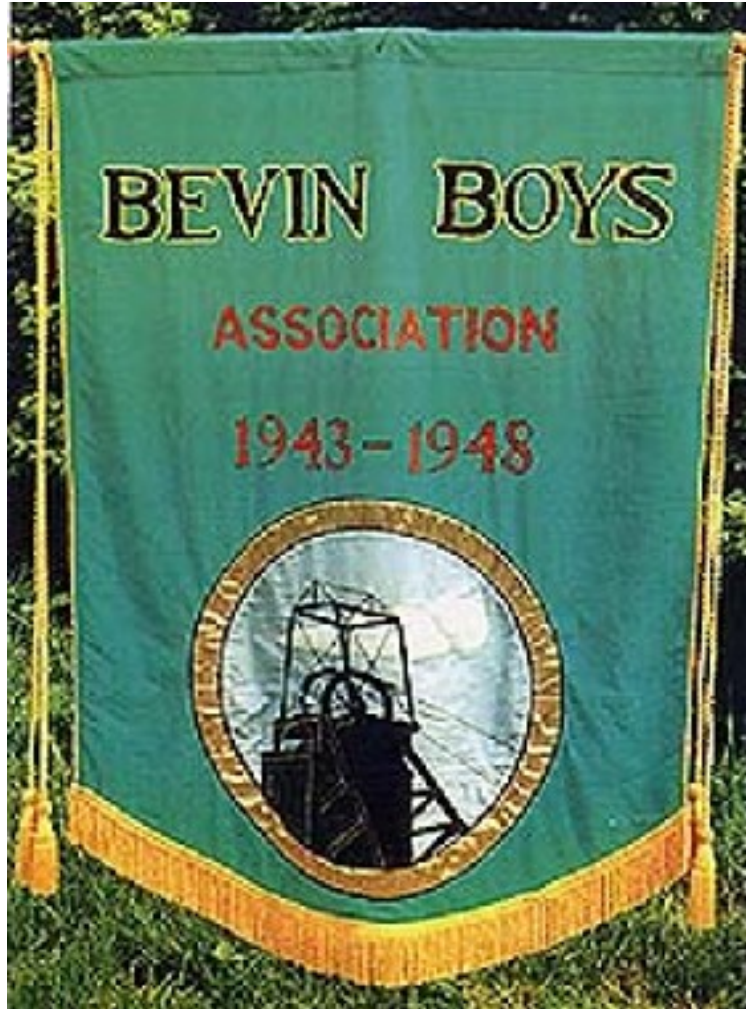


# Bevin Boys Association

(sometimes incorrectly referred to as Bevan Boys)



The Bevin Boys Association Banner  
Courtesy Bevin Boys Association.

As Britain was unable to import Coal during World War II, the production of coal from mines in Britain had to be increased. To meet this need it was decided by the Minister of Labour, **Ernest Bevin**, that a percentage of young men called up to serve in the forces should work in the mines. from 1943 to the end of the war one in ten of the young men called up were sent to work in the mines. This caused a great deal of upset as the many of the young men wanted to join the fighting forces and many felt that they were not valued. These conscript miners were given the nick name 'Bevin Boys'. Many suffered taunts as they wore no uniform and were wrongly assumed to be avoiding serving in the armed forces.

## **Formation of Bevin Boys Association**

**The Bevin Boys Association was formed in 1989** with a small membership of 32 in the Midlands area. Today the membership has grown to over 2,000 from all over the United Kingdom and Overseas. It is encouraging that we are surfacing at last.

Two Annual National Reunions are held in the Spring and Autumn, consisting of three or four day events. Regional Reunions, normally one day events are organised by Area Representatives, covering all parts of the country.

Parades and Galas are also now part of our annual programme with the Sunday Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph in London a highlight of the year.

### **Recognition of Bevin Boys**

Recognition has been a big problem for the past fifty years as we never received any medals, until 1995 when we first gained recognition in the VE & VJ Day 50th Anniversary Commemorations. In March 2000 a Home Front Memorial was unveiled by H. M. The Queen in the grounds of the old Coventry Cathedral which was dedicated to all those who served during WW2 in service for their country which included the Bevin Boys.

We have our own Bevin Boys Association Banner which is proudly displayed on Parades and Special Occasions.

Our membership fee is a one off life membership donation of only £10, there is no annual subscription. Members receive a membership card and enamel badge in addition to the twice annual "Newsletter".

We also have our own Association Tie (Navy or Maroon), Blazer Badge, Commemorative Plate (showing all the thirteen Government Training Centres) through which every Bevin Boy would have passed. Also there is a stock of a wide range of books on the subject written by our members.

The Imperial War Museum has now become the home for the preservation of Bevin Boy records, documents and photographs of which duplicate sets are held by Warwick Taylor, the Bevin Boys Association Official Archivist.

There is a main committee holding meetings four times a year normally in central England for accessibility of committee members.

The Annual General Meeting is incorporated into the Annual National Event in the spring. Bevin Boys are entitled to wear the National Service Medal and the General Service Cross. They are now entitled to wear the Bevin Boys Badge.

All Bevin Boys, be they ballottees, optants or volunteers, are eligible to apply. Applications will also be accepted from widows of Bevin Boys who passed away on or after the 20 June 2007, the date when the announcement of the badge was made. This is provided a copy of the marriage and death certificate are attached to the application form.

## Bevin Boys Badge



**The Bevin Boys badge can be issued to: Men who were conscripted directly into the mines, those who opted for mine work in preference to joining the Armed Forces, or those who were in the Armed Forces and volunteered to become miners during the period 1943-1948.**

**The application form for the badge is now available and can be obtained by calling the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency helpline on 0800 169 2277 or by visiting [http://veterans-uk.info/bevin\\_boys/bevin.pdf](http://veterans-uk.info/bevin_boys/bevin.pdf)**

### **Please note:**

**The Bevin Boys Veterans Badge is a survivors badge and can only be issued posthumously after the date of introduction – 20 June 2007. If your relative died before that date Warwick recommends that you consider **The Bevin Boys Medal -****



The Bevin Boys Medal was commissioned by the Bevin Boys Association and as such is their official medal. Designed and made by Bigbury Mint in their Devon Workshop, the medal is made of hallmarked solid silver and supplied ready to wear.

A £3.00 donation will be made to the Bevin Boys Association from the sale of each medal.

The Bevin Boys medal is available to Ballotees, Optants, Volunteers or next of kin called up between 1942 and 1948. There is no minimum length of service to be eligible for this medal but we do ask that you provide details of the training colliery and name of colliery worked, if known

The Bevin Boys Medal is currently available from:

Bigbury Mint, River Park, Ermington, Ivybridge, Devon, PL21 9NT

Telephone: 01548 830717 Fax: 01548 830046

E-mail: [info@bigburymint.com](mailto:info@bigburymint.com)

## The Bevin Boys scheme

The Bevin Boys scheme was introduced in 1943 by then Minister for Labour and National Service, Ernest Bevin, in response to an increasing shortage of labour in the coal mining industry. The scheme ran between 1943 and 1948 and involved recruiting men aged between 18 and 25 years to work in coal mines rather than serve in the armed forces. Some 48,000 men were either selected or volunteered under the scheme.

### Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks MP said:

"I am calling on all surviving Bevin Boys to come forward to claim this unique veterans badge as a tribute to their sacrifices during and after the Second World War. These heroes in our community helped to keep the coal fields running during the war and in the post-war reconstruction of Britain." "It is with honour and gratitude that we recognise their tremendous work with the award of this special badge. It is important that we never forget the sacrifices that were made both at home and abroad during the war. If you are a Bevin Boy, or you know someone who is, please come forward to claim this fitting tribute."

All Bevin Boys, be they ballottees, optants or volunteers, are eligible to apply. Applications will also be accepted from widows of Bevin Boys who passed away on or after the 20 June 2007, the date when the announcement of the badge was made. This is provided a copy of the marriage and death certificate are attached to the application form.

The first badges were issued in March, to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the demobbing of the last Bevin Boy.

- *From the 26th September 1942, men under the age of 25 could opt for underground work in mining as an alternative to military service.*
- *From the 18th September 1943, registrants eligible for call,.. up were specifically asked if they wished to be considered for placing in coalmining instead of the forces.*
- *By the 25th September 1943, 13,078 opted or volunteered for mining. of these 4,145 had subsequently withdrawn or proved unsuitable, with only 3,530 placed in coal mining, with the remainder still under consideration.*
- *On the 19th October 1943, Ernest Bevin the Minister of Fuel & Power announced that men with previous underground mining experience who were serving in the army at home were to be released for coalmining.*
- *Additionally it was proposed to direct another 50,000 men compulsory to the coal mines in the course of 1944.*
- *Subsequently a statement was made by the Minister of Labour & National Service in the house of commons on the 2nd December 1943 outlining compulsory recruitment of men for coalmining by means of balloting.*
- *On the 14th December 1943, the first of 33 fortnightly ballot draws took place with the last draw being cancelled due to the end of the war with Germany.*
- *Thereafter men called up for National Service were no longer subject to the ballot but could still opt or volunteer for work in the coalmines in lieu of service in the forces. this scheme continued until 1948.*

# THE FORGOTTEN CONSCRIPTS OF SIXTY YEARS AGO

By Warwick H Taylor, MBE,  
Vice President of The Bevin Boys Association

These young men could well be described as having served in the secret underground movement during the Second World War, but not in the sense that most people would imagine, for even today many have not heard of the term Bevin Boy.

Sixty years ago on the 2nd December 1943, Ernest Bevin the wartime Minister of Labour and National Service announced in the House of Commons a scheme that was to change the lives of many young men, by being directed to serve their National Service working underground in the coal mines of Britain.

When war was declared against Germany in September 1939, a large number of experienced miners were called up into the Forces, with others leaving to take up work in other higher paid industries. In the years leading up to 1943 various schemes were set up to recruit labour and thus increase coal production vital to the needs of the nation.

The release of ex miners in the Home Forces, the recall of retired miners, unemployed and young boys of school leaving age to make a career in coal mining were all tried, proving to be unsuccessful.

The only way of overcoming this serious situation was to conscript an additional 50,000 men to work underground in the coal mines over a period of eighteen months.

The system employed by the Minister was that of a ballot scheme whereby young men between the ages of 18 and 25 years, upon registering for National Service, would be selected according to the last digit of his registration number. Numbers would be drawn on a fortnightly basis with the first being drawn in the Minister's Office on the 14th December. The fact of having received any form of pre-service training in a Cadet Force would not grant the right for any exemption. Any refusal to comply with the Direction Order would inevitably result in a heavy fine or possible imprisonment under the Emergency Powers Act in force at the time.

Not all Bevin Boys were ballottees, as many had the opportunity at the time of call-up of choosing this form of employment in lieu of service in the Armed Forces and were so classified as Optants or Volunteers. However it must be clearly stated that Bevin Boys were not Conscientious Objectors because of this decision, an unfortunate stigma that has been a bone of contention ever since.

After medical examinations, travel warrants and instructions quickly followed to report to one of the thirteen Government Training Centre Collieries in England, Wales and Scotland.

Upon arrival at the assigned destination, a Ministry of Labour Official would allocate accommodation in either a purpose built Miners Hostel similar to an army camp, or billeted out to a private home all at a cost of £1.25 (twenty five shillings) per week deducted from an average wage of £3.50 (three pounds, ten shillings).

## THE FORGOTTEN CONSCRIPTS OF SIXTY YEARS AGO (contd.)

**Training** would last for a duration of four weeks and take the form of classroom lectures, surface and underground training as well as physical training, when at the end of this period allocation would be made to a colliery normally within the same region, where again accommodation would be similar to those at the training centre.

Bevin Boys were issued with a safety helmet, overalls and a pair of steel capped boots and like other miners carried a heavy miners safety lamp, a snap tin containing sandwiches and a water bottle.

The lamp would first be issued from the lamp room on production of a brass lamp check or token followed by a contraband search by the Banksman who was in charge of cage movements on the surface, to make sure that no person was concealing tobacco, cigarettes, matches or lighters all of which being strictly forbidden for obvious reasons with the ever present risk of explosion from methane gas or firedamp. The main purpose of the lamp is to detect any presence of gas although providing light.

Doubtless an Bevin Boy will never forget the initiation drop in the cage causing heavy pressure on the ear drums and possible nose bleeds. Upon emerging from the cage after descending anything up to a mile deep into the earths interior, invariably followed by a long walk on uneven terrain to finally arrive to work in dangerous and cramped conditions. However the majority of Bevin Boys worked on haulage or conveyor belts with only a few graduating to work on the coal face.

Most forms of haulage involved the use of cables for the movement of tubs or drams as they were known in Wales and in some collieries pit ponies were used. A pony would be an invaluable friend in the event of a miners safety lamp going out, to find a frightening situation of being in total darkness and a considerable distance from the pit bottom, by holding on to the tail of the pony, would lead the unfortunate miner back to safety. Pit ponies were stabled underground for life at some 90lleries, whereas others would allow them to come up to the surface for one week during the annual holiday period when the pit was closed.

Understandably the Bevin Boy was looked upon with suspicion by the regular miners who were suddenly faced with an invasion of young inexperienced men many who had never got their hands dirty in their lives and were forced into an industry in which they had no wish to be. Miners relied on bonuses earned by hard work, and would not relish working alongside a Bevin Boy who showed a complete lack of interest and did not pull his weight. Fortunately these fears and suspicions were soon dispelled proving their capability in spite of considerable absenteeism.

The work was hard in appalling conditions with no toilet facilities, working in areas that were either hot, cold, wet, draughty, dusty, dirty and smelly. The constant noise of machinery was also deafening with daily hazards of enduring cuts and bruises. Dangers and risks were numerous, with always the fear that perhaps there might be an explosion resulting in fire or even a rock fall. Allocation of jobs would normally be made by the Deputy, the official name given to the person in charge and it was always good policy to keep on the right side of him in order to avoid being allocated an unpopular job.

## THE FORGOTTEN CONSCRIPTS OF SIXTY YEARS AGO (contd.)

At the end of a shift a rush would be made back to the pit bottom where the person in charge of the cage movements known as the Onsetter would control the awaiting queue to get back into the fresh air and civilisation.

Some of the larger collieries had pit head baths in order to shower and change into clean clothes, but where facilities were not provided it would mean going back to the hostel or billets.

The Bevin Boy did not have a uniform and therefore only wore civilian clothes when off duty, which attracted considerable attention from the public prompting adverse remarks as to why not being in Navy, Army or Air Force uniform. Also being of military age, prompted suspicion as either being a draft dodger or deserter from the Forces or possible enemy agent with frequent challenging by the local Police.

With the ending of the Second World War in Europe, eventually a release scheme was introduced similar to that of the Forces, but Bevin Boys received no form of recognition or reward for their services to the war effort in which they played a vital part.

Whilst serving, all servicemen enjoyed NAAFI facilities with concessionary tobacco and cigarette rates and confectionary rations. When released from the Forces were allowed to keep their uniforms, kitted out with a demobilisation outfit, granted several weeks leave and received campaign medals. Also it was a mandatory requirement for civilian occupations to be held open to returning ex servicemen.

None of these applied to the Bevin Boys who were clearly identified as "civilians" and not servicemen in spite of all serving under the title of National Service.

A small number of Bevin Boys formed an Association during the war, but stood little chance of success due to lack of communication being isolated in different parts of the United Kingdom and the gradual release from the coal mining industry.

- It was not until 50 years later that a handful of Bevin Boys decided to form the Bevin Boys Association in 1989.
- In 1998 the Bevin Boys Association was granted the honour of parading in the Remembrance Day Parade at the Cenotaph in London, being the only civilians apart from London Transport allowed to participate, which has now become an annual event.
- Further recognition followed in 2000 when HM. The Queen unveiled The Home Front Memorial in Coventry to commemorate the role of all civilians including Bevin Boys who served the Nation during WWII.

Today, with the decline of the coal mining industry, the Bevin Boy will not be forgotten and has become part of our coal mining history.

**“I shall never forget my time working as one of the 50,000 Bevin Boys, or for the respect for the miners with whom I worked with in South Wales”**

For more information contact Warwick Taylor, MBE.  
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Bevin Boys veteran Warwick Taylor

**Warwick Taylor** is a war veteran with a difference. He didn't serve on the frontline, didn't fire a shot. His job was to serve at the coalface, with a shovel not a gun as his weapon..The Dorset veteran is one of thousands of conscripted miners who have been honoured for their contribution to the war effort. national service. In 1943, Bevin introduced a call up age for men to men to go into the mines instead of the armed services because there was such a shortage of coal.

Warwick was one of the recruits whose registration number was picked at random. At just 18 years old, he was forced to leave his home town of Harrow and head for the coal mines of South Wales. "It was pretty grim. I didn't like it at the time, although I realise in hindsight how essential the job was of course."

Warwick was one of 48,000 Bevin Boys who were balloted to work deep underground, digging coal in order to power the production of tanks, ships and aircraft for the war. Only 5,000 of these conscripted miners are still alive, and all are over 80 years old. They were only allowed to take part in the Remembrance Day celebrations as recently as 1998.

**But the government has finally seen fit to accept the vital role the Bevin Boys played in the war effort, much to Warwick's delight.**

Warwick is Vice President, Press Publicity, Public Relations. Author, Historian and Archivist. and now Chairman. He has a stock of a wide range of books on the subject of Bevin Boys written by him and other members of the Association.

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