

## 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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### 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.