

# DISABILITY IN COALFIELDS LITERATURE:

A comparative study of South Wales, Scotland and North East England, c. 1900-1948

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← Patients at the "Rest," Porthcawl courtesy of the South Wales Coalfield Collection

## LITERATURE PROJECT RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The literature strand is in its first year and is focusing on a mapping disability in coalfields literature in the three areas and identifying key research themes and questions.

- What were the characteristics of disability in coalfield literature between c.1900 and 1948?
- How did narrative representations engage with the economic, social, gendered and political history of disabled people?
- How has the changing imagery of disability been used to create, challenge, and debate broader cultural identities?
- To what extent do regional differences, important historical events and changes to mining practices and politics have an impact on these findings?

“It was hard for a man in the bloom of health to go out to the pit in the morning and before midday to be made a helpless cripple.”

Joe Corrie, *Black Earth* (1939)

“His father's toil had been so excessive as to make him stoop like a victim of curvature. That had been just as well, because his father's wages were so low it would have been impossible to count them standing up straight.”

Gwyn Thomas, *Sorrow For Thy Sons* [19xx] (1986)

“In the past it's as if we fought something hearty and full of life, which the industry was, but now it seems we're fighting something gone rotten, something kept going on crutches and nursing.”

Rhys Davies, *Jubilee Blues* (1938)

“The people who get ground down in wars get sung over and remembered. The state buried them after they are dead. We are not dead yet and the state's trying to bury us already.”

Gwyn Thomas, *Sorrow For Thy Sons* [19xx] (1986)

## ECONOMY, SOCIETY, POLITICS AND HISTORY

- Is there a relationship between economic recession, unemployment, class and representations of disability?
- How does disability interact with the politics of the literature?
- What role does healthcare provision play?
- Is disability being used as a metaphor for wider society?
- Is there an interaction between disabled veterans and miners? Did WWI and WWII influence representations of disability?

## GENDER AND THE BODY

- To what extent are disabled women present and how are they depicted?
- Is disability gendered and how does it relate to idealised masculinity/ femininity?
- How does the eroticisation of the 'perfect' body interact with depictions of disability?

“It was going to be a terrible thing if women couldn't bear with their husbands when they were brought home from the pit in a helpless condition.”

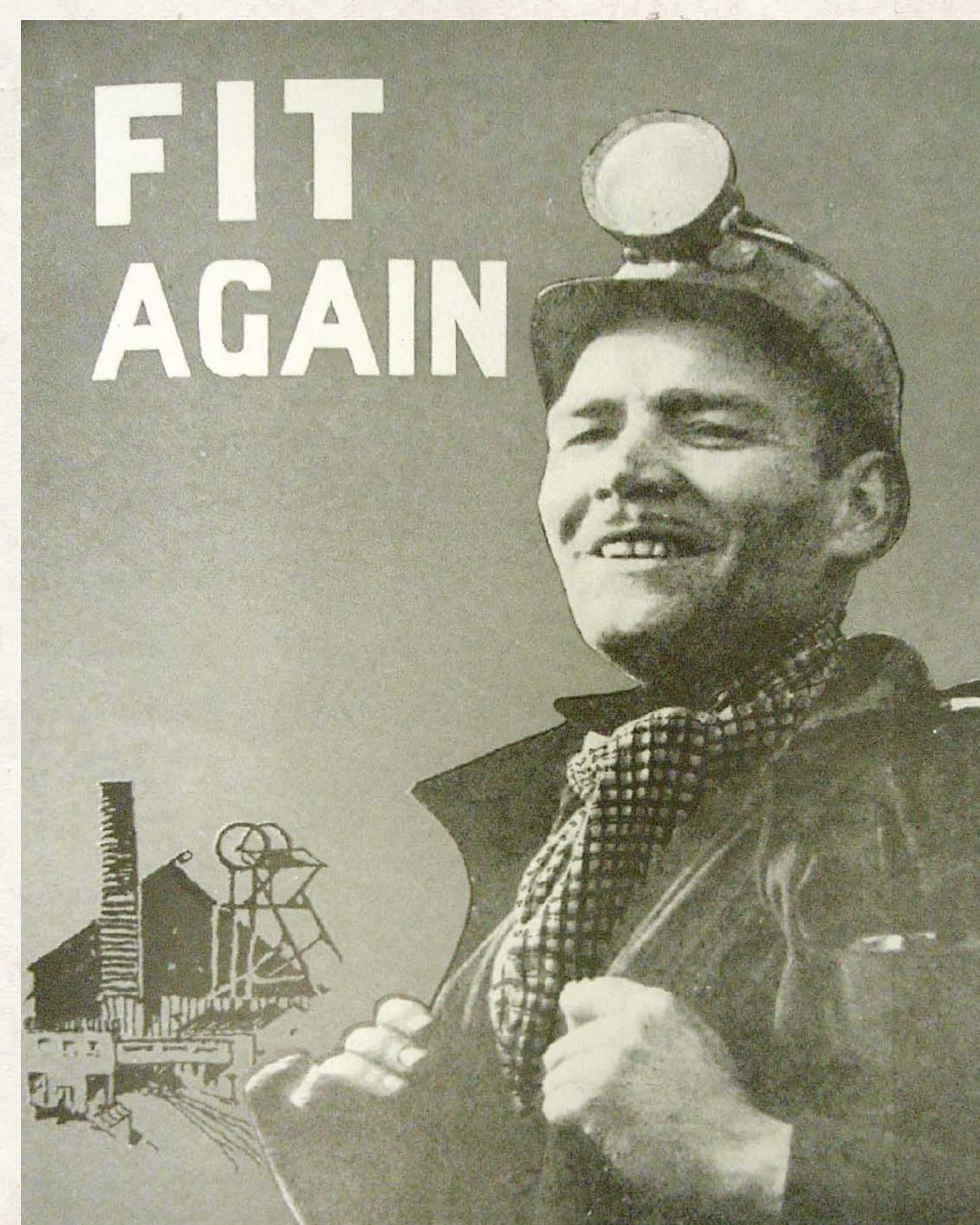
Joe Corrie, *Black Earth* (1939)

“Olive was what is called a good invalid.”

Gwyn Jones, *Times Like These* (1936)

“How precious was the freedom of healthy limbs striding over the hills, one's body beautifully intact. To see, to hear, to feel - how precious was each faculty.”

Rhys Davies, *The Red Hills* (1932)



Rehabilitation for Injured Miners  
Uddingston Out-Patients' Centre  
MINERS WELFARE COMMISSION

## ABOUT THE PROJECT:

This PhD is part of the literary strand of a comparative cultural history project, funded by the Wellcome Trust. The five year project, *Disability and Industrial Society: A Comparative Cultural History of British Coalfields, 1780-1948*, is led by Swansea University and involves a team of 14 researchers working across five institutions.

## Disability and Industrial Society:

A Comparative Cultural History of British Coalfields, 1780-1948

[www.dis-ind-soc.org.uk](http://www.dis-ind-soc.org.uk)