



FIGURE 1.4 South Yorkshire miners

John Greaves: 'The walk to work'

Pre-1984

Woken at 4 am by a twin belled wind up alarm clock, placed out of arms' reach. Boil the kettle while having a wash and brush up. Fill a flask, snatch a quick cup of tea before making off for the day shift at Goldthorpe Colliery. Flask in pocket, acme snap tin under my arm I make my way along Furlong Road, which is busy with similar looking men travelling to their work ... The odd pair of bicycles would creak past, no matter where you worked everyone said good morning or something of the like when passing. Passing the Jungle Club at five to five the odd light would still be burning, with a customer or two still putting the world to rights, or maybe they were piloting a round the clock drinking licence. Crossing the railway bridge on the sound of diesel locomotive pulling coal wagons away from the pit. Turning into Goldthorpe's Main Street just as the five o'clock buzzer at Hickleton Colliery was sounding. Three out of Goldthorpe's five butchers' shops would have been swept and swilled down, and the owners inside cutting and slicing ready for the day's trading. All three newsagents were brightly lit, with placards outside promising news hot off the press. By far most popular was Barry's, he had lost his right arm up to the shoulder as a young man. But an artist when it came to folding newspapers, or distributing chewing gum, snuff or cigarettes. All ... would soon be discussing Saturday's match, or who would win the 3.30 at Doncaster, while Barry struggled on manfully with his task. Once served, onward towards the Pit Lane with the mouth watering smell of fresh baked bread drifting from Mr Brown's Bakers shop past all the well kept shop fronts, then reaching the Goldthorpe Hotel, which was also taking part in

the open all hours scheme. Into the Pit Lane, a long concrete road with a swing park, football pitches and rugby pitches on the left and, on the right an allotment site with a shanty town of huts and greenhouses, a few with smoking chimneys. The first stop in the pit yard was the time office ... Then making a move for the pit head baths, this was where the transformation took place from normal human being into a coal miner. Off with jeans and tee shirt and on with bright orange overalls, helmet, knee pads and steel toe capped boots. Fill a large plastic bottle with drinking water before going into the hot acid smelling area known as the lamp cabin. On with a cap lamp and battery and out the



FIGURE I.5 The National Coal Board recruits for a job with a future (below). This advertisement appeared in a football programme, October 1961 (left)

there's a career for you in

COAL

one with a real future



The thriving Yorkshire Coal Industry offers an interesting, well paid, **SECURE** life to young men and boys leaving school. There are vacancies at most Collieries for trainee Mine Operatives and Apprentice Craftsmen. The increasing use of modern machinery makes the work interesting and varied, training is thorough, and good wages are paid for a **GUARANTEED** five day week. Apply to any Colliery Manager or write to:

NATIONAL COAL BOARD
NORTH EASTERN DIVISION
South Parade, Doncaster.

other side for a breath of fresh air, before being searched for smoking materials. Boarding the paddy train along with another 120 men to be lowered down the tunnel known as the drift, to where we worked in the black water sodden seam, that was called by people locally 'The Sludge'. Everybody was happy, hard worked but happy.

The NCB recruiting posters used to say 'A Job for Life'.

1997

Woken by a noisy milk float at 4.10 am, boiled the kettle, made a cup of tea. No need for the flask these days, and the wash and brush up seems less important. Set off for a walk, into Furlong Road towards Goldthorpe, not a soul in sight, not a house light on. Then a sign of life, a postman whistles by on his regulation Royal Mail bicycle on his way to Goldthorpe small sorting office, again I am alone. Reaching the Jungle Club at five to five, paint flaking, all in darkness no more all night sitting, too many empty pockets. Crossing the railway bridge no longer the sound of locomotives pulling coal wagons. Looking over into the cutting is a depressing sight, rails that once shone now rusting, grass growing over the once well maintained sleepers and ballast. Landing on Goldthorpe's main street at five o'clock the buzzer does not sound anymore, Hickleton Colliery no longer exists. No butchers sweeping and swilling, only one newsagent open. 'Mick's News' has retired, the shop has been extended,



FIGURE 1.6 Demolition of a colliery, South Yorkshire

brightened but lacks customers. Walking towards the Pit Land passing boarded up shops that once thrived, no longer the smell of fresh baked bread. It seems the only new traders are second hand dealers. Reaching the Goldthorpe Hotel all in darkness, silent. Turning into the pit lane to find grass growing out of every crack and joint in the concrete road. What happened to the dozens of lorries and their drivers, that used to travel this way? The pavement that was once trodden by hundreds of men a day has been lost to the grass verge. Passing the swing park, seats broken the rocking horse on its side dead! Both the football and rucker pitches look in good condition, the council took them over. The shanty town on the allotment site is thriving, perhaps looked after by people in search of the 'good life'. Into the pit yard, no time office, no canteen, no pit head baths. Just odd bits of rubble left of what was the life blood of the local community. Going down to what was the mouth of the drift, all that's left there is a steel pipe coming up from the ground, to drain away gas from underground workings. It stands like a monument to all the men who worked there, and to some who lost their lives there.

The NCB recruiting poster used to say 'A Job for Life'.

Source: John Greaves