

**Anne Kerr:**

What does the word community mean to you? A group of people united by faith, by sexuality or another form of identity? Or perhaps it's about the place where you grew up, or the people you work with.

This is Recovering Community, a podcast series about community: what it means, how it's formed, and how it can be rebuilt.

I'm Anne Kerr, and I'm the Head of School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Glasgow. And as a social scientist, I spend a lot of my working life thinking about communities and the different way they exist, and adapt.

In this age of what some would call rampant individualism, communities are as important as they've ever been.

But it's all too easy to fall back on empty cliches when we talk about involving communities in addressing contemporary issues.

For this first episode, we're focusing on Moodiesburn, a former mining town about eight miles north of Glasgow. Moodiesburn was home to the Auchengeich Colliery. The danger of mining left its mark on the area. Six men died in an explosion in 1931. And then, in 1959, the community was struck by disaster when there was a fire in the mine.

It claimed the lives of 47 men, and Auchengeich became one of the UK's worst mining disasters of the 20th century.

But during the miner's strike of '84 and '85, striking miners and local people put up a memorial to commemorate the disaster, and they come together each year to mark the anniversary.

To find out more about how the community has recovered from tragedy, deindustrialisation, and austerity, I went to Moodiesburn with my colleague, Jim Phillips, and I asked him to tell me more about the place...

**Jim Phillips**

We're at the Auchengeich Memorial Garden in Moodiesburn, adjacent to the Auchengeich Miners Welfare Club, which will be 100 years old in two years time and forms the center of a really interesting and lively community here. An ex mining community in Lanarkshire, but which has a lot to say to us about the world in the 21st century.

**Anne Kerr**

Jim has formed close connections with the mining communities he researches, and he suggested we talk to Willie Doolan. Willie is a former miner, now a local councillor, secretary of the Auchengeich Miners memorial committee and he's lived in Moodiesburn almost his whole life. If there's something going on in this community, Willie won't be far away.

**Jim Phillips**

Willie tell me about the memorial and its situation here in Moodiesburn

**Willie Doolan**

The monument as it stands today. That was a redesign that the community took on board. We wanted to spruce up the existing memorial site that we had down here for the Auchengeich miners. And I mean, you'll know, from the front of the memorial, we have a winding wheel, which was gained from the now closed Cardowan Pit. And that is always a remembrance there to our community. That was part of mining, you could always recall when you seen a local village pit, the winding wheels were always aloft. And that displays our dedication to the miners in general, the winding wheel. We also have here a bronze statue of a miner that was kindly, very kindly donated to the community by a Glasgow businessman. And he provided our community with this beautiful statue of a miner standing solemnly remembering his colleagues that died in Auchengeich Pit, in 1931. And in 1959.

Beyond that, we also have two dedication stones there. With each miner who lost their life in the Auchengeich disaster, their name, their age. Those names will never ever be forgotten within our community.

The loss of 47 miners was a very, very tragic and sad occasion. Because a lot of miners I mean, I've experienced it, the death of a miner in a workplace. It's a very, very traumatising situation. And the people here for a while, long, long while and even to today, they still feel the effects of the Auchengeich disaster. Where 47 local men, local men. The terrible effect that it had on the communities, because everybody knew someone at that particular time, who worked in Auchengeich Pit.

I mean, I can remember my own father, how distraught... he offered to go underground, help. But as I say, the rescue teams were in, they were trying their best to try and bring the bodies back up. The bodies were retrieved as it was, the bodies were still sitting in the man riding bogies that had took them so far underground. So devastating effect in this community. And even today, 62 years after the disaster, those effects still hang around our community, and our community will never ever forget.

Come on. It's too cold out here. The rain's starting to come down. Let's go in and get a wee bit of comfort in the miners welfare club and we can talk in there.

**Anne Kerr**

It was a cold, wet day and we were all glad to get inside the miner's welfare club. We were joined by Danny and Ian, they're linchpins of the club, who between them, have put decades of service into this place

**Ian Lowe**

My name is Ian Lowe. I was a miner from I left school and I worked in Auchengeich from 1952 to 53 until it closed. And then I went to Cardowan Colliery, I was in there for 18 years, in Cardowan. And then I went to Fife, to Bogside to Dunfermline and they were shutting all the pits down. And I came out in one piece, going strong yet.

### **Anne Kerr**

So Ian, we've come indoors to get away from the weather. And I'd really like to ask you about your involvement in getting the memorial set up during the miner's strike. Could you tell me about that? First of all, please?

### **Ian Lowe**

I think it was because there were no memorial there. And the men was all there, on strike. We were on strike for a year. This is what developed out it, was a memorial, although we were on strike. And I guy you never hear spoke about, Jerry Stark, and myself and one or two others at the pit. We drew up what we think we should have, and it would be a small memorial but it would show plenty, you know with the hutchies and the wheel and things like that, you know. And then we got a guys who was on strike...they used to get - I think it was - a fiver in here, you know, so we're all hanging about. And we got them to start to dig out the memorial. We got the wheel, it was lying up the back in Cardown Pit. That was a start of it. We've got a stone with all the men's names on it. The Co-Op have done the engraving and the gold writing free for us... on that because we no money. Nobody had any money. But i think that was the reason when it comes to the men that we had plenty time. Remember? We were getting a wee bit of payment. Anyway, that's how we got the first memorial

### **Danny Taylor**

There's a lot of photographs, poems and there's a lot of poems relating to the Geich, relating to the club as well, done by local people. We've got all this stuff here, that's been kept. It's quite a storyline.

My name is Danny Taylor, I am president of the club, Ian and I are directors of the club and I'm the company secretary of the club. I'm the chairman of the memorial committee, Ian's the Vice Chairman, Willie's the secretary of the memorial committee and we have been the committee of memorial for years, the three of us. Ian's served in the club for about 56 years I believe Ian?

"Aye"

Our hearts are in the club you know they definitely are. I've built, God Almighty, loads of this place...

### **Jim Phillips**

Can you tell us all, our listeners a bit more about the club because here is attached to the Auchengeich Colliery, which has been away for 55, 56 years and the club has survived and that tells us something, I think about the community around here and its support for the club, and its involvement in the club. So maybe just tell us a bit more about how the club has survived and how it's developed.

### **Danny Taylor**

It's basically I would say it's survived because of the people. The club's, it's always had a good support, always. We're strict enough without getting over the top. We don't have any religious biases. It's not allowed. So I think that's one of the things that makes the club good, is the people

### **Anne Kerr**

As we sat and talked, Danny began to sort through a couple of shopping bags, which revealed a huge archive documenting the club's history. And it was obvious that this was also a record of the lives lived in the town...

### **Danny Taylor**

There's a poem wrote by John Morrison, who stayed up in Chryston, and there's one, that's Top of the Bing. [Freya: "do you want to read it out for us?"]

Top of the Bing by John Morrison.

Top of bing. Peace and quiet, Sunday morning after a hectic night. Head sore, limbs weak. Steady climb to the peak. Reach the top, a wonderful sight. Clouds above, a fleecy white. Sit down contemplate. Why get in such a state. Women and drink. No more for me. Top of the bing. Near God I be. Gaze across to a far off hill, enjoy the moment, time to kill. Sore head gone, feeling fine, nature's beauties are all mine. Drink and the devil, well behind, peace and happiness in my mind. Top of bing a heavenly place. Of all my ills, there is no trace. Top of the bing, worth the climb. All is silent, no thought of time. Longer I sit on top of bing. My thoughts adrift, as on the wing. Soaring here, flying there searching, seeking everywhere. What's in the future, we cannot see, I wonder what's in store for me. I know that somewhere, there's a place, that is home to all the human race. Home is nearer, as angels sing, sitting here on top of the bing. John Morrison.

### **Ian Lowe**

Do you know what the bing was? Where all the waste went out the pit. Created a bing.

### **Jim Phillips**

Just still thinking about the club in your members. And I suppose the club hasn't... The club has changed, but it's been here through many decades of community changing. So I'm interested in that, how the community has, has changed around us. I mean, we look outside, and a lot of, there's a lot of new housing in Moodiesburn, you can see that the housing...so the community has changed around you, hasn't it?

### **Willie Doolan**

I mean, I can recall, Ian, you'll recall also, Danny, the main hub of employment within the communities at that particular time was either Bedley Pit, Cardowan Pit, Gartcosh strip mill or Auchengeich Pit. They sadly, they're no longer with us. And yeah, I mean, I'm the first to put my hands up and say we've seen welcoming change within Moodiesburn. I think it would be fair to say, in my honest opinion, that we've integrated greatly together. And any newcomers coming

into the village, maybe no association whatsoever or any background whatsoever with the mining industry or the miners in general. But they respect the hard work and the effort that the miners put into building their community that Moodiesburn is today. These people, they've integrated tremendously and, we got a load of people, no association with the mining industry, who retain their membership of Auchengeich Miners Welfare.

During the miner's strike, the club was utilised as a soup kitchen for the miners, the striking miners and their families. And can I say that the pattern's returned again, because just prior lockdown, Moodiesburn was in the throes of setting up a Community Food Bank. Now, lockdown came, we were still in the formation process. But we found ourselves homeless within a matter of weeks. With the COVID situation. Now, we were in a position, we recognised entirely during that lockdown period, that there were people within the community, both young and old, who required help. So I spoke to Danny, Ian, and other officials of the club - not a problem, use the miner's welfare. We're still supplying from the base of the miner's welfare, the people of Moodiesburn in the community with foodstuffs. So thanks to the Miners welfare.

### **Pat Egan**

I think it's also fair to point out that the role that these guys have played and they're very much under playing it a bit.

### **Anne Kerr**

This is Pat Egan, he saw the 1984 strike through with Willie....

### **Pat Egan**

The reason it's been so successful. Or one of the main reasons is the involvement in the schools, and the day of remembrance of the memorial. But the schools are all involved in Moodiesburn. So even people coming in as strangers that knew nothing about it, they shouldn't get to know about it and I think that's been a classic part of the work that these guys have done.

### **Jim Phillips**

So what you're saying Pat is, when the annual commemoration takes place here at the memorial, the community as it's evolved, comes together, and in consciousness of the industry, but also around the togetherness of the community that the industry has gifted us in society

### **Pat Egan**

Yes, and I think it's still a thing that people desire is a feeling of belonging. And it certainly embeds that in the community.

### **Willie Doolan**

We have always involved our local schools and by involving the schools, we're passing on the feelings of the older generation to the youngest generation in the communities and it's been really, really well received through the community.

### **Anne Kerr**

The acts of commemoration that emerged from the strike have helped to keep the threads of community life tightly woven in Moodiesburn. But the picket line protests have left a lasting legacy of injustice for many mining families. Pat and Willie were just two of many miners arrested and charged under circumstances that 40 years later, are being re-evaluated

### **Willie Doolan**

Paddy and I were huddled for want of a better word, on the same day up at Bilston Glen, 21st July 1984. I gets lifted, Paddy's get's lifted: breach of the peace. Two of us were arrested...What had actually happened was, if you recall. We were talking to a police inspector. The police always liked to meet the picket organiser, and they would go through what was expected and what we didn't want to see blah blah blah. So we're the picket coordinators, we're round this police inspector. And the next thing, a bus load, Bilston Glen a bus load of scabs come in. So there was a surge from the back, the inspector correct me if I'm wrong, went down. We have circled round about him, genuinely I mean that, we're circled round about him to protect the guy cause there was a crush coming on. The next thing, two of us, huddled, carried facedown by about 6 police. Correct? And we took some rattling in the ribs going through the police cordons. We gets in to the back of the meat wagon. So the two of us Loanhead police station. first time I'd ever been in trouble with the police in my puff. Paddy, he'd had a couple of other picket line offenses thrown against them.

Remember it, the number? you were given as if he'd done a murder or something, Jim, Anne. Standing with this ID number in front of you. So that was early afternoon we were arrested. Round about 12 o'clock at night. They came to my cell. Paddy was in the next cell to us, and the next thing. They were releasing me at 12 o'clock at night. I was getting out, Paddy was being detained

### **Jim Phillips**

Some of you involved Willie, Pat with the independent review of policing in the miner's strike, I wonder if you could just tell us, tell our listeners a wee bit about the campaign for a pardon. It's long running. It looks like it's coming to fruition. Why do you think it's been successful?

### **Pat Egan**

Because it's the truth is the straightforward answer to that. Our voices were never heard during the strike. It's always been a problem, I think, but no problem. It's been I think it's been passed through the mining communities where we don't say too much outwith the community and our stories are never told, as they should be. And what we realise is that the establishment always get their narrative put across. And it's never questioned. And that's why we feel this is important. And if you look at the questions that the government that the Scottish Government are now asking - and they've to be in by June, and you'll notice that most of they questions have nothing to do with policing. It's about what should happen with sacked miners, the police didnae sack anybody. it was about the sentences handed down the judiciary. Again, that was nothing to do with the police. And we think that the next part of this campaign is taking it to have a look at

Orgreave and that. That still sticks out, much in the craw. We were down at Orgreave and we come back. And the amazement...that was one of the most scariest experiences ever witnessed. I was 24 year old, police charging at us and then you come up the road. And then the rest of the week. People have been wondering why were you attacking the police? And we're looking aghast, what are you talking about? We were unaware that the BBC had reversed their tapes and shown it to look as if the miners attacked the police and the BBC held on to that seven years before they issued an apology. And nothing was ever looked into about it. That was the kind of things that was going on. And it was a big thing that went against that we realised during the strike, that when we went into communities that weren't mining communities, they were asking about the violence, and were worried about the violence. And they just wouldn't believe us at the time that wasn't coming from us

### **Jim Phillips**

What will it mean for the 500 plus Scottish miners who were wrongfully convicted to receive a pardon?

### **Willie Doolan**

Well, I think Jim, it takes us back to comments earlier about the stigma that was attached to the people who were dismissed, victimised. And I think it will mean a lot to families, because people like myself, like Paddy Egan, not criminals, not criminals, picket line offenses, minor picket line offenses or trumped up offenses. That Jim, in my opinion, would mean the world to families, it would mean the world to families whose sadly, their connection is no longer alive. From my own personal opinion, there should be compensation made to these people. Because a lot of these people, they lost their jobs, they lost that credibility with...Do you know what I mean? They were walking about communities, sacked, victimised. Not only that, the families were also victimised too. And it was very, very hard for these people to get another job because they had been blacklisted for activities during the strike.

### **Pat Egan**

If we're being honest, nobody could tell you how the people that were sacked were picked. nobody could tell you. There was people who done the very same things, that didn't get sacked. So I dunno if they put names in a hat or how they done it. I have no idea, and the same, some of us got our jobs back, some didn't. I remember going in to Seafield for an interview with the pit manager and he says right so, he asked what had happened, I told him, breach of the peace at Bilston Glen. Is that all? I says yeah, so they knew. He didn't seem that interested. That was that I was one of the lucky ones that got back. But again, a lot of guys didn't get back in, some of them that got back, got put into open cast, for example. All the pit delegates at that time were all sacked, they never ever got their jobs back

### **Anne Kerr**

So thank you, Pat and Willie for coming along today. It's been really fascinating to hear your story, we really appreciate it.

### **Willie and Pat**

Pleasure. Our pleasure. Thanks.

**Anne Kerr**

So we've just finished recording and speaking with Willie and Pat there, Jim, what did you, what did you think of this morning?

**Jim Phillips**

Well, this is a really interesting story about community and about how community is dynamic, that we've come to the miners welfare club, in Moodiesburn. This club has been here for almost 100 years, the community itself has changed immeasurably, but still, there's a miners welfare club. Their children are at the primary schools and the secondary school that we heard about, from our friends here today, where the school has made a big effort in situating itself as an institution within a place, a space that owes so much to its history, its history based around mining. So there's a community here that has changed. But the values, the values of solidarity, the values of togetherness, pragmatism, working to make the world a better place, I think they're still embedded within this community.

**Anne Kerr**

I was really struck by the stories of commemoration and I suppose reconciliation in some ways, when when we think about what was what was spoken about with the with the strike, and how powerful those things are, in terms of just keeping these connections going within the community, but also beyond, were were very powerful, I thought.

**Jim Phillips**

Yeah, t's an awkward fit, in some respects, thinking about the strike, which was a traumatic, prolonged, very painful end to coal mining, and not just in communities in Scotland, but in other parts of Britain, when we're also talking about reconciliation. But I think the two things really do fit together. Because what was being protected in that strike was economic security, and community sustainability. That strike was lost. It was lost because of the determination of the then UK government, to liberalise the economy, to reduce the role of the trade union voice, in policymaking and in workplaces. But thinking about what emerged was a kind of endurance of the values that had underpinned the strike in communities like this one. So they lost the strike, but they didn't lose the argument, I don't think. They didn't lose the argument about the importance to communities of economic togetherness, of opportunity for younger people, the women in their communities had found new opportunities in Scotland, with economic diversification, those changes in the economy were accepted by the miners, because those changes offered opportunities for their daughters, as well as for their sons. Nobody wanted to work underground forever. The miners recognised that their industry was dangerous. They did a lot after the Second World War, to make those workplaces a lot safer. Because that's what made the disaster here all the more, all the more painful. So yeah, there was a, there was pain and difficulty in the 1980s through the forced changes and ending of the industry. But I think what, what remains is embodied in the memorial that we've spent time at today, and the club that we've been in this morning, is the value of, of community.

**Anne Kerr**

And we were talking earlier about the huge amount of artwork and poetry and all the murals and the photographs that we've seen as we've been going around the club, I think it's quite striking as well how that forms... and sport and how that all forms part of the picture of community that we've been discussing today.

**Jim Phillips**

Yeah, I suppose a personal reflection, which I've come to over the last few years, when I wonder why it is that I'm attracted to and keep coming back to the miners and their communities. I was born in 1968. I grew up in a social democratic society. It was a good society to grow up in in Scotland in the 1970s. And into the early 1980s. It was a society obviously, with defects and inequalities of, of gender and ethnicity and race. But it was a society where we could see opportunities ahead of us.

The miners played an awfully big role in creating that safe environment for me, and others of my generation. Obviously, they kept the lights open, keep the lights on, I should say, they provided were heating, but they provided us with a lot in terms of civic society, in terms of cohesion, in terms of resource, in terms of well provisioned public services, health services, educational services, I owe them a lot. We owe them a lot. And that's why I'm so happy, really reflecting on what we expect to come out of the independent review that we're talking about today. Because removing the stigma of wrongful conviction from these men and their families, I think, will be a tremendous next stage in our development as a society.

**Anne Kerr**

Jim, thanks very much for being with us today.

**Jim Phillips**

Thanks Anne . It's been a pleasure.

**Anne Kerr**

Thank you for listening to our first episode of Recovering Community. I'm Anne Kerr and I'm grateful to my colleague Jim Phillips, and to Pat Egan and Willie Doolan for joining me in Moodiesburn. Many thanks also to Ian Lowe, Danny Taylor and the staff from the Moodiesburn Miners Welfare Club.

Thanks also to staff in the School of Social and Political Sciences and the College of Social Sciences who helped with this project.

All the songs featured in this episode were written by Bill Adair. They have been taken from the album 'Along The Miners' Rows' by Bill Adair and the Bridgend Sessions Band, and are used with kind permission.

Jim Phillips is author of *Scottish Coal Miners in the Twentieth Century*, published in 2019. Community is also a strong theme in *Coal County*, Ewan Gibbs's 2021 book on deindustrialisation and memory in Lanarkshire.

Recovering Community is produced by Freya Hellier.