

NYESE, LONGMAN, HUEBER, IBS CONFERENCE for TEACHERS

The use of Folk Songs in teaching
language and culture – Steve Jones

Industrial Ballads; “Down in the Mine”

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www.singlish.hu

Gresford Disaster

1. Oh you've heard of the Gresford disaster
Of the terrible price that was paid
Two hundred and forty-two colliers were lost
And three men of the rescue brigade
2. It occurred in the month of November
At three in the morning that pit
Was wracked by a violent explosion, dear God
In the Dennis where gas lay so thick
3. Now the gas in the Dennis deep section
Was packed like the snow in a drift
And many a man had to leave the coal face
Before he had worked out his shift
4. Now a fortnight before the explosion
To the shot firer Tomlinson cried
If you fire that shot then we'll be all blown to hell
And no one can say that he lied
5. Well the fireman's reports they are missing
A record of forty-two days
The colliery manager had them destroyed
To cover his criminal ways
6. Down there in the dark they are lying
They died for nine shillings a day
They worked out their shift and now they must lie
In the darkness until judgement day
7. Oh, the Lord Mayor of London's collecting
To help both the children and wives
The owners have bought some white lilies, dear God
To pay for the colliers lives

Ballad of Springhill

1. In the town of Springhill, Nova Scotia
Down in the dark of a Cumberland mine
There's blood on the coal and the miners lie
**In the roads that never saw sun nor sky
in the roads that never saw sun nor sky**
2. In the town of Springhill you don't sleep easy
Often the earth will tremble and roar
When the earth is restless miners die
Bone and blood is the price of coal
bone and blood is the price of coal
3. In the town of Springhill, Nova Scotia
Late in the year of fifty eight
The rain still falls and the sun still shines
But its dark as a grave in the Cumberland mine,
dark as a grave in the Cumberland mine

4. Down at the coal face miners working
Rattle of the belts and the cutters blade
A rumble of rock and the wall close round
The living and the dead men two miles down
the living and the dead men two miles down
5. Twelve men lay two miles from the pit-shaft
Twelve men lay in the dark and sang
Long hot days in a miner's tomb
It was three feet high and a hundred long
three feet high and a hundred long
6. Three days past and the lamps gave out
And Caleb Rushton he upped and said
There's no more water nor light nor bread
So we'll live on songs and hope instead
we'll live on songs and hope instead
7. Listen for the shouts of the bare faced miners
Listen through the rubble for a rescue team
Six hundred feet of coal and slag
Hope imprisoned in a three foot seam
hope imprisoned in a three foot seam
8. Eight days past and some were rescued
Leaving the dead to lie alone
Through all their lives they dug a grave
Two miles of earth for a marking stone,
two miles of earth for a marking stone

Bells of Rhymney

1. Oh what will you give me say the sad bells of Rhymney
Is there hope for the future say the brown bells of Merthyr
Who made the mine owners say the black bells of Rhondda
And who robbed the miners say the grim bells of Blaenau
2. They will plunder willy-nilly say the bells of Caerphilly
They have fangs they have teeth shout the loud bells of Neath
Even God is uneasy say the moist bells of Swansea
Oh what will you give me say the sad bells of Rhymney
3. Throw the vandals into court say the bells of Newport
All will be well if if ... say the green bells of Caerdydd
Why so worried sisters, why? Sing the silver bells of Wye
Oh what will you give me say the sad bells of Rhymney
4. Oh what will you give me say the sad bells of Rhymney
Is there hope for the future say the brown bells of Merthyr
Who made the mine owners say the black bells of Rhondda
And who robbed the miners say the grim bells of Blaenau

Dark as a Dungeon

1. Come all you young fellows so brave and so fine
And seek not your fortune in a dark dreary mine
It may form as a habit and seep in your soul
Till the streams of your blood run as black as the coal

Chorus:

It's dark as a dungeon and dank as the dew
Where the dangers are double and the pleasures are few
Where the rain never falls and the sun never shines
It's dark as a dungeon way down in the mine

2. There's many a man I have known in my day
Who seeks not to labour his whole life away
Like a fiend with his dope and a drunkard his wine
A man may have a lust for the lure of the mine
3. I hope when I die and the ages shall roll
My body will blacken and turn into coal
As I look from the door of my heavenly home
I pity the miner a diggin' my bones

The industrial revolution was based on the ability to produce power from steam. The coal industry flourished all over the British Isles, especially in South Wales, where the coal (anthracite) was of excellent quality. In addition, the railways were able to transport the large amounts of coal necessary to feed the smelters to make iron and steel.

Notes:

Britain particularly South Wales, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire and Yorkshire and the North East (Newcastle and Durham) was covered with coal mines and their winding houses as the coal was deep underground. Miners were taken to the coal face by lift and there the coal was dug out by hand. Often ponies were used to haul loaded wagons from the face to the lift. It was backbreaking and dangerous work. Often the roof would collapse, burying the miners. More common were explosions caused by pockets of gas in the coal seams (particularly in geological faults) and by the naked flames of the lamps miners carried.

Sir Humphrey Davey was responsible for a safety lamp which kept the naked flame from the gas (if the flame turned blue there was gas about). Miners took caged birds into the pits with them as they were very sensitive to the gas and gave warning of its presence. Even so, with electric lighting there were enough sparks to ignite the gas. Even switching on or off a lamp created a spark.

The songs featured here are both from the UK and from North America (Canada and the United States). Although the traditions and methods of mining were different the problems were the same. We see the same today in China.

The songs we are looking at here are about 'deep' mines rather than the open cast mines which are found in many parts of the world and where the problems are very different.

In addition to coal mining there was a thriving precious metal mining industry in the South West of the UK (Devon and Cornwall) and of course we might also look at diamond and precious metal mining in South America and Africa.