

The Coal Cutter Dream - John Wood

I am John Wood, born in Pen Y Bryn, half a mile from the park. I worked in Penallta for 35 years. I was a coal cutter and a miner. When I went to the colliery first it was all hand getting; shovels and picks and what have you. But later on they introduced all these mechanisation, and this was the baby that produced all the coal. It was a tough, tough machine; very, very noisy. I mean it just took coal out. I mean a machine like this would turn out 50 tonne in a shift and it reduced the need for large number of people for filling coal by hand.

Part of the inspiration behind 'The Coal Cutters Dream' was that when the miners were working underground it was very cold and wet. When they'd have a break, to have their lunch or something, they would lean against their machine, 'cos it was warm, because it had been working in and the friction made it warm. So they would lean against the machine, eat their sandwiches and then, the idea that the artist came up with, was that they would drift off and think about life above ground.

You'd be allowed 20 minutes half way through the shift. Generally a Water Jack, with water, a couple of sandwiches and that's all you'd have. I never dreamt about working on the surface but I dreamt about being in other places, like Spain or Portugal, but you was always afraid, as a miner, about the explosions that you read about in other collieries. But no, I enjoyed working underground and every day was different. Over night things could change. You know, the conditions; gas accumulations; all sorts. So it wasn't like working in Woolworths, that is a common expression miners always used, "we're not working in Woolworths but!"