

Miners' Gala



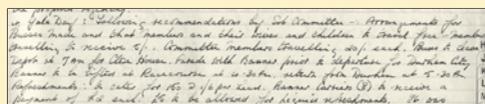
Photograph of Sam Watson and Hugh Gaitskell, leader of the Labour Party, on the balcony of The Royal County Hotel, Old Elvet, 1960 (DCRO D/CL 27/277/182)



Banners arriving at the racecourse on Gala Day, 1910 (DCRO D/X 188/14/4/4)



Photograph of Dean and Chapter Colliery banner at Durham Miners' Gala, 1948 (DCRO D/Ph 285/4)

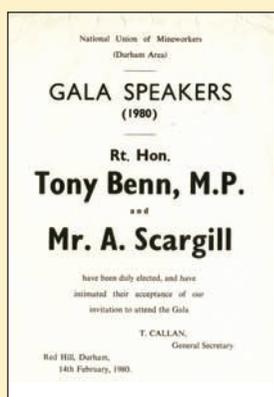


Eldon Drift Lodge minute book, 25 May 1958 (DCRO D/DMA Acc: 2157(D) volume 167)

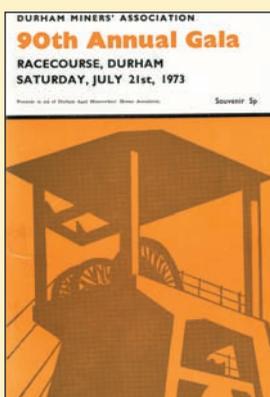
nominated, elected and invited months in advance. Banner carriers were often selected by lottery. Everything was planned in minute detail, as the Eldon Drift Lodge minute book shows:

'Arrangements for Busses made and that members and their wives and children to travel free – members travelling to receive 5/-. Committee members travelling 20/- each. Buses to leave Depot at 7 AM for Close House. Parade with banner prior to departure for Durham City. Banner to be lifted at Racecourse at 4.30 PM return from Durham at 5.30 PM. Refreshments : to cater for 150 @ 1/6 per head. Banner carriers (8) to receive a payment of £2 each. £5 to be allowed for liquid refreshments'

Many lodges bought flowers to sell on Gala Day for the Aged Miners' Fund. Others laid wreaths at local war memorials.



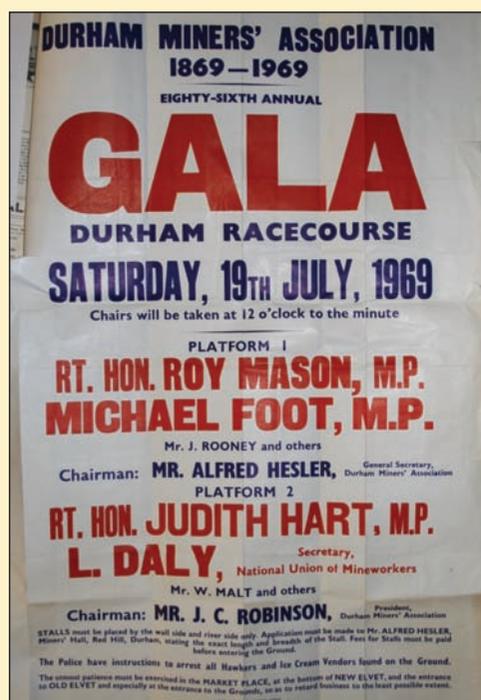
Notice concerning Gala speakers, February 1980 (DCRO D/DMA Acc:2157(D) volume 167)



Gala souvenir programme, 1973 (DCRO D/DMA 325/4)



Photograph of Gala spectators, 1983 (DCRO D/Ph 360/1/23(6))



Gala poster, 1969 (DCRO D/DMA Acc: 2157(D) volume 141)

Gala History

The Durham Miners' Gala is organised by the Durham Miners' Association and is one of the largest trade union events in Britain. The first Gala (or Big Meeting) was held in Wharton Park, Durham, in August 1871. It has been held every summer since then at the racecourse, Durham, except for breaks during the war years (1915-1918 and 1940-1945), the national lock-outs in 1921- 1922 and the general strike in 1926. The 1984 Gala was cancelled as a result of the miners' strike. An 'unofficial' Gala was held at Burnhope in 1926 and attended by 30,000 people. In 1875 the North Eastern Railway Company withdrew services to Durham station, claiming it could not carry so many people on a Saturday. The Gala was held on Monday for the following two years.

At its height in the 1950s around 300,000 people attended the Gala. Numbers steadily declined as collieries closed from the 1960s onwards, and the event almost folded when the last pits in the Durham coalfield closed in the 1990s. There has been a revival recently and in 2009 the Gala attracted about 100,000 people.

On Gala Day lodge members parade around their village with the lodge banner and a brass band before travelling to Durham City. They then march through the streets to the racecourse, stopping to play one tune in front of dignitaries on the balcony at the Royal County Hotel. Political speeches and various entertainments take place on the racecourse before the banners are paraded to Durham cathedral in the afternoon. There has been a miners' festival service in the cathedral since 1897.

Preparations

Lodge records show that preparations for the next year began almost immediately after Gala Day had finished. In 1958 the Eldon Drift Lodge chairman had already approached Cockerton Silver Prize Band before a committee meeting held on 17 August. Well known speakers also had to be