

**'Making a man of you':
forging masculine identities & the
male body in Scotland's heavy
industries, 1930-1970s**

Paper for the Masculinity Workshop, Glasgow University, Sept 2010

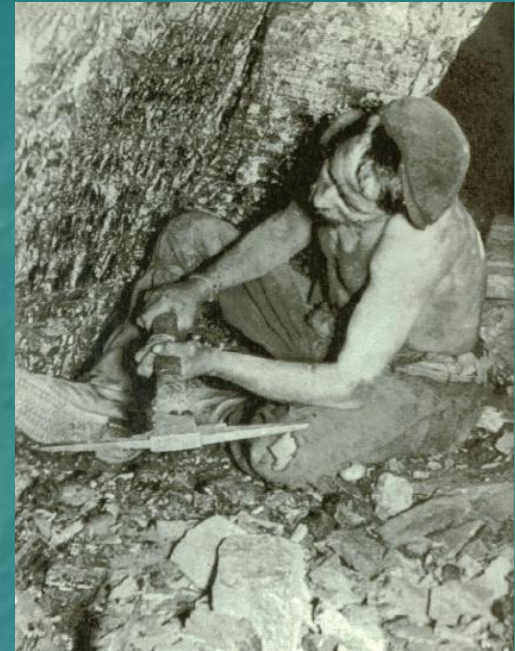
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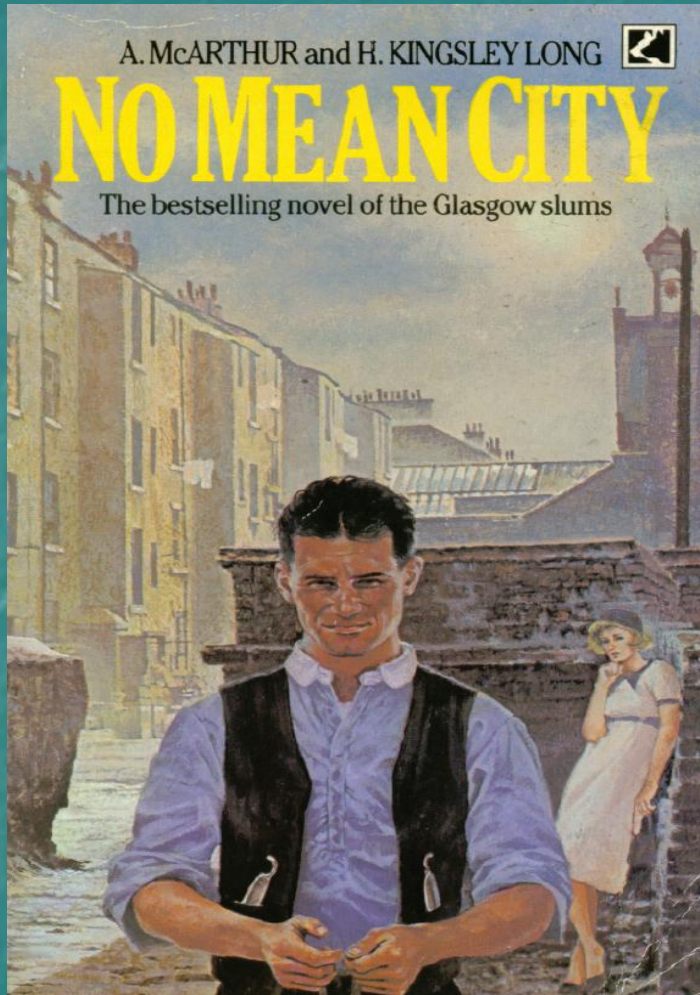
Presentation

HIGHLIGHT THREE POINTS:

- **Forging masculinities at work:
The heavy industry workplace,
dangerous jobs and the 'making' of men**
- **Losing work and eroding masculinity**
- **Some issues / caveats to the 'hegemonic masculinity' thesis**



Images of the Glasgow 'hard man'



See H. Young, 'Hard man, New man', *Oral History*, 2007

Masculinity defined

- **Eileen Yeo definition :**

'The models and practices of manliness that prevail in a social group at a particular historical moment... there is no solid masculinity (or femininity for that matter) but rather multiple masculinities, which also exist in relation to one another in historical situations of unequal power'

Labour History Review, 69, 2, 2004

Craft and labouring masculinities

- 'Respectable' masculinity: Craftsmen: skill; training; knowledge; discretion – and high earnings.

'Rite of passage' through apprenticeship.

- 'Rough' masculinity: Labourers: physical strength; toughness and endurance.

See C. Cockburn, *Brothers* (printing) and D. Wight, *Workers not Wasters* (coal mining)

Hull drawing, Ailsa shipyard, Troon, 1998



Jimmy Reid (1971):
'We not only build ships on
the Clyde, we build men'

Mining

- Walter Greenwood noted of miners in the 1930s:
'You can usually tell a miner a mile away. Short, stocky, muscular, rarely carrying any superfluous flesh, he has to be hard as nails...Coal getting calls for the use of specially developed muscles'.

Greenwood, *How the Other Man Lives*



George Orwell *The Road To Wigan Pier*:

It is impossible to watch the 'fillers' at work without feeling a pang of envy for their toughness... the fillers look and work as though they were made of iron... It is only when you see miners down the mine and naked that you realise what splendid men they are. Most of them are small but nearly all of them have the most noble bodies; wide shoulders tapering to slender supple waists, and small pronounced buttocks and sinewy thighs, with not an ounce of waste flesh anywhere... No-one could do their work who had not a young man's body, and a figure fit for a guardsman at that; just a few pounds of extra flesh on the waistline, and the constant bending would be impossible.



'They came out of the mine after ten hours down there and then played a hard game of football without flinching. A tough breed that knew no fear or weakness'

Thomas Jordan, born 1892, autobiography in J. Burnett (ed.), *Useful Toil* (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 102.

Forging masculinity

Street football, Glasgow, early 1960s (Marzaroli)



Tommy Coulter interview

TC: Ah mean it was. Especially younger guys, when we thought we were the best in the world. We were the elite. When you went tae work in the coal face you, well we were strong lads, you had tae be. And your lifestyle was such that if you werenae producing coal you were playing football, or boxing or dancing or walking, mainly engaged in physical pursuits. Ah mean ah used to walk twenty-five miles every Saturday and Sunday and that was, ah done that fur years and years. ..





Because of the nature of work and the nature of lifestyle we could at least hold our own in any, if and ah mean if, we wouldnae of, ah mean if there was any fisticuffs involved we were quite able tae do the business because we're hardy buggers and we thought, ah dare say something like soldiers...

Tommy Coulter, Interview C21 (SOHC).

When we got out of the pit cage and directed our steps the short distance toward home, he [his father] always asked me how I liked the experience. Always I answered him that I liked going into the mine, which I did several times until I was fourteen years old. He was a fearless man and I did not wish to let him know that I was nervous or else he might have thought that I was 'queer'... With the passing of the years I became indifferent to the many dangers in the mine. When someone was killed I might become apprehensive for a day or two, then the incident was completely forgotten. This training was valuable to me during the First World War when men were yielding their lives on a far larger scale.

Thomas Jordan, cited in Burnett, *Useful Toil*, pp 103; 104.

The younger miner may be regarded as the best class of recruit in this region [referring to Wales]; hard, well developed and muscular, he strips well... the colliers as a class [referring to NW England] are well developed and muscular, and strip much better than the cotton operatives... Of all miners examined 75% were placed in Grade 1... As a rule their muscular development was particularly good. What struck one most was their general aspect of mental and physical alertness.

Ministry of National Service, 1917-1919, *Report upon the Physical Examination of Men of Military Age by National Service Medical Boards*, Vol. 1, (1919), pp. 17-18; 134.

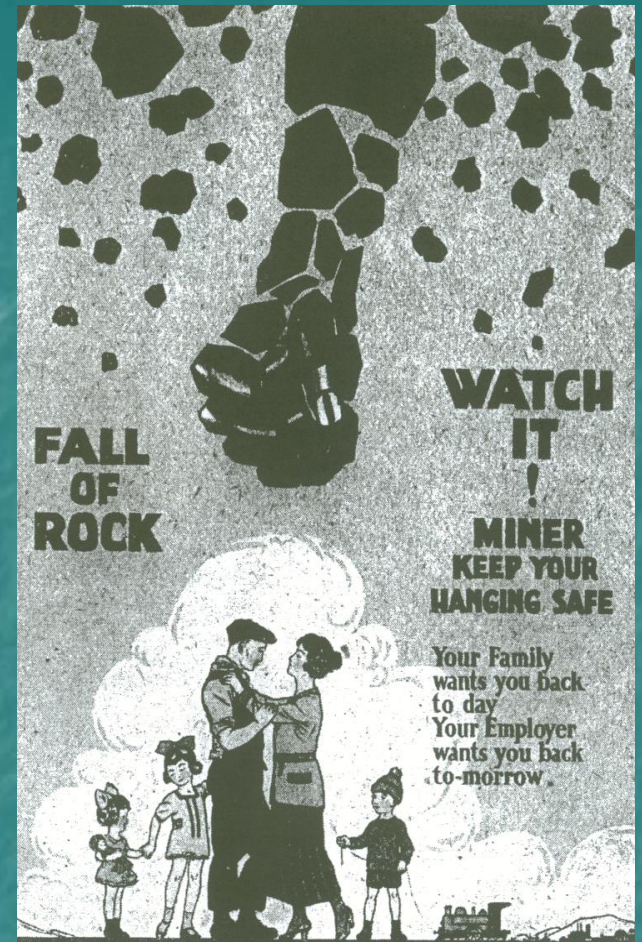
These near escapes make us nervous for a while, especially if we think what might have happened. For some time we see danger in every stone, *then become hardened again*. I remember when a boy of seventeen was killed about twelve yards away from me. More than sixty boys were working there, but not one came to work on the next shift – all were afraid. [our emphasis]

Bert Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, p. 121.

■ Ayrshire miner:

'You found out that men and management in general were always at loggerheads in the coal mining industry....If you were a *weak* man you would have did what the boss said.

Alec Mills, Interview C1 (SOHC).



I'm the top machine worker in Scotland,
put that on your form... aye... you know...
status... you know, when you stand at the
bar and say 'I'll buy yous a round'.

Wight, *Workers not Wasters*, p. 163.



Tommy Coulter (Scottish miner)

- Yes we were a bit macho but a' don't think we were nasty, we, you were taught to respect women in particular and older people and ah suppose, it was no only just mine workers, that was the village life. But we were macho and we thought we were the greatest and we knew that was the case...
- Tommy Coulter, Interview C21 (SOHC).

Ayrshire miner commenting on the late 1940s:

That's what you done till aince you got a place eh on the run ken among the men ken. Eh, and I can mind sir...I was...I was drawing when I was 18 year old, 19 year old, and eh that eh...I was drawing 100 hutches a day. No kidding you I was like steel. I was a hard man then. And eh I drew off a wee bloke. He was a wee Pole this wee bloke and he was a hard man. Arkuski you cried him ken. Tony Arkuski. He was a hard man sir. Him and I...Oh we were down there first go in the morning and last away ken. Aye we made good money then ken...

Thomas McMurdo, Interview C20 (SOHC).

Risk-taking at work

- In response to a question about the existence of safety procedures when shotfiring John Jones noted:

'Yes, well there was but, oh they were, sometimes we; it's our own fault we were taking risks; it was our own fault sometimes...to get that stuff out, to get the coal out... This is the point. We were at fault, our side by risking it instead of saying 'oh, I'm leaving it there, I'm not doing it'.

John Jones, Interview C27 (SOHC). He ended up with pneumonconiosis in the 1970s, just like his father.

Risk-taking at work

- In this culture, workers routinely ignored protective clothing; helmets; harnesses; goggles respirators

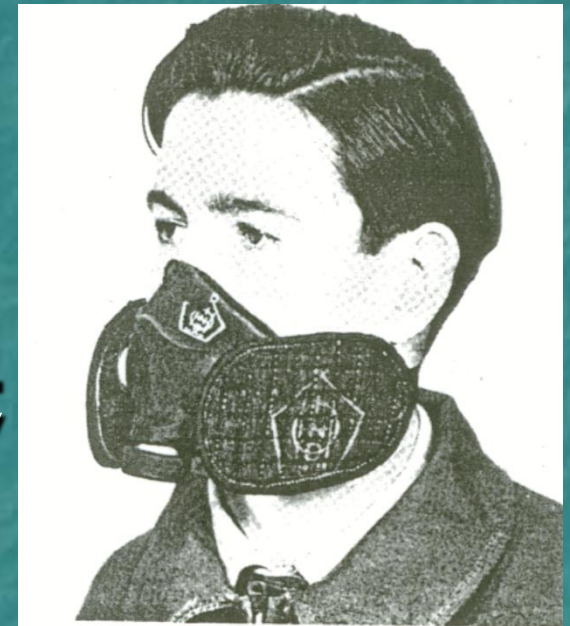


Fig. 16.14. The Siebe Gorman Mark IV Dust Respirator

- Scottish miner on masks:
'We didnae wear them. You didnae think of the future, we just thought from day to day'

Work ethic / Maximising income

- The provider / breadwinner role encouraged working even where the job was dangerous and inimical to health
- Biggest wage packets denoted masculinity
- e.g. the 'big hewers'



- You just carried on with your work, you did you know. What you done you earned isn't it? Especially with Tison. If you done like I did you got good pay like. If you didn't do like I did your pay would be down like you know. That was a lot to do with it to tell you the truth.

Malcolm Davies, Interview C29 (SOHC).

- DC: If you were getting away early, *you worked harder*, and if they were giving you more money, *you worked harder* because it was money. George might disagree with me, but I reckon that was two of the best incentives or the biggest incentives as far as the men were concerned was *money and an early allowance*.
- GB: I couldn't argue with you because it worked, it worked but there was a price to pay. There was a price to pay and we're paying that price now, you have young men with pneumoconiosis now. Of course when I was working at the coal face we were taking off three strips a day, sometimes four. Sometimes *nine strips in a shift*, and the dust, the dust, the dust.
- DC: They've been known to do eleven...

David Carruthers and George Bolton, Interview C23 (SOHC).

Miners have a plan for clearing a fall of rock. Here you see it in operation as the search goes on for the missing men.



- Bert Coombes commented that in South Wales in the 1930s:
'Men who do not do their share are treated with contempt and are given nicknames, such as "Shonny one tram", by their fellow workmen who are usually too ready to pour out their sweat and their blood'.

Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, p. 44.

- When I worked with Tison I was competitive you know, we tried to beat the other heading and things like.... We were all good pals mind but we would come up, we'd have a chat 'what have you done today?' like y'know. 'Oh we put ceilings up or two-way put up' and things like that. I put five up one day, in one day. Me and three men. Five yards. Five yards travelling, in a twelve foot heading.... I don't think anybody else did that I tell you. Not five rings. There was a couple of boys from the Rhondda working it up there. Oh they were very good workers like. They could work. And that's how it was back years ago.

- Malcolm Davies, Interview C29 (SOHC).

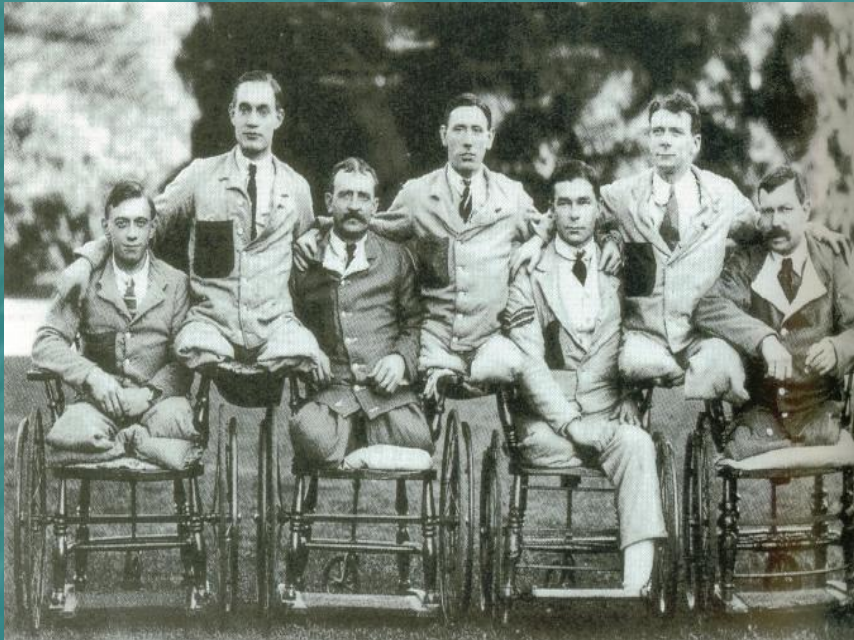
- DP: That was the village culture sort of thing eh? You knew who the good workers were and who the guisers were. A lot of it was everybody trying tae be better than the next one eh? Ken, you couldnae... you couldnae have an easy shift sort of thing. Or somebody would tell your faither eh? Or somebody doon the street would be talking about you or they would be talking about you in the pub, the fingers would be pointing at you.
- RC: Oh there was a pride aspect.
- DP: Pride, pride, oh aye, aye.
- RC: There's a standard in the pit and if you didnae set your standard the shift that followed you would see you the next day 'Hey, dinnae you leave that like that again' and then so and so would talk to so and so.

Robert Clelland and Duncan Porterfield, Interview C22 (SOHC).

- DP: Oh yes, everybody thought they were top dog eh? You didnae want anybody, if you thought somebody was that wee bitty better than you, you used to work all the harder. Ken, "your no getting ma mantle." Ken, there was an awful lot of pride at stake, oh aye.

Robert Clelland and Duncan Porterfield, Interview C22 (SOHC).

Loss of masculinity through disability

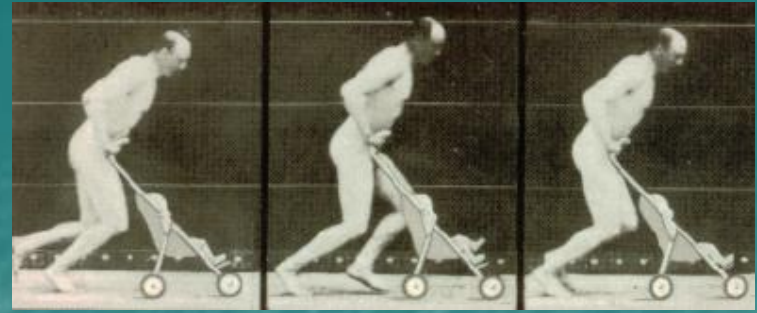


Post- WW1
disabled soldiers



Paraplegic coal
miners, 1950s

Mutations in identity with loss of work



- Shift from workplace to home
- From independence to dependency (on the state and/or wife's earnings)

An Ayrshire miner:

I worked a' my life.... it was a big blow to me to be told that I'd never work again. Eh, your pride's dented, ken.

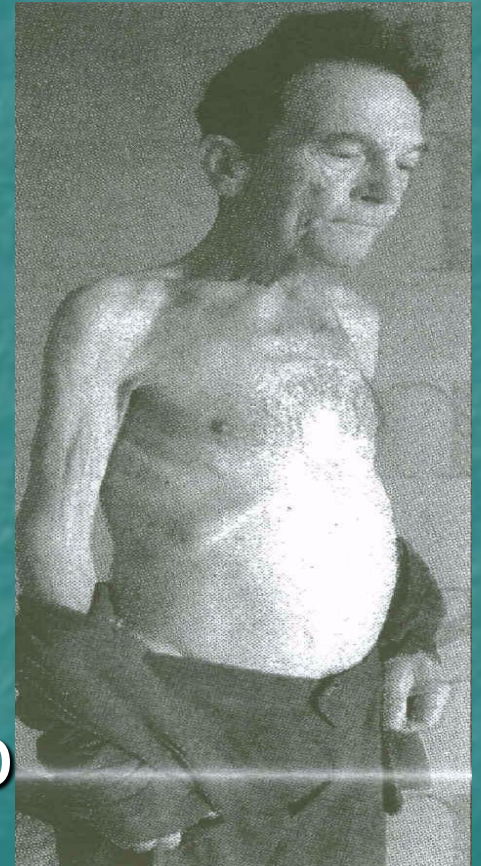
Cauldmoss miner on unemployment: 'it makes you less of a man in other people's eyes' (D. Wight)

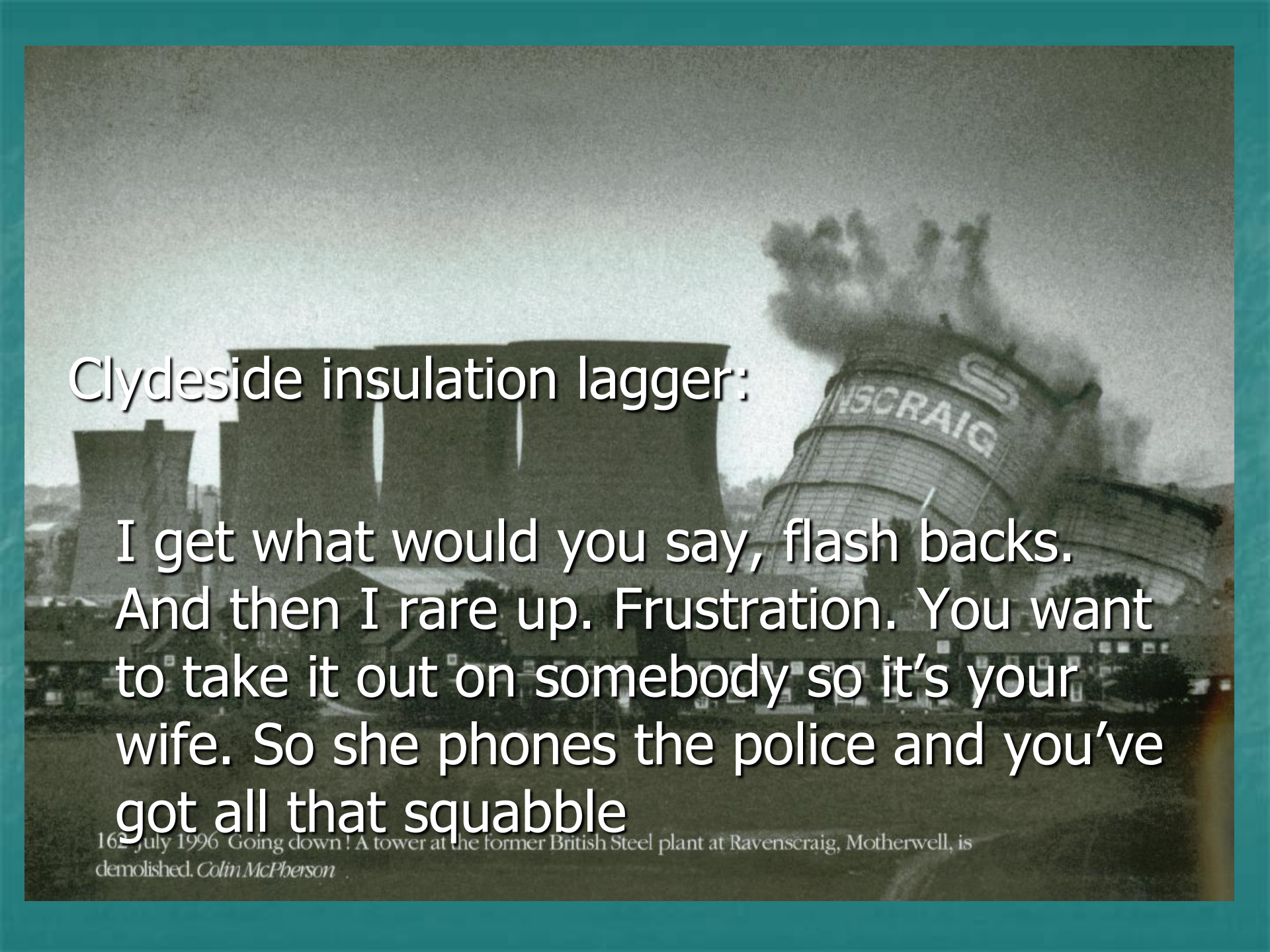
- Scottish miner:

I mean when you are out and your wife's to come out and say to you 'Come on I'll get that...' Wee jobs outside eh, that you're no fit to do, and your son or whatever eh will say to you 'Right come on...' It definitely hurts your pride.

Wife of a Clydeside worker with an asbestos-related disease:

He really didn't drive very much by himself at this stage. Men are funny things. We would get in the car together here and we would drive out the gates, and then we would pull in and stop and I would take over. Men eh, don't like to give in.





Clydeside insulation lagger:

I get what would you say, flash backs.
And then I rare up. Frustration. You want
to take it out on somebody so it's your
wife. So she phones the police and you've
got all that squabble

162 July 1996 Going down! A tower at the former British Steel plant at Ravenscraig, Motherwell, is demolished. *Colin McPherson*

Conclusion

- The experience of Clydeside men in the heavy industries suggests that work as a factor in forging masculine identities and empowering men within the home deserves more attention.
- Oral evidence and other personal testimonies facilitate such a reconstruction.
- Loss of work – through unemployment and/or disability - had a profoundly emasculating impact, contributing to the late-20th century crisis in masculinity.