

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

A few years ago an old workmate of mine now departed Charlie (Straggy) Handcock gave me a note book to read which contained the poems of Harry Fokinther a workmate from Charlie's days at Ramcroft colliery.

Harry moved from Ramcroft colliery when it closed and went to work at Oxcroft colliery where he was later so tragically killed. His wife gave Charlie the poems and he would let people borrow them to read. I suggested that I could photocopy the original and do a few copies for Charlie to pass around so that the original was kept from the rigors of public reading, I also asked if I could keep a copy to which Charlie agreed.

I enjoyed reading the poems so much that I tried to persuade Charlie to have them published to raise money for a suitable charity, this he declined to agree to. I think these poems should be in the public domain and respecting Charlie's wishes I have produced only a few copies for other people to read.

The original writing of each poem is signed with the authors signature and contains comments about some of the poems origins this has been included. The poems have been written using the original spelling and punctuation but differ slightly from the originals in so much as all words of the poems start with a capital letter and each poem starts on a new page.

Enjoy

A.N.Bridgewater June 26th.1998.

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

The Ancient Miner.

Over four score years and ten,
This beauteous earth I've trod,
And for this wondrous span of life,
I humbly thank my god.

He gave me health and kept me safe,
In him I'll put my trust,
For fifty years with scarce a break,
I've toiled within earth's crust.

I did not come through this unscathed,
Of knocks I've had my share,
Through hewing coal my backs become
A tattooist's nightmare.

At early sobbing of the morn,
My pick I'd swiftly wield,
Till pearly shades of eventide,
Shrouded lane and field.

Long and arduous were the hours,
To earn a meagre pay
In winter time for weeks on end,
I scarce saw light of day.

To supplement our frugal fare,
I'd go with dog and gun,
And poach the game from anywhere,
To get both food and fun,

Oft times our fruits of toil upheld,
Some rich man's grand retreat,
Yet we were called the social scum,
And names I won't repeat.

Enough of my unholy past,
Let's to the future fine

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

For there's splendid opportunities,
For young men in the mine.

I must confess I am confused,
By machinery I see,
Being taken to out local mines
On the wagon of N.C.B.

How they worked these monstrous things,
I could never understand,
Or how they got them down below,
To me it beats the band

My sons explained and gave them names,
Of shearer and trepanner,
It seems to me there getting coal,
By button, key and spanner

What a contrast From my day,
No shot firer to pester
For the sole devices that I knew
Were sicol and sylvester

You do not have to work so hard,
But you must go to school,
To make these titans cut and load,
Needs no blundering fool.

I must accept this modern age,
Of juke box and guitar,
Though tolerant I try to be,
It gives my ears a jar

I watch my grandsons do the twist,
It needs energy I'd say,
I can also do the twist,
Just half an ounce a day

They sing of girls with fancy names,
Like Jezebel and Selina,

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

I still prefer sweet Nellie Dean
And my old concertina.

I do not grudge them their gay time,
Or criticize their ways,
I'm only thankful I've been spared,
To see these brighter days.

If the Lord who gave me this long life,
Would my youth return to me,
I'd go and train with all the lads,
For a miner I would be

Possessed once more with radiant youth,
With prospects bright and clearer,
Down the pit I'd go again,
And learn to drive a shearer.

The old man portrayed in these verses actually Lived, and strangely enough showed great approval to the modern mining after a full working Life in the mines of Derbyshire he lived to be nearly ninety two.

Coal.

One million years and more I've lain
Neath rugged hill and windswept
Abundantly my seams expand,
Beneath the face of this fair land.

In ages man endured the test
Of delivering in my stubborn breast
With implements so crude and frail
To penetrate my rocky mail

Mids't sweat and grime I have teen
On womens backs and shoulders torn,
On little chudrens loins I'd ride,
From early morn 'till eventide.

Thus the tale of my fast life,

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

A history of shame and strife,
Tis' gone forever this cursed stage,
To a better and brighter age.

Now with every mechanised device,
I'm torn asunder in a trice
With drills I'm bored and powder fed,
Then blasted from my rocky bed.

On rubber belts I am conveyed,
Let not this progress be delayed,
For when I see the light of day,
for all your toil and sweat I'll pay,

The brightest jewel in the crown,
Or other gems of great renown,
Are but mere dross compared with me,
Black and grimy though I be.

For from my loins spring countless things,
From battleships to minute springs,
Tractors, Locos, Light and Heat,
And even the Daily Bread we eat,
And countless other things untold,
Ar iso from my resourceful fold.

In this your darkest hour of need,
If you would still your children feed,
Arise in one united band,
And hew the coal beneath the land.

This was composed as an appeal to all British Miners to return during the critical War Years.

Ted.

For half a century you have borne,
The rigours of the pit,
Its every phase you have endured,
Yet still you'r fighting fit,

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

A remarkable achievement,
A record to admire,
Over three decades you've fought,
Explosion, Gas and Fire.

The gallant rescue teams you've led,
Whose deeds we do not know,
Appalling must have been the scenes,
You witnessed there below.

Fire can be mans greatest friend,
Or be his deadley foe,
You've fought it on the surface
And you've fought it down below,

Heroic deeds are oft portrayed,
By gilded decoration,
Those scars of blue suffice
Your value to the nation.

Leasure you have sacrificed,
It has not been invain,
Many men can thank you,
For relieving him of pain.

A ribboned tunic goes to show,
Your service in First Aid,
A worthy member of St John,
Efficient, sure and staid.

Unseen perils of the mines,
Did not your zest impair,
You are quite prepared to meet
All dangers from the air

For should our country be attacked,
In this Atomic Age.,
We are certain youth be there,
Should hellish fire rage.

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

Clear headed and courageous,
With physique of a bull,
God gave you all these talents,
And you used them to the full.

Eventually you will retire,
Though you will not rest,
We who know your qualities,
Here wish you all the best.

This poem was written as an appreciation to Albert Edwin Smith, known to us all as Ted. Fire officer at Ramcroft Colliery.

The Wheel.

In this age of automation
With inventions commonplace
When man is sealed within a shell
And hurtled into space

Marvelous new creations
Some whose benefit we feel
All owe their great appearance
To the turning of the wheel

It came out of antiquity
Its maker no one knows
It may have been a branded slave
In the land where sandstone blows

Some haughty Pharo's vassal
Or some woaded Briton could
And yet some slant eyed mongol
May have started it in wood

Revolving through the ages
Serving man in devious ways
Tyred in bronze and iron
To these synthetic days

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

Up the highest mountain
Down the deepest mine
In planetary travel
In climate foul or fine

In the worlds casinos
The rotating roulette wheel
Can give a man good fortune
Or bring him down to heel

At the Spanish Inquisition
It played its gory part
In Ceasars vast arenas
On Tyburns tumbrel cart

Numerous are its uses
Some of sorrow some of joy
From intricate computer
To simple childhoods toy

Rolling ever onward
With the craven and the brave
Bearing mankind from the cradle
To his destined end, the grave

When er'e you see these wonders
In plastic wood or steel
Remember in their inner hearts
There surely turns a wheel.

To the Lads in the Telephone Exchange.

Ardent and efficient men
Are an asset to their trade
We've quite a lot but I know three
Who are within this grade

You may call them when you wish
The're allways in your range

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

I refer to these good fellows
In the telephone exchange

There's Tom and Dennis and there's Jim
Who likes his pinch of snuff
These three important men
Surely know their stuff

No radar in ship or plane
Did ever work so well
They are able (and they often)
Get us through to hell.

I've never seen them down below
And can never understand
How they know each district
As the lines upon their hand

You never can escape them
They'll track you till you'r found
They are keener than a poachers dog
With a ferret underground

Not only do they know your voice
They know your every mood
Whether you've been on the tiles
Or simply off your food

Let some emergency arise
Chose what or whom you need
By their aid it will be sent
With accuracy and speed

Although they never weild a pick
Or ply a dobbie key
Their work is most essential
I'm sure we all agree

If Jim could find the winners
Like he finds the men below

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

William Hill and all his tribe
Would sure be full of woe

When next you want to know the time
Be you English, Welsh, or Scotch
Spare these most obliging lads
And buy yourself a watch.

The River.

Emerging neath the distant hills
With a gurge and a quiver
As a infant from its mothers womb
Begins a mighty river

Nurtured by heavenly rain and snow
Infused by crystal spring
By willowy brook and tiny rill
Mid banks of moss and ling

Growing stronger every mile
Becoming deep and wide
Upon its rippling silvery back
Both coot and swan doth ride

Abounding with aquatic life
To numerous to tell
Within the shade of weedy banks
The vole and otter dwell

Natures element for fish
Roach and perch and bream
Rejoice with spotted trout and chubb
In shallows and midstream

Within its green and murky depths
There prowls voracious pike
Marauding every living thing
In its ferocious strike

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

Here the lordly salmon leaps
Agile as the flea
Taking some unwary fly
On its journey to the sea

A paradise of water sport
The anglers delight
Here the brawny college crews
Display their sculling might

Here some rich man cruising by
In streamline luxury craft
And some venterous country lad
Aboard a flimsy raft

Many a romance has begun
Upon its banks tis said
Many a lass with troubled mind
Has ended on its bed

Passing through this rustic phase
To some industrious vale
With yellow wave and ochered bank
Begins a sordid tale

Injected by mans noxious streams
The spoil of mine and mill
Detergent from the kitchen sink
Besmearing wharf and sill

Residue and oily waste
Polluting every wave
An ailing or unwanted pet
Oft' finds a watery grave

Writhing in mans harness
Like an unbroken colt
In boiler, pump, and turbine
Creating therm and vault

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

Upon a broad and billowing back
Ply craft of every size
Wallowing barge and dingy tramp
Replete with merchandise

Each bank a hive of toiling men
With hawser, hoist, and crane
Preparing all the nations wares
For every shipping lane

Here the rivers journey ends
It's reached the estuary
Merging with each briny wave
Tis' lost within the sea

So is the life of man my friend
As a river from its source
A surge of joy, a roll of pain
We take within lifes course

Whirling youth and wavering age
A rippling laugh, a moan
Drifting on lifes stream until
We reach the great unknown

The Miners Prayer.

Restore oh Lord my strength this day
That I may truly earn my pay
Let thy power refresh my soul
Then I shall fill my share of coal
With thee oh Lord I have no care
When I set foot upon the chair
Into the mine I will descend
Supported by an unseen hand
A friend who me will nee'r forsake
Though my heart and back nee'r break
Beneath the pits perpetual strain
My faith in thee will ease the pain
Though death be ever lurking here

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

Disguised in rock or faulty gear
His icy hand I have no dread
Thy names a cover for my head
I know it is the will of thine
That I should labour in the mine
And when my strength seems at a loss
I think of thee upon the cross
It is thy will that I should toil
A thousand feet beneath the soil
Though my heart and back both break
Please Lord do not me foresake
Protect me from the dangers here
Disguised in rock and faulty gear
The deadly gas we cannot see
Dear Lord I put my trust in thee
How frail are we in this dark hole
Compaired with mighty seams of coal
Yet by thy power we know the way
To bring it to the light of day

Perpetual Motion.

Man has strove for many an hour
To capture self sustaining power
In some device entirely free
To revolve until eternity

He'll oft' create some fine invention
That functions well yet needs attention
Automation and remote control
Brought him almost to his goal

Success would take him to the moon
He'll till the ocean bed quite soon
The elements freely utilize
To meet his needs of every size

Something free for nothing done
Theres no such thing beneath the sun
It would surely need some brilliant notion

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

To bring about perpetual motion

Modern Art.

Distortion seems to be the thing
In modern art today
By painted brush and printed word
In music, dance and play

Twisted wire or broken spring
Will often gain a prize
A daiper slapped upon a wall
Is called a bright sunrise

Some famous piece of music
They will mutilate and mar
Arrange it with some raucus voice
With amplified guitar

A long haired youth will take the floor
With gesture rude and riotous
And caper in a frenzied whirl
Like a pupil of St Vitus

They get approval and applause
And I myself would give it
If I could understand these things
But they say I am not with it.

Testament.

Like many members of my trade
My future it is most unstead
I bear the hazard of the mine
And trust my luck will hold out fine

I take my pleasure when I can
And try to help my fellow man
I follow no particular creed
No time have I for vice or greed

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

Simple things in life please me
Like birds that sing upon a tree
For one thing I would run a mile
To see an infant smile

When I this glorious life must leave
I know my kind will truly grieve
Although I shall not leave a cent
They will not grudge me what I've spent

The Rat.

Vile member of the rodent clan
Despised by bird and beast and man
Because of your predacious ways
No poet ever sang your praise

With every race in every clime
In mansion grand, or sewer slime
You follow in the wake of man
And steal from him what're you can

Nothing comes amiss to you
Rich fare or obscene residue
Prolific is your breeding way
Your loathsum tribe is here to stay

On human creatures of ill fame
We wrongfully bestow your name
Though very little good you do
This human kind is worse than you.

Shadows.

Distinctive in a sun at noon
Fainter by a yellow moon
Dappled neath a tree a quiver
Corrugated on the river

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

Lively in a firelight dance
Welcome in a sweet romance
Enchanting over maidens eye
Cause of matrons secret sigh

Eerie in ancestral hall
Amusing on the nursery wall
Aiding crook and painted jade
In robbery and oldest trade

An asset to the sleight of hand
To spiritual and mystic band
Shadows cast by dull and wise
Differ only in their size.

Black Diamond.

It does not grace a royal crown
Or glitter on some ladies gown
Yet sparkle at some great event
It is no costly ornament

Unlike the gems that shine on high
It is not pleasing to the eye
But there within its ebon core
Lies energy and wealth galore

By brawny arm and level head
Tis wrested from its stoney bed
Prepared by scientific ways
Despite the cost it always pays

Commodities worth more than gold
Rise from its ever fruitful fold
Diamonds clever men can fake
Black diamond coal, they cannot make.

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

The Closing of Ramcroft Colliery.

It seems we now have reached the end
Of a long eventful phase
The masters say our pit must close
For it no longer pays

And yet theres nothing we can do
The belts must cease to roll
Ramcroft will leave a page unique
In the history of coal

In the nations darkest hour
It more than played its part
Our countries needs were well supplied
By men of noble heart

Men differing in charecter
Men of every sort
Men studious and curious
Men who follow sport

Scrap dealers and fish fryers
And flopping great big liers
Political fanatics
'Top Hard' men with rheumatics

Great lovers, men of prayers
Artists, rhymers, and two mayors
Men as bald as coots
Men who never buy pit boots

A happy pit these men have made
Despite their whims and trends
As records show they know their jobs
And I'm proud to call them friends

Most miners like a drink of beer
Yet strange as it may be
These men all have a tendency

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

For a good strong pot of tea

It's every mans perogative
To criticise and scorn
Unjustly it has been applied
To our friend Percy Vaughn

How do you gaurd the interests
Of such a temprenal crew
How would you approach the 'boss'
To get a man his due

He's done his very best for all
For the clever and the crude
I hereby express for all
Our sincere gratitude

Very soon this little pit
That nestles in the vale
Will be just a mine of memories
That make many a childhoods tale

It's caused me many an ache and pain
And sometimes grief and tears
Yet I hope my future pit will bring
As many happy years

And now its with a heavy heart
And a feeling strange to tell
Knowing many feel the same
I bid a last farewell.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "H. Fokinther." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'H' and a long, sweeping underline.

Harry Fokinther.

The Poems of the Late Harry Fokinther.

Harry Fokinther.

Harry Fokinther.
Accidental Killed.
Oxcroft Colliery
November 2nd 1966
Age 53 Years.

'In The Bowels Of The Earth
His Toil Is Done
But In Gods Own Garden
His Lifes Begun'.

Many thanks to Harry's family for the photograph and shedding a little light on someone I never personally met but have enjoyed his poems so much. A.N.B.

The man referred to in "The Ancient Miner" was Harry's grandfather, Joseph Attenbrough. Harry left Ramcroft colliery on the Friday and started work at Oxcroft on the Monday and was accidentally killed on the Wednesday, he is buried in Scarcliffe Churchyard.



Photograph kindly donated by his family.

H. Fokinther.