

10 Years of Walking Together

As part of the **10 Years of Walking Together project supported by National Lottery Heritage Fund**, Creative Writer Lynn Ludditt and a number of Markham Vale Heritage Group volunteers delivered creative heritage workshops. These were bespoke and designed individually for each school. Sessions for primary schools concentrated on coal mining as a local occupation and included three key elements: a day in the life of a miner, living in a mining community, and miners' hobbies, interests and holidays. Secondary school sessions covered all of the above, but also included informative displays and presentations relating to the three disasters at Markham Colliery of 1937, 1938 and 1973. These were designed and delivered by local historian and Heritage Group volunteer, Sandra Struggles.

The following poems and creative writing pieces are from Netherthorpe School students.

SELECTED AS OVERALL WINNER

Just Like Every Other Day

Awoken to the window rap
Just like every other day
Rush out the door with my Dudley and snap
Just like every other day
Friends surround me on my way
Just like every other day.

Then ...

Sudden waves of noise roll over the street
Dark clouds of smoke appear as if from nowhere
Screams and shrieks hang thick in the air
I don't want to accept what no-one dare say
This is NOTHING like any other day.

By Sophie

SELECTED AS WINNING PIECE 2

The Days I Were Down the Mine

The strike was a confusing time
Streets were ridden with hatred and crime
Home were filled with dust and grime
The days I were down the mine.

Eight hours a day were spent in the pit
A couple of pennies to pay for it
A belt on the hip with lantern lit
The days I were down the mine.

A lot of pain without any fuss
Everyday I sat on that bus
Eggs and bricks were thrown at us
The days I were down the mine.

All we could do was stare in silence
No lantern could give us guidance
Oh I could never forget the violence
The days I were down the mine.

By Charlie

SELECTED AS WINNING PIECE 3

Walking Together - Summer Sun

Summer sun beating down
Summer breeze drifting around
Walking together, sand in our toes
A break from the graft and the hullabaloo
A week's stay at Skegness sands

Summer sun beating down
Summer breeze drifting around
Wheelbarrow races, tug of war
Care and love, respect for us all.
A week's stay at Skegness sands

Back to work with graft and hullabaloo
Fear for life, longing for
Summer sun beating down

Summer breeze drifting around.

By Lucia

ALL REMAINING WRITING IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER

Walking together

A brand new day, a brand new start

Lending my mate a sandwich with lard

Keeling over at the sound of the cart

I looked at my skin and thought it has charred

Near the cage was when I was scared

Gears and electric boxes were where the sparks flared

Together with an almighty bang

Our ears were ringing, the birds still sang

Getting near was the flame

Emergency services finally came

The accident was caused by a methane gas leak

Help was finished in over a week

Every life was taken in the mine

Remembering the families of the 79

At 5:00 am, I woke up and immediately got ready. I put on my uniform and packed my snap tin and Dudley, before attaching them to my belt. I head out the house after putting on my working boots. I walked down to the mines, meeting my friend on the way.

“Did you see the whippet racing this weekend?” he asked me.

“Actually I was pigeon racing on Sunday” I replied.

We had a similar conversation every Monday. Either talking about racing or the families.

When we finally got to the pits, work started straight away.

The smell of coal dust fills my lungs, all I hear is the constant crumbling of rock-diamonds. I see my friends relentlessly smashing the coal down, desperate to find something.

My arms ached and ached, I felt blisters forming on my feet. Sweat dripped down my back.

At break, I felt so relieved to open my snap tin. It felt almost heavenly to press my sandwich to my lips finally. My cold tea from my Dudley soothed my dry throat.

By the end of the day, I looked forward to the bath my wife would have prepared.

The young lad, Oliver, grabbed his Dudley and snap tin, connecting them both to his belt. He walked down his stairs with loud thuds due to his boots, as he wandered down, his wife called out to him, reminding him not to forget his snap that she had prepared. Running his hands through his fluffy brown hair, he sighed, hoping nothing bad would happen this time.

What astounded the boy was how fast they sent people back to work after 1938. Most miners hated their bosses for that but Oliver was glad that he was able to get money again to help support his family. Although it was just him and his wife, money was still sparse and he needed to work as much as he could to earn the funds they needed.

Oliver knelt down to check his boots were tied correctly, hoping they wouldn't fall off half way through walking!

He left his house and closed the door lightly, not wanting to wake anyone up who may still be asleep at the ungodly hour of 5:30 am. He walked down the street, tapping loudly on every miner's window to remind them of work. They consecutively left their homes, some making small talk as they made their way along the long track to the mines.

By the time most of them had gotten to the mine it was 6:00 am. They all crowded around each other, waiting to give away their cheques to be able to start work.

Oliver adjusted his cap, hastily feeling for the light thinking he had put on the wrong one. When he confirmed that he hadn't forgotten it, he passed his cheques to the man collecting it and stepped into the probably not sturdy lift.

Once it was filled with all it could carry, it carefully lowered down into the mines. Some of the men impatiently shifting on their feet, others looking around, attempting to not allow their nerves to get the better of them.

Wives of miners are overlooked.

As they worked, the women cooked,

Loving, helping, cleaning, sustaining,

Keeping them happy, their tolerance draining,

Ignoring the signs, the miners soon snap,

Never apologising, on a loop, like a trap,

Getting worse, women can't take the crap.

The women will leave, can't take anymore

Or else the miners won't be a love, but a chore

Girls and women, it is hard to be them

Eternally working, like a plant's stem –

The foundation of all, keeping things up,

Helping and healing, taking care of the pups

Each woman was strong

They weren't allowed to be wrong.

A day like every other, that's what I expected when I awoke on the 9th of May 1938. When I opened my eyes at 5 o'clock to clean the kitchen before the children woke, the other side of the bed was empty, like usual. Down in the kitchen I saw a group of miners pass the window on their way to work the day shift at the mine. I used to love this part of the morning as it filled me with excitement, because I knew that soon my husband, the love of my life, would return home.

In anticipation for my husband's return I brought in the tin bath (as quietly as I could for fear of waking the children), and began to fill it. Then I heard it, the noise that changed everything, the noise I had been dreading more than any other. A loud bang coming from the direction of the mine. I felt my heart drop. Drop to the very bottom of my stomach. The pan I was about to fill with water fell out of my hand clanging loudly on the floor.

Before my brain could fully process what I was doing, my feet were carrying me out of the front door. I was running down the street. Running towards the mine. All around me anxious house wives emerged from their houses asking each other if they knew what had happened. I didn't share in their conversation. All my energy was focussed on my legs, on making them run quicker. Quicker. My mind was focussed on one thing, not my young children who I later realised must have surely woken after hearing the bang but my husband who something terrible surely must have happened to. I needed him. I still do.

Eventually I reached the road that leads up to the mine, the air in front of me was engulfed by a large cloud of black smoke. I could just make out little figures in the distance pouring out of the mine. How I hoped my husband was one of them, though I knew it was unlikely. Around me rescue teams appeared preparing to enter the mine. To save lives. I had finally stopped running and exhaustion kicked in. I managed to hobble over to the pavement and just before my knees gave way the anxiety, grief and emptiness I had been suppressing while I was running rose and left my body in the form of one final heart-wrenching wail.

Today is a normal day, it always is. I wake up at 5 am and reach into my worn wardrobe, fished out my long, coal stained trousers (apparently they were once brown) as well as my long, coal stained shirt.

I said good morning to my wife and ate some leftovers from last night's dinner. I grabbed my Dudley, filled it with water and attached it to my worn belt. I put my checks in my pocket, pulled on my large mud-covered boots and walked out the door. As I walked down the road, I realised that I was the first one awake.

Once I had reached the pit, I walked to the lamp room, fished a check out of my pocket and exchanged it for a lamp. I dragged my rusty, heavy lamp to the lift and gave a check to the man. He opened the large metal lift doors, allowing me to enter. He waited a few minutes before closing the door and sending the lift down.

When I reached the bottom, I grabbed my shovel and pickaxe and walked down the long, winding maze of tunnels. I reached my space and began working, the canaries shrieking in protest at the sudden cacophony of noise. Slowly, the pit filled with miners and a rhythm began to form: bang, whack, bang, whack, bang, whack. Somewhere around the fourth hour the canaries stopped singing, there was a few moments of silence before a faint thud.

Screams filled the pit as miners trampled through the tunnels. Some had abandoned their tools but others desperately clung to them as if they were scared to lose them. There was a sudden rise in heat as we ran, I couldn't tell if it was from running or from something else. Someone risked a glance behind us and yelled "fire!"

Panic raced through our veins as we sprinted through the maze, the number of us grew as we neared the exit. People pushed and shoved to get into the lift but I was unlucky. I felt hands grab me and shove me aside as the lift doors closed. I watched the lift rise as others started to cry around me. The fire had almost reached us by now.

As I peered into the fire, I saw the other miners desperately trying to escape the fury of the flames. I ran in to try and help them, although I am not as strong as I seem. So I too, fell to the flames.

Walking together,
Remembering the good times,
Before the accident, for those in the mines.

When it happened,
It sure was a shock,
When the lift began to drop.

We wish it never happened,
We wish they weren't there,
The families grieved, the families cried,
But in the end, the past can't be denied.

They try to forget,
But they may never,
As the grief of a loved one,
Stays with you forever.

Walking Together Forever

We knew sunlight will never come.
And work will never be done.
Loneliness was always an end.

Knowing we may not come out again.
In our hearts we could feel the pain.
Never ending was our gruesome work
Going on forever.

To live our life it meant to suffer.
Outside our lives were heaven.
Getting out of work was always our happiness.
Even though our wives were loyal,
Together we enjoyed enough.
Hours went by and we began to sleep,
Ending our day with dreams of engines and coal,
Redoing the day was always our only goal.

Forever we live as one.
Only one of us ever survives.
Rescuing others is our only hope,
Even though they were dead.
Vile things will always happen,
Everlasting life will never be ours.
Rhyming while finding those who lost their lives on coal and coal alone.

We remember those who died in the accident
At the Markham Pit Disaster – 10th May 1938
Losing relatives and neighbours
Knowing their work only rewards them with 12.6 p a week
I mine with my mates, in the dark and dust
Not much society for me
Getting a canary to sense toxic gases

Talking with my friends at the welfare
Our eyes starting to sleep

Getting up at five to get ready to work
Everyone walking to the pit
Then we hand in our tokens, yet again
Hearing a lot of machinery moving
Even though they're gone, we still –
Remember

To say that I have a hard life would make me seem selfish. The only one in the house with a hard life is my husband.

Everyday is the same for him. Get up at the crack of dawn, and wake me up as well, run around the house to find his equipment, call me to fill up his snap tin and Dudley, get his boots and his lunch and finally leave the house.

As I watch him walk down our little street, knocking on all the doors and shouting his mates, it does make me feel quite upset. How on earth did we get to this? My husband's working a job where once he's left, he might not come back, just to provide for his family.

Such a selfless man, but I do worry, I really do.

Every now and then we go to the miner's camp for a short getaway from all of the stress. Taking long walks down the beach and watching the evening entertainment makes you sort of blissfully unaware that this could be the last time you come here and that this all comes with a price. That I could lose the love of my life in a split second.

And then it's back to the normal life I'd been living the whole of my life. He gets up at the crack of dawn, wakes me up too, runs around trying to find his equipment, call me to fill up his snap tin and Dudley, get his boots and lunch and then finally leave the house.

But one day, that all stopped, with the sound of a siren and wives running in the direction of the mine.

I miss him.

I have a hard life.

Actually, to say I have a hard life would be an understatement.

My name is Mary and I am the wife of a miner on strike. It is currently 1984 and my husband, George, has been on strike for two months now and I don't think we can survive any longer.

My husband and other miners went on strike because Margret Thatcher tried over-working them and then threatened to close some mines. I understand why they did it but so far nothing has changed and I don't think it's going to.

I have a family to clothe and a child to feed and I can't do that when my husband isn't making any money so he can provide for us. If it keeps going on like this we will starve to death.

The other day my daughter Annabeth came home from school balling her eyes out because other kids had been bullying her about how bad she smelt and dirty her clothes were.

She begged me to get George, her father, to go back to work so she wouldn't have to live like this but I can't do anything. She hasn't spoken to her father in two days because of it and I can't live like this any longer, it was bad enough we had no money but now it is creating tension in my family.

Some miners have started to go back to work as they don't think they will win the strike but George is adamant on seeing this through to the end.

Weather conditions are getting harsher and we only have a one bedroom in our small cottage with barely any warmth and we are all crammed in one small bed.

If the weather doesn't improve I don't know how we will survive.

Walking down to the cages that led to the mine.

All I had was my Dudley, snaptin, helmet and lamp.

Listening to the beautiful canaries sing.

Knowing the inevitable risk of dying.

In the depths of a dark coal mine.

Nonetheless I had to work here in order to survive.

Going down 1,329 feet below surface level.

Through the winding house roof.

On Monday, 30th July 1973 at exactly five-twenty am.

Groesome deaths of 13 men were discovered.

Every dead miner's family inconsolably cried.

The wives and children of the miners watching

His wife observing their confused and miserable children's faces, not knowing what to do with herself.

Every woman from the coalfield area knew when others were in need of support.

Rallying round, the women proceeded to provide help for these now desperate families.

Life As It Goes

Life as it goes
It tugs and it throws
Down in the pit
I can't think, not even a bit.

The coal dust clinging to my skin feels like
Something stabbing me on the chin
Never did I think life could be this hard.

The precious ore they call coal
Is draining my energy, making me cold.

Life as it goes
It tugs and it throws
But down the pit
I don't like it, not one bit

I woke up at dawn
Welcomed by the opening smile of the sun
I let out a yawn
And broke out into a run.

I picked up me snap tin
filled me Dudley with water
I turned to see my closest kin
A lovely daughter.

She begged and pleaded
"Daddy please don't go"
But I needed to and
Left her feeling low.

I get to the pit
Sweating already
I really need to sit
To keep my legs steady.

I had a bad feeling
Oh I knew it so
Being down here was so appealing
I head a pal yell "Yo!" .

Trying to go myself out
I cried out in pain
I was filled with a dreaded feeling of doubt
The face of Death, covered by a mane.

The solid fuel filled my head
Controlled my dreams when in bed
Then I woke up right on time
Ready for the eight hours down the mine
Took my snap and Dudley down the pit
In the shaft my lantern lit.

Crouching down my back was sore
Hunting for coal, more and more
Worried I would get thinner
Four hours passed - I ate my dinner.

The third check was to climb back up
After the day my time was up
In the bath I had a scrub

Then made my way out of the tub.
Then I was off to the pub
Having a pint at the Welfare Club.

Jukebox was playing in my head
Until it was time to go back to bed.

They say it's an easy job with great pay
But it's not as simple as that being down the pit all day.

With few breaks and holidays per year
The accidents and constant fear.

It's not easy going to work knowing you might not go back home
Leaving your wife and kids all alone.

Walking to work with belt and boots
Knocking on door of my colleagues and I wonder as I walk past their homes
"Will I be doing this again tomorrow?"

There was a man
His name was Stan
Everyday he went to the mine
Where he spent most of his time.

He grabbed a light
So the darkness didn't give him a fright
And he worked all through the night.

Until ...
He thought there was a strange smell
He looked behind him and saw a wall of fire.

In a small cramped place
The miners sped up their pace
With the coal dirty and black
They couldn't wait to go back.

Although the miners unselfish and brave
To go home is just what they crave
Their bodies full of dirt
Their arms ached and hurt.

They knew they may find gold
But that's not close to what they'd hold
Overworked and underpaid.

Everyday I mined for coal
All the lads called it black gold
That day I felt especially rough
But I put a face on because I was tough.

The lift went down bit by bit
Oh Lord, I dreaded that pit
For everyday I longed for the pub
And strapped to my waist was my grub.

Down the mine it was so sweaty
I couldn't wait to get home to see my Hetty
In my pocket was the sound of brass
Though I wish I had a job where I saw grass.

I was weighed down by my soapbox
After my skin was as black as my socks
As I got home I said "Hooray!"
But in the pit there's always another day.

The Markham Colliery Disaster 1973

In a small cramped lift I stand
With my flickering lantern in hand
I notice it's not the only thing emitting light
I saw orange sparks, I knew something wasn't quite right.

The emergency button was soon pressed
The lift didn't stop, we were all very stressed
We rapidly plummeted down to the ground
The catastrophe affected everyone around.

Thirteen men died on scene
Another five in hospital later
The rest seriously injured
Which wasn't that much greater.

Deeper down into the mine he went
Expecting nothing more than a day's work
Trapped he felt, stuck down far
Little he knew how it would hurt.

Clocking in went the same
The little check shone in his hands
Clocking out went well too
The check shone upon the stands.

It all struck as he left

Disaster like non before
Heard about it the next day
Leaving him lots to mourn.

Family and friends alike
In the mine crushed below
Trapped in survivor guilt
He had no time to wallow.

Deeper to the mines he'd never go
No more days work again
Feeling trapped, yet no longer down below
Hurt him more than hurt before.