

Poppet Head

Harry, coal miner, late 20s (1904)

My name's Harry. I'm a miner.

At the end of the day I'm covered in coal dust from head to toe. My wife Mabel says she knows it's me because of my smile — it's the only bit she can still see!

No matter how hard you scrub, some of it always comes home with you.

Most people never see what it's like underground.

The coal doesn't sit waiting at a comfortable height. Some days the seam is so low I'm lying on my side, chipping away by candlelight. It's hot, cramped and dusty, and every creak makes you wonder if the roof's about to come down.

Then there's the gas, the floods, the cave-ins.

It's a job that keeps you awake... even when you're exhausted.

Last year the bosses wanted to cut our wages, so we miners went on strike.

Seventy weeks.

In the end, many of us had to go back for less money than before.

That was a hard pill to swallow.

Still, I've got work.

Not everyone does.

The lights in Korumburra, the trains, the homes and businesses that depend on coal — they don't often see where it comes from.

But miners do.