THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF DAVID SWALLOW
Life and Times of a Miners Leader

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In 1828 a young man called John Dixon started work in the coalmines of Yorkshire, he was just 7 years old. When he was 16, in 1844, as strikes, spread across the British Coalfield, young John Dixon attended a meeting to listen to the Yorkshire strike leader David Swallow address miners. Dixon was so enthused and inspired that it determined him to emulate Swallow, which he did by becoming Secretary of the West Yorkshire Miners' Association later from 1867 to 1876. [1]

DAVID SWALLOW was born at East Ardsley, Wakefield in 1817. He started work in the coalmines at the age of just 8, but David was destined to become a miners' leader of rare quality. He was a leader with all the abilities necessary to inspire men and a great orator who could draw large crowds whenever and wherever he spoke.

In the 16 years, from 1826 to 1842, David toiled in Britain's worst, and most horrendous mining conditions of the 19th Century but found time to seek out his natural desire to educate himself. Seeing injustice all around him, he became a Chartist which he must have seen as the answer to the continuing oppression that blighted his early life.

Crucially, David Swallow is credited with being the founder of the first national miners' union. He played a leading role in the first national strike of 1844. He also has to be credited with being the first miners' leader to organise county-wide union organisation in both Yorkshire and Lancashire coalfields.

The mystery is why, suddenly, at the age of 37 he abandoned his life as a miners' leader when, after being in attendance at the "*Committee on Accidents in Coal Mines"*, in London, he *"entered into other pursuits and settled down"* and why Frank Machin, author of *"The Yorkshire Miners"*, says, "*That is the last we hear of him"*[2]

Maybe, because he left the scene at a comparatively early age, he has, apart from casual mentions by a few historians, not appeared on the radar of most.

What were the other pursuits he entered into and where did he settle down? Why did he, in 1853, after 11 years as a very distinguished miners' leader, appear to have cut all ties with his former calling? It was not until 1873 that Alexander MacDonald, in a speech, tells us about him entering *"into other pursuits"* and settling down.

Did Swallow, as Machin and others claim, become the Secretary of the first national miners' union at a meeting, at the Griffin Inn, in Wakefield, in 1842?

Many of these questions can now be answered, but inevitably others, 175 years after he rose to prominence in 1842, are still left open to speculation.

Frank Machin in his book, published by the Yorkshire NUM in 1958, says Swallow was from Nelson Row, East Moor, Wakefield. We now know this is incorrect.

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[1] Swallow's evidence to the Parliamentary Committee on Accidents in Coal Mines

[2] Frank Machin, The Yorkshire Miners, Chapter 3, page 66

The IGI Index[3], seen in Wakefield Library, records David's baptism as having taken place on 9 November 1817. His father was Joseph Swallow and his mother was called Sarah. He was born at East Ardsley, Wakefield. Not East Moor.

Census Returns

Census Returns are released every 100 years in 10 year intervals starting in 1841, the most recent being the 1911 Census Return. The 1841 Census Return refers to him living with his father, Joseph, a coal miner, two brothers, James,15, and Joshua, 11, both coal miners. There were two sisters Hannah, 15, and Elizabeth, 13, neither of the sisters were employed. The family lived at Nelson Row, East Ardsley, Wakefield.

David is recorded as being 20 years of age in the 1841 Census Return and, at the time, he was a coal miner.

The 1841 Census was taken over a period of four years, from 1837 to 1841. In 1837 David would have been 20, and we are confident, given the date of his baptism, in 1817, that the Census enumerator visited David's home, at Nelson Row, East Ardsley, Wakefield, in 1837.

David's mother, Sarah, does not appear on the 1841 Census Return, having died on 31 January 1837 prior to the Census having been taken.

David's father, Joseph, married Eliza Holmes, in 1838, in Wakefield, and the 1851 Census shows them as living at Whitwood, Castleford, having moved from East Ardsley but David, at this stage, had left home. Since neither Sarah nor Eliza appeared in the 1841 Census Return it is clear evidence, that in the case of the Swallow household, for the purposes of the 1841 Census Return, it was compiled in 1837 following Sarah's death and before Joseph's second marriage in 1838.

Later Census Returns all refer to David having been born at East Ardsley or Ardsley or in one instance, simply Wakefield.

The 1851 Census Return records David Swallow's employment as *"Miners' Agent".* He was living as a lodger with Betty Ball and her family of two sons and two daughters in Bolton, Lancashire. During this time, he would have been working as a Miners' Agent/Missionary in Lancashire and paid by the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, the MAGBI.

David does not appear on the 1891 Census Return and a David Swallow is recorded as having died in 1885, in West Derby, Liverpool, Lancashire. He would have been 68.

It can be seen from the 1841 Census Return, that David's youngest brother, Joshua, was already working as a coal miner at the age of 11, in 1837, well before the Mines and Collieries Act of 1842, which outlawed the employment underground of females of any age and children under the age of 10.

[3] International Genealogical Index (IGI)

David Swallow began work in the coal mines at the age of 8, probably in 1826 or 1827. At a miners' meeting at Smallthorne, near Stoke-on-Trent on 24 September 1843. A crowd of 1,200 were present with 30 or 40 police and Captain Lance on horseback. Swallow is reported as saying that: "He was but an unlettered man, having been sent down the pit when he was but 8 years of age. He went to a day school but a fortnight and the little he had learnt was at a Sunday school"[4]. His father and two brothers, would also have worked in the coal mines from a very tender age. His sisters, Hannah and Elizabeth, it seems, were spared the cruel indignity, suffered by many young girls at the time, of working in the mines as children, probably because they had a father and three brothers working and earning sufficient to look after the entire household.

Life in the mines for young children, in many cases babies, both girls and boys, in the 19th Century, beggars belief.

"Instances occur in which these children are taken into the mines to work as early as four years of age, sometimes at five, and between five and six, not infrequently between six and seven, and often from seven to eight, while from eight to nine is the ordinary age at which employment in these mines commences."

"In several districts female children begin to work in these mines at the same early ages as the males" and "in the districts in which females are taken down into the coal mines, both sexes are employed together in precisely the same kind of labour, and work for the same number of hours; that the girls and boys, and the young women, and even married women and women with child, commonly almost naked, and all men, in many mines quite naked; and that all classes of witnesses bear testimony to the demoralising influence of the employment of females underground."[5]

Other sources claim: *"Children as young as three or four were employed, with both sexes contributing to the work."*[6]

Horrendous as it was for these very young girls it does not in any way detract from the horrors faced by young boys, such as David Swallow, in Britain's coalmines.

The First National Miners' Union

On or around 7 September 1842, David left his work as a miner, dismissed from the colliery at which he worked for agitating for an increase in wages.[7]

[4] Colliers' Meeting at Smallthorne, 24 September 1843.

[5] The 1843 report, *The Physical and Moral Condition of the Children and Young Persons employed in Mines and Manufactures*, is an off-shoot publication from the official Report of the Children's Employment Commission of 1842.

[6] North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers, 2007. "Ages at which children and young persons are employed in coal mines."

[7] Swallow's evidence to the Parliamentary Committee on Accidents in Coal Mines

He was probably blacklisted and unable to find work at any nearby collieries. His victimisation in no way deterred him and probably inspired him. Machin describes him as the founder of the first miners' national union and goes on to say:

"His work and importance have not been recognised except by Alexander McDonald" and that "Swallow was one of the few working miners whose testimony to the Children's Employment Commission was outstanding."[8]

Alexander MacDonald, became a Lib/Lab MP. Born in Scotland, he started work in the mines at the age of eight, and during his time as an MP fought for improvements in mine legislation. He rated Swallow, as a leader *"above Martin Jude,"*[9] who was one of the most highly regarded of miners' leaders in Northumberland in the 19th Century.

Continuing, McDonald, referring to the leaders of the 1844 strikes said, "One cannot take time to comment on them all – there were the Judes, the Grays, the Swallows, the Tetlows, and others … Mr. Swallow was by far the strongest man of the party."

Parliamentary Committee on Accidents in Coal Mines

Swallow's evidence to the Parliamentary Committee on Accidents in Coal Mines, on 4 July, 1853, when answering questions from the Chairman, Edward J. Hutchins, is revealing:[10]

2468. Chairman: Have you been practically engaged in mining?
Swallow. I worked 16 years in coal mines.

2469. Chairman: How long have you ceased to work?
Swallow: The last time I worked was on the 7th September 1842.

This would mean that David started work in the mines, in 1826, having been born in 1817. David, apparently said he started work in the mines at the age of just 8. This would be true if he started work before his 9th birthday in 1826.

2470. Chairman: Is that the time you first began to be their agent?
Swallow: It was some few weeks previously; but I was engaged by men in collieries which I worked at locally, so that I have been engaged ever since the 7th September, but not in the capacity of agent.

David had attended a meeting in Wakefield on 1 August 1842 at which he took responsibility for writing to the coal owners inviting them to a meeting on 15 August 1842 to discuss wages and other issues. This might be what he means by "engaged". He was still employed in the mines according to his evidence above. It may be that this precipitated his dismissal on 7 September 1842 and, thereafter, him being "engaged" and later employed as Agent and Secretary of the Miners' Philanthropic Society at a meeting on 7 November 1842.

[8] Frank Machin, The Yorkshire Miners, Chapter 3, page 45
[9] Frank Machin, The Yorkshire Miners, Chapter 3, page 45
[10] Reports from Committees. By Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons

2471. Chairman: Is your practical knowledge of the workmen confined to one colliery, or have you worked at a good many?
Swallow: I have worked at a good many.

2472. Chairman: Have you ever worked out of your own district? — Yes, I have worked in some parts of Lancashire, and I have worked at Bradford, in Yorkshire, and Wakefield; principally about Wakefield.

David Swallow was sharp, quick of wit, and could think on his feet. He showed no deference to anyone. His answer to another question demonstrates that.

2491. Chairman: In answer to question 1,062 of the Minutes of Evidence taken before the committee of 1852, Mr. Darlington says, that your union is almost exploded; is that true?
Swallow: No; the explosion has been at his colliery.

Then this in respect of the composition of Coroner's Inquests and Swallow arguing the need for miners to sit on Coroner's juries:

2842. Chairman: Would it not be necessary for him to have some knowledge of the law?
Swallow: I think the law would be plain and simple, and that he would not have any doubt about it.

2843. Chairman: However plain and simple, would it not be necessary for him to have a perfect knowledge of the state of the law?
Swallow: He could devote some attention to that subject.

2844. Mr. Locke. Do you think that if he had a knowledge of mining, he would be a great deal more useful?
Swallow: A great deal - We have had too much law; we now want some justice.

Here Swallow makes the point that the law and justice can be two quite different things.

Peterloo Massacre

Swallow was born about two years before the St. Peter's Fields massacre, in Manchester, the massacre took place on 16 August 1819, where a crowd, estimated at between 50,000 and 80,000 had gathered to demand the reform of parliamentary representation, although numbers vary in respect of both fatalities and injuries. Henry Hunt, a radical Chartist speaker, otherwise known as *"Orator Hunt"*,[11] was the main attraction and scheduled to address the crowd. The Chartist movement campaigned for the right to vote and parliamentary representation throughout most of the 19th Century.

[11] http://spartacus-educational.com/PRhunt.htm

The government had banned gatherings of more than 50 people. Local magistrates viewing events, which have never been described as anything other than peaceful, ordered in the yeomanry.

It is said that Hunt began to speak and the army tried to arrest him. The mounted yeomanry launched a sabre charge against anyone standing in their way, cutting and slashing at the crowd,18 people were killed and hundreds injured. Henry Hunt was arrested and sent to prison for over 2 years. The Prince Regent, later George IV, congratulated the Army.

Four years before the massacre Wellington had won his famous battle at Waterloo and the St Peter's Fields massacre became known as *"Peterloo".*[12]

William Hulton, 32, the High Sheriff of Lancashire, was in attendance and issued a warrant for the arrest of Hunt, a decision which led to the massacre.

In 1811, Oxford educated Hulton, then 24, arrested 12 Luddites at Westhoughton Mill and sent them to be executed for their part in an arson attack on the mill, one of whom was said to be 12 years old. They were hanged outside Lancaster Castle[13]

Until 1831 he paid his workers with tokens or vouchers that could only be redeemed at his company shop. In 1843, he paid his colliers the poorest wages in Lancashire. He remained opposed to permitting the right to free assembly and vehemently opposed to miners congregating with the object of forming a union.

When miners at his coalmines went on strike in 1830 to assert their right to organise, William Hulton issued a pamphlet condemning his workforce and said you have: *"wantonly injured me to the full limits of your ability, in my purse, and you have much farther wounded my feelings."* The heart bleeds.

David Swallow was to clash with Hulton when the *"association, initially strongest in Yorkshire and the North-East, held a public meeting at Kersal in 1843 that was attended by 150 miners. Its general-secretary, David Swallow, considered the Lancashire miners to be among the worst paid in the country and attempted to address miners in Westhoughton, but the mineowners, including William Hulton, prevented him from holding a meeting."*[14]

Hulton died on 30 March 1864. His carcass was buried in Deane, Lancashire.

David Swallow became a Chartist himself, mixed with leading Chartists, was an orator of note and miners' leader in the Yorkshire coalfield. Nothing is known about his early life other than him being a coal miner at eight years of age and his mother having died when he was 19. There is nothing to tell us how he became politicised; how he became a Chartist and a miners' leader or how he gained his education other than attendance at Sunday

[12] http://spartacus-educational.com/PRpeterloo.htm
[13] Simpson Robert. History and Antiquities of the Town of Lancaster
[14] Challinor 1972, page 35

school. It is not until 1842, when he would have been 25 years of age, that the history of this remarkable man and his activities begin to emerge.

Oddfellows Hall, Halifax

On first of August 1842 eight hundred people converged on Halifax for a meeting at the Oddfellows Hall. One penny was charged as an admission fee. We are told that on this day *"Halifax was crowded with colliers; a sight which astonished the townsfolk as they could not guess at or get information respecting the object contemplated by the miners … as none were allowed to be present but known brethren of the trade."*[15]

Malcolm Bull's *Calderdale Companion* describes the Oddfellows Hall as a *"Magnificent building which stood at Coleridge Street, Cross Fields, Halifax with its classical Corinthian-pillared front was designed by Charles Child and opened on 9th June 1840. It was built at a cost of £10,000."*[16]

The large room was capable of holding 3,000 to 4,000 people. It was used for public meetings and lectures.

"Distress was acute"[17] in mining areas and there was a rising tide of militancy. Given the activities of Chartists in the area of Hebden Bridge, Todmorden and Halifax, it is difficult to believe that Chartists of the radical *"Physical Force"* wing of the movement were not in some way involved in the organisation of this meeting. Furthermore, the miners were emboldened by the appearance of a leader, David Swallow, with no fear of the coal owners.

Employers could always deal ruthlessly with the most benign militancy through vicious victimisation. Any resistance would be met with dismissal and eviction. Any miner at the forefront risked, along with his family, being evicted from his home if he lived in a company house, as many did. Blacklisting would follow barring him from employment at other mines. It was an extremely brave man who stood out from the crowd and raised issues, such as wages or mine safety, that flew in the face of the coal owners' interests.

This, however, could backfire, if the miner dismissed was single, did not have a company house, was intelligent, literate, educated and articulate. If such a man had a purpose and could organise as well, then miners would flock to hear him speak and assume the mantle of leadership. Swallow was clearly such a man in every respect.

Miners resolved at the Oddfellows Hall that *"In order to facilitate the object desired we form ourselves in Societies. These Societies into Districts, and those Districts into one grand body as speedily as possible, to consist of the whole of the miners of England, and that we all cease from labour on one day."* [18]

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[15] Frank Machin, The Yorkshire Miners, Chapter 3, page 42
[16] http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~calderdalecompanion/mmo172.html
[17] Frank Machin, The Yorkshire Miners, Chapter 3, page 42
[18] Frank Machin, The Yorkshire Miners, Chapter 3, page 43

At first the miners attempted conciliation and invited the coal owners to a meeting, to be held in Wakefield on 15 August 1842. The owners did not turn up, but the yeomanry and cavalry paraded the streets.

Frank Machin, at Page 44, refers to a meeting on 7 November 1842. The meeting took place at the Griffin Inn, Northgate, Wakefield, *"for the purpose of taking into consideration the distress of the coal miners and adopting a petition to parliament."*

This meeting took place as a follow-up to the meeting in Halifax on 1 August 1842 and the meeting in Wakefield on 15 August 1842.

The committee met at 8am and the delegates at 10 o'clock. It was decided to appoint an Executive Council and that the Executive should start a *"periodical in which all matters interesting"* to miners could be reported.[19]

By the end of 1842 delegates of the Miners' Philanthropic Society had been meeting fortnightly and the Executive had been formed. There was an income sufficient to maintain a full-time secretary which allowed Swallow to correspond with employers and sign himself, David Swallow, Secretary.

Colliers in other districts were urged to communicate with the secretary of *"the Miners' Philanthropic Society"* at the Griffin Inn[20]. Frank Machin claims this to have been the *"foundations"* of the first miners' national union as did John Hall who had been the Secretary of the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland for most of the Union's existence. The Secretary at this time was David Swallow, he was 25 years of age. The correspondence address was the Griffin Inn where the miners must have used the premises for correspondence and administration. They may have paid a small room rent.

The first mention of Swallow's work is on page 45 of Machin's book where he says:

"the national union of miners made slow progress and on 21 December 1842, the Secretary issued another appeal to colliers of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales" in which he urged *"Fellow workers, we earnestly address these few lines to you, hoping that you will boldly come forward and assert your rights and not allow yourself to be trampled on any longer by the greatest tyrants on earth. They are doing all they possibly can to crush you and yet you stand quietly by with your hands folded lamenting your fate."*

This *"appeal"* was just over six weeks after the Griffin meeting of 7 November 1842.

There is no doubt that this was a very serious attempt to set up a national organisation with its address at the Griffin Inn, but was it, at this stage, a national union? From Swallow's appeal to miners of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales it is clear that a national union was his intention.

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[19] Wakefield Journal, 11, November 1842

[20] Frank Machin, The Yorkshire Miners, Chapter 3, page 44

The appeal to miners was published in Fergus O'Connor's *Northern Star*[21] in the name of David Swallow, who had been appointed Secretary of the Miners' Philanthropic Society at the 7 November meeting at the Griffin. O'Connor was a leading Chartist.

Swallow, in this communication sought to gather information with regard to each pit, the name of the colliery: numbers employed, particulars as to accidents, reductions in wages, strikes and *"all information concerning the miseries that oppress you. These facts carefully collected and printed will show the world such a picture as it never saw before."* [22] He also suggested that every pit should appoint "a man" to provide this information.

Machin states: *"We have no evidence that any but Yorkshire miners attended the meeting at Wakefield on 7, November, 1842." "The founder",* Machin says*, "of the first miners' national union was David Swallow who had been victimised for his trade union activities and who in 1841 lived at East Moor, Nelson Row."*[23] We are certain this is an error and should have been East Ardsley.

It is also open to doubt as to the attendance at these meetings and that other than miners were in attendance, or involved in the decision-making process both before, and at, the Griffin meetings.

The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield

Robert Colls covers Chartist involvement with the miners in more depth in *"The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest. 1790-1850"*, published in 1987.

His timeline of events on page 282 is interesting:

"the foundation at the Griffin Inn" on 7 November 1842*, "of the National Miners' Association"* and *"By 1843 the NMA had 20,000 members; by January 1844 it had an estimated 50 - 80,000 members from all coalfields, a growing fund, its own newspaper, and forty professional 'lecturers' in the field. Northumberland and Durham had nearly total adult membership, and by 1844 Newcastle was the Association's headquarters. Grouped around its newspaper, the Miners' Advocate, the NMA was a political trade union. By creating a national organisation of coal, lead, and ironstone miners of all grades, its leaders hoped to make an effective weapon for the theory of labour value. From its origins, Chartists were at the intellectual centre."*[24]

And continuing on the same page Colls adds this:

"Two months after the Wakefield foundation, David Swallow, the Yorkshire Miner, Chartist, and first General Secretary of the Association, came to speak at Scaffold Hill near Newcastle.

[21] Northern Star, 31, December 1842
[22] Frank Machin, The Yorkshire Miners, Chapter 3, page 45
[23] Frank Machin, The Yorkshire Miners, Chapter 3, page 45
[24] Robert Colls, The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest. 1790-1850, published in 1987, page 282

After this he was taken round the coalfield by Ben Embleton, and in March 1843 Embleton again presented Swallow to 20,000 pitmen at Scaffold Hill for the formal inauguration of the Association."

So, Colls has the foundation of the National Miners' Association having taken place at the Griffin Inn meeting of 7 November 1842, in Wakefield, and from its origins Chartists where heavily involved.

Colls touches on the breadth of opinion in Chartism. Some Chartist theorists, like George Harney, wanted to use physical force while others on the less radical wing advocated moral force.

The Chartists were beset by wide differences between Harney's call for war *"ARM! ARM!! ARM!!! at one end of the strategic spectrum and the fluid gradations across to moral force at the other." (*Colls page 280). Among many miners, there was no desire to become involved in politics while others could see political involvement as the only way forward. This led to divisions, even at the early stages of the Association's life, and may also have been a factor affecting Swallow's grip on his position as Secretary.

Chartism: A New History

Chartism: A New History by Malcom Chase, published in 2007 at pages 243 and 244 provides this:

"the coalfield strikes of 1842, although the product of conditions in the pits themselves, were interleaved with Chartism, the influence of which was manifest in the formation of the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland (MAGBI) in 1842-43.

"This, the first national miners' union emerged from consultation between leaders from different coalfields during the summer of 1842. Several strike meetings called for a national congress of English and Welsh miners but the decisive lead came from West Yorkshire where county-wide meetings were held during the strike wave at Halifax, passing resolutions for the Charter, the formation of a general union and a strike so as to bring all machinery and all power requiring coals to a stand."[25]

Malcolm Chase tells us that the *Northern Star*, the proprietor of which was the Irish Chartist, Fergus O'Connor, was the main medium of communication, between the coalfields and that the newspaper generously covered *"The pitmen's general union from the initial steps (taken by a miners' philanthropic society at Wakefield in November 1842) through to the formal establishment of the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland the following year."*

[25] Malcom Chase, Chartism: A New History, published in 2007 at pages 243 and 244

The difference between Colls and Chase is clear. Colls says the National Miners' Association had its foundation in Wakefield. Chase says Wakefield represented the *"initial steps".*

So, the Miners Association of Great Britain and Ireland (MAGBI) was officially formed in 1843 in Newcastle following the meeting in Wakefield on 7 November 1842 at the Griffin Inn. We think this was merely a change of name from the Miners' Philanthropic Society to the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland.

Chase goes on to say that:

"Throughout its relatively brief yet impressive life, the leadership of the MAGBI was closely associated with Chartism: its draft constitution was submitted to Fergus O'Connor for his legal opinion. William Prowting Roberts was its national legal officer; its treasurer was Martin Jude and at least two secretaries had been active Chartists: its journal, the "Miners' Advocate" (commenced in 1843)"

The two secretaries referred to would have been John Hall, who became secretary of the MAGBI at the May 1843 meeting in Newcastle, and David Swallow, who was *"deposed"* at the same meeting.

There was no place for Swallow at national level.

Much depends on the status attributed to the Miners' Philanthropic Society. The evidence is that those who inaugurated it believed it was a national union and Swallow clearly believed it was meant to be a national union and he was the Secretary.

Machin on page 46 reports that the task set for Swallow, as Secretary of the Miners' Philanthropic Society was two-fold. *"He had to sell the idea of a national union to other districts and then build up an organisation. He achieved both objectives.*

"It was not until 21, January, 1843, that Swallow's appeal of December, 1842, evoked a response from pitmen of the Cowpen, Cramlington, and Seaton Delaval, Collieries. They decided to correspond with the colliers of Wakefield." Actually, it was a very quick response by any standards.

All three of the collieries responding were in Northumberland.

Machin continues:

"The upshot was that Swallow went North and, at the delegate meeting in Newcastle at the beginning of April, 1843, it was resolved that the miners of Lancashire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Cumberland, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and every other district where either iron, lead, or coal miners are employed, be respectfully requested to put themselves in communication with the General Secretary of the Miners' Philanthropic Society, (Mr. David

Swallow) who will feel great pleasure in giving every information necessary for becoming members of this laudable body."[26]

Swallow had every reason and justification to regard this as the beginnings of a national organisation.

Less than a month later on 1 May 1843 the three-day meeting, in Newcastle, took place at which the MAGBI was formed and Swallow *"deposed".*

David's Swallow's hard work and determination had created a national miners' union where none had existed before. Indeed, it can be attributed to his painstaking dedication and advance preparation in setting the groundwork for the Newcastle meeting, in May 1843, that the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland was formed against immense odds.

Carolyn Baylies in her book *"History of the Yorkshire Miners 1881–1918*",[27] published in 2003, refers to the Halifax meeting, in early August 1842, and its intention to form a national union.

There is little doubt that Chartists were the driving force behind this meeting and anything up to 800 people attended. Baylies refers to *"another meeting in early November in Wakefield, where the Miners Philanthropic Society was established, with David Swallow serving as its full-time secretary. Having been delegated the task of promoting and developing a national union, he appealed through the columns of the Northern Star for miners throughout the country to join the endeavour. A response from the northeast led to a delegate meeting in Newcastle in May 1843 and was attended by representatives from Durham, Northumberland and Scotland as well as Yorkshire."*

All the national union's officials were from the northeast and, therefore, unrepresentative of the coalfield as a whole. Swallow found no position in the national organisation and returned to Yorkshire. He was employed by the Association as a miners' agent, a missionary, and sent to organise in Lancashire.

As to how David Swallow actually felt about this we can only speculate, as it is 175 years ago, but it is difficult to imagine that, on the long journey back from Newcastle to Wakefield, he could feel anything other than political blood running down his back.

Baylies tell us that *"Here a new association was established – the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, the composition of its officers and committee reflecting the greater relative numbers of miners from the northeast during this period of the industry's history. John Hall was its secretary, John Armstrong its president and Martin Jude its treasurer."*

Was this a *"new association"* or was it the Miners' Philanthropic Society renamed in what was no more than a successful attempt to take control of the first national miners' union that the Philanthropic Society gave birth to? This possibility is further evidenced by the fact

[26] *Northern Star* 8, April, 1843
[27] Carolyn Baylies *"History of the Yorkshire Miners 1881–1918*", published in 2003, page 45

that the Miners' Philanthropic Society gets no further mention following the May 1843 Conference in Newcastle.

Machin says much the same. Referring to the three-day meeting, in Newcastle, which started on 1 May 1843, he states:

"Swallow was deposed from the Secretaryship, John Hall became Secretary, John Armstrong was President, and Martin Jude, Treasurer." He then goes on to say:

"It was perhaps inevitable that the leadership of the Society should pass into other hands for Yorkshire delegates were in a minority and the Association was strongest in Durham and Northumberland, counties from which all the chief officers were drawn." First Machin refers to the *"Society"* and then to the *"Association*" and that the *"Society"* passed *"into other hands".*[28] This indicates that Machin saw the *Society* and the *Association* as one and the same.

It is also highly relevant that Machin used the word *"deposed".*

The definition of "dispose" is to "remove" from office or position, especially high office. This indicates that, in Machin's view, Swallow held the position of Secretary at the start of the Newcastle meeting on 1 May 1843 and was removed from that position and replaced in the course of the meeting.

Despite the first miners' national union having been formed in Yorkshire, more progress in terms of membership numbers was made in Durham and Northumberland. By December 1843, more than a year after the Wakefield meeting of 7 November 1842, control and membership strength of the national union was concentrated in the northeast. This concentration though might have had an effect on enthusiasm for the union in Yorkshire. It may well have led to many miners in Yorkshire feeling that they did not have a proper stake in the union's structure and, maybe to a feeling that their favourite son, Swallow, had been wronged and exiled, first to Scotland and then to Lancashire.

Regardless, it is clear that Swallow worked hard in Lancashire

Challinor says: *"The association, initially strongest in Yorkshire and the North-East, held a public meeting at Kersal in 1843 that was attended by 150 miners. Its general-secretary, David Swallow, considered the Lancashire miners to be among the worst paid in the country and attempted to address miners in Westhoughton, but the mineowners, including William Hulton, prevented him from holding a meeting. Lord Francis Egerton employed 1,300 workers, paying them little more than if they were in the workhouse"*[29]

William Hulton was a coalowner who lived on a large estate, in a Bolton mansion.

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[28] Frank Machin, The Yorkshire Miners, Chapter 3, page 46

[29] Raymond Challinor "*The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners*," 1972 page 35

The coal owners' efforts to prevent Swallow's work succeeding had little effect and membership in the county grew and 98 miners' lodges were formed by October 1843, only six months after the Newcastle meeting of 1 May 1843.

Maybe this was recognised and Swallow returned to Yorkshire in January 1844. His return coincided with the most rapid period of growth in Yorkshire's membership of the union in the three months following, which Machin attributes mainly to the efforts of David Swallow but also to the efforts of other missionaries.

Machin says on page 48:

"Without the work of the missionaries the Association would never have secured a foothold in many centres. They were something new for they were out of reach of the coal owners displeasure. They could not be penalised by the employers. They brought the miners of one pit into contact with those employed at others: publicly denounced the coal owners and colliery officials: articulated the thoughts and expressed the demands of the miners: raised their hopes and dulled their fears for they represented a movement established in every coalfield and because of this, could persuade the men that if they became members of the Association age long grievances could be at last remedied."

Swallow worked hard and visited all parts of Yorkshire, including, Bradford, Halifax, Wakefield, Barnsley, Sheffield and other areas. He was the main speaker at events where thousands of people were in attendance.

At a meeting, near Chapeltown, Barnsley, for instance, colliers, carrying banners and led by a band, marched to the meeting place. Nearly 4,000 people attended the demonstration, David Swallow was the principal speaker. He spoke at many such meetings.

A Glasgow Conference on 25 March, 1844, saw the first real attempt at a national strike, but there was no consensus across the coalfields or even within areas. There were even divisions within the leadership as to the timing. Northumberland and Durham were ready for strike action although Martin Jude was hesitant. In Yorkshire Swallow believed *"they were organised and markets were bare. The iron was hot and unless they struck while it was hot it would be useless to strike at all."* Others disagreed and said the markets were not bare.

The Conference decided against a national strike but allowed Northumberland and Durham to go ahead with strike action. A fatal decision.

Many different forms of action were taken across the entire coalfield. Machin covers the dispute at some length in Chapter III of his book.

The Union had tried to avoid the need for strike action knowing the hardship that could follow in its wake but strikes did occur during the first three months mainly in Lancashire where 16 collieries were on strike or locked out. The miners main aim was to restrict output rather than take all-out strike action. This "restriction plan" was first put into effect in Durham and Northumberland. By February, 1844, miners in Yorkshire had decided to

restrict production at collieries where the Union was well organised and by March the "restrictive plan" was in operation at many of the West Ridings collieries.

In Yorkshire the restriction of output inevitably led to strikes and lockouts by employers, occasioned by many dismissals and evictions. Between the Glasgow Conference in March and July, the course of events varied in different areas of the coalfield. There were successes and failures. Some employers acceded to the miners' demands while others totally refused to give way.

The larger coal owners maintained a united front refusing raise wages or contemplate arbitration and refused to employ any miner who was a member of the Union and *"that all miners refusing to send out the usual quantity established for the time being at the colliery at which they are employed shall be taken to be members of the Union and shall be forthwith dismissed."*

By 12 May most West Yorkshire pits had ceased work.

In Sheffield, the miners had set out four demands: *"Non unionist should not be employed; no collier should work more than eight hours per day, underground managers and stewards should be 'approved and be members of the workmen's union;' and that except for one colliery where wages were very low and it was 'extremely wet and uncomfortable' wages should be increased by twenty percent.*"

Some small pits in West Yorkshire and Barnsley gave way and increased wages but the larger ones refused.

Speaking in Sheffield Swallow said this was the first time, *"They had thrown the yoke off*" and it would be their *"own fault if they put it on again."* The miners' committee asserted *"without fear of contradiction that there is not a colliery in the neighbourhood of Wakefield, Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield, Barnsley, Rotherham or Sheffield that is working at the old prices"* and *"A list of forty-three was given at which the men had received an advance in wages."*

The larger coal owners refused to budge and resolved to starve the miners back to work, made it clear that local union leaders would not be allowed to return to work and would be victimised and not allowed to find work at other pits. They prosecuted miners for breach of contract where they could and at Crigglestone, Rothwell, Silkstone and elsewhere miners and their families were evicted from colliery homes, their beds and other furniture thrown into the streets. Three men were charged with riot and transported for 15 years.

The strike first began to break in South Yorkshire and only a few were still on strike by the middle of July in the neighbourhood of Rotherham and Barnsley. Miners in Sheffield began to drift back to work but at Tinsley Park Colliery men returned to work after securing three-quarters of their demands and no one had to forsake the Union.

An incident occurred on the night of 25 August at the Deep Pit, owned by the Sheffield Coal Company when the engine boiler was blown up by a cask of gunpowder in an attempt to

stop others working at the pit. The powder had ignited before it had been properly placed and men were badly burnt. One died of his injuries.

The strike ended in November 1844. In Northumberland and Durham it had ended in August. After a long and very bitter dispute of twenty-four weeks the stoppage in West Yorkshire ended.

It is not surprising that organisation had been found defective given that this was the first nationally organised action at the beginning of a long learning curve for miners and their leaders. Miners' demands were not uniform and neither was the action. Nevertheless, thousands of miners had answered the Union's call.

Swallow speaking in 1844 denied the miners had been defeated and declared that as a result of the strike working hours in the mines had been reduced.

Arthur Scargill, leader of the 1984/85 Miners' Strike, over 140 years later, a strike which lasted a full year, denied the miners had been defeated stating the *"victory is in the struggle itself."*

The miners went on to make significant gains during Swallow's leadership and determination and in saying they had *"thrown of the yoke*" by having responded to what he had called for, on 21 December 1842, when he appealed to colliers of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, saying: *"fellow workers, we earnestly address these few lines to you, hoping that you will boldly come forward and assert your rights and not allow yourself to be trampled on any longer by the greatest tyrants on earth. They are doing all they can to destroy you and yet you stand quietly by with your hands folded lamenting your fate."* Swallow making the point Scargill had made 140 years later. Swallow knew, as Scargill knew, that you had to meet the tyrant and fight and, in doing so, it represents a victory in itself.

Swallow was also making a statement of defiance, not just for himself but for the miners he led. The heroic struggles that were to come during the rest of the 19th Century and for most of the 20th Century bear testament to Swallow's words and the unceasing courage of the miners once engaged in struggle.

We also have to understand the difficulties faced by David Swallow and the other leaders of the action. There were many different employers spread across the coalfield, some small and relatively weak while others were more powerful.

When smaller employers gave way to the miners demands the Union would instruct them to return to work and ask them to continue to contribute to the Union to help those still on strike. This would naturally create divisions as some miners returned to work while others fought on. There was no proper structure or central command. Communication between miners and different Areas would have been almost impossible in an age before immediate mass communication and before the advent of a fully integrated railway structure. Decisions would be made by different leaders in different parts of the coalfield. It would take a few days to travel from Wakefield to Newcastle at best. Apart from the meeting in

Glasgow on 25 March, 1844, Machin mentions no other conferences or meetings. Much relied on the hard work of the Agents, like Swallow, to get around the coalfields and, through endless speeches, try to maintain the morale of the miners on strike and to keep those back at work contributing to those who were not.

David Swallow's Travels

Swallow was a much-travelled man, especially following the Wakefield meeting of 7 November, 1842 but we also know he gave testimony to the Commission on the Employment and Condition of Children in Manufactories 1842-1843. We know he travelled North to Newcastle in early 1843, sometime after the 21 January. Between his arrival in Newcastle and his attendance at a delegate meeting in April, he spoke at two meetings at Scaffold Hill, the second of which was in March. He then attended the first national miners' Conference on 1 May of that year, at which his Philanthropic Society was renamed the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland. It is difficult to imagine that this was anything other than one visit given the state of travel in the early 1840s. The distance is approximately 106 miles from Leeds to Newcastle using today's A1(M).

Railway travel had not developed to any extent and was still in the early stages of development. The railways developed piecemeal with many private owners building short-distance unconnected systems. The main mode of transport at this time was still the stage coach. There was still no means of travelling by rail from Leeds or Wakefield to Newcastle until the late 1840s.

We cannot establish how he travelled around but the journey to and from Newcastle, and later when he worked in Scotland for a while, would have been arduous, extremely uncomfortable and would have taken a number of days.

He worked in Lancashire and Yorkshire as a miners' agent making speeches in Halifax, Bradford, Leeds, Wakefield, Barnsley and Sheffield. It is just as likely he covered most, if not all, the mining districts of Lancashire. We know he spoke at Stoke-on-Trent on 24 September 1843 referred to above.

It is worth mentioning that even in 1926, eighty-two years later, during the six-month miners' strike of that year, when the miners' leader A.J. Cook spoke in Lancashire, miners from Yorkshire would walk all the way to Lancashire to hear him speak and visa versa.

David Swallow in the 1850s

We know that by 1851 David Swallow was working as a Miners' Agent and lodging with a family in Bolton, Lancashire, because that is what the Census Return for that year tells us. Shortly after this he moved to Windle a few miles from Rainford where he continued his work as Miners' Agent. We know from the Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths that he married Jane Smith on 9 March1852 and moved to live in Rainford, St Helens taking up

residence in the Bottle and Glass public house and that this is where he met his wife, Jane.[30] this is also confirmed by his evidence to the Committee on Accidents in Coal Mines on 4 July 1853. We know he attended the *Committee on Accidents in Coal Mines*, *4 November 1852 – 20 August 1853*, in London, and that not long after the miners left this meeting Swallow went off and *"entered into other pursuits"*.

David Swallow had clearly arrived at a crossroads in his life. The Association's finances had suffered considerably as a result of the epic 1844 dispute and by 1855, at a time when demand for coal was low, some pits were working only three days a week and the Association and its finances were basically defunct. Swallow could undoubtedly see that the Association could not continue to provide him and his wife, Jane, with a living.

The Census Return for 1861 has him living at Hill Top, Rainford, St Helens, Lancashire. He had no children and his occupation was Tobacco Pipe Manufacturer, with 13 employees, 10 men and 3 women. He is described as born in Ardsley. We are told that David did not make pipes himself and that pipe making was mainly the occupation of his wife's, family. We also know that David served as a Justice of Peace while living in Rainford.

Rainford is well known for its industrial past when it was a major manufacturer of clay smoking pipes.

In 1871, Swallow is described as a Surveyor of Highways Land Overseer and Assistant, married to Jane Swallow and born in Wakefield. His wife Jane died on 11 February 1877 and on 1 June 1879, he married Mary Ann Airey.[31] His occupation in 1881 was still Tobacco Pipe Maker employing 6 people and born at East Ardsley.

We are absolutely confident that our tracing of David Swallow following his departure from the London Conference is reliable.

One final twist to this research is that in 1861, lodging with Swallow and his wife Jane, was one Thomas Greenall aged 10.

Later, a Thomas Greenall was a British Labour Party politician. He became Member of Parliament for Farnworth, in Lancashire, from 1922 to 1929. He previously stood in Leigh in January 1910. He was born in 1857 and died in 1937.

He was also President of the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation.

The difficulty is matching him to the Thomas Greenall lodging with Swallow in 1861 at Rainford in Lancashire, and working with him as a tobacco pipe maker. If the Census Return is correct, the Thomas Greenall living with Swallow was born in 1851. Thomas Greenall MP is recorded as being born in 1857 and would not be employed as a tobacco pipe maker at 3 years of age. If it is the same Thomas Greenall the date of his birth, 1857, simply does not match although he may have been related.

[30] Ron Dagnall, David Swallow: Pipe Manufacturer of Rainford, 1817 - 1885
[31] Ron Dagnall, David Swallow: Pipe Manufacturer of Rainford, 1817 - 1885

As a final brain teaser. The distance from Farnworth, Greenall's constituency, to Rainford, where Swallow lived, is only fifteen miles. Such a coincidence could have happened but Greenall was a common name in and around Rainford and the surrounding area, and Thomas was a common Greenall Christian name. There was more than one Thomas Greenall around at the time. The coincidence, if it is one, has to be remarked upon.

If it is the same Thomas Greenall or a near relation, was it David Swallow who inspired him, just has he had previously inspired John Dixon, and introduced him to the world of trade unionism and politics? Given the discrepancies referred to above it cannot be said with sufficient certainty.

Conclusion

November 2017 will be the 175th anniversary of the meeting at the Griffin Inn, in Wakefield at which the first national miners' union was formed. 2017 also marks 200 years since Swallow was born.

He played a noble role in ensuring that it was illegal for the very youngest of children to worked in coal mines and that it was also outlawed for females of any age to do so. His work and contribution in respect of mines safety was unstinting. His evidence to the Committee on Accidents in Coalmines in 1853 led to the establishment of the mines inspectorate. Her Majesty's Inspector of Coalmines was independent of management and coal owners. They had the power to insist of mines being made safe, could stop a mine or part of a mine from working until remedial action had been taken and crucially. The inspectors could institute criminal proceedings against miners, managers and owners alike.

David's bravery in facing up to the powerful coal owners regardless of the considerable dangers in doing so cannot be underestimated.

We think it is time to recognise and honour a great miners' leader who did not receive the recognition he deserved during his lifetime.

Graham Capstick, Ken Capstick, August 2017
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