

# Women's Support Groups, 84'-85' | Guidance Notes

## Introduction |

*'Picture Bank' resources provide a set of images focused on a particular theme or subject.*

*This 'Picture Bank' resource focuses on Women's Support Groups during the Miner's Strike in Wales, between 1984-85. The images have been selected from Amgueddfa Cymru's collection. They are high resolution enough for use as a whiteboard resource.*

*Within these guidance notes you will find background information on the theme, interpretation of the images, and details on further reading and web resources.*

*The resource is downloadable and does not have a specific age or progression step in mind. We would encourage users to read through the notes and edit the resource to best suit their needs.*

## Background Information |

*In the UK as a whole there were 235,000 men working at 223 pits in 1979. By 1983, this had fallen to 182,000 working in 175 pits. The recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s had also damaged other Welsh industries. Therefore, unemployment in south Wales was already over 13%, much higher than the UK average.*

*As a result, and with the looming threat of pit closures, many miners and their families felt they had no choice but to fight for the right to work and the future of their communities by going on strike.*

*The strike would last from March 1984, to March 1985. Throughout this time miner's with two children would have received £11 a week Supplementary Benefit; it was supposed to be higher but the government saw that it was well below average. Unions would pay out some funds and charitable donations would be given.*

*Mae'r adnodd hwn ar  
gael yn Gymraeg.*

*This resource is  
available in Welsh.*

*[amgueddfa.cymru/dysgu/](http://amgueddfa.cymru/dysgu/)  
[museum.wales/learn/](http://museum.wales/learn/)*

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## Background Information |

*As the strike continued, the miners and their families began to face real hardship as the men, who had been amongst the best paid manual workers in the country, had been without income since the beginning. This economic hardship, together with the fear that the Conservative government's policy would lead to the destruction of their communities, forced many women into action. There existed throughout the coalfields of south Wales a tradition of women supporting their men during industrial action, but this time the women went even further.*

*They raised funds, set up food centres, provided clothing and ran soup kitchens. They addressed public meetings and rallies, organised jumble sales, and wrote leaflets and pamphlets supporting the strike. Many women stood alongside their men on picket lines and, at Cynheidre Colliery, they even occupied the pit-head baths.*

*Some men within the mining communities felt threatened by this display of women's power. Some NUM lodges initially refused to allow women onto the picket line.*

*The strike gave many women more confidence in themselves; some went on to set up their own business or to study at university. In the Dulais Valley the 'DOVE' workshop, a community education and training resource, was set up by members of the local women's support group.*

*On the march back to work in March 1985, women made the walk back alongside the men.*

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## Images used and interpretation |

Slides 1-2 | These slides show picket lines at various collieries, along with police lines in opposition. These are to give an impression of the front lines of the strike. While many women did stand on the picket lines the biggest impact they made was away from these tense stand-offs between police and miner's outside collieries.

***Police at Abercynon Colliery, 1984***

***Police at the Phurnacite Plant at Abercwmboi, 1984***

*Slides 4-7 | Women's Support Groups were created all across the coalfields of south Wales. They began with the intention of providing food and clothing, but soon the groups would be gathering on marches and rallies in support of the strike. They all grew separately but would eventually come together as a supportive, vocal force. Slide 7, a list of rallies held to raise awareness, is a great example of how Women's Support Groups had become a part of the fight against pit closures and how there were many of them marching alongside others regularly.*

***Rhymney Valley Women Support Group marching in a demonstration in London, 1984***

***Welsh women and children peacefully protesting, taken from 'The Enemy Within' leaflet, 1984***

***Women and men protest together, taken from 'The Enemy Within' leaflet, 1984***

***Leaflet advertising Solidarity Rally across Wales, 1984***

*Slide 8 | This image is an example of the literature women were creating to both support and lament the events during the strike.*

***Treherbert Communist Party newsletter, 1984***

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*Slides 9-11 | These images highlight the incredible work Women's Support Groups did in making sure people had food. They would collect food donations, manage food distribution centres, create food packages, and generally coordinate every element of this essential part. Taking on this role was not easy put without the knowledge of these women looking out for the families of miner's and making sure they were fed the strike would have been over immediately.*

***Binny Jones, of Blaenau Ffestiniog, collecting food donations for Abernant Colliery, 1985***

***'Waiting for food parcels' – miners' wives at Williamstown Food Distribution Centre, 1984***

***'The baked beans factory' – Blaenrhondda Food Distribution Centre, 1985***

*Slides 12-14 | Women's Support Groups would organise fundraising events, but arguably more importantly, they organised community gatherings and parties, to help bring some normality for a time. These images show Christmas parties that were organised and the women that organised them.*

***A children's party held by the Banwen Women's Support Group at Banwen, 1984***

***A children's party held by the Banwen Women's Support Group at Banwen, 1984***

***Members of Banwen Women's Support Group during the Miners' Strike, 1984***

*Slides 15-16 | In March 1985, the strike came to an end and the walk back to work was a difficult thing for many miner's and their families as they felt defeated. As a show of solidarity Women's Support Groups marched to collieries alongside the miner's.*

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## Images used and interpretation |

*'The March back to work' – Maerdy Women's' Support Group, 1985*

*Rhymney Valley Women Support Group marching with the miners on their return to work, 1985*

*Slide 17 | Badges were made through the strike to show your support or to show what group you were a part of. This image shows a badge from 1985 that was worn by members of a Women's Support Group.*

### **Women's Support Groups badge, 1985**

*Slides 18-19 | After the strike many people wanted to celebrate what Women's Support Groups did during the strike. The images show a commemorative mug and badge that were made to mark the 20th and 30th anniversary of the miner's strike.*

**Women In Action Miners Strike 1984-85, mug, 2004**

**30th Anniversary Miners Strike 1984-1985, medal, 2014**

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## Key vocabulary |

### **Strike**

*An organised body of employees, as a form of protest, refuse to work, typically in an attempt to gain a concession or concessions from their employer.*

### **Colliery**

*A coal mine.*

### **Drift mine**

*A mine which is entered by a tunnel rather than a vertical shaft.*

### **Flying Pickets**

*Strikers sent to picket places of work other than their own.*

### **NCB**

*National Coal Board.*

### **NUM**

*National Union of Mineworkers.*

### **Picket line**

*Body of men positioned outside a place of work to persuade other workers to support their cause.*

### **Scabs**

*See strike breakers.*

### **Strike breakers**

*The name given to men refusing to strike or who returned to work. Known as 'scabs' by strikers and 'working miners' or 'returnees' by the media and NCB.*

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## Further reading |

*WCCPL & NUM Striking Back (1985), Salesbury Press*

*Michael Thomas The Death of an Industry (2004), Colben System Pte. Ltd.*

*John Davies History of Wales (1994), Penguin D.  
Gareth Evans A History of Wales 1906-2000 (2000),  
University of Wales Press*

*W. Gareth Evans The Role and Changing Status of  
Women in the Twentieth Century (2000), ACCAC*

*Deirdre Beddoe Out of the Shadows: A History of  
Women in Twentieth Century Wales (2000),  
University of Wales Press*

*David Egan Coal Society: A History of the South  
Wales Mining Valleys 1840-1980 (1987), Gomer*

*John Gorman Banner Bright – An Illustrated  
History of Trade Union Banners (1986), Scorpion  
Publishing*

## Websites |

*Amgueddfa Cymru Collections and Research*

<https://museum.wales/collections/>

*People's Collection Wales*

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/>

*South Wales Coalfield Collection at University of  
Wales, Swansea.*

<http://www.agor.org.uk/cwm/>

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