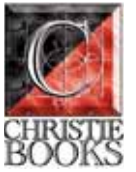




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David John Douglass
Geordies — Wa Mental



David John Douglass **Geordies — Wa Mental**

Geordies — Wa Mental, is the first volume in the autobiographical trilogy (*Stardust and Coaldust*) of David John Douglass, a coalminer for 40 years. It tells the fascinating story of the radicalisation of a working-class Geordie 'baby-boomer' during the first twenty years of his life and provides a unique and valuable insight into the political and cultural movements of the 1960s.

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A great American author once advised anyone wanting to become a real writer to tell the truth until it hurts, and then to go on telling it. I don't know if David Douglass has ever come across this advice, but his autobiography is far and away the most honest piece of writing I have read for many a long year. And whether or not it hurt him to write it, it certainly hurts to read it but only in the sense that page after page is so hilarious that the reader laughs aloud. Personally, I laughed till I gasped for breath and I'm not even a Geordie, but the sort of hard to impress Yorkshireman who will gloomily say of a comedian: 'Aye, he's all right, I suppose, if you like laughing.'

Not that Douglass sets out to be a comedian. Far from it. His book has a serious purpose. He dips his pen in vitriol as he describes his childhood in a damp pit cottage and the dimly lit, barren schooling that turned him into a rebel at an early age. And what else could a highly intelligent boy become, relegated to the despised 'C' stream and told by cane-wielding teachers that he was 'cocky' because, pursuing his interests, he read books borrowed from the adult library? Soon the young rebel became a revolutionary, trying for size a succession of movements that sought, with varying degrees of realism, to overthrow the system. As a teenager he seems to have taken part in every sort of street battle that the 1960s offered him and those of like mind, culminating in the great 1968 Battle of Grosvenor Square. He gives the best available description from inside of the 'love' movement of the 1960s, that 'raggyarsed working class hippyism'.

But some of the most effective writing in the book tells graphically of his demanding stint 'in the cauldron of hell', down pits in Durham and Yorkshire. David Douglass was, and remains, a working-class fighter, fiercely proud of his north eastern roots, fiercely loyal to his friends and his class. He is also a born story teller, whose characters come urgently to life on the page. Without doubt, his brave and gripping account of his early life is destined to become a classic.



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