

Dore Article 31

Note: In 2008 The Bevin Boys' contribution to the Second World War was at last recognized by the issue of a medal - Dennis brought his medal to show us at the A.G.M. On Remembrance Sunday 2008 representatives of the Bevin Boys took their deserved place in the march past the Cenotaph in Whitehall. Organised by the British Legion, H.M. the Queen laid the first poppy wreath on our behalf and wreaths included those from the Government, the Commonwealth, the Armed Forces and the general public.

This is an extract from the address given by the Reverend J. D. (Dennis) Monger at the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Dore Abbey on Saturday, 7th June, 2008:

The Mine, the Monastery, the Ministry

The Mine:

I was in school in Gloucester when the Second World War was declared in September 1939. People said, "Don't worry. It will all be over by Christmas." Others replied, "That was said before, in August 1914. . ."

By September, 1943, there was concern over the declining manpower in the coal mining industry. The nation and the war effort were still heavily dependent on coal. Many miners had joined the armed forces or transferred to essential war work in factories. The Government made attempts to increase manpower in the mines, but the response was far less than the 30,000 needed. The Minister of Labour and National Service, Rt. Hon. Ernest Bevin, introduced a scheme whereby new recruits would be chosen by ballot. On alternate Monday mornings, figures 0 to 9 were drawn from a hat or box in Downing Street. Those recruits whose National Service Registration Certificate number's last digit corresponded to the number drawn were automatically directed to coal mining. There were no appeals or exceptions, even if the recruit had been in the Army or Air Cadets in school or Sea Scouts. 21,800 recruits were enlisted by this method, with the addition of 26,059 optants (e.g. who were given the choice of the Navy or the Mines). The result was a total of 47,859 recruits who became known as
'The Bevin Boys.'

In the Spring of 1944, a small brown envelope marked OHMS arrived with the morning post. On the 15th May, I left home for the first time to arrive at the mining village of Oakdale, Monmouthshire to begin training as a collier. After four weeks, I was sent to the Taff-Merthyr Colliery at Trelewis, South Wales. The mine was 550 yards in depth, and from the bottom of the shaft was a walk of quarter of a mile to the coal-face with a seam of 4' 6" in height.

Two years went by. One morning the Mine Manager, Mr. Jarman M.E. came to inspect underground. His electric handlamp was like a searchlight. He stopped to ask me a few questions: home? school? education? The final question, "Would you be willing to go to the Treforest School for Mining and make it a career?" My reply was that I had already applied for training for the Christian Ministry. "Suppose you do not get in?" he said. "I leave that to Higher Authority."

Next morning at 5.45 am, I went to hand in my numbered metal disc and receive my miners' lamp, which in the 1940s was in the shape of a lighthouse with a handle at the top and very heavy. This time the lampman gave me a cap lamp and a mini oil lamp. "You're with the Mine Surveyor from now on." A private on one-day, lieutenant the next, but still a National Service Bevin Boy on six pounds (£6) a week. . .

I continued my studies in the evenings and was offered a place at theological college and the University of Wales in Cardiff. With six months of National Service remaining, I was released six weeks early so that I could begin the academic year in September. I saw an evening WEA class advertised at the Miners' Institute in Merthyr Tydfil on 'Church Architecture'. A course included a visit to Brecon Cathedral and DORE ABBEY.

The Monastery:

It is sixty years since my first sight of the Abbey from the lych gate by the roadside and I can remember the surprise and excitement of anticipation as I walked down the path to the building. How did it come to be here in the countryside? What was the reason for its unusual shape - like a cut cake with one half missing? These and other questions were to be answered in years to come.

There is an old saying, 'Every picture tells a story.' The Story of Dore Abbey can be divided into three parts, and in each I have tried to imagine the sounds beyond the words.

1147-1537 The Monastery: The building work, the sound of hammer and chisel. The singing and reading of the Offices, Chants, Devotion and Worship.

1537-1630 The Dissolution: The raucous voices of those engaged in demolition: falling masonry and crashing timbers. The Silence: broken only by the birds: jackdaws by day the solitary owl at night.

1630 - 2008 The voices of those planning the Abbey's Restoration. The sounds of repair and construction. Prayer Book Worship, retaining ingredients from the old monastic Breviaries.

The Ministry:

Ministry means Service: To minister is to help and give assistance.

This is the purpose of Dore Abbey.

To serve God in Worship: which was the original intention of its founders.

To serve God in serving people: Family and friends, visitors and tourists, young and old, troubled or triumphant: all in the love of God in Christ.

To serve the whole person in body, mind and spirit providing a place to sit, rest and pray. For the mind, lectures, talks, tours of the building.

To provide for the spiritual life: the Christian message, music, recitals, choirs, orchestras, soloists, making the most of the marvellous acoustics of the ancient building. It lifts the heart and spirit. We leave with a lighter step and renewed purpose.

We are grateful for the valued contribution from Friends, near and far, at home and abroad, which helps to make this Abbey "fit for purpose" - God's purpose in this 21st century.

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