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Honours Dissertation

‘Tragedy, Death, and Memory’: The Commemoration of British Coal Mining Disasters in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

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List of Abbreviations

BCI	The British Coal Industry
BRRC	Beamish Regional Resource Centre
DCRO	Durham County Records Office
HCPP	House of Commons Parliamentary Papers
NEIMME	North East Institute for Mining and Mechanical Engineers
TWA	Tyne and Wear Archives

Introduction

The definition of commemoration is derived from a simple idea of an act that honours the memory of someone or something; an act that not only preserves memory but also serves as a specific memorial to a person or event. The commemoration of coal mining disasters in Britain develops and complicates this simplistic definition as there are many other factors connected to commemoration that must be explored in order to understand the process of commemoration and its connection to the BCI. Commemoration of coal mining disasters occurred usually to fulfil a specific purpose linked to social, political, religious, and economic conditions. There are many reasons why one might undertake research regarding the commemoration of coal mining disaster in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain, not only because there has been relatively little written in recent years regarding labour history. Commemoration of coal mining disasters allows ideas to surface that can be connected to a range of labour history topics such as working class industrial and political reform, class tensions, and social and working conditions. British labour and industrial history in this period was greatly important in the development of British society and its transition from a state with a laissez-faire attitude towards the working classes and the poor, to the creation of a welfare state that concerned itself greatly with the improvement of living and working conditions for the masses.

It is fair to suggest that there is relatively little written academically concerning industrial accidents and the role that commemoration played in Victorian and early Edwardian working class societies. However, it is possible to draw from the wider historiography of the era and utilise the vast collections of contemporary sources in order to develop arguments and conclusions concerning not only the process of commemoration, but also the purpose and effectiveness of the commemoration of coal mining disasters. The abundance of the availability of newspaper articles, letters, mine inspector's reports, parliamentary papers and commissioned reports allow the development of an official narrative of the effects and purposes of commemoration. Whilst local archival sources, including working class pamphlets, paintings, sermons, poems, and diaries allow for

the development of an analysis into the working class actions and aims concerning the commemoration of disasters and the general populations view of the effectiveness of the process of commemoration.

This dissertation aims to bridge the gap between the classes and their approaches to commemoration by addressing the process and purposes of commemoration itself and its place in society. The first chapter aims to discuss the responses to a coal mining disaster and argue how certain responses led to a variety of commemorative actions. This chapter will also compare and contrast the differences between local and national responses and forms of commemoration, as well as the clear dissimilarities in the responses of the different classes in Britain at this time.

The second chapter goes on to evaluate, separate, and analyse the purposes and effectiveness of commemoration in regards to the social, economic, and political motives. In this chapter, the success and use of commemoration in gaining political reform will be discussed with the use of three specific examples that demonstrate how the commemoration of these disasters led to governmental and local reform. Furthermore, issues regarding opposition to reform will be discussed comparing resistance from within the mining community itself, and opposition from the higher class land owners, and industrialists associated with the BCI.

The third and final chapter will discuss questions surrounding the form that commemoration assumed in this period and attempt to explain reasons suggested for the variation of commemoration from disaster to disaster and the general change in commemoration over time. It will also consider the impact that commemoration of nineteenth and early twentieth century has had on the memory and commemoration of such events in modern day, drawing distinct parallels between certain aspects of commemoration, for example using commemoration to make a political statement. In order to allow greater contextual understanding and analysis there is a clear need to preface this study with a brief overview of the economic, social, and political organisation and history of the BCI.

Overview

During the nineteenth century, the BCI came to be a staple industry; by 1907, coal output accounted for approximately five per cent of the national income of Britain.[1] The rapid expansion of the BCI during the nineteenth century can be attributed to two factors: the increased demand for coal; the technological advancements, both, within the mines themselves, and in the consuming industries. In the eighteenth century most of the coal mined in Britain was to be used for domestic heating. However, demand was relatively low and seasonally affected.[2] From towards the end of the eighteenth century and certainly by 1830, coal was beginning to be used for almost all the purposes for which it is used today, excluding the generation of electricity.

The second factor that explains the rapid expansion of the BCI is technological advancements and consequently, the industrialisation of Britain. Technological advancements within the coal mines themselves, such as the improvement of ventilation and drainage systems and the introduction of the safety lamp, allowed the deeper, previously inaccessible seams to be worked in order to meet the increasing demand for coal.[3] The implementation of the use of steam power in factories, locomotives, and other industries ensured that a new consumer market arose in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century which rapidly and significantly increased the demand for coal. Thus, technology, whether in the mines themselves or in consuming industries, broke down the barriers that formerly restricted output at the same time as it stimulated production by creating major new sources of demand.[4]

The involvement of the BCI as an employer in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cannot be understated. Although the vast majority of all of those employed in this industry were

[1] B.R. Mitchell, *Economic development of the British Coal industry 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.2;
Roy Church, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 3: 1830-1913* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p.2
[2] M.W. Flinn, *An economic and social history of Britain since 1700* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p.1
[3] Roy Church, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 3: 1830-1913*, p.4
[4] M.W. Flinn, *An economic and social history of Britain since 1700*, p.3

working within the mines themselves and were of a lower social class, the BCI offered employment and economic opportunities for a variety of different classes. Possibilities of economic gain attracted entrepreneurs and the land owning classes alike, such as the Marquis of Londonderry who invested heavily in the North East Durham coalfield. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, more than one person in twenty looked directly to the coal mining industry for their livelihood.[5]

In comparison to other industries, coal miners were relatively well paid. This, perhaps, was a form of compensation against the high-risk nature of the work, the unsavoury working conditions and low social status associated with their job. Nonetheless, coal miners' wages were far from stable and even the miner himself did not know what his next pay packet would contain. Deductions from wages were commonplace but it is important to differentiate between the regular deductions and those for which the miner was unprepared or did not anticipate. Regular deductions on a miners' pay would be for the use of tools, candles, and power which the miner used underground – which were infamously extortion-like – and payments such as rent, union membership, and subscription to other funds.[6] Unexpected payments were familiar yet greatly unpopular among the mining communities for understandable reasons. Fines for 'unsatisfactory' work or 'offences' committed above ground, for example keeping animals in the colliery owned homes, ensured that the miners pay was even more unpredictable than any other industry in the country.[7] The miners' wages were not only dependent on the number of hours and shifts worked but also on geological conditions, management efficiency, and the intensity at which the miner worked as their payment was usually based upon weight of coal the individual worker mined.[8] The exportation coalfields were exposed to external demand and price fluctuations which would impact the wages of the miners. A dramatic decrease of miners' wages in exportation coal fields was noticed during the depression of the 1870s

[5] John Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p.27
[6] BRRC GS 284-2014.5a-d – Payslips from Pelton Colliery, Durham. Show payment, shifts and hours worked as well as deductions made to pay. Dated 17th July 1914, 24 July 1914, 11 September 1914, and 25 September 1914
[7] John Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century*, p.65
[8] John Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century*, p.64

and caused great upset and social and political unrest.[9] The volatile nature of the miners' wage would prove a source of political discourse in this period especially, in regards to the lack of a minimum wage, and the dependence of payment on weight, alone.

The social aspects of the BCI also need to be addressed as the social structure of the BCI is central to the process of the commemoration of coal mining disasters. The creation, development, and expansion of purpose-built pit villages were fundamental, not only in the formation of coal mining communities, but also in creating public perceptions of the miners as a distinct class, separated from society. The geographical isolation of coal mining communities allowed a sense of community to develop which shaped both personal attitudes and actions, unique among working class society.[10] Yet, it becomes increasingly clear that in such pit communities, life was conditioned by the decisions of the coal owners and managers. This is especially clear where working and living conditions and commemoration of disasters are concerned.[11] The phenomenon of the 'family pit' began to develop throughout the late nineteenth century as increasing numbers of families were employed in the same pit, working on the same seam in order to maximise a family's income. Sons followed their fathers to the coal face and the social relationships of the men working underground were that of family.[12] The impact of such working conditions can be seen in the aftermath of a disaster where families could lose three generations of men in one day. Even in districts where the mining population was diluted by workers in other occupations, the miners' unusual hours and patterns of employment, the unmistakable appearance of the underground colliery worker as he travelled home from the pit in the day light, and the ritual which accompanied pit deaths, and

[9] *The Colliery Guardian,* 4 April 1879; John Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century*, p.65
[10] John Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century*, p.82
[11] Griselda Carr, *Pit Women: Coal Communities in Northern England in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Merlin Press, 2001), p.7
[12] Roy Church, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 3: 1830-1913*, p.611

especially major disasters, contributed to a sense of mutuality among miners and a status apart from society at large.[13]

During the period in question, there was much social discourse within the mining communities of the BCI which, subsequently, caused a great deal of political discourse. Within a coal mining community, there was a clear social hierarchy among the miners themselves. Surface workers, for example, had a very low status in mining communities and were scarcely regarded as miners at all.[14] Whilst families with a great deal of miners at the coal face, or those who were survivors or rescuers during mining disasters held great status among local and regional mining communities. Personal feuds that took place on the surface could often cause trouble underground, where sabotage and violence would often occur between feuding groups and tensions augmented by the hot, stuffy, unsanitary conditions under which the miners worked. Despite popular middle and upper-class distaste for the mining community, and their social stereotypes of thriftless, dirty, irresponsible workers, the miner himself often took great pride in his work and ability to do a uniquely difficult job under physically and mentally demanding conditions in an industry that was integral to the prosperity and stability of Britain and her empire.[15] The acknowledgement of inter class tensions can be seen chronicled in the back of a working class diary belonging to a miner in the early nineteenth century. The quote clearly distinguishes between the classes stating: 'Society is composed of two great classes: those who have more money than wit, and those who have more wit than money.'[16]

Political discourse was common place among the BCI and concerned all classes involved in the industry. It usually involved wages, mis-management, and working conditions. At the point of production, the perpetual conflict between management and men simmered about the length of the

[13] Roy Church, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 3: 1830-1913*, p.611
[14] John Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century*, p.28
[15] Griselda Carr, *Pit Women: Coal Communities in Northern England in the Early Twentieth Century*, p.9
[16] BRRC GS 284-2014.79 – Miners diary belonging to John Kell, 1836

working day and especially about payment for piece-work which would periodically spill over into local, regional and, later, national strikes.[17] The working conditions of the miners were one of the most publicised of all industries and gained growing interest from social reformers. Consequently, an increasing number of commissions and inspections took place in order to set the stage for governmental reforms. The formation and growth of trade unions and other political and social organisations aimed to improve the economic and working conditions of the mining community. County trade unions were formed in the mid-nineteenth century in an attempt not only to provide countervailing forces to the pit owners and management, but also to attempt to improve working, living, and social conditions for the mining classes. The formation of Yorkshire Miners' Association 1858, Northumberland Miners' Association 1864, and the Durham Miners Association 1869 set the stage for a national mining union in order to assist the miners in their demands concerning wage stabilisation, working hours, and working conditions. However, as time progressed, the needs of reform greatly changed and the impact of commemoration of coal mining disasters on reform will be discussed in a later chapter.

In conclusion, the BCI was a uniquely complex and continuously developing industry with a multitude of internal and external issues. Disasters and accidents occurred frequently claiming the lives of many workers. The commemoration of coal mining disasters allows an insight into the manner in which these communities functioned and their dependence and relationship with the nation in its entirety.

[17] Griselda Carr, *Pit Women: Coal Communities in Northern England in the Early Twentieth Century*, p.10

Chapter 1

Immediate responses and the emergence of commemoration

It is fair to suggest that the responses to coal mining disasters that occurred in the aftermath formed the basis for commemoration to develop, both locally and nationally. Yet, there were certain responses to disasters that had a much larger impact on the process of commemoration, than others. This chapter will focus on the many different responses to a disaster that occurred across the social classes and then attempt to explain how specific responses led to the development of commemoration.

Local concern and commemorative actions

One of the most immediate responses that occurred in the aftermath of a disaster was the gathering of crowds at the pit head in the affected village and as news of the disaster spread across the district, the crowds would increase steadily.[18] Immediately after the disaster, it would be crowds of wives, sisters and other family members hoping for some news of their loved ones that would gather at the pit head.[19] However, as the news spread, thousands would begin to flock to the disaster site from all the colliery districts, either to aid rescue work, where possible, while others would simply gather for the curiosity.[20] In certain instances, the influx of people into a village was so great that it led to supplementary trains having to be used, as was the case in the aftermath of the Trimdon Grange explosion in 1882.[21] This mass gathering of crowds was often reported in initial newspaper reports on the disaster which would appear in regional and national newspapers alike, leading to a greater inquiry into the disaster and the lives lost.

Media responses creating commemoration

[18] Robert Laidlaw, 'The Gresford Disaster in Popular Memory', *Llafur: the journal of the Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History,* Vol. 6, No. 4, 1995, p.123
[19] *The Times,* 18 January 1862
[20] *Cambrian Daily Leader,* 15 October 1913
[21] *The Times,* 20 February 1882

Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the popularity of newspapers rapidly increased. The impact of newspapers on the general population was great and provided a platform for commemoration of all kinds but especially, commemoration of coal mining disasters. National, as well as local, newspapers would play prominent roles in not only the process of the commemoration of coal mining disasters but, also, the enlightenment of the population to the conditions suffered by mining communities.

In the aftermath of a coal mining disaster, reports would appear immediately in national and local newspapers which would provide the first instance for commemoration to take place. Despite the hesitancy of primary newspaper reports to pass blame or name the cause of the disaster, they usually contained information on the casualties, survivors' accounts of the disaster, and comments on the rescue mission, if taking place.[22] After some larger disasters, the names of those who had died would be published along with a list of their dependants and comments about their character and place in community life, as can be seen in the *Illustrated London News* in the aftermath of the New Hartley disaster in 1862.[23] Not only did these reports commemorate the event itself, newspaper clippings were frequently collected and cherished by the bereaved families along with other mementoes of the disaster in order to ensure that their loved ones would not be forgotten.

In the days and weeks following larger disasters, the funerals of the victims would receive great mention in national newspapers and there are even examples where line drawing of the funeral processions would be published along with the details of those who had perished. The line drawings of the New Hartley funeral procession and burial appealed to the upper classes in society and provided a platform to demonstrate the sheer scale of the calamity that had occurred.[24]

[22] Robert Laidlaw, 'The Gresford Disaster in Popular Memory', p.128
[23] BRRC 1970-462.1 – Illustrated London News, 1st February 1862, New Hartley Disaster
[24] BRRC 1970-462 – Illustrated London News, 8 February 1862, Line drawing of funeral procession from the New Hartley Disaster, See Appendix B, Figures 1 and 2

There are certain cases of specific disasters where the media coverage continued after the funeral and commented upon the conditions present and the effects in the long term. After the Senghenydd disaster in 1913, which claimed the lives of 439 men and boys, the vast scale of the disaster ensured that it would remain in the public eye for some time after the accident. Moreover, the media portrayal of the bereaved women and children became a focal point, not only for the newspaper reporters, but also those wishing to seek political reform.[25] The portrayal of the Senghenydd widows featured in many local and national newspapers and focused upon the desperation and shock, present in the aftermath. However, the media portrayal quickly turned into a platform to control and weaken the position of these women as the way in which they were depicted, 'simultaneously reflected and reinforced the general view of women as helpless victims, dependant on their male breadwinners for survival, and incapable of bringing up their families alone'.[26] This is an example of how the commemoration of a disaster through the media actually inflicted greater suffering upon the bereaved instead of providing consolation and support. Many women who were affected by the Senghenydd disaster received minimum payments and compensation, as well as the intervention of local authorities in family life, as the media reinforced the view that they were unable to cope with the newly imposed domestic and financial responsibilities.[27]

Another aspect that the media focused upon, following a disaster, was commenting and publishing the inquests and enquiries of specific disasters. While the newspapers often published details of the official inquests and coroners reports, they often commented little on the apportion of blame and need for political reform. Local enquiries consumed local thought and often polarised towns and communities as there was severe repercussions, both financial and social, for identifying

[25] Catherine Welsby, 'Warning Her as to Her Future Behaviour: The Lives of the Widows of the Senghenydd Mining Disaster of 1913', *Llafur: the journal of the Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History,* Vol. 6, No. 4, 1995, p.95
[26] Ibid., p.94
[27] Ibid., p.96

with a particular side.[28] This often led to little public commemoration in the direct aftermath of a controversial disaster, such as the Gresford disaster in 1934 and a sense of amnesia among the middle and upper classes. Nevertheless, 'even where public recitation of memory was not inhibited by fear of retribution, in an area where many still depended on mining for a livelihood, mining disasters were an uncomfortable memory' as it reminded the community of the deadly risks associated with coal mining.[29]

The role of the media in reporting coal mining disasters cannot be underestimated as it not only allowed information to spread rapidly across Britain but also provided a platform for commemoration to occur. Media was accessible to all and allowed those in the higher echelons of society to become aware of the plight of the miners and, for some, become integral to the process of social and political reform.

Local efforts to commemorate disasters

There are many local responses to coal mining disasters which led to the development of commemoration. Many of these local responses to a disaster had the principal aim of generating financial donations to ease the suffering of the bereaved whilst awaiting compensation and relief funds. Yet, some responses that appeared to be used to aid the bereaved were also used as a platform to demonstrate the need for reform. Pit poetry and songs did not originally emerge in response to mining disasters but, usually, to comment on social and working life within the BCI. However, there are many instances where specific poems were created to commemorate a specific disaster and also sold to raise money for the relief fund. Examples of printed poems and songs created in the aftermath of a disaster can be found in many local archives and collections as they were hugely popular among the mining classes as they provided a way in which the disaster could

[28] Robert Laidlaw, 'The Gresford Disaster in Popular Memory',, p.127
[29] Bill Williamson, *Class, Culture and Community: a biographical study of social change in mining* (London: Routledge, 1982), p.127

live on in local public memory.[30] Songs provided a platform to commemorate a disaster whilst clearly demonstrating the need for reform within the BCI. The tragic circumstances of the 1862 New Hartley disaster led to the development of a campaign to strive to end the one-shaft system which claimed the lives of so many. George Cooke, a local miner, wrote a specific poem in memory to the disaster which tied together local emotions and the greater national sentiment towards the one-shaft system.[31] The short extract from the poem below, demonstrates the contemporary attitudes towards the New Hartley disaster and the importance of the commemoration of this event on demonstrating the need for reform.

Ten score lives have proved it true,
The one shaft system will not do,
The horrid system one way out,
Has slain its hundreds there's no doubt,
May Hartley in the memory live,
A death-blow to the system give.[32]

Responses to coal mining disasters also focused upon generating funds for the bereaved families whilst commemorating the disaster. Amateur dramatic and comedic performances often took place in the aftermath of disasters in order to generate revenue for the bereaved and provide the community with an occasion to remember the disaster and its victims. During the aftermath of the New Hartley disaster in 1862, it became clear that funds were desperately needed for the bereaved families as they were awaiting official relief funding. Local groups responded to this clear need by organising an amateur dramatic performance at the Theatre Royal and an evening with the

[30] BRRC GS 12/09/1986 – Song sheet from 1880 New Seaham disaster titled 'Poor Little Joe'
[31] John Elliot McCutcheon, *The New Hartley Disaster 1862* (1963), p.117
[32] Ibid.

poets at the Hall of Mechanics Institute in North Shields to raise money for the bereaved.[33] This demonstrates the desire of the local community, not only to ease the suffering of the bereaved, but also to begin to commemorate the tragic event itself as there was often a tribute to the victims at the beginning of the performance.

Another form of commemoration that appealed to the working classes and also generated revenue for the disaster fund was the creation and purchase of memorial serviettes. These can often be seen to have appeared in the aftermath of disasters in the early twentieth century and large collections can be found in local archives. Following the 1909 West Stanley disaster, it is possible to see as many as twenty different designs of memorial serviettes all listing the names of the victims and the date of the accident.[34] These were a hand crafted, colourful tribute to the victims and often cherished by the affected communities and families.

It is fair to suggest that artistic responses to coal mining disasters were not only popular among the working classes, but also the middle and upper-classes. However, these were often of a different style in order to appeal to the higher echelons of society. Large memorial paintings were popular among the upper classes as it appeared to be, not only a way of commemorating a disaster, but also a sign of demonstrating upper-class awareness of the plight of the working classes. Following the New Hartley disaster of 1862 two paintings by H.H. Emmerson were produced and sold to commemorate the event. Emmerson was from the North East of England and produced a variety of works ranging from portraits to landscapes. The first picture Emmerson produced regarding the New Hartley disaster was titled 'Waiting for the News' which depicted women and children gathering together at the pit head waiting to hear news of their loved ones.[35] The second

[33] TWA 1074/212 – Poster advertising 'An Evening with the Poets' at the Hall of Mechanics Institute', 12 February 1862; TWA 1074/213 – Poster advertising an 'Amateur Dramatic Performance' at the Theatre Royal, 5 February 1862

[34] BRRC 2006-58.18; BRRC 2006-58.5; BRRC GS 26/08/2010.1; BRRC 2005-110 – All memorial serviettes, with different patterns, from the West Stanley Pit disaster 1909

[35] TWA CH/MPR/28/2 – Copy of the painting 'Hartley Disaster, 1862: Waiting for the News' by H.H. Emmerson

was more patriotic and depicted a bereaved family reading the Queen's letter in their modest kitchen, appearing to gain some relief knowing that the Queen was aware of their plight.[36] This form of commemoration greatly appealed to the middle and upper classes as it demonstrated their consciousness towards the conditions the working classes were subjected to.

In conclusion, it can be clearly observed how the responses in the aftermath of a disaster led to the development of commemoration both at a localised and national level. The role of the media and the reporting of disasters in newspapers cannot be underestimated as it allowed many people to become aware of the devastating conditions inflicted on mining communities in the aftermath of a disaster and led to many supporting the need for regulation and reform. Local efforts to ease suffering and commemorate a disaster was fundamental in the longer-term process of commemoration as it was these local efforts that would ensure that coal mining disasters were not forgotten for decades to come.

[36] TWA CH/MPR/28/3 – Copy of the painting 'Hartley Disaster, 1862: Reading the Queen's Letter' by H.H. Emmerson

Chapter 2

The purpose and effectiveness of the commemoration of coal mining disasters

It would be fair to say that there has been relatively little written analysing and explaining the purposes of commemoration, especially regarding the commemoration of industrial accidents within the BCI. Nevertheless it is possible to make use of wider bodies of contemporary and secondary material to determine the purposes of the commemoration of coal mining disasters and examine the level of success commemoration had in achieving those social, political, and economic objectives. In the both long and short term aftermath of a coal mining disaster, commemorative actions arose across all levels of society which all had specific objectives that they wished for their form of commemoration to serve, albeit often with conflicting motives. As will become evident as this chapter progresses commemoration and mourning are inextricably entwined, yet the purpose and effectiveness of each form and act of commemoration must be questioned and analysed in order to illuminate the general views of the success of commemoration.[37] This chapter aims to asses a variety of purposes associated with commemoration and determine their effectiveness both in local and national situations. A wide and varied selection of contemporary and secondary sources will be used to explain and highlight certain points, along with specific contemporary examples, within this chapter in order to analyse the purposes and effectiveness of commemoration and its place in Victorian and early Edwardian society.

Easing the suffering of the bereaved

[37] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.51

The aspect of commemoration that often receives the most immediate attention in the aftermath of a disaster, in the vast majority of circumstance, is the human suffering that is inflicted upon the bereaved and consequently assures that one of the initial purposes of commemoration is to ease the suffering of the bereaved and reaffirm the affected community. The miners within the BCI were part of a unique form of community, apart from society at large, and this allowed specific customs and traditions to develop in the aftermath of a disaster. These customs and traditions would form the basis for commemorative actions with the primary aim of easing the suffering of the bereaved.

The funeral and burial of the victims of the disaster and the surrounding customs provided the first platform where commemoration could occur in order to ease the suffering of the bereaved within the affected mining community. The importance of the funeral itself cannot be underestimated as it functioned to bring the entire local, and sometimes regional, community together and strengthen their relationship and support the bereaved.[38] Furthermore, the funeral played an important role in the development of traditions and customs in line with that of Victorian society as an entirety. During the Victorian period there were clear social expectations observed by middle and upper classes regarding funeral and burial practices and it would be fair to suggest that the working class communities of the BCI attempted to duplicate these. Upper and middle class funerals were often used as a platform to display wealth and status rather than focus on the memory of the deceased individual. This extravagance is often noted among contemporaries and historians alike and viewed as ostentatious, elaborate and in certain situations vulgar.[39] However is commonly assumed that the miners of the BCI and their precarious financial situations would lead to these period customs to be lost in their communities yet this is certainly not the case. For the most part, in the aftermath of a disaster funds were made available to the bereaved families in order to

[38] Bill Williamson, *Class, culture and community: a biographical study of social change in mining,* p.87
[39] Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.194; Bertram Puckle, *Funeral Customs* (1926), p.89

ensure that their loved one received a decent burial however this was not always the case. There are instances where coal mining families were willing to go into debt for years in order to ensure that their loved one did not suffer a pauper's funeral.[40] Despite these funerals being rudimentary in comparison with those of the upper classes it is a clear example of the mining classes adopting the national social funeral customs and fulfilling them to the best of their ability. There was an obvious desire among the bereaved for their loved ones to be remembered and a decent burial with a headstone is an example of early attempts at commemoration within the mining communities. There was a clear stereotype placed upon those who worked in the BCI especially those who worked below ground. Miners were classed as a 'race apart' not only in society at large but even within the working class population.[41] The notoriety of mining communities ensured that they were viewed with disdain as the nature of their working conditions and social activities, such as frequenting taverns and betting, were in complete antithesis of Victorian social ideals.[42] Therefore a strong desire arose in mining communities to reject the derogatory social stereotype place upon them and following period customs, in this case where funerals were concerned, provided a platform to demonstrate their true nature to the general population.

An immediate form of commemoration that occurred instantly after a fatal mine accident of any scale was the cessation of work at the affected pit. However the duration of the closure would depend on the nature of the accident and the number of those affected. It was a small yet significant illustration of remembrance that was greatly appreciated by the bereaved as it allowed the entire community time to remember and pay respects to the family of the deceased.[43] The need to remember and commemorate those that had lost their lives would take a more prominent and permanent place in community life with the development of a memorial, usually in the churchyard

[40] Griselda Carr, *Pit Women: Coal Communities in Northern England in the Early Twentieth Century*, p.61
[41] Neil Buxton, *The Economic Development of the British Coal Industry* (London: Redwood Burn Ltd., 1978), p.121
[42] John Benson, 'The Thrift of English Coal-Miners, 1860-1895', *The Economic History Review,* Vol.31, No. 3, August 1978, p.410
[43] Robert Laidlaw, 'The Gresford Disaster in Popular Memory', p.87

where the majority of the victims were buried or in the pit village itself. This form of commemoration would provide a communal focal point for the bereaved to gather to grieve and remember those who had been lost, in most cases a great deal of planning would go into such a memorial and an annual ceremony of remembrance would be implemented. There are even instances where a line drawing of the memorial itself, along with the events of the unveiling and preparation for an annual service would appear in the annual Mines Inspectors Reports to be discussed in parliament and used as an example to generate political reform.[44]

The politics of commemoration

There are certain cases where in the aftermath of a disaster commemoration would be used for political purposes, yet it is possible to subdivide these purposes into those concerning the apportion of blame for a disaster, and those used to instigate and achieve legislative reform within the BCI. The use of commemoration as a means to allocate blame for a disaster was extremely controversial as there were many repercussions and accusations, both social and economic, which would arise from such inquiries as was certainly the case in the 1934 Gresford disaster.[45] In order to console the bereaved and provide them with the desperately desired knowledge of the circumstances of their loved ones deaths, commemoration provided a plat form to allocate blame for the accident upon a party, and also attempt to secure some compensation for themselves and their families. Those who often would be first suspected in the pursuit for truth and apportion of blame were the mine owners and managers. It was common knowledge, and has been documented in numerous post disaster enquiries, that if mine owners were found to be negligent or permitted the miners to continue work in unsafe conditions they could be prosecuted and heavily fined.[46] Subsequently, if the management were found guilty of misconduct they would also have to pay out

[44] NEIMME CH/MPR/5/6 – Information regarding the memorial to those who perished in the 1880 New Seaham disaster and the subsequent construction of the churchyard memorial.
[45] Robert Laidlaw, 'The Gresford Disaster in Popular Memory', p.125
[46] Ibid., p.124

compensation to the dependants of those killed in the accident. A specific example of such an instance was the New Hartley disaster of 1862 where the owners appeared to have compromised the safety of the workers in order to secure economic gain. The *Newcastle Courant* publicly condemned the mine owners and questioned the quality of material used in the construction of the beam that appeared to break with no warning and subsequently took the lives of over two hundred men and boys.[47] However it was not always the mine owners who would be blamed for a disaster. The workers themselves were often accused of being to blame and this would often cause a great divide within a mining community. Miners were notorious for not always following precautions, testing gas levels correctly and ignoring the warning signs of an explosion or collapse, and this was used in some cases by the mine owners in order to remove themselves from being blamed for a disaster. It has been suggested that the miners' lack of precaution was due to the discriminating way in which their pay was calculated. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the vast majority of miners pay was based upon the weight of the coal they excavated, and therefore time spent checking for gas and responding to alarms essentially meant time away from the coalface and thus a smaller pay packet. There are numerous examples of miners ignoring safety warning and signals of danger simply because they believed them to be a drill or a hoax and the consequences often could be fatal.[48] However, attempts were made to assure that miners followed safety regulations despite the fact that they were time consuming. Individual collieries would provide each worker with a rules and regulations book that would address various aspects of the measures that must be taken in order to ensure a safer working environment but the effectiveness of these can be greatly questioned.[49] Illiteracy was very high among mining communities due to the young age which many miners began work and the consequent cessation of education therefore not all miners would seek help to read the rule books provided as they preferred to simply learn by experience.[50]

[47] *Newcastle Courant,* 24 January 1862
[48] *The Colliery Guardian,* 5 July 1878
[49] BRRC 1980-20.3 – Silksworth Colliery Mine Rules Booklet, 1888
[50] M.W. Kirby, *The British Coal-mining Industry, 1870-1946* (Woking: Unwin Brothers Ltd., 1977), p.117

Furthermore, implementing such regulations underground was extremely difficult as miners had established preferred methods of working and were very reluctant to change their patterns. However, from the 1930s onward safety in mines research board pamphlets were being produced and made available to every colliery across Britain in an attempt to standardise safety practices and increase miner's formal training in order to reduce accidents and increase productivity.[51]

Thus when the accusation of who was to blame for a disaster began to surface, entire communities could become polarised. 'Publicly identifying with either the miner's or the company's version of events both had their consequences. The company's witnesses lost the respect of their neighbours: some were ostracised and some apparently left the district. Despite bland assurances given by the company that there would be no victimisation, there is a strong local tradition that the workmen who had testified against the company were discriminated against when the pit re-opened.'[52] In cases where the miners had been accused for causing an accident commemoration could be used as a form of protest for the bereaved in order to get the mine owners to acknowledge themselves as the guilty party and this was clearly the case following the Gresford disaster in 1934. Although no official cause was initially proved it was widely believed by the community and some of the mine inspectors that there was great misconduct on the part of the mine owners, yet the mine owners themselves blamed those who had been working underground.[53] Consequently no immediate funds were put in place for a memorial as it was believed that the bereaved would use it as a site of protest in order to achieve an admission of guilt from the mine owners. However in response to the lack of funding for a memorial statue the dependants of those who died in the accident would meet on the anniversary of the disaster for a memorial service to show solidarity against the mine owners who would not assume any responsibility for the disaster.[54] However legal proceedings continued and by 1937, enough evidence had been collected to prosecute the pit

[51] BRRC GS 273.1997.37a – Safety in mines research board pamphlets, 1938
[52] Robert Laidlaw, 'The Gresford Disaster in Popular Memory', p.127
[53] Ibid., p.127
[54] Robert Laidlaw, 'The Gresford Disaster in Popular Memory', p.134

manager and mine owners for negligence and secure compensation for the bereaved.[55] The delay between the accident and the prosecution of those found guilty of misconduct and the implementation of reforms will be discussed later in this chapter. Therefore, the desire to gain compensation from a disaster is a clear example of an economic as well as apolitical purpose served by commemoration, as a community's refusal to forget ensured investigation and often prosecution and essential compensation payments for those who had lost their breadwinner. Nonetheless, there was not always such a strong desire to consolidate blame following a large mining disaster, as in the case of the 1880 New Seaham disaster, where *The Times* reported that 'not a single complaint has been heard of lax discipline' suggesting that in certain cases the mine owners and the bereaved wanted a peaceful yet cooperative response in the aftermath of a disaster. Consequently, despite the fact that there are examples of the use of commemoration for political purposes, in this case the allocation of blame, it was not used in every instance but more commonly in circumstances where there was pre-existing tension between employer-employee relations and usually used as a last resort.

Demonstrating the need for reform

The commemoration of coal mining disasters was used as a means of generating reform socially, economically, and politically. Specific disasters were used to not only draw attention to working conditions within the mines but also to demonstrate the need for reform. Among mining communities and the miners themselves there was strong desire to enlighten the general population to the human cost of mining and the conditions endured by those miners simply trying to earn a living. Large mining disasters provided an opportunity to promote public inquiry into the nature of the miner's work which at other times was simply ignored.[56] In the case of this dissertation three

[55] Ibid.
[56] John Elliot McCutcheon, *The New Hartley Disaster 1862,* p.115

specific examples will be used to argue the success of the commemoration of coal mining disasters in achieving specific reform both on a national and localised level.

One of the earliest examples of the use of the commemoration of a coal mining disaster in order to achieve legislative reform can be seen in the aftermath of the 1838 Silkstone Colliery disaster which claimed the lived of twenty-six children aged between seven and seventeen. Child employment was a prominent feature of not only the BCI but industrialist Victorian Britain as an entirety and 'for much of the twentieth century, child labour was portrayed by historians as little more than a social problem of the Industrial Revolution'.[57] Both boys and girls of very tender years were extensively employed underground in coal mines as hurries and trappers, they would commonly work longer hours than the adult workers and in far worse conditions.[58] On 4 July 1838 bad weather put the engine that brought the workers up to the surface temporarily out of order, a group of children decided to exit the mine by a ventilation shaft but an influx of water knocked them off their feet and trapped them where the subsequently drowned. There was public outcry at the newspaper reports covering the disaster and moreover the coroners request states that although it was a terrible accident it could have been avoided with die diligence and care from the mine owners.[59] When news of the disaster reached London, Queen Victoria herself called for a Commission to be set regarding child employment, with the first commission to focus upon the BCI.[60] The Children's Employment Commission investigated the work children and women had to do in coal mines and collected witness testimony of working conditions and hours. Their findings were integral in the formation of The Mines Act of 1842 which banned the underground employment of women and girls of all ages and boys under the age of ten who would continue to work legally in the mines until the 1870s.[61] However this Act received much criticism as it did not address working

[57] Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2003), p.1
[58] *The Sheffield Independent*, 7 July 1838
[59] *Yorkshire and Derbyshire Advertiser,* 7 July 1838
[60] Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870*, p.105
[61] Ibid., p.94

hours and there were many issues, which will later be discussed, concerning the implementation and resistance to reform. Despite criticisms, the commemoration of the Silkstone Colliery disaster was extremely effective in generating political reform by generating public inquiry into the conditions in which were suffered by underground workers both adults and children alike. The Mines Act set the stage for a series of reformative legislation to be developed and passed with the primary aim of improving safety and working conditions within the mining industry.

Another example of the commemoration of a coalmining disaster which led to the creation of specific reformative legislation was the New Hartley disaster of 1862.Two hundred and four men and boys were killed in this accident after the beam of the pumping engine which was positioned over the pit-head snapped, crashing into the pit head and entombing those inside. This disaster received unparalleled attention from the newspapers and there was public outcry for legislation to end the system which allowed mines to have only one means of entry and exit as had there been two shafts at the New Hartley Colliery it would have been possible for men to escape and a rescue party to have been effective.[62] Members from all levels of society were content to demonstrate their concern and disgust at the one-shaft system and there are no clearer examples than in letters to the editor of *The Times* that strongly insist upon reformative legislation as a means of the prevention of future disasters of this magnitude.[63] The parliamentary response to this disaster can be seen a decade later in the 1872 Coal Mines Regulation Act. Clause 19 of the Act explicitly state the compulsory provision of a second shaft or outlet to a mine and that failure to comply would lead to a penalty or even prosecution.[64] Although the New Hartley disaster was an isolated instance, the fact that the loss of lives could have been so easily prevented not only caused social discontent but lead to specific legislation that aimed to prevent the reoccurrence of such a disaster. Yet the large time

[62] *Illustrated London News,* 1 February 1862
[63] *The Times,* Letters to the editor, 23 January 1862, 6 February 1862
[64] HCPP 1872, The Coal Mines Regulation Act, 1872

gap between the disaster and itself and the creation of preventative measures will be analysed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Reformative measure to prevent the reoccurrence of disasters did not always emerge from parliament but from local collieries and coal companies. An example of disasters that led to local rather than national reform can be seen in the aftermath of the 1880 New Seaham and 1886 Elemore disasters. A substantial proportion of major coal mining accidents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were due to explosions that frequently followed the firing of a shot. There were numerous claims from a variety of sources that certain types of explosives had a higher propensity to cause such an explosion, but due to lack of legislation, controls, and the overwhelming desire to keep overhead costs as low as possible, these were usually disregarded.[65] This issue was raised in *The Times* on the 13 September 1880 following the New Seaham disaster that killed 164 men and boys.[66] The Home Secretary Sir William Harcourt had visited the colliery and stated that he would consider the concerns that were presented to him about the conditions in the North East coal mines, the use of powder for blasting, which the miners believed to be the cause of numerous great explosions. Although the visit was said to have been greatly appreciated by the New Seaham miners, as it appeared to signal the gathering of evidence for reform, it was not until 1886 that coal companies would begin to ban the use of certain explosives as a preventative measure. Nevertheless, after the Elemore disaster on the Durham coalfield in 1886, which claimed the lives of 28 boys and men, the Hetton Coal Company began to ban the use of certain types of explosives as a means of preventing the future reoccurrence of such a disaster.[67] The Mines Inspectors Report for the same year records the Hetton Coal Company altering the methods used when handling explosives and also their introduction of higher explosives in order to provide safer working

[65] NEIMME JBA-4-5-524-525 – Notes by J.B. Atkinson about the dangers of coal dust in mines and the dangerous effects of particular explosives.
[66] *The Times,* 13 September 1880
[67] *The Times,* 3 December 1886

conditions for their workers.[68] Therefore the commemoration and publication of the avoidable causes of mine explosions led to localised reforms aims at preventing further losses of life. Therefore commemoration was successful, in some instances, in achieving political and social reform for the mining communities of the BCI setting the stage for further reforms to improve social and working conditions not only for those involved in the mining industry but the industrial working classes as an entirety.

Resistance to reform

Although reform concerning the BCI did begin to occur in the nineteenth and early twentieth century there are often lengthy gaps between an accident calling for reform and reform actually being implemented. There are many reasons which can be given to explain the slow approach to reform within the coal industry mainly that there was resentment for reform from not only the mine and land owners involved in the industry but also notable resistance from the working class miners themselves.

The upper class industrialists who owned the coal mines themselves were concerned with reform as it decreased their ability to control productivity by their own means. Increasing controls and inspections often meant less time for the miners to produce the product and subsequently their profits would suffer. Underground inspection was made difficult by the employers as they believed that the government should not be involved in their private enterprise and as a result there was widespread and often violent opposition to regulation and reform.[69] One of the largest coal mining land owners in the Durham coal field was the Marquis of Londonderry who owned land in the East Durham area such as the Seaham Collieries. Despite his sympathetic approach to the plight of the miners especially in the aftermath of disasters he greatly opposed all reform and regulation of the BCI. His distaste with reformative legislation and the implementation of controls can be seen in

[68] DCRO D/DMA 268 – Mines Inspectors Report, 1886
[69] Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870*, p.109

comments he made regarding the 1842 Mines Act in the House of Lords. Consequently this opposition to reform from influential political and social figures greatly hindered efforts for reform and can be deemed a principal cause in delaying coal mining reforms from being enacted and applied across the nation.

However opposition to reform can also be seen among the mining communities themselves. In some areas of the Durham and Northumberland coalfields employer-employee relations were positive and therefore the desire for reform was lower than in other area of Britain. The Act to which received the most criticism from the mining communities was The Mines Act of 1842 as the removal of children and women from employment had a devastating effect on some mining families. The economic contribution of children to the household income often meant the difference between life above or below the poverty line and affected the coherence of family life greatly.[70] It was more economically viable for all members of an immediate family to work the same coal face as it increased their output and thus their wages. When The Mines Act limited the age of employment to boys over the age of ten this not only created tensions within in the family home but also within in the mining community itself. 'In districts such as the North East of England, where strong competition existed among parents to get their children employed, parents often knew the ages of other miners' children and would inform employers if any were admitted below the legal age'.[71] This would then lead to social disputes and allegations disrupting relations between the often close-knit communities of the BCI. Despite miners calling for reforms in working conditions and payment methods they did not support reform measure that they believed would have a negative impact on their economic situation which was already precarious to begin with.

The resistance to reform from the mine owners and miners themselves ensured that the process of reform was often lengthy. Nevertheless, the persistency of the supporters of reformative

[70] Ibid., p.3
[71] Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870*, p.109

legislation ensured that although reform may take time it would occur and have a positive impact on the lives of those who worked in the BCI.

In conclusion, it has become apparent that the commemoration of coal mining disasters has a variety of purposes some of which are not immediately apparent. However, it is perhaps more important to assess whether or not commemoration achieved its desired purposes. The process of commemoration greatly eased the suffering of the bereaved families and communities in the aftermath of a disaster. Commemoration provided the platform for memorialisation to develop which provided a 'place of sanctuary and mourning' for eh bereaved.[72] Moreover, commemoration also eased the suffering of the bereaved in a didactic way as it was widely assumed that you could learn from a disaster in order to prevent a reoccurrence. This consoled the bereaved as they could take solace in the fact that the death of their loved one might prevent the death of another. The apportion of blame was clearly another purpose that commemoration strived to achieve. Jay Winter stresses the importance in the search for knowledge of the circumstances of the death of a loved one, and in the case of coal mining disasters this was the cause of the accident and discovering whether any party was to blame. [73] This was integral to the recovery of the bereaved community and for the continued functioning of the mine itself. Demonstrating the need for reform was another purpose which commemoration attempted to realize. The use of media coverage in the aftermath of disasters was fundamental in increasing public awareness and concern for the working conditions of the miners. Great loss of life generated great public interest into the mining industry and many begun to note and publicly comment on the ability to avoid the reoccurrence of such disasters through the means of legislation and greater controls. Nevertheless, reform was, at first, slow to be implemented due to resistance from land owners and miners alike. This made inspection of mines difficult and in some cases dangerous and this greatly impacted the speed at which reformative

[72] Lisa M. Moore, '(Re) Covering the Past, Remembering Trauma: the Politics of Commemoration at Sites of Atrocity', *Journal of Public and International Affairs,* Vol. 20, 2009, p.48
[73] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, The Great War in European Cultural History*, p.29

legislation could be put into effect. Yet the persistence of the advocates of reform, along with increasing support from the general public, ensured that although slow reform was occurring in the BCI and this would only have a positive impact on the miners and their communities in the future.

Chapter 3

Practicalities of the commemoration of coal mining disasters

The acts and purposes of commemoration have already been discussed in great detail in this dissertation yet there are certain aspects of the commemoration process and the impact that commemoration has had on contemporary and modern societies that needs to be analysed in order to achieve a fuller insight into the impact of commemoration on attitudes and behaviours. The process of commemoration often followed a clear pattern yet each specific disaster was responded to differently and it is fair to say that this pattern was altered by technology in the period in question. This chapter will attempt to explain the reasons why commemoration assumed the form that it did whilst explaining the variances that occurred between specific disasters and on a larger time scale. It is also important to assess the impact and influence nineteenth and early twentieth century commemoration of coal mining disasters has had on the way in which those disasters are remembered and commemorated in modern day. One of the undisputable purposes of commemoration is to ensure that the event is remembered not only in the immediate years following a disaster but for generations to come and it is fair to assess the success of this purpose by tracing their impact on modern memory.

Explaining dissimilarities in commemorative actions

It would be fair to say that the commemoration of coal mining disasters followed noticeable patterns that were not always alike in each social class and community; nevertheless it is possible to explain these variances and subsequently gain an insight into the development of the process of commemoration and its impact on contemporary attitudes. The miners of the BCI and the

communities in which they lived did not have vast disposable financial resources to devote to the commemoration of coal mining disasters. Therefore it is fair to suggest that they used the resources that were available to them at the time in order to remember their loved ones.

The most visible form of commemoration, which can still be seen in various mining towns and communities, is the memorial statue which was usually placed in a churchyard or communal place. However, in the aftermath of a mining disaster the funds for such a memorial were not always available to the mourning community as they usually relied on a portion of the relief fund to be invested in such a memorial. In some cases the distributors of the relief fund were more concerned with the 'plight of the living rather than the memory of the dead' and this can be used to explain the absence of a memorial statue even when a large-scale disaster had occurred as in Gresford in 1934.[74] This issue is still at the forefront of debates concerning memorialisation as 'some argue that funds are being misallocated to create memorials to the dead, rather than to support those who survived' disasters and atrocities'.[75] Nevertheless this does not mean that there were no memorials created in the aftermath of a coal mining disaster, the affected communities simply adapted, and created a memorial in a way which was less financially demanding. This adaptability can be used to explain the great popularity of memorial shrines both within the bereaved family's home and in local meeting places such as public houses and local churches.[76] The creation and maintenance of discrete family shrines within the homes of the bereaved allowed remembrance to take place on a personalised level as frequently as the bereaved desired. There is evidence of 'memorialisation by preserving all corporeal and material vestiges' of a disaster as personal belongings, and later photographs, of the deceased miner would be cherished along with documents, newspaper cuttings,

[74] Robert Laidlaw, 'The Gresford Disaster in Popular Memory', p.135
[75] Lisa M. Moore, '(Re) Covering the Past, Remembering Trauma: the Politics of Commemoration at Sites of Atrocity', p.56
[76] Robert Laidlaw, 'The Gresford Disaster in Popular Memory', p.134

and memorial pamphlets and other ephemera relating to the disaster.[77] Similarly, in public places these shrines would provide the bereaved with a place to meet in order to mourn together and remember the dead. These shrines had little financial requirement in creation and maintenance and were the most frequent and popular form of memorial to appear among the mining communities of the BCI as many relics of disasters have been preserved to present day and appear in abundance in archive and museum collections.[78] One such memorial shrine that has been preserved to modern day can be seen at Christ Church Seaham. The 1880 disaster at new Seaham claimed the lives of over 160 men and boys, many of which remain trapped for several hours before suffocating. A beam was recovered from the part of the mine were the victims were trapped which was found to have personal messages to their families chalked and etched onto it. This beam along with miners lamps, also which have messages etched onto them, was placed in Christ Church Seaham along with other items from the disaster in order to create a memorial shrine where the bereaved could gather to mourn and support one another. This shrine has been preserved and improved over time by the local community in order to ensure that the disaster is never forgotten.[79]

Another form of commemoration that developed and increased in popularity during this period due to the lack of financial resources was the annual remembrance service. Annual remembrance services were usually attached to religious establishments within the coal mining community and allowed the bereaved families and other members of the community to congregate to remember the dead and the accident that took their lives. Yet it is interesting to note that immediate and annual remembrance services were not exclusive to the larger more infamous disasters. In 1896 a disaster at the Bracepeth Colliery on the Durham coalfield claimed the lived of twenty men and boys and it is clear that the local community would not let the lives of those men be

[77] Lisa M. Moore, '(Re) Covering the Past, Remembering Trauma: the Politics of Commemoration at Sites of Atrocity', p.51
[78] BRRC has a large collection of sermons, memorial cards and serviettes, song sheets, newspaper cuttings cornering a variety of Durham mining disasters.
[79] See appendix A, Figure 1

forgotten. In the absence of a memorial statue the local church stated the intent for the creation of an annual remembrance service in a service held one month after the disaster. The attendance at this service was notable and the desire to continue the service annually was popularly accepted, this is clear evidence of commemoration taking a practical form in the affected communities.[80] As will be discussed later in this chapter, this form of commemoration has continued into modern times and can be perhaps seen as the most effective memorial action in bringing communities together not only in the immediate aftermath but also for decades after.

The commemoration of coal mining disasters varied greatly between social classes as the memorial responses needed to appeal to a variety of people with different expectations and beliefs. In order to achieve interest in coal mining disasters, their causes and working conditions within the mines, commemoration needed to become accessible to all and this was achieved in a variety of ways. There was widespread inter-class tension during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and ensuring that commemoration appealed to the higher echelons of society was a way of ameliorating inter-class tensions whilst offering the miners themselves a platform to demonstrate the harsh working conditions. The influence and popularity of newspapers in this period allowed the commemoration of coal mining disasters to appeal to higher social classes and the heavily reported involvement of a leading figure in society in the process of commemoration led to an increased awareness and attention from society as a whole. Queen Victoria was one of those figures whose participation in the commemoration and aftermath of coal mining disasters led to many other recognisable figures in society becoming involved in both social and labour reform. The connection with Queen Victoria and her actions towards mining disasters can be seen on many occasions, from her public concern and outcry for reform regarding child employment following the 1842 Silkstone disaster, to the personal letters she sent to bereaved families following the New Hartley and

[80] *The Times,* 12 May 1896

Pontypridd disasters and substantial donation to public relief funds for the bereaved.[81] King George V was also keen to express concern and sympathies to families affected by coal mining disaster and increase awareness of such disasters among the higher echelons of society as was the case following the 1913 Senghenydd disaster, and the 1934 Gresford disaster.[82] The influence and impact of such royal concern and interest in disasters, their causes, and aftermath was even noted among politicians in the House of Commons debates where special thanks and mentions were given to the benevolent nature of Queen Victoria.[83] Not only did the connection of a sovereign to a disaster increase public interest of the incident, it also led to an influx of financial donations from other leading members of society for the mourning mining families.[84] Consequently, the involvement of sovereigns, and other prominent figures in society, in the commemoration of coal mining disaster ensured that commemoration was becoming more accessible and acceptable to the middle and upper classes of society as airing concerns and engagement with relief fund became a fashionable statement of awareness of the plight of the working classes.

Another factor which greatly influenced commemoration and can be used in part to explain the change in the process of commemoration over time was pressure for reform. One of the principal purposes of commemoration was to demonstrate the need for social and political reform within the BCI. During the nineteenth century the principal focus of those striving for reform within the BCI was the improvement of working conditions, increased safety precautions, and increased national regulation of the mines and it is clear that the commemoration of coal mining disasters served these purposes well. The sheer number of those killed or injured in what was perceived as preventable situations ensured that the general public became aware of the conditions within the mines and began to call for measures and legislation to alleviate suffering and prevent future disasters. The

[81] TWA CH/MPR/28/1 – Letter from Queen Victoria to the bereaved families of the New Hartley disaster, 1862
[82] *Cambrian Daily Leader,* 15 October 1913; *The Times,* 24 September 1934
[83] HC Deb, 31 July 1878, Vol. 242 cc778-804
[84] NEIMME /Wks/86 – Report of a meeting at Seaham Colliery regarding contributions to a relief fund following an explosion at the colliery, 'Circular letter Seaham Explosion Subs.' 29 September 1880

Silkstone and New Hartley disasters excited a great deal of public interest in the BCI and the commemoration the occurred in the aftermath of these disasters initiated two great acts of reformative legislation to be passed by parliament, the 1842 Mines Act and the 1872 Coal Mines Regulation Act respectively. However, once these initial concerns over conditions had been approached and beginning to be resolved the focus of the reformers within the working classes of the BCI begun to shift from improving conditions to securing a minimum wage. There are instances where miners had been blamed for a disaster for not following safety procedures and ignoring warning signs, such as in Gresford in 1934, yet the miners response was that they had to ignore time costly drills and warning in order to mine enough raw materials to ensure a substantial pay. Therefore the commemoration of coal mining disasters provided a platform for protest for reform as it was suggested that if the miners were paid a suitable minimum wage they would have more time to follow safety procedures and this kind of disaster could be avoided.

The impact of technology on the commemoration of coal mining disasters

In the time period between the mid nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the way in which people commemorated and remembered coal mining disasters was altered significantly due to technological advancements. Not only did technology impact the way in which people commemorated disasters, as previously mentioned, it affected the BCI as a whole. As photography became more popular and widely available it became central to the memorial process surrounding coal mining disasters and provided another way for bereaved families and communities to remember the dead. Individual and collective memorial cards were a common response to mining disasters in the mid to late nineteenth century as they provided a personalized memento of the disaster and became a relic of sorts for families to cherish.[85] Yet notably, following the West Stanley disaster of 1909, which claimed the lives of almost two hundred men and boys, photographs of the

[85] BRRC G-458.1 – Individual memorial card of Joseph Robinson, Tanfield Pit Disaster, 1890; BRRC 1991-174.3 – Individual memorial card of James Walker, New Seaham Disaster, 1880; BRRC K-188 – Individual memorial card of John Laverick, Elemore Pit Disaster, 1886

deceased begun to appear on individual memorial cards marking a significant change in the process of memorialisation due to technology.[86] Furthermore photography allowed for the creation of the celebration of those who had managed to survive a coal mining disasters through the means of memorial cards. Following the 1909 West Stanley disaster a memorial photo-card was printed picturing the thirty men and boys who had been lucky enough to survive the disaster along with the name of those who had not been so lucky.[87] The increased usage of photography to commemorate disasters and remember the dead would be continued to be used in various memorial situations from this point onwards as it was a successful and personalised way in which victims of disasters could be remembered in both family and communal settings. Another form of technology which impacted the way coal mining disasters were commemorated was the use of radio broadcasting, yet it must be noted that the first instance of this was not until the 1934 Gresford disaster in North Wales. The BBC reported in the immediate aftermath of the disaster which killed almost three hundred men and boys and broadcast details of the incident and the relief effort that was being implemented.[88] Although this form of technology did not impact the commemoration of coal mining disasters until the very end of the period in question the use of radio to commemorate coal mining disasters ensured that many people across the nation would become aware of a disaster very rapidly and therefore more inclined to become involved in the miners plight and aware of working class concerns. Technology had undeniably changed the way in which people remember and commemorate all kinds of disasters and events and there is clear evidence to suggest the impact technology had on the commemoration of coal mining disasters. The use of technology to assist with memorialisation and commemoration allowed commemoration to impact upon the lives of many people who were not in the immediately affected areas and subsequently excite more interest and concern into the lives of the working classes.

[86] BRRC 2006-58.13 – Individual memorial card for Thomas Anderson who was killed in the West Stanley disaster 1909 with a small photograph of him attached to the card.
[87] BRRC K-180 – Memorial photo-card of the 30 survivors of the West Stanley Pit Disaster, 1909
[88] http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00gqrgw, Original radio news broadcast from 1934, reporting on the Gresford Pit Disaster, date accessed 20/11/2014

The impact of the commemoration of coal mining disasters on modern day British society

Commemoration and memorialisation of past events is an integral part of modern day society and it has been suggested that there is a current 'upsurge in the production of memory with the construction of memorial sites worldwide'.[89] Yet it can be suggested that the commemorative actions that were instigated by the affected communities of the BCI in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has had a profound and lasting impact on the way in which those disasters are remembered and commemorated in modern day. The idea of commemoration through the means of annual remembrance services is one example of a commemorative action that occurred in the aftermath of a coal mining disaster that has been continued by local communities into modern day. There are numerous examples of annual remembrance services of coal mining disasters that have continued to occur across Britain in order to ensure that there is constant remembrance of the lives lost in mining communities. Local parish churches and county councils continue remembrance services with great support from the local communities and local media and special anniversary memorial services occur frequently. In 2014 it was the eightieth anniversary of the 1934 Gresford disaster and special efforts were made by local and regional communities in order to ensure that this disaster would not be forgotten. As well as the local traditional memorial service in Gresford, Wrexham council enacted a special service and creation of a Friends of Gresford Colliery Disaster local history group in order to 'preserve the memories of the miners and ensure that they will never be forgotten'.[90] The continuation of commemoration of annual services is often accompanied with the addition or creation of new memorial artwork or statues on special anniversaries. Furthermore, other artistic methods are often employed to memorialise a coal mining disaster rather than the traditional creation of a monument in the churchyard where the victims were buried. For example, at St Albans Church in Earsdon, the church where the majority of the two hundred and four victims

[89] Lisa M. Moore, '(Re) Covering the Past, Remembering Trauma: the Politics of Commemoration at Sites of Atrocity', p.47
[90] *Daily Post* 19 September 2014, *Daily Post* 22 September 2014

of the 1862 New Hartley disaster are buried, to mark the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the disaster contemporary stained glass windows were installed in the church to provide a local communal focus point to commemorate the disaster.[91] During the unveiling memorial service the local mayor state the importance of marking the anniversary of a disaster which impacted so many of the local community at the time and that continued commemoration is a simple way of ensuring that those who perished, and the circumstances surrounding the disaster, are never forgotten.[92] Artistic memorialisation had been suggested to be a cathartic process that no only allowed the bereaved to work through their trauma in the aftermath of a disaster but be more appealing to modern day communities commemorating a disaster.[93] The use of performing arts to commemorate a coal mining disaster in modern day appears to be extremely popular and successful. *She's Fired* is a contemporary play written and performed by local ex-miners and folk musicians to tell the story of the 1880 New Seaham disaster whilst making a political statement about the disaster in relation to modern day issues.[94] It has been performed across the North East of England in a variety of location from local church halls to the renowned Sage at Gateshead. Not only does the play tell the story of the disaster it focusses on the controversial choices of the management in the aftermath which sealed the fate of those trapped inside.[95] It makes statements that can be connected to capitalist greed which can be seen in modern day and provides an insight into the status of miners and their working conditions in the late nineteenth century. This is clear evidence of commemorative actions that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centauries being adapted and continued into modern day society with the aim of increasing awareness of these past disasters and ensure that they are still commemorated within local communities.

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[91] http://www.newcastle.anglican.org/news-and-events/news-article.aspx?id=568, Article about the installation of memorial stained glass windows in St Albans Church, Earsdon, date accessed 15 February 2015

[92] *The Chronicle,* 16 January 2012

[93] Lisa M. Moore, '(Re) Covering the Past, Remembering Trauma: the Politics of Commemoration at Sites of Atrocity', p.46

[94] *The Chronicle,* 25 February 2015

[95] http://www.edmundsondesign.com/shes-fired/, program for the play She's Fired, date accessed 10 February 2015

In conclusion, the commemoration of coal mining disasters is an extremely complicated process that varies significantly from instance to instance and over time. There are clear social, political, economic, and religious influences on the process of commemoration and memorialisation. Ensuring that the commemoration of coal mining disaster appealed and was accessible to all social classes was clearly important when considering how to approach commemoration in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The popularity of media allowed for news of coal mining disasters and the commemorative actions that followed to be circulated among vast audiences of all social classes whilst exciting interest into the plight of the miners and the needs for both social and economic reform. The process of the commemoration of coal mining disasters that took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has greatly impacted the way in which those disasters are perceived and commemorated in modern day. I would be fair to suggest that without the efforts made by the affected communities to commemorate the disasters, and those who died, the events that occurred could have been forgotten about by future generations. The commemoration of coal mining disasters provides an insight into working class labour history and the attempts that were made in order to improve living standards and increase reform.

Conclusion

It is apparent that the commemoration of coal mining disasters was an integral part of the BCI during the eighteenth and nineteen centuries. The prominence of the BCI as one of the principal employers in Britain ensured that injuries and fatalities were higher in the BCI than any other principal industry. Technological advancements that occurred during this period ensured that miners were working in deeper more dangerous seams and the lack of nationalised regulation ensured that there was a steady increase in accidents, both on a large and smaller scale. The constructed community that developed in response to the expansion of the BCI had a profound impact on the process of commemoration and the way in which disasters were to be remembered for decades to come.

There were many actions and responses that occurred in the aftermath of a coal mining disaster and many of these would in time develop into commemoration. The impact and role of the media became a form of commemoration in its own right, shaping attitudes and actions across Britain. Newspapers reported on the conditions in the aftermath of disasters and printed letters to the editor that called for reform. Furthermore, newspapers published accounts from all classes of society giving the perspective of the miner and the mine owner which allows historians to develop a more rounded and balanced view of conditions in the aftermath of a disaster. The responses which occurred in the local communities in the aftermath of a disaster gave rise to the development of various methods of commemoration which was accessible to all. The local efforts made to commemorate coal mining disasters have undeniably shaped the way in which these events are remembered and commemorated in present day.

It has been fairly argued that commemoration strived to serve a multitude of purposes in the aftermath of a disaster. Despite these purposes having clear social, economic, and political aims,

the success in achieving such aims was far from guaranteed. Easing the suffering of the bereaved, allocating blame, and demonstrating the need for reform were all present in acts of commemoration of coal mining disasters, yet all were not as equally successful. There was clear resistance to reform from the miners and mine owners alike and this led to increasing inter-class tensions and malevolence. Miners were concerned with regulation and the involvement of politicians in their working life, as time consuming regulations could have a negative impact on their salary. Mine owners were equally concerned by the loss of productivity due to increased regulation and a substantial loss of profit if a minimum wage were to be introduced. This resistance clearly hindered the efforts of reformers and ensured that any reform introduced would take a long time and be difficult to enforce. Nevertheless, reforms and regulation were gradually introduced and, over time, would positively impact the daily lives of the mining communities with improved working conditions and increased access to healthcare and education.

It has been made clear that commemoration took a variety of forms and differed greatly from disaster to disaster depending on circumstances. Financial constraints and social accessibility greatly impacted the way in which coal mining disasters were commemorated and remembered. Technological advancements impacted commemoration greatly as due to the increase in popularity and availability of radio and photography, disasters became to be commemorated in different ways and in much more detail. The commemorative actions which took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth century have had a profound impact on the way in which those disasters are remembered and commemorated in modern day. If it were not for the actions that occurred in the aftermath of coal mining disasters it is fair to suggest that they would not be remembered in the same way in present day. Commemorating coal mining disasters is an integral part of modern day society and continuing to research working class history is central to the development of understanding the way in which modern British society has developed.

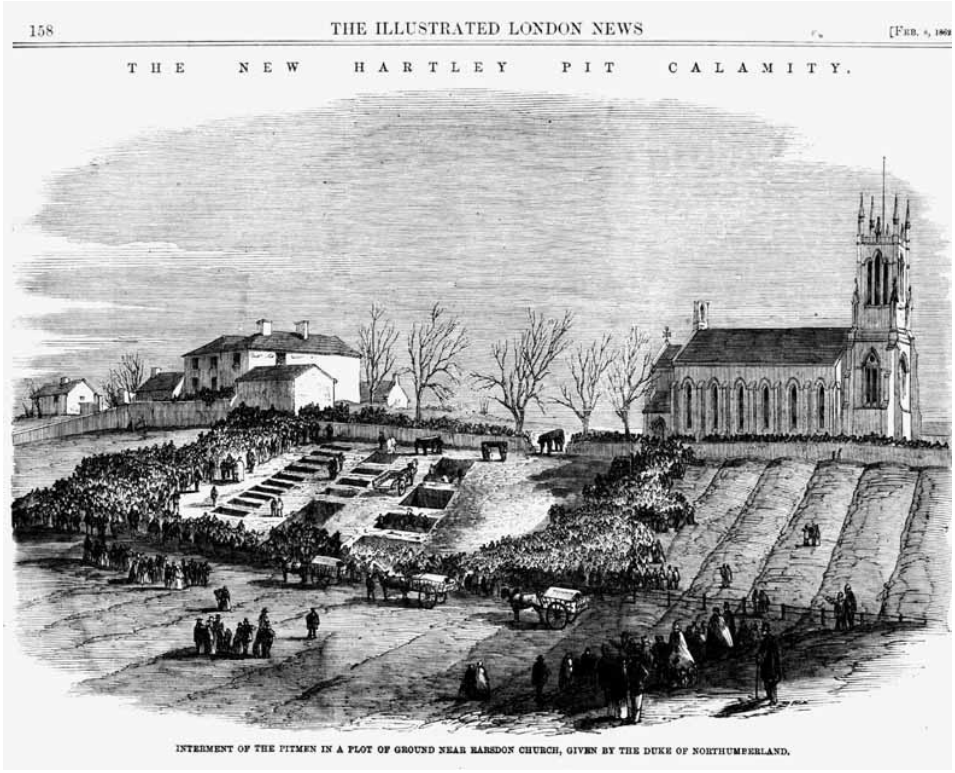
Appendices

Appendix A: Images of the memorial shrine at Christ Church, Seaham. Taken by Hannah Martin, 16 February 2015.

Figure 1: Image of part of a salvaged beam which forms part of the memorial shrine to the victims of the 1880 New Seaham Pit Disaster.

Appendix B: Line drawings of New Hartley disaster funeral, *Illustrated London News*, 8 February 1862

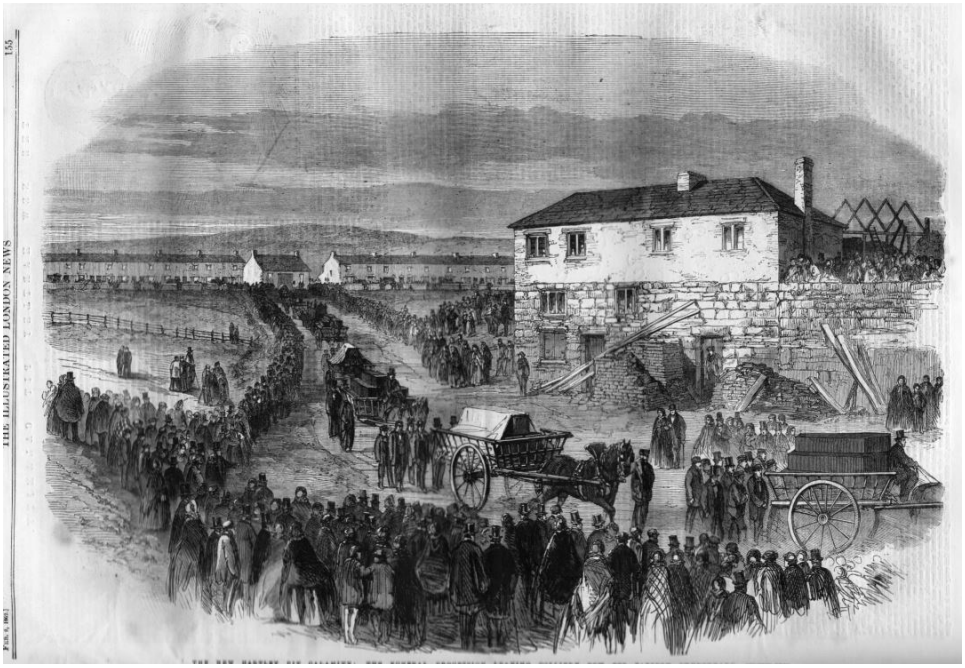
Figure 1: Internment of the pitmen in a plot of ground near Earsdon Church, given by the Duke of Northumberland


158 THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS [FEB. 8, 1862

THE NEW HARTLEY PIT CALAMITY.

INTERMENT OF THE PITMEN IN A PLOT OF GROUND NEAR HARRDON CHURCH, GIVEN BY THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND.

Figure 2: The funeral procession of the victims of the New Hartley disaster.



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TWA CH/MPR/28/3 – Copy of the painting 'Hartley Disaster, 1862: Reading the Queen's Letter' by H.H. Emmerson

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