DIGNITY IN WORK

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Category: Politics

I was very moved by the story of the closure of the Tower Pit in South Wales. This is the last deep coal mine in the Wales coalfield and it's closure marks the end of an era. In a way, it's hard to be sad at the end of an industry which was physically so demanding and which exacted such a high price of human life and health. From my childhood, I remember men, the age I am now wheezing to catch their breath because of the *dust*. It wasn't an easy job being a pitman. But the story of the Tower Pit is inspiring. When the Government of the day closed the Tower Pit, saying it was uneconomic, many of the men who worked their invested their redundancy money in buying the colliery themselves and keeping it running.

Their gamble paid off, the pit was a success. For thirteen years they extracted coal from the uneconomic pit, repaying their investment many times over. But the real success was more than that, they kept their dignity. They didn't allow their workplace to be closed down by some faceless person hundreds of miles away, they kept it open and they made a go of it. Now that the reserves are really finished, they can close the pit with their heads held high. Well done lads!

A couple of thoughts spring to mind from this story.

- It saddens me that we seem to have forgotten that the wealth and strength of this country was built by blokes like these: strong blokes, with grimy faces who dig things out of the earth or build things. I commented on this in more detail a year or so ago.
- The other thing that strikes me is that most churches I know in the UK are more or less completely uncontaminated by working class people. You can't throw stones in church for fear of hitting doctors, teachers, lecturers and the like - but there are far fewer factory workers, labourers and such like. It's not just that the balance of the country has changed - and people like me have become middle class. We don't seem to know how to reach a whole sector of

society and as a scion of that part of society, it worries me. This story from Streetlight gives one example of trying to break down this barrier.
- Lastly on this theme, I'm just getting into The Cross and the Colliery by Tom Wright. This is a series of Easter reflections for a small town that had suffered a major mining accident and then had lost it's coal mine and main source of employment. It's an excellent little book which looks at how the Easter Story is truly relevant to the human condition.