

## **BOLTON REMEMBERS THE WAR**

**Transcript of interview with Roy Swannick (RS) • Bevin Boy**

**Interviewed by Ken Beevers (K) 14.11.2005**

**K: If I could begin Roy by just asking you your name?**

RS: Roy William Swannick.

**K: And when were you born Roy?**

RS: 1926.

**K: And whereabouts?**

RS: A place called Criccieth, North Wales

**K: And when did you come to the north of England?**

RS: When I was two month old.

**K: And whereabouts did you settle then?**

RS: A place called Wargrave, near Earlestown.

**K: But you've been in Bolton quite a long time, have you?**

RS: Forty year.

**K: Forty years.**

RS: Round about, yeah.

**K: So where did you go to school?**

RS: Newton-le-Willows.

**K: And when you left school, what did you do?**

RS: I worked on the railway.

**K: Did you leave school at 14?**

RS: Yeah.

**K: So your first job was on the railway?**

RS: Yeah.

**K: And how long did you work there?**

RS: 'Til I got my calling up papers.

**K: OK, well, we'll talk about your calling up papers. What happened when you got your calling up papers? And what year was that?**

RS: I were 18 at the time.

**K: So what happened then?**

RS: Well, what happened was, they sent me these calling up papers, and about a fortnight after I got the buff paper that come through the door saying that I had to go to the pit, so that were it then, all pit work. And we were called the World War Two Forgotten Heroes. After having signed up to go and fight for my country, a number was drawn at random by the Government Secretary. I was deemed to spend the rest of the war in the mines. We were named Bevin Boys after Ernest Bevin, the Minister of National Service and Labour. I felt I was missing out, because I had done five years in the Sea Cadets and trained on several naval ships. I wanted to follow my family's tradition of naval service, of forty years, but I had to go in the mine. You couldn't refuse, or you were sent in prison. So I went to Ifton colliery, my wage was 52 shilling a week, and my lodgings was 30 shilling a week, not much left to live on. I worked alongside vicar's sons, college students, all the time I were there. After all these years the government have decided to recognise us with a service medal. We had to pay for it ourselves! But servicemen released from the Army or the Navy or the Air Force had de-mob suits, paid leave and medals, we had nothing. The Bevin Boys were given no rewards at all, and all the information was destroyed in 1950.

**K: When were you de-mobbed?**

RS: 1948.

**K: And what did you do then?**

RS: I went to the pit, Cleworth Hall and I stopped there 'til it closed in nineteen... I can't remember when that closed, but from there I went to Gin Pit colliery as a stoker, and I stayed there until it closed down in 1966.

**K: And then, what did you do then?**

RS: I worked on the Council, gardening, and I retired in 1982, through illness. I'm still ill.

**K: So, although you were a Bevin Boy, you stayed working in the mines?**

RS: Yeah, on top.

**K: On top? Ahh, as a Bevin Boy you were underground, were you? Working alongside men doing their normal work?**

RS: Yeah. But they used to say it took six Bevin Boys to make a miner.

**K: Do you agree with that?**

RS: (laughs) No, no. It were hard work, especially when you'd never been down the pit before.

**K: It'd come as a shock to you?**

RS: Yeah, oh yeah.

**K: And what time did you have to start work?**

RS: We used to catch a bus, six o'clock in the morning to get to Ifton colliery, and we used to be going down about half past six. And we used to be going home in the dark and going to work in the dark, sometimes. A job I didn't like.

**K: But there was nothing you could do?**

RS: No, couldn't do anything about it. Either that or imprisonment! Better be down the pit! (laughs)

**K: Did you think you were unlucky then?**

RS: Well, yeah, I mean, I weren't the only one. There were 50,000 of us. I mean, they didn't want to go down the pits. But what happened, they took all the pit men in the Army, you see, so that's why the Ministry of Labour did that.

**K: How many Bevin Boys worked alongside you?**

RS: There were four, four of us together. But where I lived in Oswestry I think there were about ten Bevin Boys living in Oswestry, the others were round Chirk Green area.

**K: There were one or two famous Bevin Boys weren't there? Because Nat Lofhouse was a Bevin Boy**

RS: He were, yeah, aye Natty, aye.

**K: I think he worked at Mosley Common didn't he?**

RS: He did, yeah. He'd probably tell a few tales.

**K: And was there quite a lot of pressure to... on the production?**

RS: No, not really, no.

**K: Because coal would be needed, wouldn't it?**

RS: Yeah, they used to pay us in cocoa tins. Money was in a cocoa tin, empty it out like that, what a shock.

**K: How much did you say it was?**

RS: Fifty two shilling a week.

**K: In a cocoa tin? What, they'd come round with a cocoa tin?**

RS: No you had to go queue up at a window. They'd shout your number out and they'd give you this tin with this money in like, you know. (laughs)

**K: At the end of the war, you thought, I don't want to work underground, I'll work on top?**

RS: Yeah, that's only place I got get a job, you see, there. So I worked there, Cleworth.

**K: It didn't seem as the War was on really, apart from, bit out of the way really wasn't it?**

RS: It were yeah. The only bomb I heard were in Wargrave and I sat on a school wall, and then it went off with a bang.

**K: Yeah, did you have much leave? Or holiday, or..?**

RS: No, no.

**K: Just keep working.**

RS: I think you could come home about once every five week or something like that, but you had to pay your own way.

**K: And did they provide any boots, uniform?**

RS: Nothing, no, you had to get your own, aye.

**K: What were the men paid? If you like, the regular miners?**

RS: Oh, I've no idea.

**K: More than you?**

RS: Oh a lot more yes.

**K: That would be quite a good wage really, I suppose I wartime.**

RS: I suppose that they were paying us Army rate.

**K: Which doesn't seem fair does it? For the work you did?**

RS: No, really speaking, I reckon it should have been more money and a leave, like they used to have, like in the Army, you know, paid leave. Nothing like that

**K: And some recognition afterwards, as well**

RS: Yeah, well Brian Clare said yesterday: 'Swanky medals.' I said, 'That cost me £116' 'Never' he said, 'The skinny buggers!' They should have done something about it shouldn't they? After all this time. I mean, Land Army, they've never had nothing, and they were all doing like a national service weren't they?

**K: Where you were staying, was that quite near where you were working?**

RS: No, it was a few miles away.

**K: Because it wasn't your home, was it?**

RS: No.

**K: So did they find somewhere for you to live?**

RS: Yeah, I lived with a Mrs Cheeseman, it were somewhere near the bridge as you go into Oswestry, the railway bridge, and yet I'd all relations in Oswestry and I'd never go and live with them.

**K: Well, thank you very much Roy.**

**END**