and employers' self-interest.²² It was important to miners, however, and meant that an injured miner got 5s a week when he was injured, plus free house and coals even if he was unable to work.²³ In response, John Wilson argued that the miners of Durham and Northumberland could lose their houses, coal and smart money if the amendment were accepted, and that this was a long-established system which the men considered part of their wages. He said such a loss would adversely affect the peaceful relationship which existed between the coalowners and the miners. This argument was successful and the amendment was dropped.

Away from parliament, the Workmen's Compensation Act received a mixed reception in the Durham coalfield. John Wilson MP addressed a meeting of electors in his Durham constituency and said he was in favour of compensation for accidents caused by bad working conditions, but that working men had never asked their employers to pay for accidents over which they had no control and he believed that every man with an income above a certain amount should pay to provide a fund, to which royalty owners should also be made to contribute.²⁴ He received a vote of confidence at the end of the meeting so his comments probably reflected popular opinion to an extent. Speaking at the Durham Miners' Gala, representatives of the DMA said the Act fell short by

²¹ *Hansard*, Series 4, volume 50, 12 July 1897, cols. 1638-1640.

²² Roy Church, *The History of the British Coal Industry, Volume 3, 1830-1913: Victorian Pre-Eminence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 596.

²³ *Departmental Committee on Compensation for Injuries to Workmen*, PP. 1904, Cmd.2334, Vol. II, p. 351.

²⁴ 'John Wilson MP and the Compensation Act', *Northern Echo*, 5 November 1897, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 6 August 2018].

leaving room for unnecessary litigation, while T.H. Cann of the DMA felt that to be fair and permanent, the state, employers and men should equally contribute to a compensation fund.²⁵ These comments showed some local dissatisfaction with the Act and again emphasised the independent nature of the miners and their preference for self-help where practical. However, there was also a pragmatic recognition of the necessity for a compensation scheme, even if the one enacted was not what the miners had envisaged.²⁶

The chief Liberal objection was that the new Act made no real effort to prevent accidents and it put the same obligation on conscientious owners and those who were careless.²⁷ However, there was also evidence that the Act was not expected by anyone to solve all safety issues and there was a sense of inevitability regarding accidents occurring due to the dangerous nature of the employment. The *Shields Gazette* also pointed out that disasters still happened, even with careful owners.²⁸ This implied an understanding that some owners did not pay as much attention to safety as others. However, an anonymous letter from 'a miner' expressed the opinion that 'safety is the principle and the beauty of the Act'.²⁹ Regarding fears for the future of the Permanent Relief Fund, the writer felt that the miners would never allow the Fund to crumble and the employers' contribution of £4,500 per year to the fund could easily be replaced by increasing contributions by a penny a fortnight, 'to which I think the miners will never demur'. The Workmen's Compensation Act

²⁵ 'Durham Miners' Gala', *Northern Echo*, 26 July 1897, p. 2, *BNA* [accessed 6 August 2018].

²⁶ Asher, see Chapter 1, footnote 11.

²⁷ 'The Compensation Bill', *Shields Daily Gazette*, 17 July 1897, p. 2, *BNA* [accessed 6 August 2018].

²⁸ *Shields Daily Gazette*, 17 July 1897, p. 2.

²⁹ 'Letter to the Editor', *Durham County Advertiser*, 6 May 1898, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 6 August 2018].

was therefore viewed with some misgivings and not given a particularly warm welcome in the Durham coalfield but DMA officials and miners had little option but to make the most of the Act as it stood, however imperfect they thought it to be.

The Workmen's Compensation Act set out eligibility criteria and scales of payment, but the practicalities of its implementation were left to negotiation between the interested parties or eventually to arbitration or the courts if necessary.³⁰ In the Durham coalfield, a committee of three members of the Durham Coal Owners' Mutual Protection Association, three from the DMA and their respective secretaries was appointed to consider any disputed claims under the Workmen's Compensation Act.³¹ From the outset the committee worked very well and successfully negotiated settlement of compensation claims. DMA correspondence revealed a well-organised and confident but pragmatic approach to its compensation work, while records of the Joint Compensation Committee gave numerous details of successful settlements. For example, a young driver killed by a fall of stone was initially offered £6 by the coalowners, but awarded £30 after negotiation, while a 19-year old putter who died in September 1919 after a knee injury in January of that year received £32 per week prior to his death and an offer of £99 from the committee, which was eventually raised to £116. Without this element of negotiation, many settlements would no doubt have been the statutory minimum.

³⁰ Bartrip and Burnam, p. 215.

³¹ 'Durham Miners and the Compensation Act – Agreement between Colliery Owners and Men', *Newcastle Journal*, 5 July 1898, p. 6, *BNA* [accessed 6 August 2018].

One particular case from the Joint Compensation Committee letter book demonstrated how effective application of the Workmen's Compensation Act in Durham could work for the benefit of the claimant. A copy letter from the DMA to the Secretary of Thrislington Colliery Lodge regarding an accident compensation claim explained that a doctor would be seeing 'the men who are taking a lump sum to see if there is any evidence to be got to get them a better settlement than that offered by the owners.'³² A further letter regarding the same commutation case, that of Mr Easter, indicated that 'the sum of £510 is quite correct'. It went on to explain that 'this unfortunate fellow lost both of his legs from above the knee and taking everything into account we have made a very good settlement'. Clearly there had been considerable negotiation with the coalowner as £510 was a significant sum, and more than the 'modest financial compensation' Lester referred to.³³ The compensation evidently enabled Mr Easter to regain some independence and work in the local community, for the 1911 census noted his occupation as 'hairdresser', who had lost both legs.³⁴ A photograph in a local history book showed Mr Easter standing before his shop, while a caption added that he had lost both legs in the mine.³⁵ Prior to the Workmen's Compensation Act, it is unlikely that private insurance arrangements would have enabled this level of assistance and rehabilitation. The Workmen's Compensation Act was therefore effectively applied in the Durham coalfield, thanks largely to the effective negotiating skills of the DMA and its relationship with the coalowners.

³² DCRO, Durham Miners' Association Records, D/DMA Acc 2157, Compensation Committee Letter Book, p. 184.

³³ Lester, p. 495.

³⁴ 1911 Census for England and Wales, West Cornforth, County Durham, RG14, p. 94.

³⁵ Robin Walton, *A History of Thrislington, Cornforth and West Cornforth* (Coxhoe: The Coronation Press, 1991), p. 88.

The Act did, however, have some disadvantages. In its early stages, there was confusion over definitions and the interpretation of its clauses, and the DMA worked to agree these locally. For instance, it was not clear if the common condition beat-hands, which was inflammation and bruising caused by the chafe of the pick-shaft on the hand, was classed as an accident under the Act.³⁶ In 1898 agreement was reached between the Durham Coal owners' Mutual Protection Association and the DMA that smart money would be paid for the first two weeks only to such men as hitherto received it.³⁷ However, in 1900 all collieries were asked if they continued to pay smart money for beat-hands after the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897.³⁸ Of the 147 responses from individual collieries, 18 said they continued to pay it, but due to the Act, smart money for beat-hands was combined with compensation and consequently reduced considerably. For example, at Turisdale Colliery, prior to the Compensation Act, smart money could be paid for up to 3 months, whereas after the Act, it was only paid for two weeks. Therefore there were circumstances in which miners could be worse off under the new compensation legislation.

In one his regular circulars to DMA members, John Wilson mentioned that there had been requests for rent payment by employers from the widows of men who had been killed and were entitled to compensation.³⁹ This was described as

³⁶ 'Durham Miners' Association', *Northern Echo*, 16 March 1899, p. 3.

³⁷ DCRO, DCOMPA 235, Agreement Between Durham Colliery Owners' Mutual Protection Association and Durham Miners' Association.

³⁸ DCRO, National Coal Board Records, NCB ICO 86/392, Smart Money For Beat-Hands.

³⁹ 'The Compensation Act Effect at Durham Collieries – the Widows of Miners', *Sunderland Echo*, 18 July 1899, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 18 August 2018].

being a 'great divergence' from what had been a 'generous custom', in other words widows being allowed to remain in houses without paying rent for a considerable time after their husbands had died. However, employers pointed out the large sums they were paying out under the Workmen's Compensation Act and widows now had a maximum of two months to leave the house, after which there would be a charge of 5 shillings per week for the two months' rent and coals, and for every week after that. Moreover, compensation would not be paid until the house had been vacated. Mr Wilson said that the DMA response was that they had not asked for the Act to be passed. He concluded that this was only one unforeseen consequence and other ones could be worse.

A further unfortunate effect was pointed out to the Government-appointed Departmental Committee on Compensation for Injuries to Workmen, 1904, which was instructed to investigate how the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1897 was working.⁴⁰ It interviewed many witnesses to ascertain how well or otherwise the Act was being implemented, one of whom was John Wilson, MP and DMA General Secretary. In his evidence to the Committee, he said that older, weaker men, or those with hearing or sight problems lost their jobs just prior to the Act coming into force because they represented a greater liability risk to employers.⁴¹ This was clearly a widespread problem for a meeting of the Executive of the Yorkshire Miners' Association reported that several men who were aged or suffering from health defects were discharged owing to the imminent enactment of the Workmen's Compensation Act and this was also the

⁴⁰ *Departmental Committee on Compensation for Injuries to Workmen*, PP. 1904, Cmd.2334, Vol. II, p. 351.

⁴¹ *Departmental Committee on Compensation for Injuries to Workmen*, p. 353.

case with the Cleveland Miners' Association.⁴² In addition, Challinor noted the same had applied to the Lancashire and Cheshire miners.⁴³ However, John Wilson added that, on the whole, from a monetary point of view, the Act had been of benefit to the miners.

The minutes of evidence from the Departmental Committee revealed that the Secretary of the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, W. Barnes, was also interviewed. His comments gave further indication of the nature of the relationship between the coalowners and their employees. He said that the coalowners no longer contributed to the Relief Fund as a result of the Act, which had seen a consequent loss of £4,000-£5,000.⁴⁴ However, they had continued to help the fund considerably by deducting the miners' contribution directly from their wages, thus keeping the fund stable. It was, of course, still in the coalowners' interest for their workers to contribute to their own fund and in automatically making the deduction from wages, the coalowners confirmed the paternalistic nature of their relationship with the miners.⁴⁵ The Secretary of the Relief Fund added that the Act had actually improved their fund and they had gained a considerable number of new members. He also made it clear that any compensation payments under the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897 were not taken into account as far as the fund was concerned. This may well explain the fund's increase in popularity for it is likely that the miners realised that for a small weekly contribution they could

⁴² 'Yorkshire Coalowners', 'Cleveland Mineowners', Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail, 28 June 1898, p. 3, BNA [accessed 21 July 2018].

⁴³ Raymond Challinor, *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Frank Graham, 1972), p. 265.

⁴⁴ *Departmental Committee on Compensation for Injuries to Workmen*, p. 382.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 2, pp. 23-24.

be better off in the event of an accident, due to receiving both compensation from the owners and money from their own fund, which continued to flourish well into the twentieth century.

Mr Barnes also said that that year had seen the lowest number of accidents since the fund started some 42 years previous, in fact they had fewer accidents but more members. When questioned as to the reason for this, he said that 'there must be greater care in colliery management'. His comments are, however, at odds with the Departmental Committee's conclusion that although the Act's effects were difficult to estimate, and no doubt there had been general safety improvements and greater care taken by both employer and employee, there was no evidence of any improvement in safety as a result of the Act.⁴⁶ Recorded statistics vary, and the Act made no provision for returns to show how it was working.⁴⁷ However, fatal accident statistics reported under the Coal Mines Regulation Acts nationally showed a steady increase in accidents from 908 in 1898, to 1,775 in 1910.⁴⁸ At a lecture delivered in County Durham in 1900, a barrister pointed out that fatal accidents had actually increased by 14.5% since the Compensation Act, and non-fatal accidents by 43%, although he thought the latter figure was probably due to better notification.⁴⁹

A report from the DMA Compensation Department of September 1918 in the Minutes of the Arbitration Committee for 1918-19 noted that there had been 17

⁴⁶ *Report of the Departmental Committee on Compensation for Injuries to Workmen*, Volume 1, Cd.2208, 1904, p. 22.

⁴⁷ Bartrip and Burnam, p. 208.

⁴⁸ 'A Comparative Cultural History of British Coalfields, 1780-1948', table 2.4, *Disability and Industrial Society*, 2012 <<http://www.dis-ind-soc.org.uk>> [accessed 21 October 2018].

⁴⁹ 'Workmen's Compensation Act', *Northern Echo*, 5 February 1900, p. 3, *BNA* [accessed 7 July 2018].

fatal accidents that month, compared with 6 in August.⁵⁰ It commented that the number of young boys killed had particularly increased and queried whether that was because the mines were more extensively worked and more machinery was involved, or if boys did not see the risks. In its review of work for 1918, the report to the Arbitration Committee noted 'the sad fact remains that this year has seen more fatal accidents than any year since the Compensation Act commenced.'⁵¹ It said that while 40,000 of its members were away in the forces, fatal accidents had increased to 169, the most since the Compensation Act started. In 1916, over 25% of men employed nationally in the mines had enlisted, so the well-trained and skilled young men who went to fight were replaced with the less-skilled.⁵² Many Durham miners enlisted and 89 died from Leasingthorne Colliery, and 111 from Dean and Chapter alone.⁵³ The First World War undoubtedly had an impact on the accident statistics, due to increased production and a less skilled workforce, but this is probably unquantifiable. Bartrip and Burnam noted that accident rates had not improved in the first few years of the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897.⁵⁴ However, as far as the Joint Compensation Committee was concerned, accident rates had still not improved as a result of the Act by 1918.

In conclusion, improved political representation of the working class in parliament, achieved through the extension of the franchise and an increasingly

⁵⁰ D/DMA 89-91 Minutes of Arbitration Committee 1918-1919.

⁵¹ D/DMA 89-91.

⁵² William Notz, 'The World's Coal Situation During the War', *Journal of Political Economy*, 26, 6 (1918), 567-611 (p. 595).

⁵³ 'Bolckow and Vaughan – World War I Roll of Honour, *Hidden Teesside*, <<http://www.hidden-teesside.co.uk/2015/03/24/bolckow-and-vaughan-world-war-1-roll-of-honour>> [accessed 2 September 2018].

⁵⁴ Bartrip and Burnam, p. 53.

vociferous and influential labour vote, meant that some local MPs from the Durham coalfield were able to influence the drafting of the Workmen's Compensation Act in 1897 to some extent. Regardless of the political motivation behind the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897, it is clear that its provisions were of considerable financial benefit to many local miners, although there were a number of drawbacks and complication and it was viewed locally, and nationally, with some suspicion and misgivings. However, there is evidence that in the Durham coalfield implementation of the Act and administration of compensation payments was efficient and effective. Undoubtedly this was largely attributable to the strong leadership of the DMA, the work of the Joint Committee and the good relationship which had been built between them. As a result, there were noticeable improvements in the financial welfare of many (though not all) injured miners, but a significant amount of the support they received still came from personal insurance. Evidence from the reports of the Joint Committee indicated that the Act itself did not have a major impact on the rate of accidents in the Durham coalfield.

Conclusion

This study examined the close links between industrialisation, poverty and welfare and how this link affected the miners of the Durham coalfield between 1870 and 1920. It assessed the welfare arrangements which were in place for miners and their dependents in the event of occupational-related death or injury and included the miners' attitude to self-help, relationships with their employers and community and the support available from state legislation.

The thread which continued throughout this study was the independent nature of the miners and their consistent and persistent effort to support themselves financially. The Victorian enthusiasm for self-help and the move away from dependence on the Poor Law, which was noted nationally, was no less evident in the communities of the Durham coalfield. In fact, the close-knit nature of many of these communities, and the heavy focus on a single industry, probably enhanced this. The tone of a number of the newspaper reports detailed in Chapter 1 highlighted this resolve and gave a sense of the overriding dignity and pride the miners felt in their self-reliance. That this preference was deep-rooted was shown by the miners' willingness to migrate or emigrate rather than rely on the Poor Law. However, the instinct for survival was overriding, thus migration was an economic necessity. There was indeed pragmatic acceptance of later welfare reforms, but realistically the choice between poverty or acceptance of state welfare was no choice at all.

The rigid class structure which existed in Britain at this time manifested in the Durham coalfield in the paternalistic nature of the relationship between many of

the coalowners and their employees, which was discussed in Chapter 2. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, this was increasingly challenged by the miners' instinct for independence, the wider availability of educational provision for adults in the form of miners' institutes and the growing confidence of the working class due to the extension of the franchise. The high percentage of trade union membership in the Durham coalfield undoubtedly added to this confidence, as miners met in their colliery union lodges, and this was illustrated in the minutes of their meetings. These revealed men taking an element of control over their own and their community's financial welfare, independent of the influence of the coalowners.

There was a delicate balance between the welfare support provided by the coalowners, and that arranged by the miners. Given the determination and organisation discernible from a number of contemporary records, it is quite possible that the miners would have continued to make their own insurance arrangements with or without a contribution from the coalowners. Indeed, the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund continued to function without coalowners' contributions after the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897 was passed.

While parliament debated whether legislation should deal primarily with safety or with financial compensation for injured workmen, the human toll of industrialisation continued to drain welfare resources, both nationally and locally. Benson focused on the relationship between the miners and coalowners in the Permanent Relief Fund, but the discussion of workmen's compensation in Chapter 3 highlighted that the miners in the Durham coalfield benefitted from an

unusually effective Joint Committee, which was set up between the DMA and coalowners' representatives to implement the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897. The co-operative and conciliatory nature of the relationship which built up was evident in DMA correspondence with local colliery lodges. Close examination of this correspondence gave considerable insight into the daily welfare work of an effective trade union and revealed both compassion and a determination to assist its injured members and this would benefit from further study. However, this level of effectiveness was achieved largely due to the conviction of the DMA's leadership that negotiation and conciliation were the keys to success. The social class conflict identified by a number of historians was less evident in Durham's Joint Committee, where there was mutual respect and co-operation, to the eventual advantage of the miners.

The Workmen's Compensation Act 1897 was certainly a political compromise, but as part of the wider welfare reforms of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century it was effective. If its primary aim was not to improve safety but to provide financial support for injured workmen then, as this study has demonstrated, it was very successful, particularly for miners of the Durham coalfield. There was evidence that Bartrip and Burnam's assertion that the Act had not reduced accident rates up to the end of their study period around the turn of the twentieth century, may be extended as far as 1920, although the effect of the First World War on figures is uncertain.

This study ends with the conclusion of the First World War, which was a pivotal point for Britain, Europe and indeed many other parts of the world. The British

class structure began to change, as landowners became less influential and the working class gained more representation. Welfare and social reform gained momentum. The demand for compensation for miners took a new direction in the inter-war years as the recognition of respiratory diseases caused by coal dust increased dramatically. Further mechanisation and modernisation was welcomed, but it did not result in reduced accident rates, at least in the short-term. Political change in post-war Britain was reflected in the Durham coalfield, where the Labour Party grew in popularity and influence. Liberal ideals no longer dominated the DMA and its leadership changed. Its social values, however, did not and the Durham miners continued their proud tradition of independence and community support over the next few decades.

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