

Bob Fitzpatrick Summary

Interview by Garry Lyons, for Last Seam play

Date: 27.1.17

Minutes	
	Track One
1.30	I'm Robert Fitzpatrick. Started in the mining industry in 1983, Oct 17 th at Barnburgh Colliery just up the road from here. Went out on strike 1984, back to work 1985, but at the gates there were Kent pickets there, so they sent us away for another week. Worked at Barnburgh 1983 to 1989. Then 1989 to 2003 at Maltby Colliery. Left for a while then was at Hatfield Colliery from 2007. Some of my old colleagues were there and they were struggling to fill Branch official positions for NUM. Had to wait a year to apply then in 2008 I put my name forward as Branch President for Hatfield Colliery.
3.00	The manager at the time, Chris Daniels, was totally anti union. He made it difficult for us to get time off for union activities so we did it all in our spare time.
5.00	Went to introduce myself to Chris Daniels and he said he'd show me the way to go forward, but it dunt work that way. 'So from 3 weeks of being President I think I upset him'...
6.30	Pit started to struggle and it was bad management 'a blind man on a galloping horse would see what they were doing'. They were abandoning materials. Management said we should take coal tops out, in the Barnsley bed, from the roof (connies), so the roof collapsed. So pit stopped producing for 3 months.
8.00	We as Branch officials asked them to stop taking connies out. The management wouldn't listen to the men. We were dropping behind all the time. Problems with number 3 then number 4 face. Not servicing machines. FSVs were breaking down. FSV is a little bulldozer with a great big blade on front. They're ideal for doing chock installations. Should get 3 or 4 chocks in per shift but we were down to one every 24 hours. Had 4 ABM machines but only 3 worked at any one time.
10.00	We were always falling behind. Chris Daniels asked me what we could do about it – I said he should give a bonus. He wouldn't. Instead deputy manager started a 'job and knock' system, so when we'd done 6 metres advance lads could go home. Manager didn't know about it. Spotted lads leaving shift early.
12.00	Went into administration 2009 I believe it was. Needed 9 trains a week of coal going out. We'd averaged 16. So at £100,000 per train, what's happened to that £600,000?
15.00	At a meeting I was arguing about state of machinery and asked Yitka, an administrator, if they could free up money to refurb an FSV. Chris Daniels called me in and was screaming and swearing at me for asking the administrators for money. He said there was nothing wrong with the FSVs. There was, but the engineer didn't dare tell him.
18.00	I told him to calm down. I walked out the office and his secretary Donna asked if I was alright.
19.00	

	Tony Shaw, the Branch Secretary was called in and manager, deputy manager and under manager were there, and Daniels told him to get ready. 'I aren't having him telling administrator...'
2.00	Track Two Manager said I shouldn't go in (to the administrators) and ask for money, that was his job. Tony said he wouldn't discuss it until he'd spoken to me. That was Monday. On Thursday I went into the pit and Paul Smith, the deputy said if I refused to do anything, (anecdote about banter), the first thing I did wrong, they would sack me. I kept me head down, like I've been told to do. 3 weeks later, back on day shifts I start getting deployed to jobs that demoralise you.
3.45	They had 48 inch lay flats coupled onto the fan. Normally 3 or 4 men would drop these lay flats down but I was sent on my own. So I started it furthest point away and worked my way back.
6.15	Next day I gets deployed to a build-up and there was a guy I'd already had a run-in with, John Watson, an under manager. I was carrying out a drill and got off where I shouldn't have. Watson started screaming and shouting at me about coming off district early. Deputy called Broadbent defended me, but Watson said he was going to stop me time. Watson stopped my time from 12 o'clock. We had this confrontation. Anyway I got the time back.
7.30	Safety officer came down to do self rescuer training. You have to do it every 12 months. He wanted to do it in snap time but I said no. It was our 20 mins for snap. Rob the safety officer called me for something else and when I got back John Watson was shaking his fist at me. There was loads of people stood around, and Watson lost his bottle and walked off. I told him he was victimising me.
8.30	People used to jump out of the paddy and run for the baths but I didn't do it, cos I knew they were watching me. I stopped doing all that. I was in the baths and overman came into the baths and said I was being reported for jumping off a moving paddy. He said John Watson was reporting me. But I waited a month, and nothing. Then I gets a letter from Personnel Manager, Mick. He said he had to discipline me. But I said he couldn't discipline me because I needed representation from an area official. So I was suspended for about a fortnight.
11.00	Track Three I put my statement in. Manager sacked me for 7 weeks. They wanted us to go out on strike and they would sack all the union members so I told the lads to work as normal and we'd fight it through the appeals process. The lads said they'd have a collection for me. Despite appeal process, the manager wouldn't accept it. Hargreaves told Daniels to give me my job back but he said he'd consider it over Bank Hol weekend. Yitka told me he should have given me my job back. Then Chris Kitchen rang and said Daniels had been sacked.
1.30	Hargreaves put Bannerman in and he gives us a 3% pay rise and bonus system. We couldn't sign up to bonus system because it said it would be paid 'at the manager's discretion'.
4.30	
6.30	
8.15	

	There were 270 members out of 500 employed at the colliery. Nacods had about 50/60 members, BACM with about 40/50 members. Only 110 were non union members.
10.30	The management wanted to put 4 weekly pay onto us and flexible working, but I said no. They said they wanted us to do that to keep the pit open. They printed a shift rota out, tied it into a pay deal and had us in again cos we wouldn't budge. But men did sign to do flexible working.
1.00	Track Four 12 months later we're producing less coal and the wage bills go sky high. Had to get rid of the extra 100 men. Did a scoring system, it was unbelievable. I'm trained to do 28 different aspects of mining. Machine operator, coalface, headings. My attendance was 100%. But the scores said I wasn't capable of doing my job. I was on redundancy list. They said because I had
3.30	pneumoconiosis I couldn't go back down pit. So I was put on pit top, on coal prep plant. I applied to be faceman, but it was declined. I applied for a job on belts and got it, and went back underground. I think the union swung it for me. I'd been going down victimisation route. They swapped my shifts around and put me on early start so I didn't see most of them, 5am instead of 6am.
6.00	I used to meet lads at D junction and tell them what was going on. They didn't like that.
7.15	The management started putting in more contract men. Supplied by Gordon Bannerman's own contract company.
10.00	Then I was on nights and Tony rang and said not to take any snap, we'd shut. That's how quick it was. I'm now working with NUM on welfare rights. I'm 70% - got pneumoconiosis, osteo-arthritis in knees, vibrating white finger.
	Track Five
1.30	We knew Hargreaves were in crisis talks. We were forever struggling for money. NUM lent them £4 million. We'd been told we would be mining till
3.30	August 2016. We went from producing power station coal, to home coals. Singles, doubles and trebles.
4.30	I think we were supplying Ferrybridge Power Station. But what was happening to the home coal? Where's all the money gone?
6.00	But we weren't hitting our targets and I think that's what closed us. I met Ed Miliband and he said he would look at saving Hatfield, Kellingley and possibly Thoresby if he became PM. But that never happened. It's a travesty what they've done.
8.00	Profit comes first. Richard Budge was removed because he wanted to reinvest and they said no, profit comes first.
10.00	We're still burning 40 million tons of coal a year. So that's 40 coalmines we could still have in GB. I can't see any mines being re-opened because of the expense. Costs a million pounds a metre.