

Ian Medlock

Date: 18.1.17

Interview with Garry Lyons, Last Seam play

Minutes	
	Track One
1.00	Worked at the mine from 1983 to 1993, except for the year on strike. Went back in 2000 but got laid off two or three times and got other jobs before returning 2006 as a Banksman. You were in charge of the bank itself, the actual shaft's eye, which is the men and materials coming out of the pit, at shaft number two. Included
2.45	heavy duty stuff, from four to twenty odd tonnes. Everybody's air came up shaft number two.
4.00	Shaft exams had to be done every 24 hours. Worked a three shift rota from Monday to Friday shifts. No actual weekend working unless there was an emergency and your name got pulled out of the hat. Then eventually went to four shift rota covering 24/7 except for Christmas.
5.15	I was used to that as I'd worked outside the industry. I did some factory work, drove fork lift truck, bus driver. Have lived in this house since 1987. I paid my mortgage off with my first redundancy but there weren't many jobs to go to and they were lower paid locally. Went back to the pit in 2000 because the money was better.
7.00	It was totally different than in 1985 but it still had a nationalised feel. It was a good set of lads. So long as you did your bit. It was a good set up. Wages weren't brilliant but Hatfield's never been big payers regarding bonuses. After the strike the NUM still had a fair bit of bite but that changed. After 1993 we didn't have much shout at all.
8.00	Went back in 2000 working on the coal prep. The gaffers were more stressed about not hitting targets, when it was a private pit the margins were a lot shorter.
10.00	Up to the early nineties they always found money for machinery and bits and bobs but when it was private, machinery was worth its weight in gold. 'You could just tell that money wasn't a bottomless pit'.
11.30	Nothing was thrown away. In 1983 there were 2500 men there, in 2000 there were 400 men tops. In 20 years no money had been spent on the pit. The only difference was we popped some new cable in, because the pit needed extra power.

12.30	I was there 10 years continuously until it shut. Hargreaves stepped in to stop us shutting three or four years before it did. Then my mate texted me and said they were clearing the pit. I'd been through all that before, when they shouted all the men out the pit and the next shift wasn't allowed down.
14.00	I'd had a funny feeling about it, I'd told my wife I wouldn't take my snap bag. That's when we had a meeting Monday teatime, the afters were out, all the gaffers were having a meeting and then we were told if our name wasn't on the list that was it.
2.00	Mine wasn't on the list. I was sunbathing in the garden when my mate texted and said they needed me in for August. We knew we were going to get redundancy and wages because the Govt had stepped in to guarantee it. The agreement was that the pit would be shut for a certain time in August, then the coal authority would take over, ready for sealing the shafts.
3.00	They paid me for the week before I went back in too. I'm working for Royal Mail now.
4.30	Track Two Coal fired power stations – they're doing it in Germany, America and China but Govt won't here, everything has to be green. There were only 3 pits left but the Tories got the result they wanted. That's how we feel around here.
6.30	I knew it wasn't going to be a job for life. I thought I might get 2 to 5 years out of it hopefully. You knew nobody was going to bail them out. It wasn't like in the eighties where they used to throw money at it.
9.00	We'd heard rumours that a Labour Govt would keep the last 3 pits going. It was a different set up in 2006, there must have been a lot of gaffers at the pit, I think it was very top heavy. When I went back I could probably recognise about 70 men. Before, out of 2500 men I knew probably 2000 by name.
11.00	After 2000, I'd say there were 50 to 70 local lads who lived within a 10 mile radius. It was strange to begin with. For me the strike was done and dusted, if the scabs were grafters, got stuck in and helped you out, it didn't bother me. Because you had to work with them. 'To tell you the truth, I forgot all about it, with most of them'.

	You could tell who the scabs were. There's always one or two who bring the strike up, and ask 'where were you?'. You'd even have banter about it with one or two of them.
12.15	Also had 'Dingles' working there from Notts, Mansfield, Chesterfield. Our first gaffer was Chris Daniels, was from Notts. The second gaffer was from Warwickshire, he used to drive every
13.00	day. They were grafters. The mining spirit was still there. Some people after the strike never went back to work or got other jobs so that hatred is still
14.00	there. Mine is, up to a point, but we still had that spirit, even with scabs. If you went into the Broadway Hotel, there are people in there who can't understand what I'm talking about, but you can't say you're not going to work with people. There were only 3 pits left and it's a wage at the end of the day. I picked up £700 the first week I went back, compared to £250, £300 on the buses.
1.30	In 1983, on Thurs, Fri, Sat, Sun, Mon nights around here, if you weren't on the 7pm bus you'd struggle to get your name on a dart board or pool table, the places were heaving. We had 6 Working Men's Clubs, 7 pubs, but we've only got one pub now.
4.00	But a lot of people from 2000 didn't have jobs, or had low paid ones, and many travelled to the pit and didn't live locally so you didn't see them outside work. From 1993 this place was going
5.00	down the pan. We used to have the chicken factory, the sewing factory. The people working in the pit didn't spend their money locally. So a lot of shops shut. It's nearly all takeaways and fish shops now. The young uns turn to drugs and drink. It's like you've been left by the
6.00	wayside. More should have been done for regeneration.
7.15	Track Three When the pit shut I thought I'd be one of those chosen to be on the list. It was still a shock because we still thought we had contracts in place. In 2001 when it shut I had to go cap in hand to the Social because we didn't get any redundancy. This time we did. The meeting lasted half an hour then I went to this room and this bloke didn't even know my name. He said I hadn't been kept on, I was fuming. I saw the mechanical gaffer and said I was going out to get pissed and have a game of darts. So then my mate rang and
9.00	

12.00	said I was stopping on for 4 or 5 weeks, because they'd dropped a bollock, they'd been trying to cut the budget. It was 3 or 400 pounds a week I wouldn't have been getting. The first 4 weeks we sent everything down the pit to seal it, breeze blocks, concrete blocks, concrete and mortar. We got as much cable out as we could.
13.30	Then when it was sealed we cut all the cables and tied ropes. They had stopped cutting coal on the Monday afternoon, following the meeting.
14.30	Everything was owned by Hargreaves. There were about 10 men on each shift.
17.15	When sealing the pit we cut the guide rope first. We had to leave one chair at the bottom, cut the guide rope then the main ropes, which all had to be pulled out. I was desperate because I was on the wrong side of 50. I knew I'd get some training but we'd be taking a wage drop. 'I just gritted my teeth and got on with it, I wasn't too sentimental'. But 'I was when I left, for the last day'.
1.30	I left 2 weeks earlier for a van driving job. I was there for the last manriding shift. The last 4 men in, were the mechanical gaffer, the pit gaffer and two shaftsmen. For me 'it were a job. I loved the job, don't get me wrong, but I'd worked outside the industry as well'.
2.30	Since 1983 I've had about 34 jobs. At Hatfield 'I think there were more anger than sentimental'. Because of the way it were done. We'd heard the rumour we'd be the last pit. We were still supplying Drax.
4.00	What got me is we left everything down there, 2 banks of chocks, every bit of machinery.
5.30	The management will have known for 6 months that they couldn't get more contracts. We heard rumours. But it wasn't as sickening because we got redundancy and wages and I'd got 10 years in. In 2001 I'd lost a thousand quid straightaway. This time I knew my money was safe.
7.00	Some of the old guys loved their jobs, one worked past retirement. It was slightly different at the end but still the same craic, just fewer men.
9.30	Then I had a van driving job that lasted a day, it wasn't for me. It was driving for a small brewery firm. Then I worked at Ikea at Armthorpe on the fork lift. I did a shift and two hours. I'd applied

11.00	online for Royal Mail as a postman and I got that. I've been there 12 months now.
13.15	Track Four Some of the old guys will be there till they die. It was 100% NUM, you didn't cross a picket line. You stood together. From the Bevan Boys onwards they spilt blood to get their rights. 'So to lose it just like that, they'll never forgive. I forgive up to a point because I wanted a job'.
18.30	I started in the mine in Feb 1983. The strike was fun for the first few months because I was living with my mam and dad. Later on it got more bitter and the cops got a bit more aggressive. There was some brick throwing from both sides. That never gets reported enough. There were also a lot of young socialists and some skinhead type people, some locals who wanted some aggro.
21.00	I'd only been there just over 12 months so it hadn't really got into my blood. Then I stopped going because it got nastier. I was at Hatfield, July or Aug and all the village must have been there. Just behind the pit club I could see them all coming with their boiler suits on, they had big round shields and banging them. They just came ploughing through. Then the horses came through. Took me 7 hours to get 2 miles home. I was on the run, through back streets, alleys. A week later I was on a bus coming home from Doncaster where I'd gone for a rebate for living with my mam and dad. There were bricks hitting the bus. My mam came from a farm and my dad was a manager on the railways. We lived near Mayfield Avenue. My dad hated Scargill. But even though he hated Scargill he'd buy me fags every day and offer me money to go out with. I felt degraded going to the soup kitchens for food – I stopped going in the end. I were lucky but some lads lost a lot. For all his faults Scargill was proved right. Maggie didn't only smash the unions, she smashed the communities. (Later) The union did what they could, they went to meetings if there was a grievance and looked after your welfare and your rights, but their hands were tied. The NUM was blasted and shot to pieces. Stainforth, Moorends, Duncroft, Thorne were nearly all mining houses. Without the strike I'd have retired at 52, after 34 years,

	but I've got to work till 67, maybe even older. But there's no point self pity or moaning about it. One sad story – one lad nearly died down the pit – a hydraulic air bagging thing bust on him. It had yellow oily stuff and it hit him in the abdomen. It took an hour to get him out of the pit to the ambulance. He survived but never worked again. Another one – Jimmy Allen my old electrical engineer came back as a contract gaffer. He could have retired probably. He had a heart attack in pit, I'd known him over 30 years.
--	--