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Strikingly Individual:

Popular Individualism in the Mining Community
of Horden, c.1984-1994

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education
Supervisor: Gary Love

May 2021

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the outcome of the miners' strike of 1984-5 was not individualism's triumph over the collective sense of community in traditional mining communities. By analysing individual testimonies from local citizens of a specific mining community called Horden, I suggest that individualism was an important element for miners in their year long dispute with the National Coal Board and the Thatcher Government. Drawing primarily on the academic concept of 'popular individualism', this thesis rejects the fact that mining communities such as Horden lacked individualism, and furthermore argues that the strong 'sense of community' played an important part in preserving the individual aspirations to the local citizens. Subsequently, the loss that mining communities suffered in the strike, and the deindustrialization that followed, led to a dismantling of these communities which had a devastating effect on both their individualism and community spirit.

The testimonies illustrate attitudes towards 'popular individualism' in the immediate wake of the strike, before closure of the colliery, and how these attitudes had changed years after closure. Ultimately, it contextualizes the ideological differences between Thatcherism and the mining communities, and illustrates how Thatcherism's attributed individualism failed to apply to the people of Horden.

Introduction

Individual experience is now an important focal point of research on modern British history because it offers historians new opportunities to test the strength and credibility of broader explanations of social change. The ambition of such work has not been to completely revise existing accounts of modern British history, rather it is to highlight different perspectives and to develop a more complex or indeed accurate reading of the past. This approach has been particularly effective in areas of modern British history where it has been possible to draw upon new sources that give us greater insights into the experiences and views of marginalized or previously unheard voices.¹ The miners' strike of 1984-5 and its impact on mining communities is a topic that lends itself to this type of historical approach and it is the focus of this thesis.

The miners' strike of 1984-5 has been and continues to be researched in great depth by scholars working in various academic disciplines because it remains for many people a very emotional and controversial event in modern British history. In short, the miners and their unions who went out on strike for almost a year in 1984-5 ended up losing against the National Coal Board and the Thatcher government. In the end, an entire industry was broken, leaving whole communities on the verge of destruction. Interestingly, during the strike a number of surprising social and cultural transformations took place in some of these communities. Conservative and chauvinistic attitudes from miners towards women and even lesbian and gay groups were challenged by the support they received from organizations such as Women Against Pit Closures and Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, which resulted in newly-formed solidarities.² The sense of community in these pit villages grew stronger, but new bonds could not make up for the impact of the strike or the high levels of unemployment that would result from the accelerated closure of pits. Now, thirty-six years later, some of these formerly prosperous industrial areas have been largely left abandoned with no prospects of significant employment. Many citizens of these areas are often caught in a vicious circle of low social mobility and arguably the lack of work has had a major impact on both their own and their community's sense of identity. One of the former mining villages that suffered greatly both

¹ A fine example of individual voices putting its mark on history is Linda McDowell's book *Migrant Women's Voices: Talking About Life and Work in the UK Since 1945*. (London, 2016). Also, for individual voices in British nuclear culture, see Jonathan Hogg "The Family That Feared Tomorrow: British Nuclear Culture and Individual Experience in the Late 1950s." *The British Journal for the History of Science*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2012, pp. 535-549

² The movie "Pride", directed by Matthew Warchus from 2014, is a great example that illustrates how lesbian and gay communities in London surprisingly organized in order to help the miners in their struggle.

during and after the strike was Horden in the North-East of England, which will be used as a case study throughout this thesis.

There are rich sources available to examine the strike and its impact on the mining community in Horden. In 1986, the historian Tony Parker published *Red Hill: A Mining Community*, which consists of verbatim oral history interviews with people from Horden immediately after the strike. It provides a detailed insight into how the strike was experienced from a wide range of people within one mining community, including women, striking miners, ‘scabs’ (those miners who refused to strike), local coal board officials, and other local residents who were not directly associated with mining or the strike. More recently, the author Mark Hudson also published a memoir entitled *Coming Back Brockens (1995)*, which is a portrait of Horden. He lived there for a year in 1994 in search of answers to who his grandparents were, and, in doing so, he interacted and engaged with numerous residents of Horden. He offers new insights into Horden’s recent history, into mining as a profession, and the often brutal working conditions that mining communities fought so hard to preserve.

In this thesis, then, I will analyse the individual experiences and personal narratives in these testimonies, and try to reflect more deeply on the mining community of Horden from the perspective of its own citizens. I will draw on the academic concept of ‘popular individualism’ to research and challenge historical misconceptions about the lack of individualism within working-class communities. Therefore, the main research question in this thesis is: *What impact did the miners’ strike of 1984-5 and the subsequent closing down of the industry have on the mining community in Horden?* In answering this question, I will seek to test the argument that a ‘sense of community’ was in fact very important for preserving individual aspirations among miners and villagers. As a result, the thesis will look to make an original and nuanced contribution to understanding Horden as a pit village and community primarily during the 1980s and 1990s. This will allow me to analyse the impact of the miners’ strike of 1984-5 on the everyday life of those involved, as well as those who continue to live in the area today. On a broader level, the thesis will make a modest contribution to the history of the dispute between the Thatcher Government and the National Coal Board, and the National Union of Mineworkers and mining communities.

Historiography

Background to the Miners' Strike 1984-5

The miners' strike of 1984-5 came at a time when political tensions were running high in Britain. Margaret Thatcher's landslide victory in the 1979 general election had resulted in the introduction of new policies that brought about a new way of thinking, which contrasted with the principles of the 'post-war settlement'.³ In the years leading up to the strike, Thatcher's fiscal and monetarist economic strategies were meant to address the country's inflation problem, but they also had a significant impact on levels of employment.⁴ By 1983, unemployment levels had surpassed the three million mark, more than doubling the numbers from the start of her premiership.⁵ This trend, however, did not force Thatcher to change course; the government refused to support 'full employment' and 'income' policies, which had been common staples of British political and economic policy from the 1940s until the 1970s.⁶ Thatcher refused to change course and appointed Ian MacGregor, who had recently 'rationalised' the British steel industry, as the head of the National Coal Board in 1983.⁷ This was regarded as a provocation by Arthur Scargill, the militant leader of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Thatcher believed that the trade unions were powerful, even to the extent that they posed a direct threat to her government and its economic policy. In 1972, the NUM had famously humiliated Edward Heath's government and forced it into submission, implementing a three-day working week, which played a large part in his landslide electoral defeat in 1974.⁸ Nonetheless, Thatcher was determined to find a different solution to Heath's famous rhetorical question "who governs Britain?" and she understood that she needed a better strategy.⁹

³ Neil Rollings, "Cracks in the Post-War Keynesian Settlement? The Role of Organised Business in Britain in the Rise of Neoliberalism Before Margaret Thatcher" *Twentieth Century British History* 24.4 (2013), 637-638.

⁴ David Cannadine, *Margareth Thatcher - a Life and Legacy*. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017), 30-31.

⁵ Thane, "The Iron Lady." *Divided Kingdom – a History of Britain, 1900 to the Present*. (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 351.

⁶ Huw Beynon, "'Still too much socialism in Britain': The Legacy of Margaret Thatcher" *Industrial Relations Journal* 45.3 (2014), 214.

⁷ MacGregor's appointment marked a watershed, due to his role in the British Steel industry, according to Perchard and Gildart: Perchard, Andrew, and Keith Gildart. "Run with the Fox and Hunt with the Hounds': Managerial Trade-Unionism and the British Association of Colliery Management, 1947-1994." *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* 39.1 (2018), 103.

⁸ Jim Phillips, "The 1972 Miners' Strike: Popular Agency and Industrial Politics in Britain." *Contemporary British History* 20.2 (2006), 188.

⁹ Ewen H. H. Green, "Thatcher and Trade Unions." *Thatcher*. (New York: Hodder Arnold, 2006), 106.

In fact, in 1977 Thatcher had put together a secret committee to work on John Hoskyns and Norman Strauss' strategy document "Stepping Stones".¹⁰ It was accepted that ideological warfare resulting in a head-to-head confrontation with the miners would fail, which is why the government planned a set of gradual legal reforms to restrict and complicate union activity. The 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts stated that in order for any unions to call for a closed shop, there would need to be a ballot showing 80% support within the workforce, and made it compulsory to offer compensation to employees dismissed as a result of closed-shop agreements.¹¹ From the union perspective, matters were complicated further with the Employment Act of 1984, which made it compulsory for unions to hold secret ballots before industrial action. In economic terms, the Conservative government also decided in 1980 to reduce the amount of social security payments to strikers' families to the same amount as they were to receive on a weekly basis from the unions while out on strike or picketing.¹²

After establishing these legislative actions that complicated strike action, the government prepared measures that would make them able to endure any large-scale or long-term confrontation. Thatcher increased productivity and stockpiled coal in order to prepare for a future conflict.¹³ The NUM, at a time of large-scale unemployment, read the increase of productivity positively and failed to see the threat that this posed until it was too late. By the time Scargill had been elected leader of the union and imposed an overtime ban it was too late. Thatcher had even organized non-union transportations of coal, made contingent import deals that could be put into action at short notice, and prepared to fuel the power stations through other energy sources like oil.¹⁴ Scargill had called for strike action twice within his first two years as leader of the union, but failed to gain the necessary support from ballots.¹⁵ Therefore, in 1984, when the NCB announced the closing of Cortonwood colliery and, it was rumoured, had plans for over 20 more closures resulting in a loss of 20,000 jobs, he decided to call for a strike without holding a ballot.¹⁶

The resulting strike was the biggest industrial dispute in British post-war history. Scargill announced that there would be a strike on 6 March 1984, and by 12 March about half

¹⁰ Pete Dorey, "The 'Stepping Stones' Programme: The Conservative Party's Struggle to Develop a Trade-Union Policy, 1975-79." *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* 35.35 (2014), 93.

¹¹ Ewen H. H. Green, "Thatcher and Trade Unions." *Thatcher*. (New York: Hodder Arnold, 2006), 117.

¹² *Ibid.*, 119.

¹³ Graham Stewart, "The Workers, United, Will Never Be Defeated." *Bang! A History of Britain in the 1980s*. (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), 343.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁶ Seamus Milne, *The Enemy within - the Secret War against the Miners*. Vol. 4. (London; New York, Verso, 2014), 16.

of Britain's 184,000 miners were out on strike.¹⁷ The strike lasted for more than a year and forced upon the miners, alongside their families and communities, hardship without industrial parallel in either size, duration, or impact anywhere in the world. Some commentators have even gone so far as to labelling it a war, rather than an industrial dispute.¹⁸ Miners were ineligible for social security benefits and their dependants were ineligible for 'urgent needs payments' under the National Security Act of 1980.¹⁹ The absence of a national ballot left the strikers without strike pay, resulting in no sustainable form of income. The NUM could only offer a small picketing allowance, which left the strikers in severe economic difficulties.²⁰ Scargill himself ensured the rejection to a proposed national ballot because he was not sufficiently confident of getting a majority, as well as being over-confident about his ability to use mass picketing to coerce where he could not persuade.²¹ He was worried that certain key areas like Nottinghamshire would vote against the strike had he permitted them the chance. His suspicions were proven to be correct because most Nottinghamshire miners continued to work despite of the strike.²² The resistance towards the strike movement in Nottingham intensified as the strike went on, and in September 1985 the counterparts were formalized by the creation of the Union of Democratic Miners (UDM), heavily based in Nottinghamshire.²³ This division within the industry contradicted the solidarity usually associated with the mining communities. The dispute was of national importance, but the impact on mining communities at local level was perhaps even more significant. In Horden, the effects were devastating.

¹⁷ Graham Stewart, "The Workers, United, Will Never Be Defeated." *Bang! A History of Britain in the 1980s*. (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), 346.

¹⁸ Francis Becket and David Hencke, "Not an Industrial Dispute, but a War." *Marching to the Fault Line*. London: Constable, 2009. 253-73. Print.

¹⁹ Mary Joannou, "'Fill a Bag and Feed a Family': The Miners' Strike and Its Supporters." *Labour and the Left in the 1980s*. Eds. Davies, Jonathan and Rohan McWilliam. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 173.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Charles Moore, "The Enemy Within." *Margaret Thatcher - the Authorized Biography - Volume Two: Everything She Wants*. (Great Britain: Penguin Books Ltd., 2015), 154.

²² Pat Thane, "The Iron Lady." *Divided Kingdom - a History of Britain, 1900 to the Present* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 362.

²³ David Ray and David Allsop. "Damaged by Democracy: The National Union of Mineworkers and the 1984-85 Strike." *Employ Respons Rights* 23.2 (2011), 147.

Horden Colliery

In the interwar period Horden Colliery was the largest mine in Britain with three shafts and an extensive surface operation involving a washery, brick works, and coke works.²⁴ The mines' importance and stature was further illustrated through the predictions and promises made by the newly appointed head of the National Coal Board in 1960, Lord Robens, who said it was "revealed that at least 550 million tonnes of workable coal lies in the undersea coalfield now", and that "it will be enough to keep 20.000 miners who work in these pits working for many years to come."²⁵ This positive attitude continued into the 1970s when the "Plan for Coal" agreement of 1974 promised a large-scale investment in the industry, creating a sense of security of labour for mining in general, and for the community in Horden. The mining community in Horden was reassured that the super-pit prospect meant that it would indeed be a "pit with a future."²⁶ But by 1985 the tone had radically changed. The Area Director had said that pits like Horden, which workers a decade earlier had been assured would be workable for years to come, was "a cancer that needed to be cut out if the area was to survive".²⁷ It was announced that it would turn into a 'manpower reservoir' alongside Bates colliery, which would indicate that the area would be subject to sudden large-scale unemployment. The free flow of industrial labour between the pits was no longer a sustainable option, as the levels of unemployment were too high, leaving more men than jobs.

Seeing Horden today one might be tempted to suggest that Horden Colliery rather than being the cancer that needed to be cut out in order to save the area was in fact the beating heart that kept it alive. In 2015, Channel 4 News broadcasted a story on housing in Horden. One of the local residents, Isabella Roberts, who had lived in Horden for 38 years reminisced that the houses used to be lovely, desirable ones. She argued that it has lost its appeal and now, and that "it's like Beirut. It's absolutely disgraceful".²⁸ The journalist, Ciaran Jenkins, touched upon the vicious circle that old pit villages could not escape, as he states that "the more people who left

²⁴ Raphael Samuel, *The Enemy within - Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5*. Eds. Samuel, Raphael, Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas. (New York: Routledge, 1986), 43.

²⁵ Raphael Samuel, *The Enemy within - Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5*. Eds. Samuel, Raphael, Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas. (New York: Routledge, 1986), 43.

²⁶ In 1977, the NCB launched a recruitment campaign to attract experienced miners, where they were reassured that Horden was a 'modern day super-pit' and 'a pit with a future'. Found in: Samuel, Raphael. *The Enemy within - Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5*. Eds. Samuel, Raphael, Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas. (New York: Routledge, 1986), 44.

²⁷ Ibid 44-45

²⁸ Ciaran Jenkins. "'It's Like Beirut': The Town Where Homes Are on Sale for £1." Channel 4 News 2015. Web. 04.12.2020 2020 URL: <https://www.channel4.com/news/horden-county-durham-bedroom-tax-one-pound-housing>

the village [Horden], the worse it seemed to get for the people who stayed".²⁹ In his view, this fate was inevitable following the large-scale rundown of the coal industry that took place on the back of the miners' strike. For Horden, this meant that thousands of jobs were taken away, which effectively meant that thousands of households had to replace their livelihood, and the community as a whole had to reinvent itself.

For communities such as Horden where mining had played such an integral part in peoples' lives, it appears that the loss of the mines had both a direct impact on employment and services, as well as on peoples' sense of purpose, worth, and identity. According to Horden Parish Council today:

Since closure of the mine in 1987 Horden's population has fallen and it now suffers high unemployment, higher than average health issues and problems with poor housing stock. In addition, Horden has gradually lost most of its services and amenities including Police and Fire Stations, secondary school, many local shops, cinemas, and its railway station.³⁰

Successive governments, it seems, have neglected to invest in the former mining areas, which have also led to social breakdown as a result of increased poverty and drug-related criminality. The problems in Horden are not just illustrated by the poverty and general despair, but also through the hopelessness the citizens have regarding any form of escape. Four in ten people from Horden have zero qualifications in terms of education or other types of training, which is almost double the national average.³¹ In these types of areas, the number of adults out of work and on benefits are also 40% higher than the national average.³² Horden is by no means a special case because many former industrial areas have suffered in this way since the strike of 1984-5, but its reflection of wider social patterns does much to support the justification for researching it as a case study.

²⁹ In the video attached to the article, this quote is from 0:15-0:20 seconds in the video.

³⁰ Horden Parish Council. "About Horden." Horden Parish Council 2021. Web. 21.01.21 2021

URL: <https://horden.parish.durham.gov.uk/about-horden/>

³¹ Mark Townsend, "'People Are Starving': Village Life in Britain's Blighted Coalfields." *the Guardian* (2017).

URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/aug/26/blighted-coalfields-village-life-pit-village-people-starving-horden-co-durham>

³² Ibid.

Concepts and Perspectives

Individualism and community

During the years when Thatcher was Prime Minister, people became less dependent on the state because the welfare state was rolled back, benefits were restricted, unions were shattered, and people were generally more left to fend for themselves.³³ This was causing a natural assumption that individualism was synonymous with Thatcherism, and a direct consequence of her government's policies.³⁴ However, historians now claim that such conclusions oversimplify the mechanisms that were at play in the 1970s and that 'popular individualism' was a phenomenon that had multiple valences that did not lead directly to Thatcherism. Rather, it was something Thatcher was able to embrace and exploit in her politics because of its natural fit with her particular brand of Conservatism. Emily Robinson et al. (2017) suggests that many in Britain were already expressing desires for greater personal autonomy and self-determination in the 1970s.³⁵ This view is echoed by Jon Lawrence in his recent work on 'vernacular social democracy', which by emphasising the vernacular and 'ordinary' in personal testimonies in the post-war era, suggests that the values of social democracy are still deeply rooted in British popular culture today. In his view, a symbiosis of individualism and community is an integral part of how social democracy can and should work.³⁶ He references the existence of what the sociologist Mike Savage has termed 'rugged individualism' among industrial workers since the late 1950s. For some workers, trade union collectivism could be seen as "the best means of preserving their historic rights to a measure of autonomy and independence in the workplace (and also as the best way to improve their family's living standard)".³⁷ In this interpretation, then, the social democratic post-war settlement was a key driver of growing individualism, as the welfare state, strong unions, full employment, and general affluence all provided a sense of security that allowed people to gain a higher perception of self-worth and become more aspirational. In my view, this could potentially be argued about the miners. If we widen the concept of individualism and apply it more methodologically, through an exploration of

³³ Pat Thane, "The Iron Lady." *Divided Kingdom – a History of Britain, 1900 to the Present* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 346.

³⁴ Emily Robinson et al. "Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s." *Twentieth Century British History* 28.2 (2017), 270.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 302.

³⁶ John Lawrence, "Vernacular Social Democracy and the Politics of Labour." *Renewal - a journal of social democracy* (2020)

³⁷ *Ibid.*

individual voices, it might be possible to identify more nuanced meanings of ‘popular individualism’ that were present within the mining communities as well.

Furthermore, other social changes took place in the 1970s that have relevance for thinking about meanings of ‘popular individualism’ in mining communities in the 1980s. Births outside marriage increased, alongside an explosion of ‘identity politics’, and new social movements organized around a huge variety of causes and identities.³⁸ For example, reforms during the 1970s made a significant impact on the roles of women in society, with influence from groups like the ‘Women’s Liberation Movement’ and the passage of Equal Pay and Sexual Discriminations Acts that led to more women working outside the home.³⁹ During the miners’ strike of 1984-5, some women in mining villages played an active part in the dispute, organizing support groups to help the cause.⁴⁰ The Women Against Pit Closures group grew to become a national organization as more and more local groups developed and connected with each other.⁴¹ As famously illustrated by feminist Beatrix Campbell in her book *Wigan Pier Revisited* (1984), women’s autonomy was not synonymous with the mining industry, and their exclusion from the pits meant they were often denied any income if working husbands failed to hand over their wage packets to contribute to the family budget.⁴² In fact, Campbell challenged the romantic narrative towards miners’ masculinity that George Orwell had advocated in his classic work *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937).

The 1970s has also been labelled by some as a decade of ‘dealignment’ because people started to increasingly outgrow their traditional identities.⁴³ People in general turned less to tradition, habit, family and community, and started to make up their minds for themselves, even changing their mind more frequently, and weigh issues more carefully.⁴⁴ Even within the traditional mining communities, there was a desire for self-realization and increased autonomy. In line with these broader arguments about social change, if we acknowledge these facts we can start to contest the more simplistic idea that the loss the miners suffered from the strike was

³⁸ Emily Robinson et al. "Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the ‘Crisis’ of the 1970s." *Twentieth Century British History* 28.2 (2017), 273.

³⁹ Emily Robinson et al. "Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the ‘Crisis’ of the 1970s." *Twentieth Century British History* 28.2 (2017), 289-290.

⁴⁰ Mary Joannou, "'Fill a Bag and Feed a Family': The Miners' Strike and Its Supporters." *Labour and the Left in the 1980s*. Eds. Davies, Jonathan and Rohan McWilliam. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 184.

⁴¹ Natalie Thomlinson and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "National Women against Pit Closures: Gender, Trade Unionism and Community Activism in the Miners' Strike, 1984-5." *Contemporary British History* 32.1 (2018), 82.

⁴² Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited - Poverty and Politics in the 80s*. (London: Virago, 1984), 106.

⁴³ Emily Robinson et al. "Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the ‘Crisis’ of the 1970s." *Twentieth Century British History* 28.2 (2017), 273.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

individualism's triumph over community spirit. In exploring the individual narratives of Horden, I wish to uncover how concepts of community and individualism were expressed within a specific community on the brink of destruction, where collective community spirit was being tested to its absolute limit over the course of a year, and, again, in the wake of the strike. This thesis, then, will look to research and analyse the impact of transforming attitudes towards 'popular individualism' and a 'sense of community' in Horden during the miners' strike of 1984-5, as expressed in individual testimonies.

Method, Sources and Chapter Structure

These narratives will be researched from Tony Parker's *Red Hill: A Mining Community*, and Mark Hudson's *Coming Back Brockens*. In this section, I will clarify in what way these books differ, what strengths and limitations they possess as historical sources, and, lastly, how I intend to approach them methodologically.

Red Hill: A Mining Community is a collection of written oral interviews from both sides of the dispute immediately following the strike but preceding the closure of the pit. Oral history is a valuable tool for unearthing the 'vernacular' perspectives of working-class men and women from below who might not have left as much of an imprint on the historical record as other social groups. It also allows the people directly involved in historical events to provide their own accounts of what happened and asks them to critically reflect on their own interpretations.⁴⁵ Parker, who as a conscientious objector during World War II spent eight months underground as a miner, has received praise for his ability to make people open up. With his TDK D90 cassette recorder and his calming presence, he often left a vacuum and invited others to fill it.⁴⁶ In a radio interview from 2012, Martin Phillips from BBC managed to track down two of Parker's subjects to ask them how he did the interviews. They said that he left them to do most of the talking and that he was a very good listener.⁴⁷ Parker briefly describes the settings and his subjects, before letting their words do the talking. His editing or what questions he may have had to get them talking about certain subjects are unavailable, and, consequentially, my methodological approach will pay little attention to his. As far as I know, Parker's original field notes do not survive in any physical archive, but his book is a unique and highly valuable account of the strike that has not been used extensively by historians.

The strengths of *Red Hill: A Mining Community* lies in its broad representation of citizens from Horden, who experienced the strike from different perspectives. The limitations of oral history are largely summed up by Barbara Tuchman who said that "a major problem in using oral history is the public misconception that recording reminiscence is the same as sifting and melding them into a work of history."⁴⁸ However, while such limitations need to be

⁴⁵ Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson. "Introduction to Second Edition." *The Oral History Reader*. Eds. Perks, Robert and Alistair Thomson. Vol. 2. (United Kingdom; Canada; USA: Routledge, 2006) First page of introduction to second edition.

⁴⁶ Richard Kelly, "Tony Parker: His Ears Were 'a National Treasure'." Faber 2013. Web. 15.03.2021 2021. Found at: <https://www.faber.co.uk/blog/tony-parker-his-ears-were-a-national-treasure/>

⁴⁷ Martin Williams. "The Great Listener." BBC 2012. Web. 15.03 2021. Found at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b01hdp9g> (42:28-48:40)

⁴⁸ Barbara Tuchman, "Distinguishing the Significant from the Insignificant." *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Eds. Dunaway, David K. and Willa K. Baum. (USA: Altmira Press, 1996), 94.

acknowledged, the purpose of this thesis is to highlight nuances and broad perspectives from a mining community. Furthermore, oral historian Studs Terkel, interviewed by Tony Parker himself, elaborates on the essence of oral history, as she states: "I'm looking for the uniqueness in each person. And I'm not looking for some such abstraction as *the* truth, because it does not exist. What I'm looking for is what is the truth for *them*".⁴⁹ For my analysis, the words spoken by the interviewed subjects are what is important. Their truth and how they narrate their experiences will be seen in reference to the theoretical framework as described in the historiography section above. While I am aware of methodological approaches to oral history, the fact remains that I am not practicing it myself and Parker's work provides sufficient material for analysis in this thesis.

Hudson's travel memoir from Horden *Coming Back Brockens* presents different challenges from a historical perspective. Unlike literary critics who look at memoirs as a special form of text, historians treat them as a source. As a historical source, the memoir is bound to its author and offers a single perspective. Hudson clearly states that his ambition with the book is "to find something for myself."⁵⁰ He has deep connections with Horden before the start of his project and his southern alienation from the rural life of the north contributes to an initial prejudice towards the village. Even though his book largely consists of the reminiscence of local residents, a memoir is a personal construct where the stories are fitted into his own narrative. These reminiscing accounts are also constructed through memory, a highly fragile source of information.⁵¹ Why, then, can I claim to use such a book as a source of historical analysis? The answer is quite simple, as I have stated in the introduction. My ambition is not to completely revise existing accounts of the miners' strike, but to highlight nuances and a different set of perspectives that has hitherto been neglected. To that aim, individual perspectives are essential. As I intend to examine and challenge assumptions about the miners and their communities during and after the strike, the evidence lies in the voices of the people in the village. Like Paula Fass (2006) states with regard to memoirs in general, I reject the idea that Hudson's memoir is "nothing more than a facet of self-exposure and literary thrill, as its

⁴⁹ Studs Terkel & Tony Parker. "Interviewing an Interviewer." *The Oral History Reader*. Eds. Perks, Robert and Alistair Thomson. (United Kingdom; USA; Canada: Routledge, 1998), 125.

⁵⁰ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 4.

⁵¹ According to John Paul Eakin, a person's ability to narrate stories is as much down to the identity of the narrator as it is to the story being told (Eakin 100). This problematizes self-expression as a complex product of memory, experience and narrative capability. Eakin, "Storied Selves: Identity through Self-Narration." *How Our Lives Become Stories - Making Selves*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999. 99-141. Print. // Also: Daniel L. Schacter argues that memory's fragile power can sometimes deceive us badly (Schacter 7). We rely on *the rememberer* to accurately provide insight to previous events, but we have little to no possibility to check if what we are being told is true. What we have to do, is to assume that the rememberer believes that it is. Schacter. *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past*. New York: Basic Books, 1996. Print.

sharp insight and important reflections is more than a mere contract of exaggerated sensationalism.”⁵² Its power lies in Hudson’s detailed descriptions of the faded community, alongside the local citizens melancholic accounts on life in the deindustrialized Horden, and their nostalgic accounts of how things used to be before. As Hudson’s year in Horden takes place nearly a decade after the strike, I will examine closely how the concept of ‘popular individualism’ existed in the village years after the pit had been closed, and to what extent loss of both industry and community affected the attitudes of the citizens. In addition, Hudson’s own descriptions of how community spirit in Horden has become a faded memory will have an important role, as it is clear that his preconceptions about the area were challenged while he was living there.

⁵² Paula S. Fass, "The Memoir Problem." *Reviews in American History* 34.1 (2006), 110.

Chapter 1: 'Popular Individualism' and 'Community' in *Red Hill: A Mining Community*

According to a local citizen named Harry Hartley, most of Horden Colliery's miners went out on strike in 1984-5.⁵³ In a village that employed hundreds of miners, only a few rejected the idea of going out on strike and most of the striking miners stayed out until the very end of the dispute. The loyalty that most of these families showed to their industry and community during the strike fuels the idea that in mining areas like Horden there was a strong sense of community and solidarity with the union. Men and women protested side by side, not only against specific pit closures but for the right to work and to maintain their way of life.⁵⁴ Studies of traditional industrial areas like Horden tend to be based on the view that feelings of community and individualism cannot coexist, but as this chapter demonstrates, if we turn our attention to the oral history testimonies in *Red Hill: A Mining Community*, we can see that these terms need to be understood in more complex and subtle ways. By looking for evidence of 'popular individualism' and 'sense of community' in these testimonies we can broaden our understanding of how they applied to the people of Horden immediately after the strike.

There is little doubt that the community historically benefited from a strong collective spirit, which was illustrated by two strike victories during the 1970s. Yet, one of the problems with relying on statistical analysis of the unity of the miners' who chose to strike in 1984-5 is its neglect of the internal struggles and nuanced views behind those numbers. Drawing a hard line between the striking and non-striking miners and their families suggests that almost the whole village was in full support of the strike. This also encourages historians to believe that unity was an extension of a tightly knit community. Simultaneously, even in Horden, where most miners were on strike for the entirety of the dispute, there were people who thought of 'community' as a flawed concept because they sometimes felt alienated from it. These people tended to see the strike as motivated by something else than the protection of the community. For example, Bernard Wilkinson,⁵⁵ who in 1986 had been a miner in Horden for over twenty years, said that he "was bloody glad to be getting away from it."⁵⁶ He genuinely opposed the

⁵³ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 61.

⁵⁴ 30 years after the strike, the British newspaper, the Guardian, did a piece on the strike, and shared memories of some of those involved. Bruce Wilson, who was 29 years old at the time, looks back and says that he was fighting for his 'community.' (Bannock) found online at: Bannock, Caroline. "Miners' Strike 30 Years On: 'I Fought Not Just for «My Pit» but for the Community." The Guardian 2015. Web. 10.02.2021 2021.

⁵⁵ The interviewees are originally made anonymous in the book. Both the pit and the people are given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Some of the names have later been revealed, but I will operate using the pseudonyms that the people are given in the book.

⁵⁶ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 81.

strike because he believed that it was Scargill's personal battle. As Wilkinson felt that he was "no man's servant" he went straight to the local Coal Board when the strike broke out and said that he wished to remain at work.⁵⁷ This example illustrates that there were miners who wanted to keep working through the strike even in Horden. Wilkinson's scepticism of Scargill, his own fearlessness, and his commitment to using his own agency, explains his response to the strike, but at the same time this example shows us that others who might have lacked his personal attributes could have reached a very different conclusion. Some miners might have agreed with Wilkinson, but lacking the same levels of confidence and determination they might have chosen to ignore their personal beliefs and join the strike. According to Wilkinson, he told the coal board that "they could count on me being the first one to go back" and that if they wanted someone to set an example he would be the one to do it because he was not afraid of walking through a picket line.⁵⁸ But for those who did not share this fearless confidence, to go against the strike could leave you potentially very isolated from your co-workers, friends, family, and the community as a whole.

John Potter, a lifelong miner, shared some of Wilkinson's thoughts on the strike: "to my mind, we should have never had the strike, because it was nothing else but a complete waste of time. It brought a lot of hardship and a lot of suffering to a whole lot of people. [...] all it was was an example of people looking round for something to make themselves unhappy about."⁵⁹ He opposed the strike, and even went far in supporting the Coal Board, stating that "in fact in most cases I think they [the NCB] have been very good. They've certainly spent millions of pounds improving the working conditions in pits for the likes of thousands of men."⁶⁰ However, even as his own beliefs contradicted the Union and the miners in general, he would not dare to have rejected strike action: "It's as much as your life's worth. If the Union says we're on strike brother, then we're on strike. I stopped work when they told me to and I didn't start again until the day that they told me to either. They'd make your life hell when you went back to work afterwards if you'd scabbed, it's not worth it."⁶¹ The struggle Potter felt highlights an important dilemma that many in Horden were faced with as the strike went on, which undoubtedly has played its part in constructing a powerful metanarrative about the importance and influence of a strong sense of community in the mining industry and its communities.

⁵⁷ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 84.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

The fact that many chose to support the strike despite their personal conviction that it was the wrong thing to do might seem counter intuitive when looking for evidence of ‘popular individualism’ in Horden. In fact, it appears to support Raphael Samuel’s (1986) description of a community where collective honour pre-empts personal choice.⁶² However, it also illustrates the complexity of what exists within a sense of community and clearly indicates that individual traits such as self-determination and autonomy were important elements for many in the community as well, even if many felt that they could not act on it. Going against a community on strike could have devastating effects for the individual and it is important to remember that few had deemed it possible that a government should ever beat the NUM in a confrontation, which would have led many to believe that things would quickly return to normal. The “normal” in this regard would include an alienation of those who ‘scabbed’, and, as Potter stated, their lives would suffer for it in the aftermath. Norman Lane, a twenty-five-year-old, slightly built miner, who went back to work just three weeks before everyone else in Horden, struggled to find his place after the strike. The “camaraderie” that another miner, Geoff Danson spoke about, seeing miners as mates, is a symbol for the community as a whole, and should you happen to find yourself on the outside of that camaraderie, chances are that you will be unhappy.⁶³ Lane experienced psychological bullying from the other miners: “one or two at the back’ll start making a hissing noise, very softly ‘sssss-sssss’ like that. It makes you feel scared. Or you’ll hear someone start saying in a low voice ‘Scab scab, scab scab’, then someone else then someone else.”⁶⁴ He goes on to suggest that there would have been physical bullying as well, but miners feared losing their jobs in the event that he chose to tell the coal board about such harassment.

Being side-lined from the community made Lane want to leave the village because he testified that “it’s not a good atmosphere working there at all.”⁶⁵ His decision to return to work was highly influenced by his private life because the hardship had led to his wife and kids leaving him. Seeing the strike coming to an end, he thought that a few weeks head start would benefit his economic situation and might cause his wife to reconsider the separation. This was clearly not a choice made out of spite or a decision to go against the Union, it was a move of desperation. This can be contrasted with Wilkinson’s decision, which was one based on principle. However, the main difference lay in their capabilities of dealing with the immediate

⁶² Raphael Samuel, *The Enemy within - Pit Villages and the Miners’ Strike of 1984-5*. Eds. Samuel, Raphael, Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas. (New York: Routledge, 1986), 5.

⁶³ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 52.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

consequences. Lane stood little chance of a return to normal, whereas Wilkinson was prepared to take on anyone who wanted confrontation. These cases, including John Potter, illustrate some of the complexities behind the existence of a ‘sense of community’ in mining villages like Horden, and, they highlight different perspectives that challenge any simplistic metanarratives about the importance of community spirit in these villages during the 1980s. These testimonies also suggest that the types of ‘popular individualism’ being promoted by the Thatcher Government in this period influenced these areas as well. In the following section, I will attempt to analyse to what extent evidence of ‘popular individualism’ can be found in the narratives of *Red Hill: A Mining Community* to further explore the complexities of a traditional mining community.

A significant trope to the perception of mining communities is that they are highly traditional. As one could imagine in an industrial area where the majority of workers are employed in the same field, people from these areas tend to overlap with their parents and follow them into the industry, just as they had done with their parents before them. Samuel (1986) described it as “a patrimonial transference of tradition between generations, a familial trust which passed from father to son.”⁶⁶ In the narratives of *Red Hill: A Mining Community*, however, we see tendencies that would suggest that for some miners a continuation of tradition was of lesser importance. Harry Hartley, who became a miner as his chances of a footballing career faded, ends his interview with Parker on the notion that his son can never go into the mining industry, as there is no future there.⁶⁷ In isolation, his account of the mining industry’s future is understandable considering it is made shortly after the miners had forfeited the strike because the prospects of the industry now looked dire. There was a general negative consensus concerning new recruitment in the mining industry in Horden at the time, where boys such as Paul Dennis, a sixteen-year-old school leaver, admits that he would have “gone down the mine if there’d been jobs”, even though his dad always said he “ought to try something else.”⁶⁸ However, what is more interesting is that the narratives in Parker’s book reveal that such attitudes were common in earlier generations too, even at times when the industry prospered.

Bill Barrymore, who descends from a family with long mining traditions, explains that he quit school and started working in the Horden Colliery at the age of fifteen, even though his father wanted something else for him – something “better”.⁶⁹ He goes on to say that his father

⁶⁶ Raphael Samuel, *The Enemy within - Pit Villages and the Miners’ Strike of 1984-5*. Eds. Samuel, Raphael, Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas. (New York: Routledge, 1986), 5.

⁶⁷ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 68.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

saw the pit as a last resort for Bill, should he not succeed elsewhere. Bill, however, *wanted* to go into the mining industry and down his local pit. To leave his community was not an option, which was all he knew, and he admits that “to close down the pit would mean to close down his life”.⁷⁰ Even in times of markedly strong social changes, the mining industry was a constant source of security for these areas. For many, this security represented an opportunity that could allow them to try their fortune elsewhere and fall back on the mining industry as a manner of last resort. John Potter also admits that his father “would have liked for him to do something else”, even though, alongside John’s uncles, he was a miner himself.⁷¹ However, he chose to go into mining as it was a secure option that he felt he could walk away from at any time and try something else should he so wish. Seeing as how the concept of community was entirely dependent on the wheels of the pit to keep on running, it is interesting that some of the working generations in the Horden Colliery actually favoured their sons to do something other than mining. This would suggest that they were indeed prone to thinking independently and that they appreciated a sense of autonomy as well as a sense of community, at least in time of industrial prosperity.

The fact that mining communities were traditional villages is not singlehandedly illustrated through mining as a profession, it is also seen in other parts of the community. With regards to the miners’ strike of 1984-5, it is absolutely essential to address the role of women, especially when discussing ‘popular individualism’. In Horden, women sought to take an active part in the dispute and decided through one of their meetings that they should organize and “form a Women’s Support Group in the village [...] to let the Coal Board and the Government see [that they] were right behind the men, and wanted to be a force to be reckoned with as well as the menfolk”.⁷² The formations of such groups inspired a transformation of established structures within the community, which altered the conception of the self for many women in the village. Kath Sutton, who humbly described herself as “not the most important person in the world”, illustrates the significance of how women was affected by the strike, stating that to most women involved, “[the strike] was a kind of turning point of their lives, that they’ll never be the same again now afterwards”.⁷³ The ‘turning point’ she mentions is not primarily in reference to the trauma of hardship that they had to endure during the strike, but aimed at the increased agency of women as individuals in a traditionally male-dominant culture. Annie

⁷⁰ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 36.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 134.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 167-168.

Brooks, who, according to herself, was elected leader of the support group in Horden, said that the strike made her into “a very political animal.”⁷⁴ Her transformation symbolizes both the traditional discretion of women in the mining community, and the change of attitude that the strike brought about. Before the strike, she stayed at home for her husband and children, never read any books or showed any interest in politics or society, and only ever watched “silly quiz games and chat shows [on television].”⁷⁵ As the strike continued to dominate and threaten their lives, Annie and several other women of the village decided they would get together to discuss the matter. For many women in these areas, such events had been a rare occurrence, and, as she admitted, before the strike “none of us really thought much about things seriously.”⁷⁶

Aware of their inability to comprehend the political backdrop of the strike, they started to educate themselves, reading books and newspapers, and actively reflect upon what was being written. For many women such as Annie, this was a completely new experience. Kath Hutton is a contrasting example, who with experience both from college and from working as an assistant to a man involved with the miners’ union, already before the strike felt she “was in a position where she could feel as though she was at the centre of political things in the community.”⁷⁷ However, her role there was, as she admitted, without “much power or influence.”⁷⁸ They acknowledged their positions, and concluded that the way they could *really* affect their community was not through committee meetings and administrative action – they wanted to do something practical to help, collecting money to provide food and clothes for the miners and their families.⁷⁹ Their practical contributions were instrumental in supporting the local community with basic needs, but their activity also further emphasizes the solidarity and collectivism in the village’s sense of community. Simultaneously, on an individual level, these efforts installed the women with a mindset of increasing self-perception and confidence in a way that they traditionally had not experienced.

Paulene Street, a pregnant wife of a miner, said that “the strike changed me completely.”⁸⁰ Before the strike, she was silent and polite, and would let anyone else do all the talking, whereas the strike had “changed it all.” According to her, “[the strike] made me stronger and have a lot more confidence in myself and my own opinions. [...] it was because I was

⁷⁴ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 132.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

active, I was joining in and I felt I was taking part.”⁸¹ She was no longer reduced to passivity in the shadow of her husband, but rather working alongside him for a common purpose. For Jean Heaton, another wife of a miner, the strike had a similar effect: “You wouldn’t think it to hear me now but I was a very quiet person before. I looked after the house and my husband and children [...] and kept the house neat and tidy and clean.”⁸² To her, the strike had imposed a fury that saw her exceeding her traditional role of being “just a housewife.” Now, on the outside she is still a housewife, but on the inside she is “a very angry person, [who] shall stay angry until we’ve got rid of this rotten Government and the rotten system it makes us live under.”⁸³ Heaton makes an interesting case, as her transformation is not illustrated through organized groupings such as in the cases of Kath Hutton, Annie Brooks or Paulene Street, but rather through her increased awareness to the world around her. She even illustrates her knowledge by referencing University books on economic aspects of local mining.⁸⁴ Traditionally, women had not needed to mind or reflect upon such matters, as politics and matters outside the house were left to the men, but these structures were challenged as women got more autonomy. Street’s household even saw a complete role switch, as she got a part-time job as a cleaner. Her husband had to stay home and take care of the kids, and as she was out bringing in money to the household, she demanded that he took care of everything at home – a demand to which he agreed.⁸⁵ It might seem trivial, but the traditional structures had existed for generations. Sutton notes that “this was the first time in my lifetime that women in general, in this part of the world, became involved in something which was to do with their own lives. A mining community is a very male-oriented society, and I think it was a significant thing that women became aware of their connections with other women in the community.”⁸⁶ The strike thus brought about unprecedented autonomy and self-determination among some women whom in return advocated for the preservation of their community.

However, whereas some women flourished as a result of these social changes others saw them as harmful and unnecessary. For example, Moira Potter, wife of the aforementioned John Potter, struggled to understand why her husband could not just take another job in neighbouring Peterlee when the strike broke out.⁸⁷ She found ‘community’ to be “awkward” to

⁸¹ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 143.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

deal with and she did not appreciate the same type of collective feeling.⁸⁸ Consequentially, the strike did little to inspire her to reach beyond her traditional role as woman in the mining industry. She stated that she rejected politics because she did not “really understand it”, which meant she just left it “to the men.”⁸⁹ When she was asked about possibly joining the Women’s Support Group by some local women who showed up at her door she told them she “wasn’t interested”.⁹⁰ Her view on women’s activism was that “if you want to do it I suppose it’s all right, but I think some of them neglected their homes and families if you want my honest opinion about it.”⁹¹ According to her, it was “your husband and your family first, they’re what’s important. Don’t interfere with other people, that’s my motto: you live your own life, and let other people get on with living theirs.”⁹² Moira illustrates an important point in that she balances the perspective of what the strike did for women of the Horden community and highlights the fact that some women were content in preserving their position not only in the community but also in their households. This is important to be aware of because even though the women were inspired to take a firmer position in matters that concerned themselves as well as their community, it must be seen in context with more traditional social patterns that undoubtedly continued to exist. Just as was the case with the men, the women represented a complex mix of attitudes and beliefs. The strike did not completely revise attitudes towards female gender roles or engender feelings of self-determination in all women in Horden, but it did inspire change for some women because it highlighted their resourcefulness and changing their own perceptions of their self-worth. This increased confidence and new sense of purpose was put to use in terms of fighting for their husbands’ or sons’ jobs and the future of their own communities, which would have not been possible without the strike of 1984-5.

As these oral history testimonies illustrate, there are complex and even contrasting views from miners and women on the strike, and what it represented in Horden. In order to get a clear image of how the strike affected the community, we should also acknowledge perspectives from the other side of the dispute. Brian Dickinson, a member of the NCB Area Management Board, admitted to Parker that “the whole image of the industry is now very much tarnished.”⁹³ Even though he acknowledged his position as a board member, which made it “impossible to be objective”, he explained that he had much sympathy for the miners and the struggle that they

⁸⁸ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 29.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 192.

suffered. He believed that the entire situation was ‘disastrous’ and he was genuinely saddened by the fact that the NUM could ever come to look upon the Coal Board as an enemy – something he claimed no one could have envisioned when nationalization began.⁹⁴ He admitted that the board had to take partial blame for what happened and thought the main issue from the board’s perspective was their failure to communicate properly. In his view, the board should have explained how they were “sufficiently committed to the future welfare of the mining community.”⁹⁵ He also accepted that “certain things were done which would appear as being deliberately provocative” – referring to how the NCB decided to bus in ‘scabs’ to work, to put strike breakers on display.⁹⁶ He regretted the fact that the strong historical bonds between the NCB and the NUM were destroyed and he ended his interview by emphasizing the fact that he was “not alone in the Board in regretting every single instance which now occurs which seems willy-nilly to widen the rift between the Board and the Union.”⁹⁷ His closing remarks show that the coal board also had had internal disagreements about the strike and how it was being handled, but at the same time the “union had reached a point when they felt the closure programme had gone too fast and too far.”⁹⁸ From the board’s perspective, the feelings among miners that spurred solidarity and collectivism, had “in many ways worked to their own detriment.”⁹⁹ The miners, with an enthusiastic Scargill leading the lines, were never going to accept surrender without a fight, and neither was Thatcher or the NCB. The result became an all or nothing-dispute that failed to acknowledge or communicate properly the interests of both sides. Many miners wanted to keep working but since friends and other miners in the community went on strike, they felt that they had no choice but to join in. Similarly, board members wanted to end the strike in order to get the men back to work, but failed to do so largely because of a lack of communication.

Beyond the day-to-day battles of the strike and how it awakened or re-awakened feelings of ‘popular individualism’ and ‘sense of community, we can also find some evidence of responses in the community to Thatcherite ideas and principles, particularly in relation to other aspects or meanings of individualism that the government was more strongly identified with in the 1980s. For example, Geoff Danson emphasized that “people should have equal opportunities, [that] there ought to be decent education for everyone, a good standard of health

⁹⁴ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 194.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

care, a good standard of life all round generally.”¹⁰⁰ This, he believed, was not something the government concerned itself with. The individual enterprise of Thatcher’s political project was to him nothing but “another expression for taking advantage of others.”¹⁰¹ He effectively distanced himself and his community from the selfishness that he believed was inherent in Thatcherite meanings of individualism. Thatcher’s rhetorical call for a return to Victorian values was according to him “a return to a society where there were two levels – the masters and the servants.”¹⁰² What he was implying was that Thatcherism was a model that suited some better than others and that it failed to acknowledge social aspects of individualism. Harry Hartley went further, suggesting that a difference was “when she [Thatcher] gets out of a job she’ll live in a very nice house and with a very nice pension [...] not like millions of the likes of us.”¹⁰³ Many miners bought their council houses because they were encouraged to do so by the government, through buying up the social housing stock under the famous ‘Right to Buy’ scheme.¹⁰⁴ Bill Barrymore was one of them and he felt as if he had been fooled: “when they were encouraging us to do things of that sort [buying their council house], the Government weren’t telling us we could well end up buying a council house but there’d be no job for us, oh no.”¹⁰⁵ The implication here was that he could now lose his house and savings if he failed to make payments on his mortgage as a result of unemployment. He also explained how he and his wife had thought about starting up a small business of their own, but that they reluctantly did not, as it would involve “a big risk” they could not afford with three children.¹⁰⁶ Again, the government’s encouragement of entrepreneurship would have meant the investment of redundancy money that could have been quickly lost.

In many ways, then, the oral history testimonies challenge overarching metanarratives of collectivism versus individualism in mining communities like Horden. As a result, it is also not difficult to imagine why Thatcherism was a project ill-suited for industrial mining communities like Horden, or why ideological differences have played such a large part in constructing competing narratives of the strike. As this chapter has shown, in terms of ‘popular individualism’ and ‘senses of community’, things are not as simple as historians and political commentators have sometimes led us to believe. For example, there were miners who were not

¹⁰⁰ Tony Parker, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*. London: Faber & Faber, (1986), 56.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 53.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 67.

¹⁰⁴ Helen Carr illustrates how this scheme in some cases led to impoverishing rather than enriching, in her article “The Right to Buy, the Leaseholder, and the Impoverishment of Ownership” *The Journal of Law and Society*, vol 38, 4. (2011)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 38

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

in favour of going out on strike, but not everyone had it in them to ignore their perceived obligations to their community. The same can be applied to how the strike affected the role of women in Horden. While some women felt reinvigorated in terms of their identity, autonomy, and self-determination because of their responses to the impact of the strike on their families and community, others did not feel the same way and were actually threatened by these changes or challenges to their desire to maintain their traditional gender roles and sense of community. Even the more individual members of the coal board recognised the damage being done to the area because of the impact of the strike on the community. In the conclusion, I will further explore the findings of this chapter in relation to the theoretical framework put forward in the historiography section of the introduction. However, first, I will move on to examine Mark Hudson's book *Coming Back Brockens*, which gives us insights into the state of the community in Horden ten years after the strike.

Chapter 2: 'Popular Individualism' and 'Community' in *Coming Back Brockens*

This chapter will re-examine the narratives in Hudson's *Coming Back Brockens* in order to think about how the people of Horden might have changed their attitudes towards conceptions of individualism and community long after the closure of the colliery.

Almost a decade after the strike had taken place, Mark Hudson went to live in Horden for almost a year to work on his book project *Coming Back Brockens*. In Parker's book, the strike had only recently been endured, and as the colliery was still operational, the impact of the strike was still somewhat uncertain, at least in terms of its long-term effects. Through Hudson's travel memoir we are introduced to a deindustrialized Horden where the sense of community that the miners fought so hard to preserve during the strike has been radically changed. In the local section about Horden Colliery in the introductory chapter of this thesis, I revealed how following the closure of the pit, people were forced to leave Horden as there were no jobs available. Optimists might be tempted to suggest that any causal effect that a sense of community had on blocking individualist aspirations had now been removed, when the industry evaporated, and people were now free to pursue whatever forms of employment they desired outside of the mining industry. However, the evidence in *Coming Back Brockens* reveals that when the mining industry disappeared from Horden so too did much of its sense of community.

Before turning our attention to the voices of Horden in *Coming Back Brockens*, I think it is worth taking a moment to address Hudson's own perspective and description of Horden as a village, and how his views changed during his stay. To him, his return to Horden was surprisingly remote and hostile. As he reflects upon his presence in his childhood village, he contrasts the pastoral beauty of the now rolling farmland to the physical ugliness of having "a pit heap round every corner, and the colliery winding fear and belching chimneys that stood over every hamlet." He admits that "it was a world and a way of living that seemed to mock, to negate anything soft, anything lovely, anything that was beautiful for its own sake – all the little psychological comforts with which one attempted to pad one's childhood experience."¹⁰⁷ There is little that suggests any romanticised notion of what Horden used to be from Hudson's perspective, as he goes on to reminisce about the alienation he felt from the cultural characteristics of Horden's community, as it seemed 'harsh' and 'unyielding' due to "the brightness and hardness of the people themselves – my relatives – people who in the blunt forcefulness of their speech, the strident communality of their way of life, seemed to live wholly

¹⁰⁷ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 11.

outside and not inside themselves. [...] That world [had] always represented something from which I longed to escape.”¹⁰⁸ Obviously, Hudson is filled with initial reluctance based on his historical roots and problematic childhood experience with Horden, but his immediate thoughts also illustrate a demanding pressure of conformity in mining communities, where he is distancing himself from the cultural characteristics of the village. But his early impressions also reveal something significant about the deindustrialized ‘community’ because he notes how Horden has gone from hosting the biggest colliery in Britain to becoming something ‘utterly insignificant’: “Nearly five thousand men, not only miners, but cokemen, electricians, fitters, blacksmiths, tub menders, horse shoers, enginemen and a dozen of other occupations were employed, while over a thousand ponies walked the subterranean roadways. Records for weekly, monthly and annual production were broken several times in the century at Horden. But of that glory, little remained.”¹⁰⁹ The powerful image of organized miners fighting in large numbers, filling the streets with banners and songs were according to Hudson all but a faded memory in Horden. “Even the tumultuous strike of 1984-5 seemed remote; the passion and even the bitterness – the pitched battles between police and pickets, the valiant women talking so powerfully of their husband’s right to be miners – seemed unimaginable in Horden as it existed today.”¹¹⁰ He is struck by the complete apathy that is left in the village, and just how little that is left of the fighting spirit which gave miners their militant and proud reputation as a working-class *corps d’elite*.¹¹¹ In fact, it became clear to him on arrival that “nothing was going to happen in Horden,” which illustrates the image of a dismantled community.¹¹²

His initial reluctance to the entire atmosphere in Horden confirms some of the prejudice he had towards the community as an outsider. His descriptions of both the people and the village are at first mostly hostile and negative, but, as time goes by, as he gets to know the local citizens, he is forced to reconsider his feelings towards his childhood home. After being told a quite morbid story about ‘the ninepenny rabbit’ – how local children used to capture rabbits, skin them, and then sell both the meat and fur for nine pennies – from a local former miner, Hudson experiences a near-existential state about his feelings towards Horden: “Not for the first time since I came to Horden, I thought of the meaning of the phrase, ‘The Raising of the Working

¹⁰⁸ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 11.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ According to Joannaou, “striking miners were the *corps d’elite* of the trade unions in 1984” (172) Joannaou, Maroula. “‘Fill a Bag and Feed a Family’: The Miners’ Strike and Its Supporters.” *Labour and the Left in the 1980s*. Eds. Davies, Jonathan and Rohan McWilliam. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018. 172-91. Print.

¹¹² Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995) 35

Class.’ It implied that the working class should somehow transform and transcend itself. But from what, and to what?”¹¹³ There is a certain level of arrogance that would inspire an outsider to assume that someone else ought to ‘raise themselves’, suggesting that what they already are is insufficient. What Hudson realizes through his cultural journey, exemplified by his interaction with Harry Sudgen, the man with the ninepenny rabbit-story, is that in Horden “culture was not so much at variance with, but simply indifferent to this self-improving ethos.”¹¹⁴ To Hudson, it becomes apparent that Sudgen does not tell this non-contextual anecdote about his rabbit-hunts because he wants to be liked, this is just who he is. This epiphany is an eye opener for Hudson, as he realizes that Harry, and many others like him in Horden, were “virtually self-sufficient and resolutely apolitical, with no aspiration to be anything other than what he was.”¹¹⁵ This puts his own perspective in a different light and challenges his stereotypical view of miners. His initial belief that the people of Horden should be more aspirational in both economic and class terms did not correlate with how members of the community felt about themselves. This highlights the complexity of feelings of individualism in the village, as it illustrates a type of individualism that is not concerned with self-realization and fulfilment based on what other people think. Who and what you are is sufficient.

In terms of the miners’ strike, it emphasizes the point that it was not about money or greed, but rather about principle and the preservation of communities. When asked about the miners’ strike, however, Harry is quite uninterested: “I didn’t think owt about it. They should have closed that pit forty years since, and we’d all have lived a lot langer.”¹¹⁶ To him, community was a concept that functioned independently from the mining industry. Hudson understands that he liked many aspects of Horden – the betting shop, the Big Club, and doubtless the bingo hall too – all of which Hudson “felt so bitterly that people should want to be raised from.”¹¹⁷ Sudgen is an interesting case in that even though it was years since the pit had closed, his sense of community was seemingly still strong. Given the importance the mining industry had, Sudgen’s love for Horden post-closure arguably makes a case for an expansion of ‘community’ to exceed its industrial bounds. He likes Horden, and his life, and there should thus be no reason for him to desire something else, certainly not on the premises of Hudson’s notion of what is a good life. Also, his hostile attitudes towards the mining industry indicates

¹¹³ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 128-129.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

that he did not feel as bound by the industrial traditions of the village, which would further complicate the idea of ‘popular individualism’ in Horden. Even without the mining industry, a sense of community was real and appealed to Harry Sudgen; it was something worth protecting in spite of the mining industry, which he had long wanted to escape.

However, even though Hudson comes to realize that there is more to Horden than what meets the eye, and Sudgen romantically indicates that the community has survived the loss of industry, there is a lot of evidence supporting the contrary view as well. The prospects were drastically different for those who, unlike Sudgen, had had their entire lives ahead of them. As the security and social institutions that the mining industry provided disappeared, many of the citizens left in Horden lost their individual drive and ambitions, as there was no reward in close proximity. According to the vision of Hudson’s grandfather, “the working class should ‘raise’ itself through education.”¹¹⁸ He had done his best to ensure that Hudson’s father had received the best education possible, which, in turn, ultimately led to Hudson himself leaving Horden to seek fortune elsewhere. This was not a viable option, or at least not a well communicated and plausible option to the many young people of Horden in 1994, which on a broader level than with Harry Sudgen, affected both ‘popular individualism’ and ‘sense of community’ for many in Horden.

The closure of Horden Colliery in 1986 led to a decline in social institutions throughout the entire community. It became evident just how much of the internally established structures entirely depended upon the support of the industry in the area. The conclusions that many in Parker’s book drew, about the strike being a complete waste of time, are seemingly justified by Horden’s portrayal as a village in *Coming Back Brockens*.¹¹⁹ Simultaneously, the book illustrates why many felt that it was a necessity. The journalist Seamus Milne said that from the miners stand point the strike was “entirely unavoidable.”¹²⁰ In his book *The Enemy Within* (2014), he wrote that the strike was “a last-ditch fight to defend jobs, mining communities and the NUM itself against a government prepared to bring into play its entire panoply of coercive powers necessary to break the union and its backbone of support”¹²¹. The foreseen disruption of mining communities should the industry collapse is admittedly proven throughout Hudson’s book. One man who captured the essence of how Horden had deflated as a community after the

¹¹⁸ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 129.

¹¹⁹ In *Red Hill: A Mining Community*, John Potter said that the strike was a waste of time (24)

¹²⁰ Francis Becket and David Hencke, "Not an Industrial Dispute, but a War." *Marching to the Fault Line*. (London: Constable, 2009), 261.

¹²¹ Seamus Milne, *The Enemy within - the Secret War against the Miners*. Vol. 4. (London; New York, Verso, 2014), 18.

strike was Mr. Donaldson, known as “by far the best teacher in the school.”¹²² While he was showing Hudson around his old school campus, he explained the problem Horden now faces, stating that “every year, we’re getting more pupils who we know will never get a job. They’ll get on a training scheme – maybe. But that’s about it. There’s nothing on the horizon for them; and they themselves perceive it. So what can we hold out to them as an inducement to study?”¹²³ There is a clear consensus from all sides that education has no real purpose for many of children in the village, which begs the question ‘what is the point?’ What he effectively sums up here is how bereft the citizens of Horden are of opportunities and the hopelessness that grows from such a state.

The loss of the mining industry left a void in Horden that has yet to be filled, which did little to install local children with a mindset that allows them to even consider anything remotely close to the concept of ‘popular individualism’ – a focus on the self. Mr. Donaldson goes on to illustrate the melancholy most children in Horden are left with as “they look around, and see unemployment around them everywhere in the community. They’ve got no challenge that they’re being deprived of – no burning ambition to be a vet or an astronaut. So it’s not such a shock to them as it might be to other people – the fact that there’s no job for them, the fact that there’s really nothing on the horizon.”¹²⁴ By shutting down the industry, the people of Horden lost not only their jobs, but also a large part of their identity, and with it – their purpose. The book further illustrates the extreme necessity of any form of replacement for the mining industry in terms of stable employment and the government’s failure to provide it. The unemployment situation had seriously damaging effects that exceeded the purely economic aspect. It led to a severe indifference in the community where many felt detached from any interest in ‘community’ whatsoever. This type of insularity was not only restricted to children who did not see the point in education. Hudson is even surprised at the cultural amnesia that was on display in Horden, as he remembered “how people had loved to *fight* or at least to talk about how they were *fighting* for things!”¹²⁵ To him, it was remarkable how “it was all such a short time ago, but how little evidence there was of that zeal and passion in Horden today. [...] it had all but vanished, even as a memory.”¹²⁶ The apathetic carelessness of the area is also reflected in the severe decline in trade union activism.

¹²² Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 270.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 277.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

It might seem obvious that as Britain got increasingly deindustrialized, the NUM, having fewer workers to represent, also began to decrease in numbers. Yet, the Union Committee meetings that Hudson attends is an illustrative symbol of how little people in the community had come to care for such meetings. The place that used to be “the very heart of Horden – the social centre of the village on the one side of the street, and the political centre on the other” were now reduced to weekly meetings to process the death benefit and compensation claims.¹²⁷ Even the social arenas that used to be the meeting point for most miners on a near daily basis were empty and remote. ‘The Big Club,’ a membership-based bar in which almost every miner in Horden was a member, a place they met regularly, was the symbol of social interaction that brought the community together in Horden. The amount of alcohol consumed in the Big Club was ‘legendary’, and it is said to have been, as one man put it, “a fountain.”¹²⁸ It used to be the place where local election campaign events took place, and was also an old mass canvassing ground, where nomination battles could be won or lost in epic pint-buying sessions, with a full house of an enthusiastic and politically aware crowd. Now, it was “so little patronised it was hardly worth an aspiring councillor even bothering to go into them.”¹²⁹ Former miner Jackie Hudspith told Hudson that “Nowadays, if you went in a pub or a club, there was always a game of housey or a quiz about to start. In the heyday of the Big Club there’s been no housey, no quizzes, no karaoke, just crack-talk. ...mainly, people went to the Big Club to talk.”¹³⁰

The social aspect of ‘community’ might seem relatively trivial, but in order to understand how Horden thrived under communal individualism the dynamic between the local citizens is an important element because the sense of community that had vanished in the years following the closure of the pit is emblematic of how the community changed altogether. In times of industrial prosperity, community spirit flourished and people had a sense of affiliation that tied them together. According to a local ex-policeman whom Hudson cites, such attitudes eventually came to be their undoing, as it gradually created a tolerance for criminal behaviour: “You know, they say “Oh, they’re Horden people. We know who they are”, creating an apologetic attitude that accepts injustice, which over time will have a negative influence on the community – especially if unemployment is fortified.¹³¹ He goes on to suggest that there was “a reluctance to take it very seriously. There is a feel that it can be contained in the community

¹²⁷ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995),135.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 255.

[but] what's happened is that this tolerance of what's acceptable has been stretched further and further over say the last two decades, without people noticing, until it's gone out of control."¹³²

This problem that the ex-policeman points out, of turning a blind eye towards criminality based on the fact that it is done by locals, is symbolic of how the internal structures of the community used to function when the pit was still active. In a Parish Council meeting, Hudson witnessed at the Miners' Hall, the council discussed how adolescent vandalism at the local Welfare Ground should be handled. The remarks made by the outgoing chairman illustrates how, twenty or even ten years ago, in times of a strong sense of community, they would "have had a way of dealing with this problem because the pit was open, and if these kids' fathers didn't work there, their brothers or their uncles would have done, and they'd have been left in no doubt about what was going on, and how people felt about it – and they'd sharp have done something about it."¹³³ Part of being a tightly knit community was an internal justice system that relied and depended on a common understanding between the citizens of what is right and wrong. The loss of human relationships affected the entire structure of Horden's community and led to increased criminality. Betty, a twenty-four-year-old factory worker who used to live in Horden recalls that before, in Seventh Street, you could leave your doors unlocked, and sit out on the step. Now, in Hawthorne Crescent, a few miles away, she "don't even let the children play in the garden, never mind the street."¹³⁴

Davey Hucknell, a miner showing Hudson around Easington colliery was asked whether the miners' strike in 1984-5 had actually achieved anything. His reply is devastatingly conclusive: "nothing." He continues to admit that "I lost the extension I was going to build on my house. Many lost their whole houses. Many's still paying back the debts they got into. Everybody lost their savings. Say you'd saved six thousand over the years. How're you going to get that again?"¹³⁵ Miners did not just lose their jobs as a consequence of the dispute, they also lost any sort of hope of whatever fortune they might aspire to outside of the mining industry, as they were left in economic ruin. This financial deprivation sustained for years after the pit had closed, and even led to the establishment of the Coalfield Generations Trust in 1999. This is "an independent charity with a focus to support the former mining communities and create opportunities for their people."¹³⁶ The fact that such organizations needed to be

¹³² Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 255.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 279.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹³⁶ Coalfield Generations Trust. "Where we began" Found online at: <https://www.coalfields-regen.org.uk/our-story/#one>

established emphasizes the poor state that these former industrial areas were in, which is true even to this day. According to their website, there are almost 80 000 people in mining areas today that needs to be employed in order to reach the national levels, and those lucky enough to work typically earn 8-10% less than the national average.¹³⁷ Hucknell raises the question years after the economic footprints of the strike had cemented itself on Horden. Without any income, along with the fact that all their savings were lost, the village stood no chance in raising themselves in the aftermath of the strike, and is still left severely deprived. This does not prove that the community spirit in Horden lacked a vigorous individualism needed to succeed. On the contrary, what little individual ambitions they may have had got stolen from them as a result of the strike. Like Davey, many lost their savings, and with it all their hopes and dreams for the future. Having lost the battle for their community, its absence failed to lead to individual prosperity.

The long-term effects of the strike were not purely economic. In terms of individualist self-awareness, many women in Horden thrived during the strike, and became increasingly self-determined and prominent in community affairs. As Hudson meets “the leading light of the Horden Support Group,” Ada Williams, he quickly understands that the feminist appeal had failed to sustain in Horden, and that things quickly returned to normal after the strike in terms of gender roles, as he states that “like the enthusiasm and loyalty many of the men undoubtedly had felt towards Arthur Scargill during the course of the strike, the zeal of the women had all but vanished, even as a memory.”¹³⁸ Ada herself was not one of those who went back to being a housewife after the strike. She wanted to carry on working for the community, so she had done voluntary work with the elderly until a position as an assistant warden in an old people’s home opened up. However, she was just about the only one in the group who had carried on doing things. According to her, “all the others went back to what they were doing before.” When asked to elaborate on what they were actually doing, she firmly responds: “nothing.”¹³⁹ Her nostalgic view on the strike and what spurred out from it seems to focus upon how necessary and essential the women were to the welfare of their communities: “you were exhausted all the time, but you were happy.”¹⁴⁰ The unprecedented hardship forced upon the entire community saw the need for excessive assistance, and those who involved themselves quickly realized that there was enough work to go around for everyone who wanted to. When

¹³⁷ Coalfield Generations Trust. “Employment” Found online at:

<https://www.coalfields-regen.org.uk/what-we-do/#two>

¹³⁸ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 218.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Ada started working for the Support Group in Horden, she already had a job to attend, cleaning out the infant's school. She was up at six every morning before going to the Miners' Hall at nine to help start the cooking, in addition to going around collecting money at the clubs as well.¹⁴¹ Her role was primarily to look after the financial side of the welfare support the village received, but as the strike prolonged, her role was expanded into secretary and even more cooking. The amount of work she did during the strike even had an impact on her family life, as she rarely saw her husband for the entire dispute. Her son also interrupts Hudson to suggest that he felt he became a problem to Ada during the strike, as he "was not getting enough attention" from her, and thus started playing up at school.¹⁴² Such problems were real to many women, and according to Ada one of the reasons why they were always understaffed in the kitchen: "A lot of women had small children which made it difficult for them to come."¹⁴³ Bearing in mind the testimony of Moira Potter, who thought many women failed in their roles as mother and wife, it is easy to understand that many felt a similar obligation to support their men from home.

The women were needed at home, however what happened during the strike was that the need for women occurred in other areas as well. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that while some women were granted support in their agency by their men, Ada acknowledges the struggles others were faced with as women started to organize themselves: "how does men react to women in anything? They put us down – even though it was them that asked us to start the kitchen in the first place. The way some of them reacted was like they didn't want us to succeed. They didn't want to see us doing a better job than they were."¹⁴⁴ The domestic resistance and structural oppression that the Women's Support Group met from many men highlights the male dominance that existed in the village, but also emphasizes the substantial symbolic effect it had, as it showcased female capabilities. It proved that women could be self-determined and autonomous individuals should they be granted the chance to show it. The fact that such attitudes and progressive modernisation of gender roles did not continue after the strike bear similar explanations to how the miners in general were left apathetic and careless. When the pit closed, there simply was nothing to channel their energy into. As the charity work ceased, and miners went back to work, women went back to taking care of the household, as they were no longer needed at the welfare hall or as money collectors. The strike came to an end, and

¹⁴¹ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 219.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

consequentially so too did the progressive opportunities for women outside their homes. As Hudson speaks to former local politician Mrs. Winter, she reveals that the once so important Women's Gala, where sixteen women's sections in their constituency used to meet with marches and banners, has paled into insignificance: "there's no Advisory Council, no Gala, and hardly any women's sections functioning in the constituency at all."¹⁴⁵ The fact that there are separate women's section provides in itself an illustration of women's role years after the strike had ended. Many women felt that "there shouldn't be separate women's organisations, as they're all members of the Labour Party" but such was the stance in Horden at the time. It reflects poorly on these communities' simplistic views of the potential of these women – which was arguably refuted by their actions during the strike – as Mrs. Winter concludes: "even today, there's an attitude that women are good for making tea and taking leaflets round and not much else..."¹⁴⁶

To sum up, then, 'popular individualism' and a 'sense of community' were concepts that were expressed in Horden nearly a decade after the strike, but it is clear that things had changed with the colliery. Hudson was shocked about how careless and apathetic the local community had become and how little of the powerful image of a strong and proud mining community still existed in Horden. Initially, this confirmed his assumptions regarding a certain lack of individualist drive to better their lives, but he soon realized through his interactions with local citizens that his own assumptions about and expectations of the community in Horden were far too simplistic. He accepted that the idea that they ought to 'raise itself' was naïve and could not be explained purely by a lack of individual aspiration. Sudgen's 'sense of community' still prevailed, even after the industry had disappeared and left the community severely deprived. But his example was not entirely representative of the people in Horden. As the mining industry was lost, there was nothing left for the people in the village. Children saw no viable future for themselves, so the belief that "the working class can raise itself through education" was not considered to be widely plausible. Similarly, the traditional breaks of gender roles and female autonomy that excelled during the miners' strike were all but a faded memory. As the need for community resources decreased when the men went back to work, few women sustained their inspired self-determination and personal autonomy. Horden in general lost many social and cultural aspects that contributed to its strong sense of community; for example, people no longer met regularly at the big club or organized meetings at the Miners' Hall. This, as I will address further in the conclusion, should not be seen as a conclusive argument to the

¹⁴⁵ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 242.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

lack of 'popular individualism' in Horden following the closure of the colliery. Rather, I argue that it illustrates the vast potential this mining community had both in terms of 'popular individualism' and its 'sense of community,' and how devastatingly harmful both the strike and the Thatcher Government's attitude towards the miners had turned out to be. In other words, the potential of these once thriving mining communities like Horden and the hard-working individuals that lived in them was ignored at the time of the strike and it has arguably been wasted ever since.

Conclusion

Academic and polemical analyses of the miners' strike of 1984-5 and the mining industry's opposition to Thatcherism have contributed to the construction of a number of common misconceptions about mining communities like Horden. Prominent among them is the idea that 'individualism' and a 'sense of community' are mutually exclusive concepts, meaning that individualism was inevitably lacking in traditional mining areas. These contrasting ideas were certainly visible and were highlighted as ideological differences during the strike partly because they were useful for both sides of the dispute. For striking miners and their families, a 'sense of community' was an important rhetorical weapon that had to be used to fight back against the Thatcher government's promotion of specific forms of individualism. However, as this thesis has shown, there were other forms of individualism at play in Horden that had little to do with Thatcherism. Looking at the testimonies from the miners' strike of 1984-5, we can see that other forms of 'popular individualism' were just as important as a 'sense of community' to peoples' identities in these villages. Unfortunately, the loss of the strike and the subsequent closure of the colliery shows us how both 'popular individualism' and a 'sense of community' suffered and were largely lost in Horden by the mid-1990s.

The broader individualist tendencies that can be found in the personal testimonies in *Red Hill: A Mining Community* illustrate why we need a more complex understanding of what individualism is and how it is expressed. The testimonies in Parker's book seem to support the argument that there was an increase of self-determination and personal autonomy among the British people during the 1970s as they became less attached to traditional family, community, and class identities.¹⁴⁷ Men such as Bernard Wilkinson, John Potter, and Normal Lane illustrate that some miners in Horden actually did not favour the strike and opposed the entire dispute. The fact that Potter and to some degree Lane still chose to support the strike regardless of their own beliefs suggests that they prioritized their sense of community over their individualism.

Yet, by contextualizing what community represented in Horden it is possible to think about the struggles of the strike in a different way. The security and periods of high employment in post-war Horden had played an important part in raising awareness among miners about other possibilities outside of the mining industry. In fact, Robinson et al. argue that traits of 'popular individualism', such as a desire for self-determination and personal autonomy originated in the post-war period. The social democracy that grew out of the Keynesian post-war settlement was

¹⁴⁷ Emily Robinson et al., "Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s." *Twentieth Century British History* 28.2 (2017), 273.

actually a key driver of individualism because both the welfare state and full employment provided unprecedented security and affluence in Britain.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the ‘vernacular social democracy’ that Jon Lawrence has advocated states that industrial workers had for some time “embraced trade union collectivism as the best means of preserving their historic right to a measure of autonomy and independence in the workplace (and also as the best way to improve their family’s living standard).”¹⁴⁹ This suggests that we should challenge the view that the miners who opposed the NCB and Thatcher during the strike did so purely because of their attachment to the collective identities offered by their union and their community or because they lacked individualism and aspiration. Miners had different and often complex reasons for why they went out on strike. Although support for the strike in Horden was substantial, many miners had more nuanced views and most of them would have preferred to avoid a confrontation.

For many miners, like Bill Barrymore, the sense of community was not something that people felt was an obstacle to their individualism. He did not have any selfish or greedy motivations for going out on strike, but he did it, like many others, because he prioritized community and his place within it over what he deemed to be individual or economic selfishness. His father wanted something better for him before he started in the industry, but he saw it as a secure route to a comfortable life for both him, his family, and his community. These values were deeply rooted, and they included a form of ‘popular individualism’ that was to be contrasted with a Thatcherite perception of individualism. The strike was thus as much a fight for self-determination and personal autonomy as it was for the preservation of community spirit. Therefore, on a much larger scale, Horden illustrates an already existing ‘popular individualism’ that should not be confused with Thatcherism. If anything, these tendencies amounted to a wider trend in Britain that Thatcher managed partly through luck but also political skill, to exploit, which has led many people to believe that Thatcherism inspired a renewed individualism as a result of the failed economic and social policies of the 1970s.¹⁵⁰ The individual testimonies in Horden present a different perspective, which rejects any misconceptions about the lack of individualism in mining communities. The testimonies show that many miners and their wives shared both a strong sense of community and the type of

¹⁴⁸ Emily Robinson et al., "Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the ‘Crisis’ of the 1970s." *Twentieth Century British History* 28.2 (2017), 274.

¹⁴⁹ Jon Lawrence, “‘Vernacular Social Democracy and the Politics of Labour.” *Renewal - a journal of social democracy* (2020)

¹⁵⁰ Emily Robinson et al., "Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the ‘Crisis’ of the 1970s." *Twentieth Century British History* 28.2 (2017), 272.

individual values that Thatcherites so often claimed they prized (for example, independence, hard work, and personal responsibility). Yet, for whatever reasons, the Thatcher Government was unable or unwilling to acknowledge these qualities and how they were related to the importance of a sense of community during the strike of 1984-5.

In fact, if we embrace the complexity of popular individualism, as discussed in relation to left-wing policies, the evidence supporting its existence in Horden becomes even more conclusive in *Coming Back Brockens* because it acknowledges a more balanced view on the entire discourse of mining communities. The perspective that Lawrence (2020) and his ‘vernacular social democracy’ is based on stems from the view that ‘individualism’ is a multi-semantic phenomenon that in many ways is as connected to the political left as it is to Thatcherism. What Hudson uncovers is the importance community had in the preservation of ‘popular individualism’ in Horden. Collective effort was seen as a way of preserving self-determination and autonomy because it “freed [them] from the scourge of poverty and insecurity.”¹⁵¹ To Thatcher and her administrations, the main objective with regard to trade unionism was to remove it from the realm of economic governance.¹⁵² To the people of Horden, the trade union was the “main avenue for the furtherance of the interests, for the collective self-improvement of the working class.”¹⁵³ Miners, like everyone else, aspired to having good and comfortable lives for themselves, but their place in the industrial community meant that their chances of individual self-improvement depended just as much on the improvement of their community. Hence, following the loss of the strike, and the subsequent downfall of the NUM, the disruption of these communities also included a disruption of the individual and their individual aspiration. Like Davey Hucknell, many were left in economic ruin, and as the trade unions failed to sustain their position in the economic governance of the nation, people in Horden lost their primary incentive towards ‘popular individualism,’ as the deprivation of the community was effectively transferred to the individual. The former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair summed up the complexity of determining political individualism by stating that “Thatcher was right on some limited areas, but went wrong in ‘promoting a rampant individualism that too often ignored citizens’ responsibility for, and interest in, promoting the wider health of society’.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Jon Lawrence, “‘Vernacular Social Democracy and the Politics of Labour.’” *Renewal - a journal of social democracy* (2020)

¹⁵² Ewen H. H. Green, "Thatcher and Trade Unions." *Thatcher*. (New York: Hodder Arnold, 2006), 117

¹⁵³ Mark Hudson, *Coming Back Brockens - a Year in a Mining Village*. (Great Britain: Vintage, 1995), 241.

¹⁵⁴ Emily Robinson et al., "Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the ‘Crisis’ of the 1970s." *Twentieth Century British History* 28.2 (2017), 275-276.

This is perhaps most notably the case in relation to the women of the miners' strike and their development in Horden in the aftermath. Annie Brooks, Paulene Street and Kath Hutton all effectively illustrate the potential of female autonomy in traditionally male-oriented communities. Beatrix Campbell's view on mining communities as largely patriarchal constructions was challenged during the strike, as The Women Support Group helped to transgress the limits of women's resourcefulness and capabilities. In terms of 'popular individualism' for women during the miners' strike, Robinson et al. argue that women provided a channel through which a limited engagement with feminist visions of individual female liberation could occur.¹⁵⁵ As the example of Moira Potter illustrates, there were a diversity of opinions regarding women's activism during the strike as well, and they could not completely revise the role of women in the community, but they proved that it was possible to be something more than just a housewife. This was significant in terms of increasing the propensity of women to claim equal rights as individuals.¹⁵⁶ However, as the strike finished badly for these communities, and the colliery eventually closed, the door to female activism seemed to close in Horden. Newly awakened forms of 'popular individualism' among women during the strike were ultimately the victim of a two-front war that the mining communities had no chance of winning.

In the end, the findings of this thesis challenge the simplistic view that the forces of individualism triumphed over community the miners' strike of 1984-5. Such a conclusion must be based on a rather narrow understanding of what individualism is as a concept. While the miners lost the dispute against the NCB and the Thatcher Government their 'popular individualism', which was deeply rooted in left-wing visions of social democracy and collective bargaining, was greatly weakened, and arguably lost in the aftermath of the strike in Horden.

The arguments put forward in this thesis might not help to build bridges between supporters of Thatcher and people in the former mining communities, but they might help us to better understand and refine our conception of what exactly happened during the miners' strike of 1984-5, and, what the consequences were for people and these communities in its aftermath. In many ways, mining communities were well-suited for the type of society Thatcher envisioned because they believed in the virtues of hard work.¹⁵⁷ As illustrated in both of the key accounts that have been analysed here, most miners began working down the pits at a young

¹⁵⁵ Emily Robinson et al., "Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s." *Twentieth Century British History* 28.2 (2017), 290.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Robert Saunders, "'Crisis? What Crisis?' Thatcherism and the Seventies." *Making Thatcher's Britain*. Eds. Jackson, Ben and Robert Saunders: (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 40.

age and continued to work until they were told to stop. The traditional community structures also favoured a traditional or Thatcherite society, which could have been contrasted with the new 'permissiveness' of 1980s Britain.¹⁵⁸ However, these aspects paled into insignificance compared to her political ambition of moving Britain away from socialism, which to her "had weakened the national character and created a culture of 'something for nothing.'"¹⁵⁹ The result was devastating for the potential and prospects of mining communities like Horden, both in terms of the survival of their 'popular individualism' and their 'sense of community.'

¹⁵⁸ In a debate about the permissive society on BBC against Paul Johnson, the editor of 'The New Statesman' Thatcher revealed that to her, the term 'permissiveness' had a derogatory meaning. BBC, "Radio Interview for Bbc Radio 4 Woman's Hour ("Permissive or Civilised?")." Margaret Thatcher Foundation 2021. Found online at: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101845>

¹⁵⁹ Robert Saunders, "'Crisis? What Crisis?'" Thatcherism and the Seventies." *Making Thatcher's Britain*. Eds. Jackson, Ben and Robert Saunders: (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 40.

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Appendix

Teacher Relevance

There are several aspects of my thesis that can be linked to teaching. The thesis in itself might be too extensive and advanced for adolescents in junior high and high school, but in terms of theme and methodology, I believe there are much to offer future students. Firstly, the study of the individual is an important part of what it means to be a teacher. Every student in Norway has the right to individually customized teaching, and in a large group of other students, the ability to focus on the individual will be absolutely essential. As my project has attempted to illustrate, generalization based on larger metanarratives risks leaving the individual neglected. I believe it might give me an increased awareness to the fact that the individual truth does not necessarily correlate with the perceived reality.

Furthermore, working this extensively on a project to get it done has showed me the importance of perseverance, and the rewards of hard work. The proud feeling of satisfaction with a product that has demanded a lot of work and attention is something I believe to be very inspiring. It has installed me with a desire to help students achieve the same level of satisfaction, and belief that even when tasks seem hard and insurmountable, they rarely are, and that hard work normally pays off. In addition, in writing this thesis, I have learned a lot about the history and culture of Britain during the time period reaching from roughly 1970 to 2000, including political changes, popular attitudes and important historical events. All of which are elements that are directly transferable to English as a school subject. Knowledge about history, culture and language variations within English speaking countries are central elements of English in the Norwegian curriculum, and should therefore be a substantial benefit to my role as an English teacher.

In addition to all of this, I have through this project had the time and exercise to reflect and learn about the importance of precise and correct use of language. This increased knowledge will undoubtedly make me better equipped in teaching students the language, both verbally and textually. It has provided me with an increased confidence in my own ability, and thus given me a better chance of teaching others to learn the same.

