

**WELLCOME TRUST PROGRAMME AWARD**

**DISABILITY AND INDUSTRIAL  
SOCIETY: A COMPARATIVE  
CULTURAL HISTORY OF BRITISH  
COALFIELDS, 1780-1948**

**FIRST ANNUAL REPORT**

**1 October 2011 – 30 September 2012**

## **Introduction**

*Disability and Industrial Society: A Comparative Cultural History of British Coalfields, 1780-1948* is funded over five years by a Wellcome Trust Programme Award of £972,501. In the application for the project, we promised to provide the Advisory Board with an Annual Report. When the first Advisory Board met in December 2011, the project was less than three months old. It has now entered its second year. Therefore, we present the First Annual Report for the period 1 October 2011 to 30 September 2012.

## **Staffing**

The application included three named research associates to work in the three coalfields that form the comparative dimension of the project:

- Dr Ben Curtis for the South Wales Coalfield under the mentorship of Dr Steve Thompson at Aberystwyth University;
- Dr Victoria Brown for the North East Coalfield under the joint mentorship of Professor Don MacRaild of Northumbria University and Dr Vicky Long of Glasgow Caledonian University; and
- Dr Angie Turner for the Scottish Coalfield under the mentorship of Professor Arthur McIvor.

During the spring of 2012, two research fellowships and a PhD studentship were advertised, all to be held in Swansea. After a process of selection and interview, the following appointments were made:

- Dr Dan Blackie to work on the period 1780-1880 under the mentorship of Dr David Turner in the Department of History and Classics, College of Arts and Humanities;
- Mike Mantin to work on the period 1880-1948 under the mentorship of Professor Anne Borsay in the Department of Inter-professional Studies, College of Human and Health Sciences; and
- Alex Rees to work on a PhD thesis examining disability in coalfield literature under the supervision of Dr Kirsti Bohata, Department of English, College of Arts and Humanities.

Dan, Mike and Alex took up their positions on 1 October 2012.

## **Work Programmes**

The task of producing a comparative cultural history of the British coal industry is a big intellectual challenge. Our research question – How important was industrialization in shaping conceptions and experiences of disability? – requires us to address at least four key themes:

- The effects of economic development and technological change;
- The role of medical and welfare services;
- The influence of politics, trade unionism and social relations; and
- The implications of these historical factors for the literary genre of coalfield narrative.

To tackle these themes effectively, we have expanded the milestones listed in the original application to include start as well as finish dates, and developed systematic work programmes for the research associates and the research fellows.

In the first month, each research associate pursued an individual reading plan, designed to fill in any gaps in their historical knowledge across the spectrum of the project. They then began to consult the rich and diverse primary sources relevant to the project.

Each category of source was allocated a time period, which reflected an estimate of the volume of material. At the beginning of each period, a scoping report was prepared to list the records available and to provide a guide to their systematic consultation. The materials were then processed and added to the NVivo database that forms the repository for our primary sources.

The research associates followed the same timetable in each of the three coalfield areas, covering the poor law, medicine and health, trades unions and trades councils, providential and permanent relief societies during 2011-12.

The same approach will be adopted in subsequent years and for the research fellows.

## **Training**

The project is using a CAQDAS [Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analyses Software] package called NVivo to manage the primary sources being collected. Training and

consultation is being delivered by Dr Paul Nash in Swansea University's Centre for Innovative Ageing. The South Wales Team attended a course at the beginning of the project and this was repeated in December 2011 during the Full Team meeting in Swansea. The course was also undertaken by the research fellows and the PhD student in October 2012.

### **Programme Management**

Throughout the year, mentors met regularly with their research associates. A South Wales Team meeting was also held each month, at which monthly reports from the research associates were received and discussed, along with the scoping reports at the beginning of each new research phase.

In addition, two Full Team meetings were convened in December 2011 in Swansea to coincide with the first Advisory Board and in May 2012 in Aberystwyth to coincide with the first Public Lecture.

### **Advisory Board**

The first Advisory Board was a lively and productive gathering, and we are grateful to all members for their inputs. The minutes of the first meeting were considered by the South Wales Team at its January meeting and by the first meeting of the Public Engagement Panel in March 2012. The Advisory Board meeting stimulated discussion of the definition of disability and emphasised the need to look at the impact of disablement not just on workers but on their families, carers and communities. These are important ideas which will be looked at in the research.

The Advisory Board also made many valuable suggestions for public engagement and for influencing public policy. In addition to the activities described under Public Engagement below, David Turner has worked with the producer Elizabeth Burke, of the production company Loftus Audio, and presenter Peter White to develop a 10 part series on the History of Disability which has been commissioned by BBC Radio 4 and scheduled for broadcast in May 2013. The series will highlight the work of disability historians at Swansea through David's role as academic consultant and via interview contributions by Anne Borsay and Mike Mantin, giving further publicity to the work being undertaken as part of the project.

Project members are now looking to engage more directly with policy makers and the team would welcome suggestions from the Advisory Board on how to develop this aspect of the work.

### **Academic Outputs**

No publications were scheduled for the first year of the project. However, each research associate has identified the theme of his/her first article, jointly authored with the mentor, which is due for submission in April 2013. The working titles are as follows:

- Ben Curtis and Steve Thompson, ‘The provision and prevalence of artificial limbs in south Wales coalfield society, 1897-1948’;
- Victoria Brown and Vicky Long, ‘Changing conceptions and understandings of Miners’ Nystagmus, c.1913-1939’; and
- Angie Turner and Arthur McIvor, ‘Disability, gender and the Scottish coalfields in the mid-nineteenth century’.

In addition, Victoria Brown was a guest speaker at the Centre for the History of Medicine and Disease Seminar Series, Durham University, on 27 April 2012. Her paper was entitled ‘From Darkness into Light: Miners’ Nystagmus and the Workmen’s Compensation Acts, 1897-1934’.

### **Public Lecture**

The first Public Lecture was hosted by Aberystwyth University on 9 May 2012. The speaker was Professor Steven King of Leicester University, whose title was “‘We must be rid of these waste people’: The Experiences of the Disabled Poor in the Industrial Districts of England and Wales, 1790s to 1920s’. The lecture attracted an audience of over 70 people. It was interpreted in sign language and recorded as a podcast.

The second Public Lecture will take place at Northumbria University in Newcastle on 15 May 2013. The speaker will be Professor Peter Kirby of Glasgow Caledonian University.

### **Public Engagement Panel**

The Public Engagement Panel is chaired by Andrew Hull and comprises the South Wales Team plus four members of the Advisory Board: Steph Mastoris (National Waterfront Museum), Elwyn Williams (National Library of Wales), Elisabeth Bennett (Richard Burton

Archives, Swansea University) and Sian Williams (South Wales Miners' Library, Swansea University). We are grateful for their contributions.

The Panel met twice during the year: in March and in July. Most of its energy has been spent on planning the **Roadshow**. This has been a more complicated event to organize than we originally anticipated. Therefore, it did not happen in June 2012. However, it will take place on Saturday 23 March 2013 at the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea.

The Panel will now arrange the **Professional Workshop** for the autumn of 2013.

There has also been preliminary discussion of the **exhibition** on industrial disability to be mounted at the National Waterfront Museum in 2015/16.

### **Disabled People's Panel**

The Disabled People's Panel proved more difficult to set up than we had envisaged. A number of calls for volunteer participants were issued, but few replies received. Collaboration with Welsh Focus, initially via its founder member Damian Chick, was more fruitful and led to a number of volunteers coming forward and to publicity for the project via the organisation's website.

The first meeting occurred in July. David Turner chairs the Panel and Anne Borsay attends, together with other members of the South Wales Team on an occasional basis. The disabled representatives are Damian Chick (Centre for Welfare Reform); Mark Philips (Welsh Focus); Henry Langen (Welsh Focus); Sue Kent; Jim Kimpton and Ricky Stevenson (Swansea University postgraduate student).

At the first meeting, a wide range of issues were discussed. Participants were keen to establish their role in the future development of the project. Discussion of public engagement took place, and future meetings will be used to involve members of the panel in shaping key events such as the exhibition at the National Waterfront Museum.

There were also suggestions of ways in which the Panel might be a launch pad for future projects involving collaboration between the university and disabled people. Two possible areas that will be explored further are the prospect of establishing a Disability Studies archive for Wales, and collaborations with family historians to highlight the importance of disability in people's ancestry.

## **Publicity**

There was relatively little publicity for the project during its first year, with a modest web presence on the sites of the partner universities.

Press statements were released in early October 2011, with variations to reflect the different institutional involvement. These statements led to coverage on the BBC Wales website.

A short article on the project by Anne Borsay also appeared in Issue 50 of *Wellcome History*, published in summer 2012; and Ben Curtis was interviewed on the BBC Radio Wales programme, *Good Morning Wales* on 24 September 2012, where he commented on the history of workmen's compensation.

Following the appointment of the research fellows, work is now underway on a dedicated website. This will be previewed at the 2012 Advisory Board and launched in January 2013.

## **Conclusion**

The project had a very successful first year and remains on track to deliver its objectives. We are grateful to the other team members, and to Advisory Board and the Disabled People's Panel, for their enthusiastic support, and look forward to another good year in 2012/13.

Anne Borsay, Principal Investigator and Co-Director

David Turner, Co-Investigator and Co-Director