

REMEMBER ORGREAVE!

COMMEMORATION 2024



SKETCHES FROM ORGREAVE COMMEMORATION 2024

Charcoal sketches from a rally at Barkers Pool, Sheffield, Saturday 15th of June 2024.

This rally commemorates the 'battle of Orgreave' when the police attacked pickets at Orgreave Coke works on the 18th of June 1984.

In Sheffield there were speeches from the steps of the City Hall, a rally and then the Unite the Union Brass Banded off the march.



MARCH 1984

In March 1984 the National Union of Mineworkers launched a national strike in response to the plans of the National Coal Board to close a number of pits. The NCB claimed that it only wanted to close 20, but the NUM maintained – and subsequent events proved them right – that more than 70 pits were on the NCB's hit list. In the decade after 1984 the coal mining industry was effectively destroyed, with devastating consequences for the miners, their families and their communities.

The NUM called for a mass picket outside the Orgreave coking plant on 18th June 1984, aimed at disrupting the supply of coke from Orgreave to Scunthorpe. It followed a series of smaller demonstrations at the plant in May and early June. Whereas in the first three months of the strike police forces around the country had done their utmost to prevent pickets, on this occasion, 18th June, the police fell over themselves to be "helpful", guiding and ushering miners to the site, in particular to the "topside", the field to the south of the Plant. The "topside" was a field bounded at its bottom by a cordon of police officers six and more deep, blocking access to the plant; the two sides were patrolled by dog handlers with their charges; and a steep railway embankment and railway lines marked the back of the field. The only real escape route was over a narrow railway bridge at the top corner of the field, and this led into Orgreave village, with domestic housing on the right and a small industrial estate to the left.





"THE BATTLE OF ORGREAVE"

What happened on 18th June 1984 was not a battle but a rout. In the lull that followed a number of what were by then ritual but ineffectual pushes against the police lines, the officer in charge of the police operation, Assistant Chief Constable Clement, ordered the police lines to open. Dozens of mounted officers, armed with long truncheons, charged up the field, followed by snatch squad officers in riot gear, with short shields and truncheons. The miners fled up the hill towards the embankment and the railway bridge. Many of those who couldn't or wouldn't run were assaulted with batons, causing several serious injuries, and dragged back through the police lines to the temporary detention centre opposite the plant.

It was a miracle no-one was killed. One officer was seen on television straddling a defenceless miner on the ground and battering him repeatedly about the head with his truncheon. Because the incident was witnessed by millions on TV, South Yorkshire Police interviewed the officer, PC Martin from the Northumbria force, two days later. PC Martin said: "It's not a case of me going off half cock. The Senior Officers, Supers and Chief Supers were there and getting stuck in too – they were encouraging the lads and I think their attitude to the situation affected what we all did." The papers were referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who advised that PC Martin should not be prosecuted. There is no record of PC Martin being disciplined, either.













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MARK GAMSU

I draw people.

I am a print maker based at
Exchange Place Works in Sheffield.

You can follow me on instagram.

@markgamsu

