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Changing Barnsley: from mining town to university town

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

Cathy Doggett  
University Campus Barnsley

### ***'The past we inherit, the future we build'* NUM Banner Motto**

It is an honour to write the introduction to this book which is the result of celebrations that were held in October 2007 to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the opening of an iconic building which had its origins in the coal mining industry as the largest Mining College in Britain, evolving in subsequent years to become, finally, home to the University Centre Barnsley (now renamed University Campus Barnsley) in the heart of the town. The University is very proud to be housed in such a magnificent building which, if the walls could speak, would have many tales to tell from across the years and indeed some from the present. As such, the celebrations of its history and current status were about more than bricks and mortar, they were about the people who have worked, taught and studied there during those seventy five years.

The University Centre Barnsley is part of the University of Huddersfield. The main aim of the Centre is to combine educational development through widening participation with objectives for urban and social regeneration. Our goal is to offer Higher Education to students within their own community and in the spirit of partnership work to increase aspirations, develop courses and contribute to the local economy. Nevertheless, even though an enormous financial investment has been made in creating what is now a state-of-the-art university centre, the warmth and character of the building remains unchanged. Anyone entering the premises cannot fail to experience a sense of belonging and welcoming, perhaps a legacy that perpetuated the idea of the 'Voices in the Stone', a permanent exhibition which is housed within the Centre and was funded jointly by the Arts Council and the University of Huddersfield. In fact one can almost hear the echoes of past generations of students and staff.

Throughout the four weeks of celebrations the Centre opened its doors to the public, and during that time we were visited by many members of the community. These celebrations comprised the exhibition 'Voices in the Stone' as the central focus. To enhance the exhibition and mark the central subject area taught within the building over many years, mining, the public were invited to take a stroll down memory lane through a second exhibition of coal mining and coal mining education memorabilia, kindly loaned to the Centre by the National Coal Mining Museum for England and the University of Huddersfield Archives. In addition, events were staged that brought history to life for both adults and children, through living history performances staged by the National Coal Mining Museum.

In relation to the present, one of the objectives of the University Centre is to raise the aspirations of the children and young people of Barnsley, in particular

towards progression to University. The celebrations presented an opportunity to foster an interest in the Arts. To this end a competition was offered across all the schools, the College and Community Learning Groups in the Barnsley borough. Education establishments were invited to enter the work of children and young people. The competition was called 'My Barnsley' and pupils were asked to produce a piece of art work (in a medium of their choice) and/or creative writing that reflected Barnsley from their perspective. Our thanks are due to locally-connected individuals for judging that competition, namely, artists Ashley Jackson and Graham Ibbeson along with local historian and writer Mel Dyke, archaeologist and Egyptologist Joanne Fletcher and Robert Cockcroft, editor of *The Barnsley Chronicle*. This will now become an annual event.

Finally, the seventy-fifth anniversary was an opportunity to launch a series of public lectures that were the first in what will be another annual event here at the University Centre. This provides the public of Barnsley with the opportunity to hear eminent speakers who are experts in their subject area. Interestingly, as the reader will see in chapter three, these are actually not the first public lectures to be held here in Barnsley, the concept having been introduced here as far back as 1837. The content of this book includes a selection of chapters based on those lectures that were directly concerned with the history of this building or related topics.

In chapter two, Professor Tim Thornton, writer and historian, sets the scene around the history of the building, but more than that he provides a fascinating insight into the events leading to its opening in 1932. He captures a unique culture, steeped in history while demonstrating the forging of strong links between those involved with the mining industry in Barnsley and a commitment to the education and training of those working in that industry, a commitment that was to be sustained until the closure of the coal mines in the area. There is no doubt that the sense of partnership at that time is reflected throughout periods of the building's history, and that spirit of partnership is indeed very evident today.

In chapter three, educationist Martyn Walker takes us through the history and development of adult education in Barnsley within the national context. He discusses the somewhat turbulent history of the Mechanics Institute, its closing and opening on several occasions, moving from one set of premises to another amidst competition from other education providers of the times, until finally in the mid-eighteen-hundreds seeing the foundations finally laid and charting this success through the establishment of the Mining and Technical College, through the days as a wider technical college as part of the Barnsley College to the present day as a Centre for Higher Education, now part of the University of Huddersfield.

Moving on to the building itself, that is University Centre Barnsley, and those whose lives have been touched by the activities therein, through three parts of a century, senior lecturer Lynn Rollin takes us through another journey, but this

time through the eyes of an artist. She describes the build-up to what is now a permanent exhibition of photography and creative writing within the Centre, 'Voices in the Stone'. This celebrates those who have worked, studied or contributed to its development in some way. Her starting point is the unique importance and significance of our memories and story telling. She links this to how 'the seeds' of the exhibition were sown quite simply from the foundation stone at the side of the building, seeds which grew into full-blown celebrations of the building and its people. Lynn links the project to the art world, taking us through the process of photography and creative writing that is based upon some of the characters mentioned earlier who, generation by generation, have connections with the building and who have all contributed to the warmth and character therein which one cannot fail to sense on entering it. The chapter comprises a selection of the photographs taken from the exhibition and linked through pieces of creative writing based upon what former and current staff and students have to say. This truly gives the reader a flavour of what 'the voices in the stone' might well say about the past seventy five years if they could speak out loud.

Pete Birkby, senior lecturer in music and a professional musician, wrote chapter five following initial thoughts and the inspiration provided by his work on the composition of 'Voices', written and recorded at the University Centre here in Barnsley and played on the evening of the seventy-fifth anniversary as part of the celebrations. In order to write this piece, the composer researched seventy five years of music 1932 to 2007. As the reader will see, in this chapter the writer tells us about the process, his thoughts during that time and how the music was developed. A copy of the music on CD can be found in this book. In addition to the music of the era, reflections on the final composition, the creation of the audio experience for the opening night and exhibition give the reader a glimpse into the world of the composer.

In chapter six, now moving out of the building but within in the same era, Jayne Dowle, writer, columnist and journalist, discusses aspects of the town of Barnsley. Taking us through the 1930's and providing a 'feel' for the changes taking place in the town at that time concerning, in her own words, the town development, the evolution of civic pride and the identity of Barnsley in the 1930's. As will be seen this fits well with the next chapter each providing different perspectives on the rich and dynamic social context within which the Mining College developed.

In the final chapter Keith Laybourn, born in Barnsley, the son of a coal miner and now Professor of History at the University of Huddersfield and one of the leading historians of twentieth-century Britain working today, provides a link between himself and Barnsley, giving a brief overview of the town from his perspective during his early years before moving on to explain how gambling was part of his early life and the culture in which he was raised: a chapter driven by personal

and professional interest, and the strong sense of place which this book celebrates.

Giving us a brief taste of his childhood experience in one of Barnsley's communities, the writer moves on to a wider context, tracing the history of gambling during a significant part of the twentieth century. He demonstrates the role of a number of key parties, political and other, and how they influenced changes in the laws governing what appears to have been a popular pastime and feature of the times for a significant part of society. He clearly demonstrates how changes in law tended to affect working class people in the main ending with the changes that post Second World War liberalisation brought; this is a truly fascinating read about past times and culture.