

WARM UP

1 Which political party formed the UK government and who was the Prime Minister in the 1980s?

***** Today at **Cortonwood** there is a shopping centre where the coal mine used to be. The only signs left of the past are a few photographs depicting the life of the miners on the walls of a large supermarket.

MORE ABOUT...

Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013) was the Prime Minister of the Conservative government from 1979 to 1990. Known as the Iron Lady, her time in power was one of immense social and economic change. After resigning as an MP in 1992, she was awarded the title Baroness Thatcher. She died on 8th April 2013 and was given a ceremonial funeral with military honours. Even if several decades had passed since her time as Prime Minister, Thatcher's death caused strong reactions amongst the British public, media and politicians. On the one hand, some remembered in a positive light her attempts to help the UK out of an economic crisis, while others openly celebrated the death of the woman they considered to have ruined their lives.

BRITAIN'S INDUSTRIAL NORTH IN THE 1980S

The politics of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative government shaped and changed the UK during the 1980s and beyond. Thatcher was in favour of privatising state industries, reforming and reducing the power of trade unions and cutting the costs of industry and manufacturing. It was these cuts that particularly affected the manufacturing and industrial areas of the north of England, Scotland and Wales. One of the industries at the centre of the cutbacks was coal mining. In 1984, it was announced that 20 uneconomic pits would have to close, leading to the loss of 20,000 jobs. At one of the threatened pits, **Cortonwood*** in Yorkshire, miners walked out in protest on 5th March 1984. Support from other miners was swift and soon nearly half the country's miners were on strike. The strike lasted a year with fierce battles between politicians and the National Union of Mineworkers led by Arthur Scargill, even fiercer and often violent fights between striking miners and the police, and unfortunately conflict between striking miners and working miners. After the strike ended, the plans to close the mines continued and soon thousands of people lost their jobs, destroying local communities and leaving them without prospects.

Ian Sanderson, an ex-miner from Yorkshire, remembers what life was like as a miner in the 1980s.

When I started work in the mines in 1981 it was a fantastic place to work. Filthy? Yes. Bad for health? Yes. Hard work? Extremely. Dangerous? Always. The level of friendship and acceptance was the main attraction. You felt very much part of a team; more of a family. Everybody was responsible for their own and everybody else's welfare. So much potential for injury meant everyone was aware of the reality that you could die here. Nobody complained. Miners were proud men, all prepared to work in disgusting conditions to do a good days work for decent pay. And, let me tell you, the money was certainly not as good as the newspapers said it was. We were straight talking, like all good Yorkshire men, and liked to be able to hold our heads high and say, 'Yes! I am a miner and proud to be one.'

Mrs T. changed all that. The attitude of us miners was that we knew we were worth more. We were important to the economy but we never held it to ransom and we certainly weren't the 'enemy within' as we were called. We were told we were uneconomical; we knew this was a lie. We were told coal was no longer needed; we still rely on it today and have to import most of it. These lies all stick very heavily in the throat for miners.

Every ex-miner still feels hurt from the strike and the closing of the mines. Not only because the jobs were taken from them, but because people believed they were liars. For proud men this cut deep and will continue to do so until the whole truth comes out. Hopefully with freedom of information, and now 'the witch is dead', this could happen.

Over 50,000 men were employed directly in coal production in Yorkshire alone. Thousands more were employed indirectly. After the pit closures, many of these never worked again. Local areas were left devastated. Factories and shops were all closing too, so there was little chance of finding other work. There were some suicides, many marriages failed and some turned to crime in order to pay the bills. These things were never counted in the cost of the strike. Nor was the humiliation that I felt when I had to go and dig coal from the railway embankment near my house as that was the only way I could keep my wife and family warm.

READING COMPREHENSION

2 Read the introductory text and, in your own words, write about the importance of the following dates, people and places for the miners' strike.

- 1 Margaret Thatcher
- 2 Arthur Scargill
- 3 Cortonwood
- 4 5th March 1984
- 5 8th April 2013

3 Read Ian Sanderson's point of view and choose the correct option.

- 1 What was working in the mines like?
 - A Miners were not very friendly towards each other.
 - B Miners were able to work together with members of their family.
 - C Miners didn't complain about the dirty and dangerous conditions.

- 2 Which adjectives best describe a miner?
 - A self-respecting and honorable
 - B materialistic and talkative
 - C tall and proud

- 3 The miners felt that the reasons given for the pit closures were...
 - A untrue.
 - B exaggerated.
 - C important.

- 4 What does Ian feel could happen after Mrs Thatcher's death?
 - A People will understand the real economic cost of the strike.
 - B People will learn the facts about what happened.
 - C People will get their jobs back.

- 5 Why was it difficult for miners to find other employment?
 - A They did not have the qualifications.
 - B They did not want to leave the local area.
 - C There were not many other job opportunities.

- 6 What was the consequence for some miners?
 - A They had to leave their homes.
 - B Their personal and family lives were destroyed.
 - C They needed help from their families to cover their costs.

INTERNET RESEARCH/WRITING

4 Find out how the death of Margaret Thatcher was reported in the media in your country and write a short report, including the following details.

- how much space/time was dedicated to her death;
- which aspects of her personal and political life were mentioned;
- any comments on the reaction of the UK public to her death.