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Skill, Independence, and Trade Unionism in the Coalfields of Nineteenth-Century Britain, with Particular Reference to Scotland

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Article abstract

Les mineurs de charbon, cela est bien connu, ont été fort privilégiés par l'historiographie britannique par rapport à de nombreux autres groupes de la classe ouvrière. Toutefois, jusqu'à maintenant, on n'a véritablement pas tenté d'évaluer le rôle qu'ils ont joué dans le fonctionnement des houillères et l'on n'a pas, non plus, essayé de cerner tant la manière dont ce rôle a façonné leur mentalité particulière que l'influence qu'il a exercé sur les politiques qu'ont adoptées leurs associations syndicales.

L'auteur analyse donc ici le travail du mineur écossais en insistant sur le fait que l'élément-clé de cette analyse réside dans le fait que le mineur exerce un travail spécialisé. Cet aspect de la compétence et la double incidence d'un milieu physique particulier et d'un salaire payé à la pièce ont contribué à l'établissement, chez eux, d'un système de valeur gravitant autour de la notion d'indépendance. Or, cette indépendance a engendré, à son tour, une fierté d'appartenance et une conviction qu'il revient au mineur de garder la haute main sur le milieu de travail. En témoignent fort bien d'ailleurs, leur système fermé d'apprentissage et la façon dont ils réglèrent la production afin de mieux contrôler le marché et, par extension, les salaires.

Avec les années, toutefois, ces poltiques s'avérèrent insuffisantes et de multiples facteurs contribuèrent à l'effritement du système tels, par exemple, l'hostilité des employeurs, la multiplication des grosses entreprises, et la venue sur le marché d'une abondante main-d'oeuvre non spécialisée et souvent immigrante qui vint nuire considérablement au pouvoir de négociation du groupe.

Skill, Independence, and Trade Unionism in the Coalfields of Nineteenth-Century Britain, with Particular Reference to Scotland.

ALAN CAMPBELL

Despite the fact that the coalminers are the best served occupational group within British labour historiography, until recently there has been little serious attempt to analyse the role of the miners in the labour process of the coalmine, or to assess the influence of this role upon the mentality of the colliers and the policies of their trade unions. This is what this paper sets out to do, taking as its central focus the coalfields of Western Scotland from the end of the eighteenth century until the 1880s.

The paper will suggest that the key to analysing the work of the nineteenth-century hewer is to recognise his skills as an underground craftsmen. These skills, coupled with piecework systems of payment and set within the physical layout of the mine, gave rise to a spectrum of values which can best be described as "independence." These values included a craft pride and a belief in the right of the hewer to control his own workplace. It was this work culture which informed the "closed" policies of successive miners' unions. Of central importance were apprenticeship, to control entry to the trade, and output restriction, to control the coal markets and hence wages. Faced with the hostility of the coal masters, represented by increasingly larger and more capital-intensive enterprises, and an unfavourable shift in the colliers' bargaining position through the introduction of unskilled, often immigrant, labour, these policies were ultimately found wanting. In conclusion, the paper suggests the relevance of this Scottish case study for an analysis of the work situation of other British miners and of their unions.

1. SKILL AND INDEPENDENCE

The Dimensions of Skill

The concept of skill in the mining workforce is a problematical one. Archibald Alison, in his writings on industrial Scotland in the 1830s, located colliers and miners in the category of "skilled labour" alongside cotton spinners, ironfounders, engineers, tailors, and bakers. In 1868, the industrial correspondent of *The Scotsman* stated that removing pillars of coal required "the exercise of great skill," but a few paragraphs later stated that the miner held a "humble position in the industrial ranks. His occupation does not require much skill."[1]

1. A. Alison, "Trade Unions and Strikes", *Edinburgh Review*, 67 (April 1837), p. 257; D. Bremner, *The Industries of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1869), pp. 15 and 19.

This ambivalence on the concept of skill in relation to mining work is reflected in the views of other writers on the subject. Henry Pelling dismisses Eric Hobsbawm's inclusion of "some miners" within the stratum of the labour aristocracy by noting that there was no apprenticeship system. The hewers, he states, "were not distinct from other workers except in being fitter and more powerful. This was as much a matter of age as of physique."[2] Other writers, however, have suggested alternative sources of the hewer's status within the pit. Jevons, in his classic text on the coal trade, suggested that coal getting "needs great skill" and that "the hewers, repairers and a few other grades of workers are highly skilled and earn good wages." Similarly, Carter Goodrich argued that before mechanisation in the United States coalfields "the old time miner was a wonderful craftsman."[3]

These contrasting views reflect the ambiguous status of the miner in the hierarchy of labour, incorporating elements from the work situations of the labourer—who had nothing to offer but physical strength—and of the skilled artisan. The later development of the Scots colliers' unions can only be understood within an appreciation of the tensions engendered by this ambiguity.

But before analysing the work situation of the collier, the concept of "skill" requires further consideration. Although the "skilled worker" is a commonplace of labour history, the defining characteristics of this being are usually left unexamined. The Hammonds, for example, neglect to define "the skilled labourer" in their volume of that name which includes the miners of North-East England.

In its most elementary usage, skill relates to a manual dexterity coupled with a knowledge of the tools, materials, and processes to which it is applied. An editorial in the *International Molders Journal* at the turn of the century added a further level:

> ...beyond and above this it is the knowledge which enables him [i.e., the craftsman] to understand and overcome the constantly arising difficulties that grow out of variations not only in the tools and materials, but in the conditions under which the work must be done.[4]

However, skills cannot solely be regarded as the possession of technical knowledge or manual dexterity under variable conditions. As R.J. Morris has pointed out while comparing the intrinsic similarities in the work of skilled cabinet-makers and unskilled dress-makers, "positions of skill were socially created and defended during the course of class conflict."[5] The means of maintaining such a status included the ability to control the pace of work, the organisation of work, and the entry to the trade as well as to claim a skilled wage. Joseph Melling further develops this theme, suggesting that definitions of skill

2. H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1968), p. 47.
3. H.S. Jevons, *The British Coal Trade* (London, 1915), pp. 7 and 209; C. Goodrich, *The Miners' Freedom* (Boston, 1925), p. 22.
4. Cited in H. Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York and London, 1974), p. 136.
5. R.J. Morris, "Whatever Happened to the British Working Class, 1750-1850", *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 41 (Autumn 1980), p. 14.

> vary not only with peculiar industrial conditions, but according to the customs and traditions of those in possession of the craft expertise. Such practices were embodied in the rules of the trade societies which specified not only the conditions of entry to the craft, but also the prerogatives for 'working the tools.' Here lay the crux of the whole issue: the degree of *control* which employers and workmen could exercise over the capitalist labour process. Whether this control came from the unusual working conditions of the coal seam or the tight regulation of the craftsman's tools, the status of the skilled worker was defined along a frontier of control in Victorian industry.[6]

As we shall see, a crucial dimension of the history of the Scottish miners was the creation and defence of their skill, a process which was bitterly contested along just such a frontier.

The Work of the Miner

There were two methods of coal extraction employed in Scotland, the pillar and stall system—or "stoop and room" as it was locally known—and the longwall system. The former was the more common in Scotland until the middle of the nineteenth century. In the stoop and room method, each hewer worked in a room or chamber cut into the coal seam. The rooms were separated and the roof supported by "stoops" or pillars of coal which were left unworked. Under the longwall system, the hewers worked at a long continuous coalface. As they advanced into the seam, the superincumbent strata were allowed to settle behind them, but several roadways were constructed to maintain access to the shaft.

Under both systems, other groups of workmen, known under the general title of "oncostmen," performed various tasks ancillary to the hewers. These groups included drawers and putters who hauled or pushed the hutches of coal to and from the pit bottom, reddsmen and brushers who maintained the underground roadways, bottomers who loaded the cage, and trappers who opened and shut the ventilation doors. On the surface, the cleeksman and engineman unloaded the cage and controlled the winding gear, while the pitheadman supervised the weighing of the coal. In addition, there might be managers, clerks, oversmen, labourers, and such craftsmen as blacksmiths and carpenters to maintain tools and equipment.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, such a division of labour would only be found in the larger collieries. In 1834, the various pits at the Govan colliery near Glasgow employed 269 colliers, 72 drawers, 119 reddsmen, and 116 drawers and trappers underground.[7] This was exceptional because, not only was Govan among the largest collieries in Scotland, it was also worked by the longwall method which demanded a greater number of reddsmen since the roadways were difficult to maintain. In collieries using the stoop and room method, the hewers represented a larger proportion of the workforce. At the Calder Colliery in 1834

6. J. Melling, "'Non-Commissioned Officers': British Employers and Their Supervisory Workers", *Social History*, 5 (May 1980), pp. 187-8.
7. Royal Commission on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, Minutes of Evidence, British Parliamentary Papers (hereafter PP) (1836), XXXIV, p. 588.

and the Rosehall Colliery in 1840, the hewers represented 68 per cent and 74.5 per cent respectively of the underground labour force compared with 38.5 per cent at Govan.[8]

Like Govan, Calder and Rosehall were relatively large enterprises. Smaller collieries were more typical and very small pits persisted until well into the nineteenth century. For example, the average workforce in the ten pits operated by the Shotts Iron Company in the Castlehill district of Lanarkshire in 1838 was seventeen men.[9] In these smaller collieries, the hewers probably accounted for an even larger proportion of the workforce.

The following description by the Children's Employment Sub-Commissioner for the West of Scotland in 1842 provides a clear account of the hewer's principal task:

> The ordinary posture is sitting with one leg doubled beneath him and the other foot resting against the coal. Inclining his body to one side so as to nearly touch the ground with one shoulder, he digs his pick with both hands into the lower part of the coal, or haply into a stratum of fireclay or some softer material beneath the coal. In this way, he picks out an excavation often for a considerable distance under the mass of coal, beneath which he half lies to work. When he has, after two or three hours labour, undermined as much coal as he judges prudent to attempt, he inserts iron wedges by means of a heavy hammer between the coal and the roof above it, by which, and by the weight of the ground above, the mass of the coal is detached and falls.[10]

Considerable expertise was needed in estimating how far the coal could be safely undercut, using as indicators the sound of the coalface as it was "holed" and its first barely audible cracks. One writer who lived and worked among the Fife miners at the end of the nineteenth century noted that "part of the art of mining" was safely judging this "holing" and that he was "outdistanced every time by the experienced men owing to the skill that is born of long practice."[11] The hewer also had to be able to predict when a working place would need timbering, when it might become gaseous or wet, or when the coal seam might break off in a fault. A commentator on Scottish mining in 1865 observed that such faults were "very often perplexing to the miner, and it requires great skill to pursue successfully the escaping beds of coal."[12] The collier's interest in practical geology could usefully enhance his earnings. A knowledge of the way the lumps of coal would break off the face was important, for the hewer was paid more for "great coal" than for dross. "The art of the collier," claimed Robert Bald in 1808, "is to hew down immense blocks of coal."[13]

8. *Ibid.*; *The New Statistical Account of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1845), VI, p. 646.
9. A. Muir, *The Story of Shotts* (Edinburgh, n.d.), p. 12.
10. Children's Employment Commission (hereafter CEC), Appendix 1, PP, (1842), XVI, p. 334.
11. K. Durland, *Among the Fife Miners* (London, 1904), pp. 63-4.
12. *Glasgow Weekly Mail*, 14 October 1865.
13. R. Bald, *A General View of the Coal Trade of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1808), p. 44.

To facilitate bringing down the coal, vertical cuts or "shears" were made at the sides of the coalface. These were kept as narrow as possible to minimise the amount of dross produced. According to one mining expert in 1871,

> Some good colliers will work in cuts from two to three feet deep, and not exceeding five to eight inches wide at the front, so dexterously that the standing side, as the face advances, will form a large surface with evenness resembling a good brick wall and covered with marks of the pick point.[14]

The variety of tools required by the hewer is further evidence of the range of his skills. Picks of varying weights and shapes were required for holing and shearing, for underhand or overhand strokes. If the coalface was to be blasted, drills, chisels, and scrapers to bore and clean the charge hole would be required, as well as needles, tampers, and fuses to set the charge. In addition, axes and saws for timbering and a variety of hammers and shovels were needed.

Because of the complexity of the hewers' tasks, hewing was rarely a job which untrained men could successfully attempt. An informal system of training colliers had existed in the Scottish mines from time immemorial. One Lanarkshire historian wrote in the 1860s that:

> The old Scottish colliers ... looked upon this profession as a sort of hereditary right, which had descended from generation to generation, and for which they had to undergo a regular apprenticeship. At the age of eight or nine the boy was sent to work in the pit as a trapper.... In a couple of years he became a putter and assisted in pushing the loads of coal from the workmen to the pit bottom. In a couple of years more he was termed a half man when he assisted the working colliers and after another two or three years he was entitled to rank as a man and invested with full powers to wield the pick, wedge and mallet at the coal wall. Thus step by step he was trained to the work.[15]

Job Control and Independence

The hewers were paid on a piecework basis for the amount of coal which they put out, at a rate per ton or per cart load. The rate at which the hewer was paid was calculated according to the conditions in the coal seam in which he worked. In 1825, John Johnston, the manager of the Redding and Brighton Collieries in Stirlingshire, described how the hewing rates there were adjusted:

> In the coal pits of Brighton, in which the splint coal there is more difficult to work and consequently that a collier cannot turn out as much weight of coal, [he] gave an allowance per ton of from threepence to fivepence beyond what he paid to the Redding colliers, by which means the value of each man's labour under [his] management were so equalised.[16]

As well as contracting to cut the coal at a certain rate, hewers might also bargain individually or in groups to perform other tasks underground such as cutting air courses or constructing new levels. At Govan, "experienced colliers" would

14. W. Morgans, *Manual of Mining Tools* (London, 1871), p. 86.
15. A. Miller, *Coatbridge, Its Rise and Progress* (Glasgow, 1864), p. 187.
16. Scottish Record Office (hereafter SRO), RH2/4, no. 156, Declaration of J. Johnston.

undertake this type of exceptional work. Such men "were able to turn to almost any work that was necessary to keep the pit functioning. They constituted the aristocracy of the mines."[17] An analysis of the surviving output books of the collieries at Quarter, Avonbank, and Skellyton from the 1830s reveals similar tasks being undertaken there and paid for either as a piece rate or as a day wage which would provide an income equivalent to that which might be earned by hewing. For example:

> John Wilson, 4 fathoms of a mine @ 3/5
> Alex Fleming, Building up openings
> and hanging trapdoors for air, 2 days @ 3/-[18]

Thus, the picture which emerges of the hewers is that they should not simply be regarded as wage labourers, but rather as skilled contractors, paid either at piece rates or bargain derived day wages, and engaged not only in hewing coal but also in a variety of other underground work. This view of the miner as contractor is supported by the fact that occasional lump payments were made to "companies" of hewers for particular contracts. At Quarter, for example, the sum of £5-3-6 was paid to "Robert Hart & Co." for "redding and taking down roof." In addition, in pits where drawers were used, they were often employed and paid by the working colliers themselves.

Various writers have commented upon the freedom of action which piece and contract payment systems bestow upon the workers involved. Carter Goodrich noted the absence of close supervision which piecework allowed the traditional American miner.[19] Moreover, if piecework obviated the need for managerial supervision, the physical conditions of underground labour made such control impractical. Trist and Bamforth, who analysed the work relationships in a mine using traditional "hand got" methods, concluded that there was "no possibility of continuous supervision in the factory sense." As a consequence, the hewers displayed "a craft pride and artisan independence" and enjoyed a "responsible autonomy" unknown to most other groups of industrial workers.[20]

Similar conclusions may be offered about the Scots miner in the early decades of the nineteenth century. "The collier is his own master and may work out as much coal as he likes and is paid by the piece," stated one Lanarkshire witness to the Children's Employment Commission in 1842. The Sub-Commissioner noted that "the only way to which his work is at all regulated by the coal owner being

17. P.L. Payne, "The Govan Collieries 1804-5", *Business History*, 3 (1960-61), p. 82.
18. Hamilton Burgh Reference Library, Hamilton Estates Papers, Account for Quarter Colliery, 23 September 1836.
19. J. Hagan and C. Fisher, "Piecework and Some of its Consequences in the Printing and Coalmining Industries in Australia, 1850-1930", *Labour History*, 25 (November 1973), pp. 19-39; C. Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control* (New York, 1921), pp. 161-75; C. Goodrich, *The Miners' Freedom* (Boston, 1925), pp. 26-35.
20. E.L. Trist and K.W. Bamforth, "Technicism: Some Effects of Material Technology on Managerial Methods and on Work Situation Relationships", in T. Burns, ed., *Industrial Man* (London, 1969), pp. 335-6.

that the engine by which the coal is raised to the surface begins to work generally at six o'clock in the morning."[21]

Around the collier's skills and independence from managerial control, there was erected a rich work culture. The young collier's attainment of the status of a "full man" was celebrated by a ceremony known as "brothering." This initiation ritual involved readings from the scriptures, taking an oath, the revelation of the secret "collier's word," and being instructed in the signs and handshakes of the trade. As Eric Hobsbawm has noted, such "rites of passage" were almost universal among artisans in Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century.[22]

Many of the colliers' customs and superstitions were built around their ability to stop work as they pleased. John Dunlop, the Scottish temperance reformer, catalogued the frequent interruption of colliery routine for the consumption of alcohol:

> At boring for coal, as soon as a workable seam is obtained the master bestows a gallon or two of whisky.... In sinking, as soon as the first coal is turned out the dose is repeated, and as all the colliers cannot get to work at once, each one has or pays for his quota of drink as he enters. Whenever a room has been cut for every pickman, the overseer assigns a room to each man and another drink is resorted to.... When a screen is required to be put up, this makes a days drinking....[23]

Thomas Stewart, a Lanarkshire collier who wrote of life in his village in the 1840s and 1850s, described a similar situation, the miners controlling their own work pace and using a minor accident as sufficient excuse to spend the rest of the day carousing.[24] Stewart's account is confirmed by the observation of a mining overs-man in 1844: "If an accident of any kind occurs in the pit, they all come up for that day, even if the accident is of a trifling nature. It is a sort of superstitious custom."[25] Other events such as the sight of a magpie or a woman with red hair were said to be sufficient cause for colliers to refrain from work. The theme of the collier's "independence" runs strongly through Stewart's account. "The principal trait in the character of the Scottish miner," he stated, "is unyielding independence" and he disparaged the "cringeing slaves in other trades, envious of the fearless independence they could not imitate." The miners were, he asserted, "an independent, brave and industrious portion of our Scottish peasantry."[26]

The inclusion of the colliers among the "peasantry" can be explained by the fact that in those districts unaffected by the larger scale coal and iron works, many colliers lived scattered among the rural population, often owning or renting small-

21. CEC, 1st Report, PP, (1842), XV, p. 133.
22. E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (London, 1971), pp. 150-74.
23. J. Dunlop, *The Philosophy of Artificial and Compulsory Drinking Usage in Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1839), p. 81.
24. T. Stewart, *Among the Miners* (Larkhall, 1893), pp. 17-8.
25. Report of the Mining Commissioner, 1844, PP, (1844), XVI, p. 35.
26. Stewart, *Among the Miners*, pp. 32, 60.

holdings and working for farmers at harvest when the seasonal demand for coal was at a low point.[27] This close relationship between colliers and the agricultural community could, therefore, provide yet a further source of "independence."

2. TRADE UNION ORGANISATION AND POLICY

Trade union organisation among the Scottish miners was weak and fragmented for the greater part of the nineteenth century. Yet the recurring impetus towards union organisation was persistent and tenacious. Its source, it will be suggested, lay in the culture of the independent collier.

The first stirrings of collective organisation occurred in the closing decades of the eighteenth century when Scots colliers were still bound to their masters by a form of serfdom. This system of colliery bondage, in which the colliers became a "hereditary caste," had developed in the seventeenth century to ensure a captive labour supply. However, the system proved unable to accommodate the increasing industrial and urban demand for coal in the second half of the eighteenth century and two Emancipation Acts were passed in 1775 and 1799. The abolition of serfdom did little to alleviate the shortage of colliery labour and the colliers enjoyed considerable bargaining power. "The slavery of the slave," noted one writer in the *Edinburgh Review*, "had become his strength in the battle for wages. It gave him the advantage of a monopolist. It frightened competition away."[28] There were numerous strikes in the 1790s and the preamble to the 1799 Emancipation Bill complained that the coal hewers "have of late years frequently entered into Combinations and Agreements among themselves for raising wages."

Nor were these combinations necessarily confined to ephemeral wage agitations at individual collieries. One observer in 1793 noted that in the West of Scotland the colliers had "some watchword by sending round of which they can lay the whole collieries in the country idle."[29] The organisation of these colliery "brotherhoods" was inevitably shadowy as a result of the laws on combination. There is no evidence of permanent, formal trade union organisation at this time, but this is not a necessary precondition for "a continuous association of wage earners." As H.A. Turner has suggested,

> people of the same occupation, who are regularly brought together in the same workplace or town may acknowledge regular leaders, develop customs of work regulation and systematic 'trade practices,' and can produce a disciplined observance of the latter without embedding these procedures in any formal records[30]

The adoption of similar policies and strategies by Scots collier's unions at different times and places during these years indicates that they were indeed drawing

27. J.E. Shaw, ed., *Ayrshire 1745-1950* (London, 1953), p. 234; Muir, *The Story of Shotts*, p. 1; W. Naismith, *Hamilton Directory for 1878-79* (Hamilton, 1879), p. 122.
28. Anon., "Slavery in Modern Scotland", *Edinburgh Review*, 189 (January 1899), p. 144.
29. Anon, *Considerations on the Present Scarcity and Dearness of Coals in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1793), pp. 14-5.
30. H.A. Turner, *Trade Union Structure and Growth* (London, 1962), p. 51.

upon such "practices", normally submerged in a shared work culture. These were developed into an organisational form under the influence of a variety of pressures but in particular the cyclical fluctuation in the demand for coal.

In the years 1816-1818, for example, at a time of falling wages, colliers' association sprang up in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire as well as in the eastern coalfields around Edinburgh. In 1824, freed from the constraints of the Combination Laws and with coal demand at a peak, the colliers in the western counties of Lanark, Dunbarton, and Renfrew united into a powerful association and took the lead in establishing a federation known as the Associated Colliers of Scotland. With the downswing in the trade cycle and a counterattack by coalmasters, this national federation fragmented. A similar process occurred in the years 1835-1837 which culminated in the formation of a General Union of Operative Colliers throughout Scotland, which was soon to collapse amid strikes and lockouts. This cyclical pattern of organisation was to recur throughout the remainder of the century. From the 1850s onwards, there was some permanent trade union presence in the coalfields in the form of district and sometimes county unions which were federated in a series of Scottish Colliers' Associations. Membership of these unions fluctuated enormously, the general picture being one of weakness punctuated by mass wage agitations. The institutional details of these unions are not of concern here.[31] Rather, the central concern is the policies which these unions adopted and the ways in which their aspirations were shaped by the colliers' work culture.

In order to understand the policies which the colliers' unions developed, it is important first to note that the scarcity of colliery labour at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, coupled with an uninterrupted boom in the coal trade until 1810, ensured a high rate of wages. For the Scots collliers, their emancipation from serfdom coincided with a rising standard of living. Yet it was short lived. In the following decades, as their wages fluctuated, they sought to defend their living standards by influencing the market for coal. By maintaining high prices in the local markets through an artificially enforced scarcity, it was hoped to ensure high wages, since the latter conventionally followed the former. The mechanisms through which the colliers sought to manipulate the coal markets were first, by restricting entry to the trade to skilled colliers and, secondly, by limiting the output of each collier.

The concern of the early unions with the level of the coal markets was evidenced in the preamble to the articles of the Glasgow and Clydesdale Colliers' Association in 1816:

> It being now ascertained that 750,000 carts of coal are required yearly for the Glasgow and Export Markets, the weekly proportion of the said quantity being 14,425 carts, it becomes necessary to guard against any infringement that would tend otherwise to destroy the prices obtained....[32]

31. The history of the Scots miners' trade unions is described in R. Page Arnot, *A History of the Scottish Miners* (London, 1955); and the author's *The Lanarkshire Miners* (Edinburgh, 1979).
32. SRO, JC26/396, "Articles of the Glasgow and Clydesdale Association of Operative Colliers".

The first rule set precise age limits at which boys should pass through the training stages until they became "full men." Other rules contained financial premiums in an attempt to restrict entry to the trade to trained colliers and in particular to colliers' sons. Rule Two, for example, required:

> that no person shall take any person to learn as a collier who never was in the line thereof before, unless he pay seven pounds sterling into the Association, and serve two years to his said master....[33]

Proof of having fulfilled such apprenticeship requirements was provided in the form of membership "diplomas" and in some collieries association members refused to work alongside men without diplomas.

The activities of the colliers' associations at this time are resonant with the artisanal consciousness developed by the Scots miners in the years after emancipation. Their diplomas, inscribed with the "colliers' arms," suggest not only a pride in their craft, but also an attempt to emulate other tradesmen whose union emblems were engraved with "the authentic sign of the trade."[34] The grandiose styling of the Ayrshire Association's entry rules as "the Coal Articles of Ayrshire" which were to "be wrote on vellum with a nine shilling stamp" smacks of the artisan's traditional concern with regulating the trade.[35] "Were the above Articles strictly observed," these concluded, "the operative colliers never would experience those fluctuations as they have done with in these few years past from low wages."

Similar apprenticeship restrictions were written into Scots miners' union rule books throughout the nineteenth century, although their precise terms often varied. In 1824, the Lanark, Dunbarton, and Renfrew Association admitted the sons of colliers on the payments of a few shillings as they passed through their training. Boys not the sons of colliers were required to pay sums amounting to £8 for the same "rights" while adult men wishing to become colliers had to pay £5 "and serve an apprenticeship of 3 years."[36] Eight out of twenty-two articles of the Scottish Coal and Ironstone Miners Association in 1855 referred to entry to what they termed "the profession" and similar restrictive clauses were included in the Scottish rules published in 1858 and 1862.[37] The rules of both the Lanarkshire Miners' Association of 1879 and the Ayrshire Association of 1881 made admission to the coal face conditional on a four year apprenticeship, while in 1886 the Forth and Clyde Valley Miners' Association demanded an entry fee of £5.[38]

It is clear that such rules were often difficult to enforce, for, as shall be seen below, coal masters increasingly sought to dilute the colliers' ranks with unskilled

33. *Ibid.*
34. For a description of early union emblems, see R.A. Leeson, *United We Stand* (London, 1971), p. 8.
35. SRO, JC26/396, "Minute of Proceedings at Stewarton".
36. *Glasgow Herald*, 17 December 1824.
37. *Glasgow Sentinel*, 20 November 1858; *Hamilton Advertiser*, 4 October 1862.
38. SRO, FS 7/3 and 14.

immigrants. For their part, the colliers' unions used a number of methods to identify trained miners. In the early decades of the century, when the colliers work culture remained largely intact, knowledge of the brothering rituals of password and grips was one mode of distinguishing the trained from what were known by the colliers as "neutral" men. One writer also recalled that "a curious habit with miners in those days was carrying their picks on their left arm. When a miner carried a pick in any other manner it was proof that he was not a trained pickman."[39]

Miners coming from another district were required to present to the committee of the union in the district to which they moved "free lines" or clearance lines, that is, certificates that they were union members in good financial standing. As a member of the Baillieston district union stated in 1859, a free line was "a certificate of clear membership ... the free lines given to the members are meant to show that the bearer is sufficiently skilled as a collier that any man may work beside him."[40] It is clear that "tramping" or migrant colliers bearing such lines were not always welcomed without suspicion as to the authenticity of their trade qualifications. A rule of 1855 required that:

> Any man at any work employed, if the men consider him inadequate to put out a full days work, he or they shall be put into a room or wall by themselves and whatever quantity of work they shall perform on fourteen days trial, the same will be considered the claim of their wages for the next six months; and any person claiming a right to the trade, but of whom the district committee may be suspicious, they shall receive a trial card, and pass through the same trials as above and shall receive accordingly.[41]

Despite the fact that such rules were an ineffectual protection in many districts, what is notable from this survey of union rules is the persistence of the aspiration to defend the colliers' occupation as a trade throughout the century. Equally persistent was the second limb of the union policy to regulate the trade, the restriction of output. The methods by which output was controlled included limitations on both the amount of coal which individuals were allowed to hew each day and also on the number of days which would be worked each week.

In the 1790s, an observer noted that the Scots colliers "are generally united, and if the majority in the pit agree to make an idle day the rest must do the same. If they offer to work, they are severely fined, or obliged to leave the work. By this means, a pit seldom works above three days in the week."[42] At Calder in 1818, a collier stated that the miners there had agreed amongst themselves "that each should be restricted to put no more out than ten hutches per day, or three carts and third," despite the fact that a man could normally put out an average of four or five carts.[43] In 1825, the Lanark, Dunbarton, and Renfrew Association also

39. A. Roy, *A History of the Coal Miners of the United States* (Columbus, 1905), p. 20.
40. *Airdrie, Coatbridge, Bathgate and Wishaw Advertiser*, 12 February 1859.
41. *Glasgow Sentinel*, 13 October 1855.
42. Anon., *Considerations*, p. 15.
43. SRO, AD14/18/38, Declaration of James Brown, 27 February 1818.

adopted restriction as a central strategy. The Sheriff of Stirlingshire reported to the Home Office that:

> So very tenacious is the committee in the West to enforce the most rigid adherence to this regulation that they have ... appointed a Committee of Inspection who go round to see that every coal pit within the limits of these three counties does not exceed the prescribed quantity of coals to be put out of the pits.[44]

In August of that year, there was no stock of coal in hand whatsoever in Glasgow compared with the fifty thousand tons which were usually stored in the city at that month in preparation for the winter demand. At the Hurlet Colliery in Renfrewshire, it was claimed that the association exercised an almost total control:

> No new hand could be taken in without the concurrence of the combined. Six times this year did they demand an advance of prices and each rise was accompanied by a corresponding diminution in the hours of labour.[45]

Although this association was to eventually disintegrate in defeat the following year, its temporary success in forcing up wages through output restriction helps explain the repeated adoption of this strategy in subsequent years. It again met with some considerable success in the mid-1830s and in 1842 the Children's Employment Sub-Commissioner for the West of Scotland noted that rules "for stinting or limiting each others earnings were widespread" among the miners:

> The general rule is that a man shall not earn above from 3s 6d to 4s a day; consequently, whatever quantity of coal is delivered at the pit bottom he is paid by the employer 3s 6d or 4s—this is fixed by the men as a man's darg or day's work. No collier is allowed to deliver more than this, though the employers were willing to pay him for it.[46]

In the 1860s and 1870s, output restriction remained one of the central planks of the wages policy of the Scots miners' unions. Those districts which were unionised clung to taking a weekly "holiday" and limited their "darg" to eight hours work.

The restriction strategy demanded considerable collective discipline however, involving as it did a voluntary limitation on earnings. Sanctions were applied to those who broke it. One former collier stated in 1844 that "those who attempt it have their lights blown out and are annoyed in the pit in various ways."[47] More formally, the union would fine men who overproduced as much as five or ten shillings, the equivalent of one or two day's wages. The colliers adopted informal working rules to encourage adherence to the darg. The proximity of a collier's room to the pit bottom or the availability of hutches might influence his output.

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44. SRO, RH2/4, 147, Letter from R. Macdonald to Home Office, 6 October 1825.
45. *Scotsman*, 2 November 1825.
46. CEC, Appendix 1, PP, (1842), XVI, p. 325.
47. Report of the Mining Commissioner, 1844, PP, (1844), XVI, p. 35.

To equalise such factors, the colliers access to the "cleek" or cage was collectively regulated according to a strict rotation of "turns."[48]

The central concerns of the miners' unions to control the markets for labour and for coal provide an explanation for further aspects of their policy. For example, as apprenticeship barriers were broken down, the colliers turned to emigration as a means of reducing the surplus of labour.

To argue that successive miners' unions drew upon a shared work culture to pursue policies aimed at regulating the coal trade and defending a craft status is not, of course, to suggest that the texture of trade unionism in the Scots coalfields was unchanging over the century. The secret colliery brotherhoods in the early decades would resort to acts of extreme violence against the infiltration of "neutral" men while the unions of the 1860s and 1870s were anxious to present their policies in the garb of mid-Victorian respectability. For example, at that time the leadership of the Scottish miners had high hopes that boards of arbitration might achieve an "amicable" agreement over the relationship between wages and coal prices. These sentiments should not be interpreted as a surrender to the law of bourgeois political economy that wages must follow prices. The possibility of a national federation of colliers' unions following a policy of output restriction instead suggested that miners' wages might determine coal prices. Thus the policies of the 1870s can be regarded as a sophistication of those of the colliers' association some fifty years earlier.

3. INDUSTRIAL DISCIPLINE, IRISH IMMIGRATION, AND THE EROSION OF INDEPENDENCE

Unsurprisingly, the aspirations of the colliers to control the workplace and to regulate the coalmarket were regarded by the colliery owners with considerable hostility. This was particularly the case in that sector of the mining industry connected with iron manufacturing in the western counties.

From the 1780s onwards, new coal and iron companies had been growing in importance in relation to the traditional mining lairds. The expansion of the iron industry, particularly after the application of the hot-blast smelting process in the 1830s, led both to a huge increase in the demand for coal and to the domination of the coal industry by large, vertically integrated coal and iron mining enterprises owning a number of collieries. Alongside them existed smaller coal companies producing for the domestic and industrial markets and typically working only one or two collieries.[49]

In 1841, Scotland had 16,152 coalminers; by 1851, this had doubled to 32,971; and by 1871 the figure had reached 46,190, almost half of them concentrated in

48. Select Commission on the Combination Laws, Minutes of Evidence, PP, (1825), IV, p. 634.
49. R.H. Campbell, *Scotland Since 1707* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 117-32.

the county of Lanark.[50] This massive increase clearly could not have been produced from the existing mining population. Instead, there was an influx of new labour into the western coalfields. "The population," noted the mining commissioner in 1844, "as might be expected from the rapidity with which it has increased, is of a very mixed character, persons have been brought together from all parts of the country and from a variety of other occupations, attracted by the demand for labour. Many of them are Irish." The Commissioner was informed by one witness that approximately four thousand Irishmen had entered the mines in Lanarkshire in the previous few years and had become "permanently engrafted on the trade."[51]

The coal and ironmasters confronting this turbulent and heterogeneous population increasingly became aware of the need to forge a disciplined labour force. This was particularly true of the ironmasters. They controlled larger firms, involving much larger capital investment than the small colliery owner, and were in a more competitive market situation. Delays in the supply of coal, whether through the individual collier's preference for leisure or the collective restriction of output, represented a considerable problem in terms of under utilisation of investment. Moreover, the ironworks demanded a continuous production of coal quite different from the seasonal rhythms of the small rural collieries. The ironmasters, therefore, were in the forefront of double-edged offensive to maximise managerial control. Not only was it intended to discipline the new hands among the unruly mining population, but also to destroy the restrictive practices of the old colliers' traditional work culture.

The colliers' control of entry to the trade was one of the first targets of the masters' hostility. In 1826, Colin Dunlop of the Clyde Iron Works had locked out his striking employees and recruited "labourers, weavers and able-bodied workmen of all descriptions to replace them." He resolved "to make his pits a nursery for colliers and rear such a body of new workmen as will be a complete counterpoise to the combination at all times."[52]

The problems attendant upon such a strategy were considerable. In addition to that of physically protecting the blacklegs, there was the skilled nature of the hewer's work. But in many of the collieries which succeeded in introducing unskilled men initially, there were specific circumstances which facilitated this. One common feature was a more developed division of labour. The presence of groups of workers other than hewers who were familiar with underground labour could provide a nucleus of semi-skilled strike breakers. At the Hurlet Colliery in 1826, the owners were able to replace hewers by labourers with underground experience because "the regular collier at these works does nothing but dig; the freeing of the coals from dross, bringing them to the mouth of the pits, etc. being done by

50. Census of Scotland, 1841; Census of Great Britain, 1851; Census of the Population of Scotland, 1871.
51. Report of the Mining Commissioner, 1844, PP, (1844), XVI, pp. 18 and 39.
52. *Glasgow Herald*, 12 May 1826.

labourers."[53] Such a division of labour was most often associated with the longwall method of working. William Dixon was another ironmaster who successfully recruited blacklegs in 1825 to several of his collieries worked under this system. According to the *Glasgow Herald*,

> By this mode, there is a saving of two-thirds of pickwork [since no pillars of coal were left] and of course, the art is much sooner acquired. This is a fortunate circumstance for the new colliers as they will learn much sooner.[54]

It is no doubt significant that the occupational penetration by Irishmen was higher in ironstone mining compared with coalmining and all ironstone mines were worked under a variant of longwall working.[55] Even so, when the new hands commenced work in Dixon's pits, "they were accompanied by several regularly bred colliers who put things in order for them and are to instruct them in their business."[56] The importance of skilled instruction for such newcomers was highlighted by the works rules of the Shotts Iron Company in the 1840s which demanded that "each collier, when required, shall be ready to take charge of and instruct any labourer the company may think proper to employ...."[57]

The dilution of the colliers' trade by these newcomers aroused much hostility among the native mining population. One writer in 1864 noted that:

> The descendants of the original colliers retain their identity and look upon the others as interlopers in the mines, not belonging to the brotherhood. Trained as the Scotch colliers were, this feeling is not to be wondered at; for they looked on their profession as a sort of hereditary right ... but the barrier was broken down.[58]

Because many of these interlopers were Irish immigrants, a racial dimension was added to the Scots colliers' dislike of them. In 1862, an editorial in the *Glasgow Sentinel*, the main labour journal in Scotland at this time, contrasted the mining villages of Clackmannanshire, where the colliers had a "monopoly ... and into which strangers rarely find an entrance," with the districts around Glasgow which had "been invaded by hordes of miserable Irishmen ready to enter upon the most dangerous work at the lowest rate of wages, and through their competition the Scottish miners have been degraded and overborne."[59] As late as the 1880s, a "skilled collier" was objecting to " grown up Irishmen coming into the pits as drawers, and in a few months being allowed to have places of their own. It does themselves no good, and it does the trained colliers much harm."[60]

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53. *Ibid.*, 4 November 1825.
54. *Ibid.*, 21 October 1825.
55. See the author's *Lanarkshire Miners*, p. 179.
56. *Glasgow Herald*, 21 October 1825.
57. W. Cloughan, *A Series of Letters on the Restriction of Labour and its Effects in the Mines of Lanarkshire* (Coatbridge, 1846), p. 20.
58. Miller, *Coatbridge, Its Rise and Progress*, pp. 187-8.
59. *Glasgow Sentinel*, 2 August 1862.
60. R. Haddow, "The Miners of Scotland", *Nineteenth Century*, (September 1888), p. 362.

This friction between the Scots and Irish in the mining communities frequently erupted into violence. With the implantation of militant Orangeism into the West of Scotland, religious sectarianism was added to the divisions within the mining population. On at least two occasions after religious riots, the miners around Airdrie in Lanarkshire struck work to expel Roman Catholics from the mines.

Dilution of the colliers' trade was only one aspect of the coal and ironmasters' campaign to undermine the colliers' work culture and their unions. This assault was codified in various sets of works rules. The rules of Coltness Iron Works demanded that every collier should work the full day for at least five days or forfeit five shillings for each occasion that he failed to do so. Moreover, every workman was entitled to put out as much coal as he wished. Similarly, the rules at Shotts Iron Works required that:

> the output of coals by the colliers shall not, in any instance, be fixed to a given quantity ... and what is called the cleek to be free to every man in the pit; so that each hutch as it comes forward shall be sent up, thus at no time keeping any standing at the pit bottom.[61]

Acting collectively, the Scots colliery owners framed a set of Special Rules under the terms of the 1855 Mines Inspection Act. Although ostensibly concerned with mine safety, these contained a number of clauses aimed at disciplining the workforce. Rule 3 required colliers to "work at their appointed coal faces continuously, industriously and without unnecessary interruption while the shift continues," while another rule prohibited underground meetings of workmen.[62]

Such rules directly conflicted with the union policy of output restriction and a number of strikes and lockouts focused on this issue. In 1844, when the Lanarkshire miners restricted output to reduce coal stocks, the masters retaliated by locking out all those unwilling to work the former "big darg". According to a report in the *Glasgow Saturday Post:*

> The strike is no longer a question of wages, but the right of how much labour is to be done. The colliers think themselves the best judges of the amount of work they ought to perform. The masters, on the other hand, say the colliers have no right to think in the matter.[63]

In a similar dispute three years later, a correspondent in the *Northern Star* proclaimed:

> This is not a trial of strength on the part of employers, simply on the question of wages but it involves a far deeper principle—the principle of liberty—the principle of commencing labour when you please and ceasing when it is necessary.[64]

To enforce their new work discipline, the masters increased the number of supervisory personnel. By 1868, one of the Scottish mines inspectors estimated

61. See the author's *Lanarkshire Miners*, pp. 178-201.
62. Report of the Coal Mines' Inspector for Scotland, 1855, PP, (1856), XVIII, p. 801.
63. *Glasgow Saturday Post*, 29 June 1844.
64. *Northern Star*, 25 August 1847.

that such men amounted to one in fifteen of all colliery employees. A fireman at the large Blantyre Colliery claimed that he visited every working place in his charge at least two or three times each day and often as many as six times.[65] The iron companies, who typically controlled a large number of pits, often employed contractors to work them. As well as organising the working of the pit, the contractor was responsible for recruiting and paying the workforce out of the payment per ton he received from the company employing him. In effect, this was a two-tiered payment-by-results system. The colliers were paid according to the number of carts they put out. The contractor was paid by the number of tons which the men under him produced. There was, therefore, a financial incentive for the contractor to work his men hard. "The contractors do the work for us cheaper than the masters can get it done," observed one colliery owner in 1844, "they take more out of the men."[66]

In the 1860s, another form of contracting developed in the deep thick coal seams in the southern districts of the Lanarkshire coalfield. These were worked by the "Newcastle method" of leaving very large pillars of coal or "stoops" which were later worked away. The safe extraction of this coal, an operation known as "stooping," required considerable skill. The mines inspector recommended that only "the most experienced miners ought to be employed [at stooping] and at wages above the average rate so that the work may be done properly."[67] But because the pillars of coal were already exposed, the masters argued that it was more easily got and reduced the prices. This work was often done by contractors or "stoopers" who would accept low rates and then drive their men beyond the limits of safety. In addition, since coal from the stoops could often be produced more quickly than from the face, and because the depth of the pits in these districts required more expensive winding gear, the colliers' traditional "turns" conflicted with managerial efficiency and stoopers were keen to enforce "free cleek."[68]

Yet, despite these efforts, the coal owners were never fully successful in proleterianising the colliers into unskilled wage labourers and the miners' independent work culture displayed a remarkable resilience throughout the century. The Scots colliers' continued freedom from managerial control was testified to by a number of observers during the second half of the nineteenth century. A Glasgow coalmaster in 1866 stated that a collier might leave the pit in the middle of the day "if he chooses."[69] Similarly, in 1892, a miners' leader claimed that "we can come up at any time; provided that the bottomer can get an empty cage we are allowed to ride ... [the collier] may be singularly desirous of taking a half holiday, or he may have somewhere to go, and he may go home after a short turn."[70] Even the vice-president of the Lanarkshire Coalmasters' Association admitted in 1892 that

65. PP, (1868-69), XIV, p. 733; PP, (1878), XX, p. 677.
66. Report of the Mining Commissioner, 1844, PP, (1844), XVI, p. 73.
67. Reports of the Mines' Inspectors, PP, (1867-68), XXI, p. 328; PP, (1872), XVI, p. 380.
68. *Glasgow Sentinel*, 25 September 1869 and 30 May 1868.
69. Select Committee on Mines, Minutes of Evidence, PP, (1866), XIV, p. 465.
70. Royal Commission on Labour, Minutes of Evidence, PP, (1892), XXXVI, Pt. 1, p. 92.

"we have too much laxity. The men in many cases come and go to the collieries as they please."[71]

The colliers also remained resistant to close supervision. Around the turn of the century, an overman in Lanarkshire stated that "they always stop work when they see an overman coming, and sit down and wait till he's gone.... They won't let anybody watch them."[72] The colliers' adherence to a fixed darg was another tradition many employers were forced to come to terms with. In 1866, the secretary to the Mineowners' Association of Scotland declared that the masters regarded it not as "a mere ancient tradition," but as "a power of controlling the masters and the market ... the masters would be very glad to see such a limitation done away with...." He admitted, however, that they "recognised it as a thing which they cannot help."[73]

It is clear that the colliers' work customs did not survive uniformly in every district or every colliery. In 1860, for example, Alexander MacDonald, the Scottish miners' leader, claimed that apprenticeship regulations were observed only in the eastern counties of Clackmannan, Fife, and Mid and East Lothian, but could not be generally enforced in the western districts.[74] The mines inspector for Eastern Scotland stated in 1866 that "trade rules" governing the output of boys during training were in operation in the principal collieries there.[75]

The resilience of the colliers' traditional work practices can be principally explained first, by the fundamentally unchanged nature of the hewer's job and, secondly, by the uneven development of the Scots coalfields. Despite the intensification of the hewer's workpace through improvements in underground haulage, winding gear, and the use of explosives, there was practically no mechanisation of the actual cutting of coal until the very end of the nineteenth century. Hewing remained dependent upon the collier's skills and these continued to be remunerated on a piecework basis. Longwall working became widespread in Scotland after 1850 and this led to some subdivision of the hewer's tasks among semi-skilled ancillary workers. One of MacDonald's complaints against the coalmasters' Special Rules was that they allowed roadmen to repair falls of roof and shore up loose strata. "Roadmen," he claimed, "were generally the most ignorant men and not skilled at all."[76]

The second explanatory factor was that large-scale mining operations in the Scots coalfields developed unevenly over a period of more than fifty years. In every decade after 1830, some new district was experiencing the transformation brought about by the more intensive exploitation, both of men and minerals, by

71. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
72. C. Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control*, p. 137.
73. Select Committee on Mines, Minutes of Evidence, PP, (1866), XIV, p. 480.
74. National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, *Trade Societies and Strikes* (London, 1860), pp. 307-8.
75. Select Committee on Mines, Minutes of Evidence, PP, (1866), XIV, p. 250.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

the larger companies. This development was not only chronologically uneven, the differentiation between the iron companies and the smaller-scale coal companies also tended to be reflected geographically. Since the drive towards industrial discipline and managerial control of the labour process was strongest among the former, the colliers' traditions survived for much longer in some areas than in others, and it was from these areas that a continuous aspiration to organise was maintained.

The disadvantage of this situation was that union activists remained confined within an exclusive form of trade unionism derived from the early decades of the century and which was increasingly inappropriate to the circumstances of the Scottish coal industry. The 1860s, for example, witnessed the rapid growth of the Order of Free Colliers which sought to revive the secret rituals of the early colliery brotherhoods.[77] To the growing mass of newcomers, especially the culturally segregated Irish, such unions and their policies held little appeal.[78] By the 1880s and 1890s, it was to socialist policies, including a legal eight hour day and nationalisation of the mines, that the colliers of Western Scotland looked to regulate the coal trade and guarantee their freedom.[79]

4. CONCLUSION: THE INDEPENDENT COLLIER IN BRITAIN?

It is important to conclude this case study of the Scottish coalfields by considering whether the work culture of the independent collier was uniquely Scottish or if the analysis presented here offers insights into the history of other British coalfields.

It is true that the values of the independent collier in Scotland were expressed in a unique form because of the historical and cultural experiences of the miners there. Colliery serfdom, for example, was unknown in other British coalfields. Its legacy was a sense of occupational identity and of the collier's trade as a hereditary right which persisted for generations after emancipation. Such feelings of exclusiveness were no doubt reinforced by the fact that many newcomers into the Scots coalfields were the culturally distinct Irish.

However, the fundamental bases of the culture of independence lay in the work system of the coalmine. Here the Scottish situation was in no way unique, though there were some significant differences. For example, in the thick coal seams of Lanarkshire, Scotland's major coalfield, stoop-and-room working remained widespread and the hewer there remained more of an all-round underground tradesman. In 1907, the percentage of faceworkers in the mines of Western Scotland was 57 per cent, compared with only 40 per cent in the English coalfields of Lancashire and Staffordshire.[80] The average size of the basic unit of production, the pit,

77. R. Page Arnot, *A History of the Scottish Miners*, pp. 47-50; and the author's *Lanarkshire Miners*, pp. 277-86.
78. For example, Irishmen were underrepresented in samples of Lanarkshire union activists. (*Lanarkshire Miners*, pp. 194-7.)
79. J. Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class* (London, 1979), pp. 134-60.
80. Miners' Eight Hour Day Committee, Minutes of Evidence, PP, (1907), XV, p. 39.

several of which might constitute a colliery, was also smaller, in terms of numbers employed, in Scotland than in England.

But influential though such differences may be for any comparative analysis, they are differences of degree rather than essence. Many aspects of the work of the Scots hewer was similar with that of his counterparts elsewhere. What, then, of the struggle for control of the labour process and the clash of values between independence and efficiency in the other coalfields of Britain? For an explanation of the absence of these themes in the historiography of British miners, at least until recently, one must look to the concerns of historians to produce either an institutional account of the miners' unions or an economic analysis of their industry, rather that the empirical absence of such struggles.

A cursory examination of England and Welsh sources suggests that the aspiration to a trade status was evidenced south of the border in the latter half of the nineteenth century. When miners from Wigan in Lancashire approached the Scots miners unions in 1863 to convene a national conference of Britain's miners, one of the aims was to petition "that mining may be registered as a trade, prohibiting any person ... being employed in mines until he was passed an examination and proved his competency...."[81] The Rules of the Ogmore District in Glamorganshire of the Amalgamated Association of Miners in 1874 included "apprenticeship" provisions prohibiting any miner "to take a person with him to learn" unless he paid a sum of up to £10 to the Lodge Fund. These rules sought to restrict entry to the trade to the sons of miners and laid down the training stages for boys, as did the Rules of the Abersychan District in Monmouthshire in 1873.[82] Restriction of output was also widely adopted as a strategy in the 1860s and 1870s both by unions affiliated to the Amalgamated Association of Miners and also to the Miners' National Association, whose president, Alexander MacDonald, was also secretary to the Scottish Miners' Association.[83] Superficial and fragmentary though such strands are, they suggest the need for English and Welsh historians to dig more deeply into the struggle for control in the coalfields and to examine to what extent this was sustained, in all its regional expressions, by a work culture centred on independence.

81. *British Miner*, 2 May 1863.
82. Public Record Office, FS 7.4/172 and 135
83. C. Fisher and J. Smethurst, "War on the Law of Supply and Demand: The Amalgamated Association of Miners and the Forest of Dean Colliers, 1869-1875", in R. Harrison, ed., *Independent Collier: The Coal Miner as Archetypal Proletarian Reconsidered* (Hassocks, 1978), pp. 114-55.