CHAPTER ONE

THE BOY FROM BOLE HILL

"Be calm"

The constant advice of Fred Croft,
Chairman of the Denaby Main branch
Yorkshire Miners’ Association
During the 1902-03 strike

ALBERT (GINGER) GOODWIN grew up in the rapidly expanding coalfields of Yorkshire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born on 10 May 1887, in the mining village of Treeton in the West Riding of Yorkshire (now South Yorkshire), a few miles east of the big industrial city of Sheffield, he was named Albert after Prince Albert, Queen Victoria’s late husband. She celebrated the 50th anniversary of her reign in June 1887. Later, Albert was nicknamed Ginger because of his red hair.

Like tens of thousands of other young men, Goodwin followed his father into the mines as soon as he left school at twelve. Miners’ strikes and evictions from company houses, including his own, etched class-consciousness into his soul. Mining companies often evicted tenants from company-owned houses to press a point in a strike and create accommodation for strikebreakers. Those who were evicted often made do in tents supplied by the union.

Miners were frequently crowded together into cheap barracks-like housing that maximized land use and minimized the cost to the coal companies. The state of sanitation in company houses was atrocious: Primitive sewage systems that in some cases were nothing more than holes in the ground were responsible for epidemics of typhoid fever. Mining subsidence damaged houses that often needed bracing by iron rods after developing severe cracks.

Goodwin’s father, Walter, was a hewer, one of the skilled men who worked at the coalface to win coal from the earth by manual labour in the days before machine mining. Hewers worked in stalls about eight yards

1 J.E. MacFarlane, The Bag Muck Strike Denaby Main 1902-1903 (Doncaster 1987).
Grim conditions in Denaby Main are well portrayed about 1900. This is Loversall Street, built in 1895, several blocks from where the Goodwin family lived. The filthy toilets, called privy-middens, are on the left. *Doncaster Library and Information Service.*
"The stalls system of getting coal demanded men of superb courage and resource," writes Treeton historian Tom Rossington, who lived in the village his entire life. Each stall had a small team, usually two hewers and a filler. Stalls were generally worked two shifts a day. The men were required to provide their own tools. One of the miners, lying on his side, hacked away at the base of a seam with his pick. "He might take away about a foot of coal and gradually work his way underneath to a distance of five or six feet, and as he did so he would fix short wooden sprags to bear the weight of the coal above him. In this uncomfortable position his body was often bruised, and an old miner would bear on his body for the rest of his life dark blue marks under his skin," writes Rossington. The next step was to knock out the sprags and hope the coal would fall and break up. If this didn't happen, the hewer worked harder and longer "and this was a serious matter, for wages depended on the amount of coal produced from the stall. So it often happened that, because of geological conditions the wages due to one stall might differ considerably from another, although a greater amount of hard work had been expended."

A variant of this form of mining was, after undercutting the seam, boring holes into the face up to five feet in depth, inserting explosives, and exploding them, breaking down the coal into manageable sizes. Coal was mined at Treeton and many other places by the stall system until the 1920s when coal cutting machines were introduced in the long wall method.

The job of pony driver, which Ginger Goodwin took up as a teen-ager, was to keep a supply of coal tubs running to and from the coalface. "The pony driver's role was important. If they thought the circumstances warranted it they had power to stop the pit and so it happened on a number of occasions," writes Rossington. At the end of the shift, the pony drivers and other mineworkers left and saw daylight. Not so the ponies. "Only on very rare occasions was a pony brought to the surface, possibly for rest and treatment in the pony 'hospital,' or, being old and worn out to be humanely slaughtered," writes Rossington. But there were times, such as strikes, when the ponies — and there were more than 150 of them at one time at Treeton — were brought to the surface to run and graze in the fields.

Walter Goodwin moved his family every few years, taking up better working places at the new mines that were quickly opening up to fuel the expansion of British industry and to heat homes. Walter hailed from Killamarsh, where Derbyshire blends into Yorkshire, and his wife, Mary Ann, came from Workington in Cumberland county. Albert was their third child. He was preceded by brother George, with whom he was closest and who later turned down his requests to join him in Canada, and sister Alice. George

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8 Fighting For Dignity
and Albert worked together in the Cadeby Colliery opposite the new mining village of Denaby Main. George himself had twelve children including five boys, who followed him into the mines. Albert never married. George named his youngest boy Albert after his favourite brother. Edith, Walter (junior), Daniel and Elizabeth rounded out the offspring of Walter and Mary Ann Goodwin.  

Goodwin was born at home in Well Lane in the Bole Hill neighbourhood of Treeton just before the street becomes Bole Hill Lane. The site has since been cleared and is vacant. Goodwin was baptized into the Church of England on 29 May 1887 at the parish church of St. Helen in Treeton.
Boy leads pit pony and coal car in an English mine contemporaneous with Ginger Goodwin, who was a pony driver before coming to Canada in 1906. More than 70,000 horses and ponies were at work in British coal mines by 1913. *Leeds Postcards.*

Over the years, many of the original Treeton mining houses were condemned and pulled down after being weakened by subsidence from underground mining. Others remained but were often braced with steel supports. Rother Vale Collieries leased 1,300 acres from the Duke of Norfolk, one of the great landowners of Britain. As the Earl Marshal of England, he was the premier peer of the realm. He lived in splendour in Arundel Castle in Sussex, a rebuilt Norman fortress above the River Arun, hundreds of miles from Treeton.

Treeton today is an attractive village perched on a hill overlooking the Rother Valley in one direction and country fields in the other. Mining activity began in 1875 with the sinking of two shafts to a depth of 333 yards to the famous Barnsley Bed, a coal seam eight to ten feet thick. A sleepy country village with 383 residents in 1871, Treeton’s population soared more than six-fold to 2,450 in 1901. Treeton claimed to be the first village in England to have electric streetlights, in 1897. Rother Vale Collieries Limited built
Treeton Colliery, where Ginger Goodwin’s father, Walter, worked in the 1880s, is in South Yorkshire near Sheffield. The mine closed in 1990 and the property was turned into housing. Ginger Goodwin was born in Treeton in 1887. A typical street scene in the village is shown from just over 100 years later. Helen Ayers.
234 units of row housing for miners in Treeton. Other miners came to work from nearby villages.\(^6\)

While the Goodwins moved frequently, they remained within the coalfields of north Derbyshire and south Yorkshire, 60 kilometres at the most between the north and south points. The family started out shortly before 1880 in Clowne, in north Derbyshire. The coal mine in Clowne, Barlborough No. 1 Colliery, had opened in 1873 and, at its height, employed 560 men underground extracting 200,000 tons of coal a year. The family moved to Mexborough in Yorkshire and then to Treeton shortly before Albert's birth in 1887. Within three years, the family moved north to New Fryston, near Castleford, where Wheldale Collieries had opened a new mine close to the River Aire that would remain open until 1985. Nothing remains of it today. The Goodwins lived on Castle Street. Like many working-class families, they supplemented their income by taking in lodgers. Walter was involved in a 16-week strike of 300,000 miners in 1893 in Yorkshire, Lancashire and the Midlands against a threatened reduction of nearly 20 per cent in wages. The school logbook at Treeton, where they had lived, recorded that many children had no boots to wear. Despite the labour unrest provoked by the colliery managements, Yorkshire coal production rose by more than half, from 20,100,000 tons in 1887 to 32,500,000 tons in 1906. Employment increased in the same period from 66,900 miners to 115,500.\(^7\)

Just before the turn of the century, the Goodwins moved to the rapidly expanding mining village of Denaby Main on the River Don just below the historic town of Conisbrough, between Rotherham and Doncaster. Here the family's last child, Elizabeth, was born in 1897. Conisbrough is famous for its castle that was built about 1100. Its ruins dominate the countryside. Denaby (now called Old Denaby) was a quiet country village with a population of 203 in 1861 and a history going back 1,000 years although the presence of coal was long known and some mining had occurred since medieval times. Denaby Main sprang into life as an industrial village next door to Old Denaby, in the midst of the beautiful Yorkshire countryside. The Denaby Main Colliery Company Limited sank two shafts in 1863 and the famous Barnsley seam, well over nine feet thick, was reached in 1867 at a depth of 422 yards. It was then the deepest mine in Yorkshire and the farthest east in the coalfield. Just across the River Don, a second mine was started slightly farther east at Cadeby. By 1893, the Barnsley coal seam was reached at 757

\(^6\) Rossington, The Story of Treeton Colliery.
yards and production began at Cadeby, where Ginger Goodwin was to work.

By the time the Goodwin family arrived, 3,500 men were employed in the two mines, 2,600 of them underground. This reached 4,672 workers in 1903 — 2,069 in Denaby Main and 2,603 at Cadeby. The company built more than 1,000 units of terrace housing packed into a density of 49 to the acre, laid out in barracks-style rows. Several hundred units of housing were added in the 1890s for workers at the new Cadeby mine. Eventually, the company built 1,700 units of housing.

Denaby Main historian John Gwatkin, who lived there before the housing was demolished in the 1960s and 1970s, saw them as “rows of endless terrace houses, with no open spaces” that were not built “to afford much pleasure or comfort to the miners and their families who inhabited them.” The “closely packed rows” of terraced housing “radiated outwards from the colliery like parallel lines and every now and then an odd row would criss-cross the others forming a maze-like structure of houses, roads, narrow passages and entries.” The sameness of the streets gave rise to the expression “Packy’s Puzzle,” because packmen, or pedlars, became confused.

Homes in Denaby Main often housed several miners with working sons and lodgers. Company houses were small, typically with two rooms on the main floor and two rooms upstairs, although some were three up-three down. None of the houses had bathrooms, indoor toilets or running water when they were built. Water initially was obtained from just two taps for the whole village before the company built a reservoir in 1898 after housewives complained. Toilets and areas for household waste, separate from the homes, were emptied once a week, later more frequently. Disease was rife, particularly with outbreaks of typhoid, a highly contagious disease producing fever that is usually associated with unsanitary conditions.

Gwatkin describes the privy-midden system of disposing of sewage and household wastes this way: “In between the backs of the rows of houses in Denaby Main was another building which housed the privy-middens. The privy part of the building was just a hole in the ground with a plank of wood across it. The sewage was shovelled out at night into a horse and cart. At the same time, the middens that were adjacent to the privy and contained the ash from the coal fires and other household waste, was also emptied.”

Later, the privy-middens were upgraded with water closets that flushed, at specific intervals, a whole block of toilets. The infant mortality rate, a classic

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8 John Gwatkin, A Photographic Record of the Old Village of Denaby Main (Conisbrough 1990).
9 Denaby and Cadeby Miners Memorial Chapel, Denaby Main local history brochure (Denaby Main: Parish Church of All Saints, 1989).
10 Author’s correspondence with John Gwatkin, 3 March 1993.
The Goodwin family with seven children lived at 64 Firbeck Street in Denaby Main (row houses) when they were evicted along with almost 800 other families in January 1903 during the Bag Muck Strike. By 1905, they were back in Denaby Main, living at 39 Rossington Street (shown in later photo). Both homes had only two rooms up, two rooms down, and outside toilets. The houses on these two streets were built in the late 1880s/early 1890s and demolished in the early 1970s. *A Photographic Record of the ‘Old’ Village of Denaby Main.*
measurement of the state of public health, was more than twice that of middle class areas of the city of York. A quarter or more of all babies born in Denaby Main died before they were one year old, a common death rate for poor and working class districts. The infant mortality rate at the turn of the century reached 276 deaths for every 1,000 births in Denaby Main. But throughout England and Wales, the infant mortality rate in 1900 was 154 deaths per 1,000 births. By the end of the 20th century, infant mortality rates in western industrialized countries had dropped to fewer than 10 deaths for every 1,000 births because of more plentiful and varied food, steps to prevent infectious diseases, public health measures to make the environment less hazardous to health, and new drugs. The worst rate in the world in 2002 was Angola with 191.66 deaths per 1,000 live births. Even this was well below conditions when Ginger was a child.

An outbreak of typhoid in Denaby Main in 1904 resulted in 95 cases and eleven deaths. The privy-midden outside toilets were labelled “obsolete abominations” by Dr. C.J. Russell McLean, Medical Officer of Health for Doncaster Rural District, which had approved them at the time of construction. The toilets frequently overflowed. The toilets themselves, together with the sloppy removal of excrement, and the closeness of the toilets to the houses, “are the likeliest explanation of the existence of typhoid fever,” reported Dr. McLean. The outbreak was sufficiently alarming to cause the Local Government Board in London to launch an inquiry. Dr. Reginald Farrar concluded that there was strong evidence to connect not only the typhoid outbreak to the privy-midden system but also the excessive annual prevalence of epidemic diarrhoea. Because of bad construction the toilets were often full to the level of the seat, and unusable because of faecal accumulation. Dr. Farrar wrote that Doncaster Rural District Council “should seriously entertain the question of substituting for the present midden-system a water-carriage system of removal of excreta.”

The sulphur-laden coal smoke from industry and homes often clouded the community but housewives took pride in keeping their homes as clean as they could. Steps and windowsills were scoured to produce a white effect.

12Reports of the Medical Officer of Health for Doncaster Rural District, 1901-1909, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, Cultural Services Division, Archives Department; Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*.
14Annual Report for 1904 by Dr. C.J. Russell McLean, Medical Officer of Health for Doncaster Rural District, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, Cultural Services Division, Archives Department.
Men, filthy from work in the mine and without any washing facilities at the pithead (a situation common in Britain until the privately-owned mines were nationalized by the Labour government in 1947), crouched over tin tubs of hot water in their living rooms while their wives scrubbed them. With sons following fathers into the mine, this happened several times a day, with the water heated by a coal fire. Monday was washing day and housewives typically worked from morning to night laundering clothes. Respiratory problems were common in the choking atmosphere, especially when coal smoke mixed with fog to produce what in later years would be called smog.

The mining company was paternalistic, providing many social, educational, and recreational amenities, including buildings and playing fields. Not for nothing was William Henry Chambers, manager of Denaby and Cadeby Main Collieries Limited, nicknamed "the King of Denaby." But inside the velvet glove of outward care and concern was an iron fist.

"On the one hand the DMCC was seen to be generous in their provision of numerous facilities for their pit village; yet on the other hand they were a commercially ruthless company who had a hard, even callous, attitude to their men when working at the pit," writes historian A.J. Booth.

The first strike at the Denaby Main mine was in 1869 and others followed in 1875, 1877, and 1884-85. The strikes brought hardship for the miners but also camaraderie among the men who shared the danger of work each time they descended into the mine, and with women who supported their husbands, especially on picket lines.

Ginger started work either in 1898 when he turned 11 years old — school leaving age — or the following year when the age was raised to 12 by the Elementary Education (School Attendance) Act. In 1901 it was common for 12-year-old boys to start work underground hauling coal. He worked at the Cadeby mine across the River Don from the Denaby Main mine where his father worked, according to family members. By 1901, he was working as a pit corporal underground — showing his leadership qualities at a very early age as the one in charge of the haulage boys whose job it was to move full coal tubs from the face and bring empty tubs for filling. Later in his teens, Ginger became a pony driver. Ponies pulled loaded coal tubs from the coalface to a point inside the mine where the tubs were attached to haulage ropes that took them to the bottom of the shaft. The tubs were loaded, eight at a time, into the cage, two tubs on each side of four decks, and hoisted to the surface.

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17 Denaby and Cadeby Miners Memorial Chapel, brochure.
18 Author's correspondence with the National Coal Mining Museum for England, Overton, West Yorkshire, 23 September 2002; British census 1901 (www.census.pro.gov.uk); author's correspondence with Goodwin family.
Goodwin experienced his first strike as a worker in 1902-03. It was called in a complicated dispute over payment for removal of dirt, called bag muck, between two layers of coal and it is still known as the Bag Muck Strike. Goodwin and several thousand others personally witnessed the heartless cruelty exhibited by many mining companies on both sides of the Atlantic. While unions and collective bargaining were lawful, this was effectively undermined by the legal (and not infrequent) use of strikebreakers and the eviction of miners and their families from company housing when they were unable to pay rent during strikes. In the 1902-03 Denaby Main strike, the evictions were used as a weapon by the company to advance its bargaining position.

The company persuaded the Lower Strafforth and Tickhill Petty Sessions of Doncaster Court on 13 December 1902 to issue eviction orders against almost 800 families, including the Goodwins, for non-payment of rent. The company tried to pressure the strikers into returning to work under the conditions that prevailed before the strike began the previous summer. When this failed, the company used its power as landlord to drive the strikers from their homes. The company issued a notice on 1 January

\[^{19}\text{Court register, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, Cultural Services Division, Archives Department.}\]
1903, saying police would have the eviction orders in their hands for execution on 3 January.

The notice read: "All those against whom orders have been made will then be compelled to give up possession of their house. UNLESS THEY HAVE PREVIOUSLY SIGNED THE AGREEMENT TO GO TO WORK ON THE TERMS WHEN THE PITS ARE DECLARED OPEN TO THEM."

The evictions of more than 2,000 men, women, and children between 6 and 9 January 1903, at times during snow and rainstorms, caused considerable distress. Sticking to the advice of Fred Croft, leader of the union strike committee, the families remained calm. Their possessions were dumped into the streets and they were left to find shelter from friends or families, from churches that stood with them to the end, and in tents supplied by the Yorkshire Miners’ Association.

The evictions received national publicity. The press noted the calm of the miners and their families and praised union leaders. The first families to be thrown out of their homes lived on Firbeck Street and Cliff View. At the time the Goodwins — father, mother and seven children — were living at 64 Firbeck Street, jammed into two rooms up, two down, in a row of houses built in 1892. It was noted that the miners’ furniture was of good quality but, clearly, much had been sold to provide income during the strike. More than one policeman was in tears on having to evict the families. Among many poignant scenes was the removal of 96-year-old Bridget Ford from her grandson Richard Knight’s home at 22 Annerley Street. Two policemen, their eyes full of tears, carried her out in a chair. The memory of the evictions was etched deeply among those who experienced them and has been passed on to subsequent generations. It could not have failed to disturb Albert Goodwin, who was then only 15. The strike lingered on before being called off in its 40th week. Hundreds of miners never returned to work. Among those victimized was George Henry Hirst, who went on to become a Labour Member of Parliament from 1918 to 1931, winning ever-increasing majorities. Denaby and Cadeby Main Collieries Limited sued the union for damages and court costs of 180,000 pounds sterling (more than one million pounds in current value, or more than $2 million) to cover its losses. Long after the strike ended, the Court of Appeal ruled in 1906 in favour of the union in a decision approved by the House of Lords. There was dancing and singing in the streets of the mining districts and flags were flown.

20Mexborough and Swinton Times, 9 January 1903.
Cruel evictions during the Bag Muck Strike in Denaby Main of almost 800 families — more than 2,000 men, women, and children, including the Goodwins — were carried out between 6 and 9 January 1903, at times during snow and rainstorms. The eviction scene is captured in the sketch from the Mexboro and Swinton Times. Police remove furniture from the upstairs of a home. Doncaster Library and Information Service.
What happened to the Goodwins immediately after the evictions is not clear but the family was back in Denaby Main in 1905, moving first into 39 Rossington Street and then to 36 Edlington Street the following year. Ginger Goodwin was working at the Cadeby colliery as a pony driver. He boarded with the Martin family where he was remembered for frequently discussing work issues and conditions.

With coal mining booming in the New World, recruiters often came to British coalfields seeking miners who left in groups for new opportunities. The United States and Canada were particularly attractive for hundreds of thousands of Britons. Between 1871 and 1911, Britain experienced a net loss of 1,950,000 persons by migration. Both the Dominion Coal Company and the Dominion Iron and Steel Company in Nova Scotia recruited in Europe. Press accounts in the Denaby Main area painted a glowing picture of work and conditions in the Cape Breton coalfield. This undoubtedly encouraged the migration of miners. A former Denaby Main miner named Kenshaw was commissioned by Dominion Coal to recruit new labour. He had gone to Glace Bay earlier in 1906 to join Dominion Coal after working for 17 years in Denaby Main. On 27 July 1906, no fewer than 200 miners left Mexborough railway station near Denaby Main to work for Dominion Coal. The company paid the fares that were deducted over 52 weeks after starting work. If the miner stayed for 12 months, then it was returned as a bonus. It was reported that there was “a craze for emigration” from Denaby Main “to depart from the old mother country, in search of fortune in the land of the West.” In the summer of 1906 Goodwin was 19 and ready to emigrate to Canada.

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23 Miners Museum of Glace Bay, N.S., “The History of Mining in Cape Breton: Immigration”.
24 Mexborough and Swinton Times, 14, 28 July 1906; The Colliery Guardian, 6 April 1906. Both quotations are from the 14 July 1906 issue of the Mexborough and Swinton Times.