

## *A North Country Lad* - Ronnie Dodds -

There wasn't a conversation at 5 in the morning, and as the cage left the surface and slowly descended, it was even quieter than usual.

About 120 ft down, the cage stopped in the shaft which it often did if the upcoming cage stopped at another seam. One minute we were suspended there in the dark draughty shaft, thinking of nothing in particular, and the next we were plunging like a stone to the bottom of the 1,200 ft deep shaft. No-one uttered a sound. The cage came to a shuddering halt at our seam near the shaft bottom and for a few seconds went up and down like a yo-yo on a string. One of the older miners burst out, "the blasted engine winder has forgotten it's 'men on'- he thinks it's 'coals on' instead. Just wait til I see the beggar tha' neet at the Big Club, arl give him something to make him think twice in future.'

### **In Another Country ...**

Ronnie Dodds has lived in Frampton for thirty-four years following a career full of change, including a few years down a coal mine as a bricklayer.

Born at Cold Hesledon, County Durham in 1926, the youngest of six children, he was destined to work down the mine as his father and grandfather had before him. Many towns and villages owed their



Tom, Billy, Dad (Pa!), Sadie, Clarice, Mum, Edna and Ron in front

existence to coal, and mining was the focus for the whole community. By the time Ron was born the eldest girl 'Sadie' had left home to train as a nurse in Rochdale. The family lived in a typical collier's cottage which consisted of 2 - 4 rooms and

sometimes a pitman's garden nearby. The sleeping arrangements were such that Ron's parents slept downstairs and grandfather and the six siblings slept in one large room upstairs. This was partitioned into sections by curtains to give everyone some privacy.

### **Black poplars shake themselves over a pond...**

Murton colliery was the main employer for the area of East Durham and the village of Murton had grown into a thriving township by the turn of the twentieth century. The colliery was modernised after World War 1 and in 1922 a Koepe friction winding machine was installed in the West Pit. This was used to raise and lower conveyances within the mine shaft.



Most of the village children were educated at the local school but lived with the constant threat of their family and friends being affected by serious accidents at the mine. The Pit siren normally sounded three times during the working day to signify the changes of working shifts underground. The emergency siren, however, would only sound to indicate the 'hollow ground' had claimed yet another life, or lives. The whole mine was then closed down. There were no pit head baths in 1930-37 so you would see all the men, black with pit dirt, returning home early to find anxious wives and children stood on the doorstep waiting and hoping. And rooks and the rising smoke-waves scatter and wheel from the works beyond ...

Ron remembers the day he was waiting at the school gates for lunch time with his brother Tom, when suddenly their sister, Edna, appeared and, after speaking with the Headmaster, rushed them back home. They found, on reaching home, that their father had suffered a serious accident and been taken to hospital.

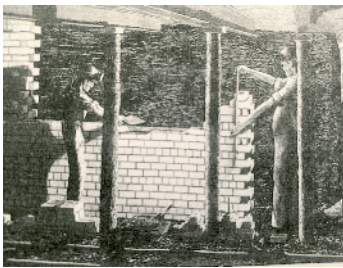
It appeared that a set of tubs (about 20 or more) had become loose and run away. Apparently the steel wire that pulled the tubs had broken causing a serious situation. Someone shouted "the sets a'main" (broken free) and the boys' Dad, not having a rescue hole near him, had hidden behind some stationary tubs which unfortunately were hit by the runaway tubs. As he had been carrying a long oval tin containing the sticks of powder used for shot firing, this was pushed into his arm as the tubs went

by causing a compound fracture of the humerus and several muscles were badly torn.

One night after Ron and his brother Tom had gone to bed, they heard voices outside. According to their mother, a man in the next street had been killed in the mine and the bad news had just been delivered to his wife. The subsequent screams from the unfortunate lady could be heard several streets away. She was now a widow with two growing children and times were hard.

### **The air is dark with north and with sulphur ...**

Two weeks before Ron's 15th birthday in 1940, he secured an apprenticeship to become a bricklayer down the mine. This was a stroke of luck for him as



before the War you were unlikely to work anywhere but at the coalface so apprenticeships were constantly sought after.

The first day in the descending cage was an

experience he would have to get used to. After changing into his underground clothes, he was issued with a trowel, a rule, a level, a line, pins and a brick hammer. After collecting his miner's lamp and head torch from the lamp cabin, he went to meet his instructor, one of the older miners who had been a bricklayer for many years.

"Stand two bricks up straight and place two bricks on the top", he said. "That is your seat and you will sit there until you can learn to spread mortar with confidence." So saying, the older man threw some mortar on to a low wall, spread it like butter over the bricks and placed a new brick on the top. It looked so easy but it took a while for young Ronnie to perfect the art. Soon though he was able to stand up and dismantle his seat. He learnt to build end walls, stables for 15 Dartmoor ponies per seam, and half walls which were then topped with girders. For the first three months his wages were paid by the mining company. The next three months the company paid half his wages and the next three months were provided by Ron, working as a qualified bricklayer.

Coal was shovelled into tubs on rails with a steel rope to pull them to the shaft. Tubs had a talley on the top fastened with a number so that it could be noted which gang had filled the tub for wage purposes. The miners' wages would be based on the

number of tubs that had been filled by a certain gang. The wages would be given out in small lidded tins on a Friday accompanied by a wage sheet. If you were of the Roman Catholic faith there would be a deduction noted at the bottom of the slip for the local priest who would be there waiting on pay day for his 'cut'.

Ron's normal shift was from 6 am - 2 pm, six days a week. There was a time when he worked in an area where coal had been found. Above the coal seam was 50 ft of stone and above that an underground lake. The water would seep through from the lake, causing the working area to be constantly rained on. At this time the shift was shortened to 6 hours.

It was very dusty down the mine as stone dust was spread on the ground in case of an explosion. Dust would then rise and settle hopefully putting the fire out. This, of course, caused poor health in many of the miners and they would end their days with chronic pulmonary diseases.

### **The grass is a darker green ...**

Ron's mother, a housewife, had a 15-hour day starting at 6 am and finishing at 9pm, six days a week, filled with cooking, cleaning and washing etc. Ron's father worked as a stone man and as there were no pit baths, the tin bath, filled with hot water, would be ready and waiting in front of the fire when he returned from work. Providing there were no women about, Dad would take off his pit clothes in the outhouse. Mum would wash the parts of him he couldn't reach, then take his clothes and bang them on the outside wall to get rid of the dirt. They were then stored in his corner cupboard until the next shift.

Monday was washing day, Tuesday was ironing, Wednesday baking, Thursday was general tidying, Friday was another baking day and Saturday might mean a trip into Sunderland with the boys. Saturday was also the day groceries were delivered in a cart pulled by two large shire horses. The animals always knew at what houses they were likely to be fed and the cart was almost overturned as they stepped on to the pavement and leant their heads over the fence, waiting for their treat.

### **And people darkly infested with purple move palpable though the scene ...**

Ronnie was called up for the Second World War at the age of 18 around the time of D-Day, but because he was in a reserved occupation he had to continue working in the mine until he was released

in 1946. One of the most dangerous occurrences happened one day while he was working down the mine. On finishing his shift, he tried to communicate with the on-setter who looked after the cage but there was no reply. It wasn't until an hour later that Ron and his fellow workers were able to get up to the surface when they were told about a bombing raid in the pit yard. The German planes dropped the bombs five miles off target and then followed with incendiary bombs to light up the whole area. Many miners' cottages were hit that day and there were many casualties.

The joy-loader, an American-made machine for coal cutting, was introduced into the mines in 1945. Prior to that, the miners would drill holes into three seams of coal, push in the sticks of dynamite and 'blow' it. The coal would then be shovelled by hand on to a conveyer belt which would, in turn, take it to a tub. Therefore the new machine was a real asset to the process. During the war, many American soldiers, who were trained miners in their own country, were sent down our mines to give instruction to the miners on the new machine.

Also down the mine went the 'Bevin boys' who, although they had joined up to fight, found themselves on a six-week training course before being sent below.

### Brassed Off ...

The film 'Brassed Off' told a story that was typical of the love the miners had for brass bands and their



Painting of 'Seeing the banner off to the Durham Big Meeting

unique sounding music. This love was shown on the Durham Big Meeting days when they would march to the Cathedral with their banners raised. If there had been a fatality at their colliery, a black veil

would cover the banner and many veils indicated how many men had been killed in a twelve-month period.

When Ron was finally released from the mine, he moved to Suffolk to join his parents, who had moved there previously. Working with a local builder in Wickham Market, building Swedish timber houses was the next step in his career but although

he had been demobbed, his life was still to have a connection with Army life. In 1948, a nearby camp of wooden Nissan huts was transformed into a prisoner-of-war camp, in which one man in particular was to become a great friend of Ron - but that's another story!



Ronnie



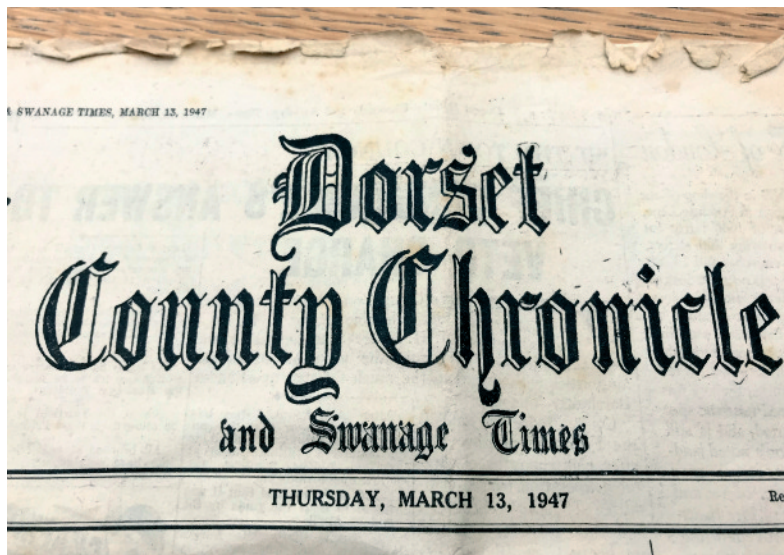
Dad (Pa) also known as Jonty

The section headings in this story were taken from the poem 'In the North' by D H Lawrence

Ronnie Dodds lives with his daughter in a house on the hill behind the garage in Dorchester Road. They always liked Frampton when they came to the area on holiday so when he retired they saw the house, and bought it.

Ron worked as a trade officer in the prison service for many years teaching brick laying. One of his last jobs before retiring was at Bedford Borstal where he worked for seven years. For his last 12 months, he persuaded the Governor to send him to Dorchester prison so that he was ideally situated to settle in Frampton.





**HAVE A LOOK AT  
THE DATE!**

## BEER FOR A THIRSTY VILLAGE

FRAMPTON, the Dorset village of some 300 souls, which has been for many years one of the few places in England without its village inn, is to have the next best thing—an off-licence shop.

With a petition signed by 133 villagers went Mrs. Selina Florence Ethel Woodcock, who keeps the village provisions store, to the Dorchester County Sessions on Saturday to ask for a licence.

In the middle of evidence supporting the application the magistrates called a halt and granted the licence.

Frampton's nearest pub is at Grimstone, more than a mile away.

Public attention to Frampton's peculiar plight was drawn in a recent "Dorset County Chronicle" survey of the village.

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The advertisement is set against a light green background with leaf motifs. It features a circular arrow diagram in the center. To the right, there is an illustration of a tractor pulling a mulch truck. Below the tractor is a large white bag filled with green mulch. The text is arranged around these elements, providing details about the company's services and contact information.

## *A walk from your back door*

During the 'lockdowns' and restricted life styles this year, many people have taken to walking as a form of getting some exercise, and of course it's free! Some are new to walking and in this article I would like to encourage people to explore a little further afield than just round the village. We are so lucky to be able to walk straight out into the lovely hills and valleys of Dorset. If you prefer a pretty flat surface or have young children (and buggies) then where better to start than along Southover and straight on to the cycle track that runs to Maiden Newton. This is also part of the Frome Valley Way, a named walking route that runs from Evershot, through Frampton and on to Dorchester.

If you want more of a challenge then here are two walks of different length to boost your confidence to venture elsewhere in the area. But before you go, a few thoughts.

### *Preparation*

Remember it isn't the weather that's wrong but your equipment! Walking boots or wellies may be advisable at this time of year as tracks can become very muddy, particularly if they are bridle ways. Jeans are fine on a good day but if they get wet they don't dry easily and can be very uncomfortable to walk in when wet! Plenty of layers and a waterproof are also a must. Take food and water if you are planning to be out more than a couple of hours. Although maps on phones are becoming very popular, and these are fine if you are in a car, often they are not on a small enough scale for the details you need for walking unless you have downloaded specific Ordnance Survey maps. Maps also help you to learn what the symbols represent and how to read a map so that it will give you the information you need and more confidence to venture out to places not so familiar. The one for Frampton Area is Cerne Abbas and Bere Regis OS Explorer 117 and is available in most shops selling outdoor gear, bookshops and online ([Dash4it.co.uk](http://Dash4it.co.uk)) You can't go wrong if you follow finger posts, bridle ways and footpaths marked with arrows. These are public paths, and bridleways obviously are also used by horse riders. Most paths round Frampton are quite well used and marked.

### *Dogs*

If you are taking a dog into the countryside then it should be kept under strict control. It's easy to think a field is empty, particularly in the winter, only to find cows or sheep lurking round the corner. The presence of a dog may make farm animals anxious and cows with young are protective and might attack. It is legal for a stock owner to shoot a dog if it is loose in a field where there are sheep, even if it is not harassing them.

### *Observe the Country Code*

**Guard against all risk of fire**

**Fasten all gates**

**Keep to the paths across farmland - remember that grass is a crop**

**Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls**

**Leave no litter**

**Help to keep all water clean**

**Take special care on country roads**

**Make no unnecessary noise**

**Protect wildlife, wild plants and trees**

**Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work**



*So let's get started!*

### *Short walk 5-6 miles*

From Wren's Bridge in Frampton Park take the track to Metlands and Steppes Farm. Go past Steppes Farm and head upwards to a gate. Go through the gate and keeping the hedge on your left continue to the next gate. Continue uphill following the waymarks and the hedge over three fields until you come to Town Hill Farm Cottages. Your climb is rewarded with lovely views. Go past the cottages and the parking bays for caravans and continue on the concrete road until you come to a track on the right. Turn right and then almost immediately right again into a field. Again skirt the field keeping the hedge on the right towards the wood where you turn left, keeping the wood on the right. You may see or hear deer in the wood and see bluebells in the spring. At the bottom is a gate, turn right, again following the wood on your right along Long Bottom. Continue through a gate into a field where eventually Long Bottom joins Church Bottom and Compton Bottom. For the short walk turn right here along Church Bottom towards Frampton, remembering to cross over the stream at the third field and return to Steppes farm and either back the way you came or through Metlands Wood.



### *Long walk approximately 9 miles*

For a longer walk, continue through the gate and over the stream. This gets rather deep in winter - there is a small bridge to the right, but this is not very stable, and slippery when wet (reported at the time of going to press). With the hill and Tumuli on your left go through a further gate, then immediately left through the gate into Compton Bottom. Cross three fields keeping to the bottom of the valley until you come to a number of gates and sign posts. Straight on leads into Compton Vallance - well worth a trip in snowdrop time. Take the Bridle route to the right



which runs up the hill alongside the fence, go through the first gate on the left and follow this round to a further gate. Look back or even have lunch looking down into Compton Vallance. From here cross a further field which brings you out onto a good farmers track. Turn right towards Frampton and continue until you meet a signpost indicating the Macmillan Way, turn left through the hedge and follow this track at the head of the valley to Notton Hill Barn. Here there is a signpost to Cruxton, follow this across the field, through the hedge and across a further field to another signpost indicating Cruxton. Turn Right and follow this down to Cruxton and the cycle track, turn right and head home to Southover.



Compton Bottom

I hope you enjoy your walk!

*Cynthia Whyte*

### **FRAMPTON'S FACEBOOK COMMUNITY GROUP - HOW TO JOIN IN ...**

*The village now has a community group on Facebook. It was set up during the first lockdown to act as a virtual community space, spread a little cheer, keep up with local news, or simply add photos from daily lockdown exercise.*

*We're nearly at 70 members now, and administrators, Lucy Warren and Harriet Stacey-Marks, welcome more members to add photos, share stories from the past and more.*

*All you need to do is go to Facebook and search for 'Frampton, Dorset, community hub'. Add yourself as a member and come and join our virtual party!*



*The Saxon Arms*

STRATTON



*The Greyhound*

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**CHARITY TOTALS:**

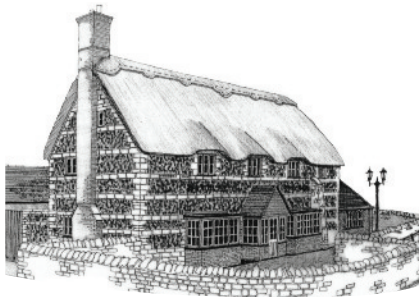
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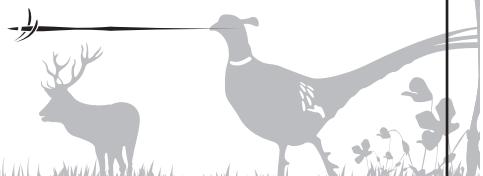
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# BOFFINS' BREAK

- 1) Which of these landmarks would you find on the Isle of Portland?  
a) Petronimus Shaft b) Nicodemus Knob c) Decladecus Bell
- 2) During the Second World War 'Hitler's Lily' was a wry name for what flower?  
a) Rosebay willow-herb b) London Pride c) The poppy
- 3) What is the most popular name for a baby boy in the USA in 2020?  
a) Mason b) Elijah c) Liam
- 4) Who sang the title song of the 70's Bond film 'The Man with the Golden Gun'?  
a) Lulu b) Shirley Bassey c) Cilla Black
- 5) Which sort of painting did Samuel Cooper, Nicholas Hilliard and Isaac Oliver specialise in?  
a) Landscape b) Portraits c) Miniatures
- 6) What are: Blair's shoulder knots, yellow-tailed tussocks, and red underwings?  
a) Dorset local name for birds b) Names of moths c) 16th century slang for unreliable men.
- 7) Which Cavalry regiment was called Prince Albert's Own?  
a) The 3rd Hussars b) The 11th Hussars c) The 18th Hussars
- 8) How many Number One Hit records did the Beatles have in the UK in the 1960's?  
a) 10 b) 13 c) 17
- 9) How many MPs are there in the House of Commons?  
a) 646 b) 648 c) 650
- 10) Name the raised part of a sundial that casts a shadow?  
a) Grealish b) Gradiel c) Gnomon

Answers overleaf



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*The FVN Committee would welcome any  
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Answers: 1b 2a 3c 4a 5c 6b 7b 8c 9a10c

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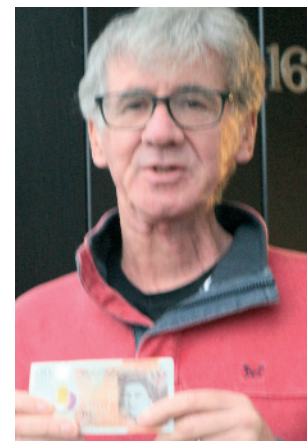
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The November draw was held on 14 November with the winning numbers being picked by Patsy Taylor.

The results are:

1 <sup>st</sup> PRIZE	£134	No. 36	Mo and Julia Mee
2 <sup>nd</sup> PRIZE	£67	No. 111	Lucy and Richard Warren
3 <sup>rd</sup> PRIZE	£22	No. 141	Barbara Thomas



The photograph is of Mo Mee with his winnings from the first draw of the 2020/21 lottery season.

The next draw will be held in February.

WISHING YOU ALL GOOD LUCK AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT  
IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES

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