

# The PEOPLE'S ECHO

Issue 1 · Christmas 2016

## MEMORIES OF THE 1984–85 MINERS' STRIKE



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## CHRISTMAS DONATIONS FLOOD IN

Every miner's family should have a turkey, and every child should have a toy.  
Dave



© National Union of Mineworkers

We got presents that were donated ... I got a little cheap plastic watch and a coat that my auntie had made, but I just didn't even care, 'cos I was having so much fun.  
Sam, miner's daughter, aged 15 during the Strike

# GIVING

I remember mum saying that her dad used to bring us a big sack of potatoes every week so that we'd at least got potatoes, so when it were food parcel day me mum never ever took any potatoes from there, because she knew 'I've already got enough', so she left them for someone else.

Gayle

## Elspeth

*I was 36, 37. I knew this one was for the long haul. My dad, my brothers, his dad, his brothers, were all miners. I got a little job in a shop. Bill looked after the girls, made their teas, when he wasn't picketing. We'd boxes in our hall: soup, beans, spaghetti, whatever was cheapest. We got the uniforms out of the catalogue, paid every week. I can't remember going without, I don't think we had a bad time. It was just so busy, we were just so busy. We stood at North Shields and watched huge tankers coming in, full of coal.*

Documentary poem by Harriet Tarlo



Week 42 of the Strike: Women's Support Group Christmas Party, Eslington © Keith Pattison



© Esther Johnson

Because I'd been working I'd got a bit of money at beginning of strike, so we didn't take our food parcels. What we decided were when money runs out we'll take it. But until then it's our contribution to everybody else. We weren't going to take from anybody else that had a lot less than us.

Jean

Brenda came to the house with, you know, a week's worth of shopping ... I spoke to Brenda and asked why she did it, and she was quite torn 'cos she didn't know how my mum would react, she thought she might be too proud to accept, but she wasn't doing it for those reasons – it was that sort of, 'Shall I, shan't I?'. The tension between them both, you know, the proud mum and the proud woman wanting to help.

Craig

# CHRISTMAS

Do you know what my mother-in-law got for Christmas that year? They'd been in pits at night and gleaned a load of coal ... everyone used to go round to her house, they used to sit in her back yard, 'cos she lived in a terrace and she got a big massive bag of coal that they gleaned for all the cups of tea and everything, everyone had had at her house.

Jean



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I was an only child, and I was a little bit spoilt, so Christmas was always a settee, you know, overflowing with presents, and that year, it wouldn't have even gone on the corner of the settee, but I really, I didn't care.

Sam

They didn't ask for a great deal ... but the fact that our family were together and we were so close. They still had presents to open, perhaps not a computer that they'd wanted, but they still had lots of presents.

Elspeth

I've got cups and badges and I've got a jewellery box that was given to me ... they're just a memory of your own history.

Jayne



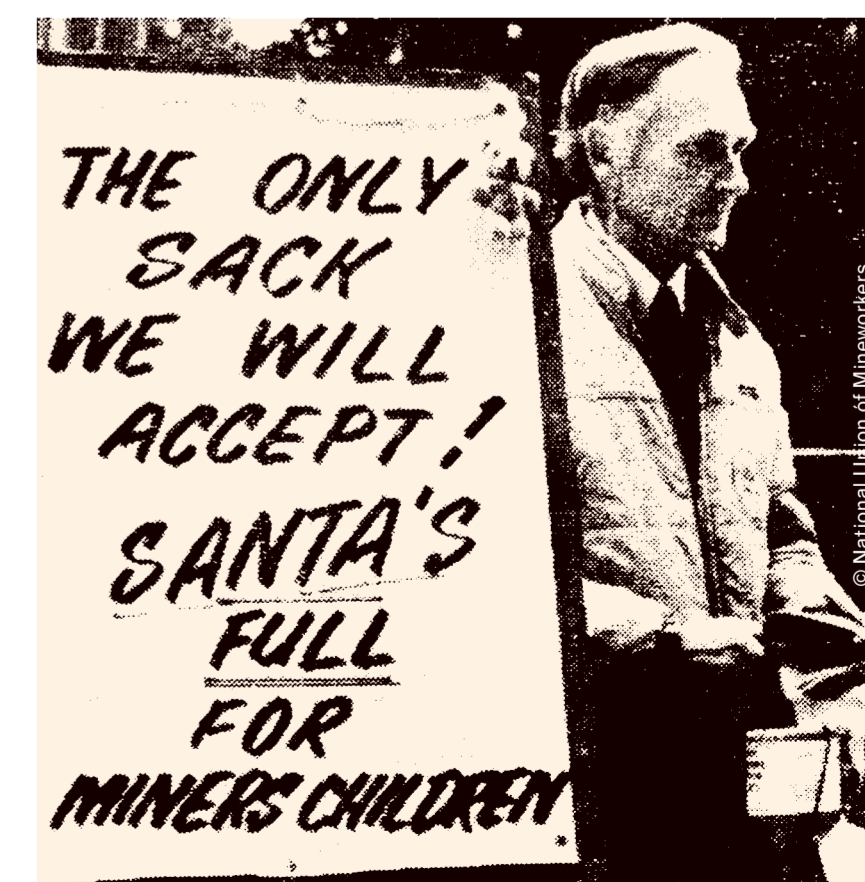
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Gayle

*I were still at nursery at 4; I remember sitting on't carpet wi' a bottle of milk 'till milk snatcher got hold of it. My brother he were 13 year old when he moved out of our house to help me mum and dad so it were one less mouth to feed, moved in wi' his girlfriend's parents – it were just like it had to be done, everyone helped each other. Me daughter looks at photos of me when I were a nipper and starts crying, says 'oh my god mum, I can't believe how poor you were', but I can't remember feeling that poor.*

*Sorry ... why am I gettin' so emotional?*

Documentary poem by Harriet Tarlo



© National Union of Mineworkers

# DAY TO DAY

I said 'We've got to do something, we've got to start getting involved in it. I started going to soup kitchen ... every day, basically, and started doing meals ... so you'd got that community spirit. Karen

We took Bill's Mam ... to hear Arthur speak and he didn't half know how to get the crowds behind him ... and it was just wonderful, wonderful she enjoyed it, we enjoyed it so ... that was something that you couldn't envisage families doing together, a night out to hear Arthur Scargill speak. Elspeth



I would listen to the news, earwiggling on the discussions you do start to become aware of what's going on ... you start to take notice. Sam

My dad was very active on the picket lines, he went all over the place picketing – Nottingham, Durham – you know, everywhere. My grandad was a little bit older and he stayed round a little bit more for the kids you know and let me dad go gallivanting off. Craig

It were a red hot summer, which were terrible for coal, you know, because nobody wanted coal. But for us, my son laid out for three months with nothing on but a smile ... we went on walks with the kids, 'cos my son's youngest of ten cousins, so we'd go en masse, and to be honest you might not have had much and I s'pose bills were a worry, but to be truthful everybody helped everybody out. Jean

My daughter led a strike at the school, a lot of people get free school meals and when you're on strike you get free school meals. They segregated the striking miners' kids. Sam marched them out of school and said, 'We're not having this'. The school put 'em in with all the rest, so people were politicized by it. Dave

## Sam

*I was 15. I don't remember the start of it I didn't pay much attention. We just didn't have a lot of money. But then it just went on and on and on. I loved the kitchens, cooking for the miners, loads of people coming to our house. To be fair, I didn't know many of the people in the village before, but at the end of that year they were just like your best friends, all except the scabs. My mate, whose dad was also on strike, we got really close when the YMCA took us all to Beadnell for a holiday—we windsurfed, canoed, it was fantastic. But then her dad went back. She never spoke to me after that.*

Documentary poem by Harriet Tarlo

My mum suffered I think the most ... she described quite vividly not knowing where she was going to get food from and going to the Social Services and asking why benefits were cut and why they couldn't get any money for food, and the only sentence of support they said was, 'If you fry your potato skins they are quite nice' ... I remember one story from my dad saying that they went to pick coal and they ended up just walking miles and miles, it was a beautiful summer that summer in the strike and he said that he really got close to his dad. It's a really kind of a loving memory that he would cherish.

Craig



# AFTERMATH

We're in a situation where people are working on zero hours contracts and you know young kids can't get jobs. So things are quite difficult for people in mining areas that have never recovered I don't think, from the strike, and the closure of the collieries. **Elsbeth**

## Craig

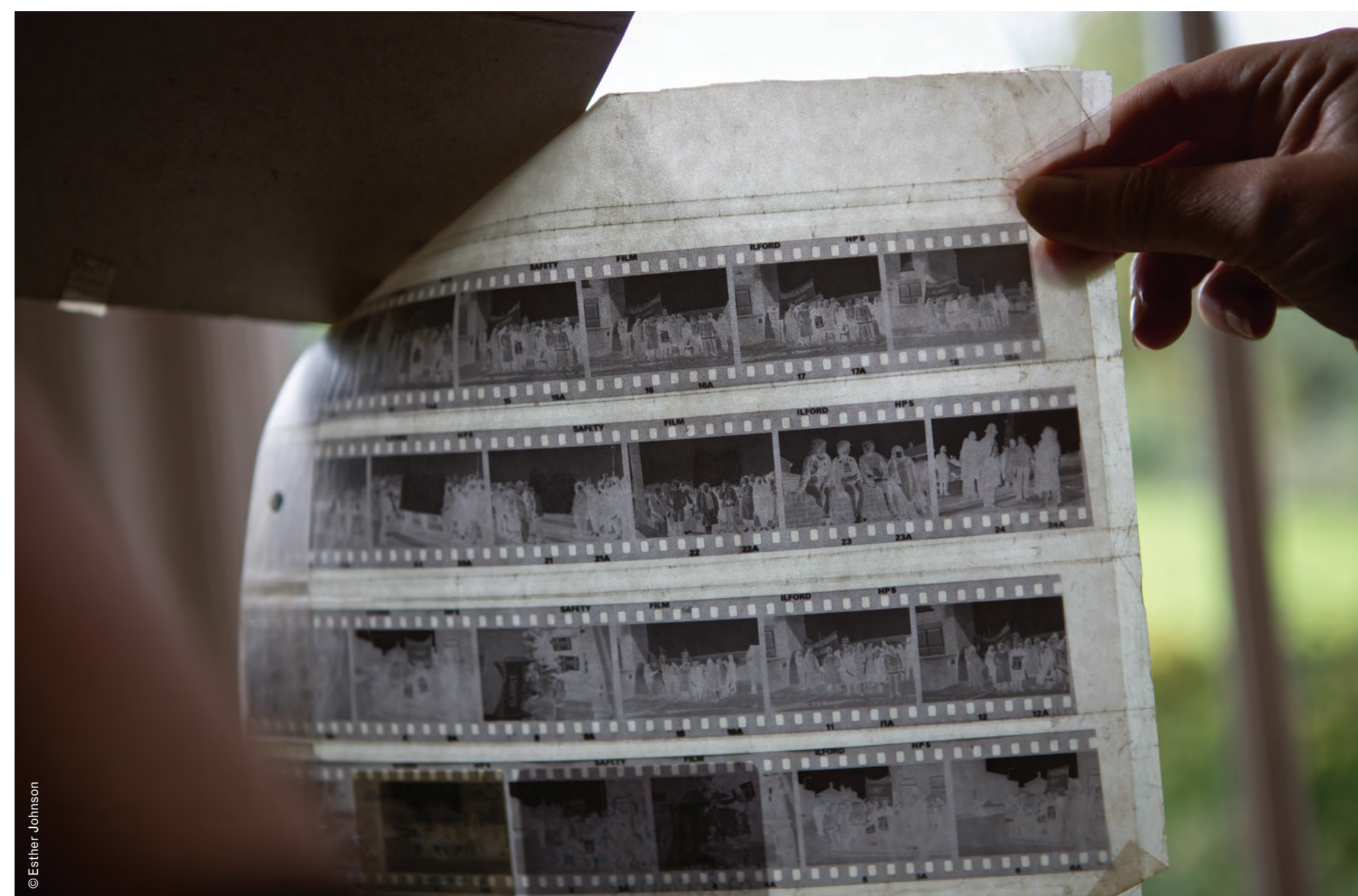
*I was born 10 days after the strike pretty hard times really growing up in that, catching my mum crying 'cos we had no money, asking for Lego, asking for sweets, everything I wanted above and beyond our means. Too much of a stretch. They divorced 5 years after, but they remember: Brenda down the road bringing over a week's worth of shopping; Dad walking miles with Grandad to pick coal (it was a beautiful summer that summer in the strike); mum, pregnant, sitting in front of the fireplace trying to roll coal dust together to make enough to burn.*

Documentary poem by Harriet Tarlo

The pit closed ... and now I think I'm right, it's the highest unemployment and crime, drugs for young people, it's, it's dead ... if you leave school now with no qualifications, you don't stand a chance of getting anything – nothing! You end up, if you're lucky, working in a chicken factory, processing chickens or a scotch egg factory at Goldthorpe.  
**Jean**

**It changed my life;  
changed your life;  
changed the life  
of other people,  
some for the worse,  
some for the better.  
Dave and Sam**

**My dad being arrested at Orgreave, he was victimized ... you know everyone in the entire world probably thought he was an enemy to his country just because he was trying to protect himself. It's about time that was shown for what it was, which was a lie. Which is why it's important. When has the truth not been of public interest? **Craig****



© Esther Johnson

I was dead proud to walk behind the banner at the miners' gala the year of the strike. It was fantastic, that year particularly fantastic.  
**Sam**

I remember going to places ... like miners' galas – I used to absolutely love that, and marches. I were always sat on pole on't banner. I spent most of me life on one of them I think.  
**Gayle**



© National Union of Mineworkers

Well it was a big part of me life, I was fifteen, it was at that time in your life when you're not quite an adult, I think you're influenced. Had the strike not happened, I would have continued with Duran Duran on my walls.  
**Sam**

I'm proud my dad was part of that, and I'm proud my mum was part of that, and I'm proud that I come from that community.  
**Craig**

## QUOTES FROM THE NATIONAL COAL MINING MUSEUM FOR ENGLAND ARCHIVE, STAFF AND FRIENDS



### GIVING

The Askern Miners' Welfare Soup Kitchen was basically a lifeline for lots of striking families. It was run by the Askern Women's Support Group and they served up one main family meal a day. The food was sometimes basic but always hot and gratefully received. I remember lots of baked beans, minced meat and tinned tomatoes – not the best food in the world, but lovingly prepared and the place had a real community feel about it.

**Ken Wilkinson, former miner**

It was hard, I'd just got married at Christmas in 1983 and my wife was pregnant. My daughter was a Strike baby; she was born in October '84. Initially I was living off savings, which eventually ran out. I had to freeze my mortgage. People who my wife worked with came through with big food parcels. I felt a bit humble that these people that I didn't even know were donating food so that we could live and I never forgot that. At the time I hated people who went back to work, breaking the Strike. I can sort of understand to a point why financially they might have done it, but I still can't forgive.

**Andy Kolundzic, former guide at the National Coal Mining Museum for England**

Rev. Peter Noble was the local vicar at St. Peter's Church in Askern. There were lots of problems in the village at the time as most people had debts because of the Strike. Some miners went back to work and this caused real anger, stress and trouble between families and friends, so Rev. Noble arranged a special service at the church so that the people of Askern could pray for peace in the community and for a settlement to the Strike.

The church provided weekly food parcels to many families and single men (miners) through-

out the Strike. The congregation chose not to pay its church stipend to the Church of England that year – there was no money to do so – but also because the church felt what money was available was needed to support the local community. It took the church nearly two years to pay off the stipend debt after the Strike ended.

**Ken Wilkinson**

I was elected the day the Strike began. I never had a lot to do with the mining industry, except I'd been invited for many years up to the Durham Miners Gala because I'd always supported the miners. During the year that followed it was the most incredible struggle, because these men who had nothing to live on, stuck it out. I think the women supporters' groups played a tremendously important part, Betty Heathfield and Ann Scargill. It was sustained throughout a complete year and in the end, the miners were beaten.

It was an astonishing story because of the solidarity. They got massive support; American miners came over, the French trade unions made a contribution of a million pounds to help the miners. I did 299 public meetings in a year, went to America and Canada and raised money, went to Europe and raised money and the international solidarity was absolutely phenomenal – that kept people going.

**Tony Benn, former Labour MP and Cabinet Minister and honorary member of the NUM**

You find out who your true friends are. I had a really nice friend called Anne and she was just brilliant, and she used to



That Christmas you learnt who your true friends were. One friend bought us round a bag of frozen food and said that their freezer had broken down. We knew it hadn't really. Other people invited us around for meals and bought our John presents.

We bought what we could afford but it wasn't much; John didn't mind though. My mum and the rest of the family helped us out too. They made sure John didn't go without.

**Barbara Lyons, current member of staff at the National Coal Mining Museum for England**

### CHRISTMAS

At Christmas time the French CGT Union and Radio Bremen they sent us some toys so because we had got so many distribution centres and all the toys came into the one centre. What I did was I contacted all the organisers of each group for the names of, not the names, but

how many children of one of boys they'd got and how many of girls so we could go through Eckington for example, we put a whole pile of toys over there and they were all Eckington's and there were twenty toys for boys and twenty for girls, you know, and going up in ages.

**Toni Bennett speaking to the National Coal Mining Museum for England**

We also got things from abroad. I remember before the Christmas we decided that we were having a Christmas party just for the central group and their children ... and I was walking in Barnsley from the bus station, up Peel Street, and this big box van stopped and said 'we're looking for Women Against Pit Closures can you tell us where they are!' I said, 'I can, I am one of the Women Against Pit Closures and we are having a social event at the moment.' And they'd come from Belgium and they'd brought new toys. And one of the central women ... said to her son who was 11 or 12, you know that there'll be no Christmas presents this year, because we just haven't got the money. They were struggling to feed themselves. So she took a bike home. And he started crying when he got up on Christmas morning because

there was a present there, and it was a bike. Those things are lovely things.

**Jean Miller speaking to the National Coal Mining Museum for England**

At Christmas, I made custard for about 200 of us, because we had a lovely Christmas party. Mike Harding came, yes, we got Mike Harding to come ... Jim Exley was Father Christmas, and every kid got a toy, and they were all there and we have lovely Christmas. Do you know, it were one of best family Christmases I've ever had.

**Anne Scargill speaking to the National Coal Mining Museum for England**



My relations, they didn't expect any Christmas presents, us families rallied round and fetched us bits and bobs. Cos my two brothers didn't work in industry so they fetched a couple of bottles of beer and a couple of bottles of wine, supplied us with basic essentials. And it proved to us that Christmas isn't all about spending money, you could have a good time at Christmas without spending money and we certainly utilised that.

**Eric Richardson, former miner, speaking to the National Coal Mining Museum for England**

Women got together in us village, they did put a Christmas dinner on for miners that were on Strike, all financed and set up by different Unions. It was absolutely, it was a brilliant Christmas without spending money that we hadn't got. Yeah we had us Christmas tree up and trimmings up, but you went that extra length to making trimmings and making toys an all. I can remember it took me about three week to make a farmyard and little animals to go in. And one of the lads fetched a big dolls house, and honestly the support that the miners had during Christmas, and all through the Strike, but during Christmas come to forefront and it were tremendous.

**Eric Richardson**



A lad called Pete, he had 3 daughters. And I just wanted to get something for him, just to throw in the Christmas stocking for the girls, cause they were only young. And in those days, they used to call it The Globe petrol station in Normanton and if you put £10 worth of petrol in the car you got a voucher towards a selection box. And in the selection box, there were only five pieces of chocolate ... it cost £50 basically because it was a voucher for every £10 of fuel and you needed five vouchers to get a selection box. So it was quite expensive that selection box! But with friends and family, I asked all the family to go and get their petrol there and save all these vouchers up, basically just to get three selection boxes for the kids. Just as an extra wrap up. I took them through on Christmas morning to give to the kids and it was just something else to open up. Pete did his best for the kids, as every parent would do, but it was just very limited to what kids could have.

**Richard Teasdale**

At Christmas it was special. We did have a party in Mechanics Institute and one of the lads got dressed up as Father Christmas, and we had an old fashioned Christmas. I mean, I think Christmas has been spoilt commercially but in Miners' Strike we had an old fashioned Christmas. Us children had to accept what they were given for Christmas, I didn't hear them moan and groan.

**Eric Richardson**

My three children received presents from Eastern European miners/families as per the foreign writing on the boxes. We were also grateful for a chicken given in our food parcel that Christmas.

**Richard Perry, former miner speaking to the National Coal Mining Museum for England**

### DAY TO DAY

If you worked down a coal mine, the chance was your entire family was employed there in some capacity. Fathers, sons, grandsons, uncles, even aunties, mums and sisters worked in the offices or the pit canteen. That's why most people realised that if the pit closed it meant unemployment not just for them but for their children and families too.

**Ken Wilkinson**

I had 12 months on strike. Majority of that time I worked on farms, I did potato picking, pea picking, strawberry picking — you know, you name it, we did it. Did quite a lot of picketing, you know. You did it to make ends meet. I were lucky, I was a single man living at home, you know, so very fortunate. My heart went out to a lot of people who had families, you know, and you know, the gas and electric got cut off.

**Neil Williams, former Mines Rescue speaking to the National Coal Mining Museum for England**

On the 1st September 1984, I married my wife, Lesley. Several weeks later, we received a DHSS cheque for £6.45 a fortnight for the two of us to live on. This cheque was the first one I had received as a striking miner since the start of the strike in March 1984.

**Ken Wilkinson**

### AFTERMATH

We knew when Strike were over, everybody were really, really upset. Women, they were crying. So anyway, we got banner out, and we marched back to work up to- from our soup kitchen up to top, because pit were at top of hill.

**Anne Scargill**

The National Coal Mining Museum for England tells the story of the thousands of people who laboured in the industry and the communities that grew around them.

The Museum collections are held for future generations to learn about coal mining and its communities. They include art, photographs, machines, transport and everyday work, and home items with a mining history. There is a beautiful collection of mining banners. The Museum also collects oral history recordings revealing how people lived and worked.

The Library holds information on the history of coal mining in England, technical, social, economic, political and geographical aspects of the industries and its communities. This collection includes current mining journals as well as journals from the nineteenth century onwards; oral histories and rare books dating from the 1700s.

### CHRISTMAS TOY APPEAL

Taking inspiration from the values of generosity and solidarity explored in **A share of a pensioner's Christmas 'Bonus', the National Coal Mining Museum for England** and exhibition artists are asking visitors to consider donating a Christmas gift to sick, disadvantaged and disabled children across Yorkshire. The toy appeal is being run in partnership with Kingston Unity, based in Wakefield.

Together, we will be collecting donations of new, unwrapped toys and books for girls and boys aged 6 to 11 years old between November and December 2016.

Visitors are encouraged to drop-off their donated gifts at the Museum's Reception. The gifts will be distributed to disadvantaged children across Yorkshire by Variety, a children's charity based in Leeds.

As well as the toy appeal, the Museum is working with Y5 pupils from Middlestown Primary School to plan and host a community Christmas Children's party at the Museum on 15 December 2016.

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**It were a pull-along ladybird  
or a tortoise and I think ...  
probably donated ... from train  
drivers in London ... or from an  
appeal that they put in paper  
for people to donate toys to  
children of the Miners' Strike  
... I were obviously lucky  
enough to get one.**

**Gayle**



Gayle, aged 4, Christmas 1984

## A share of a pensioner's Christmas 'Bonus'

This newspaper has been produced for the exhibition **A share of a pensioner's Christmas 'Bonus'** at the National Coal Mining Museum for England, a collaborative research project by artist and filmmaker **Esther Johnson**, and filmmaker and writer **Debbie Ballin**.

On a warm Monday afternoon back in September 2015, we visited the hushed, basement archives of the People's History Museum in Manchester. As artists and researchers, we were looking for items that gave a child's perspective of the 1984–85 Miners' Strike. We wanted to uncover stories of what it was like for children and teenagers to grow up in the shadow of the Strike, and understand what the aftermath of this might have been.

Within the archive, tucked into a folder amongst a pile of official letters and the minutes of endless meetings, we found a bundle of handwritten letters and home-made Christmas cards. On top of this stack was a compliments slip with the words **A share of a pensioner's Christmas 'Bonus'** typed in faded blue ink.

The contents of these cards and letters moved us deeply. They told a story of acts of kindness and generosity by total strangers. Ordinary people, many of them pensioners, had donated their money so that the children of striking miners could celebrate Christmas that year.

We dug a little deeper and discovered that during the 1984–85 Miners' Strike, the Thatcher government paid pensioners the same £10 Christmas heating bonus they had been receiving since 1972.

A nationwide newspaper appeal invited pensioners to give up their bonus in support of the striking miners. Hundreds of donations flooded in. The letters and cards we had stumbled across in the archive were written to accompany these donations.

These items inspired this project. In response to them, we sought out children and their families who were recipients of these acts of Christmas generosity and recorded their stories of the Strike.

The exhibition work includes: a poetic audio documentary, photography, archive items from the collections of the People's History Museum and the National Coal Mining Museum for England, as well as personal artefacts and memorabilia from the children and families of the Strike. These all bear witness to these untold stories.

We have made this special edition newspaper, **The People's Echo**, as a Christmas gift for museum visitors. We specifically wanted to include this element, as the original Christmas appeals that sparked this story were in the national press. There is a pleasing circularity about the story finding its way back to a newspaper more than thirty years later. We also wanted to give something back to those who visited the exhibition in the same spirit of generosity.

The newspaper provides a space to include additional elements from the original interviews with participants. Quotes from these are presented on the page so that the stories can be seen and read as well as heard in the poetic documentary. Within the paper we include original photographs from the exhibition, archive images from

the Christmas 1984 edition of **The Yorkshire Miner**, and photographs of memorabilia and ephemera from the Strike.

In addition we have collaborated with Sheffield poet Harriet Tarlo who has composed a series of new documentary poems for the paper that are constructed from our original interviews.

**A share of a pensioner's Christmas 'Bonus'** is part of our wider research project **Echoes of Protest** that investigates the legacy of key protest movements from a child's perspective.

**Esther Johnson**     **Debbie Ballin**

Many people have kindly given their time and support to this project. Esther Johnson and Debbie Ballin would especially like to thank the following:

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**Sheffield Hallam University**

**NATIONAL COAL MINING MUSEUM FOR ENGLAND**



### **With Compliments**

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