

BRITAIN'S NUCLEAR LEGACY: JUSTICE FOR ALL



Photo: National Archives of Australia (public domain)

THE SCANDAL

After the 1945 bombing of Japan, Britain joined the Cold War arms race, detonating its own atomic bombs in tests on Pacific atolls and in the Australian outback. Servicemen were stationed just miles from the blasts with little or no protective gear, while pilots and ground crews were tasked with collecting radioactive dust and decontaminating aircraft.

From 1952 to 1963, 39,000 British and Commonwealth servicemen, civilians and scientists worked at nuclear test sites while 45 atomic and hydrogen bombs were detonated. Although the Ministry of Defence (MoD) received warnings about radiation risks from the 1960s, Britain continued testing underground in the Nevada Desert until 1991 - displacing Indigenous communities and contaminating their lands for millennia.

Many servicemen and veterans subsequently suffered from rare cancers, infertility, and chronic illnesses. Partners experienced high miscarriage rates, and their children were often born with severe birth defects and disabilities, many of which proved fatal.

Want to know more?
labrats.international

DID YOU KNOW?

The MoD misled multiple court cases by refusing to disclose information relating to the nuclear tests that might have supported the veterans' claims for damages. This included the results of blood and urine tests carried out on veterans to monitor the impact of radiation exposure. Many of these records were destroyed, and the MoD claimed that the tests were never carried out. In fact, thousands of troops were sampled, and at least 370 sample records still exist.

The MoD also commissioned studies that concluded radiation exposure had no long-term effects on the body. These studies are known to be flawed.

WHY WE NEED HILLSBOROUGH LAW

"This is a criminal cover-up on an industrial scale and only Parliament can overturn it... Why has this one got the firmest of lids on it? I think it is because it goes to the heart of the British state"

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester

"If you think that you're waiting for all these guys to go because they are in their eighties, you are going to be very much mistaken because the descendants are coming behind and we are well researched"

Alan Owen Founder of LABRATS

ABERFAN DISASTER



Photo: Public domain (via Wikimedia Commons)

THE DISASTER

In 1966, 116 children and 28 adults were killed when a mountain of spoil tip waste collapsed on the village of Aberfan, near Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales. Spoil heaps — man-made piles of waste materials from coal mining — had been built directly above the village when the colliery ran out of tipping space. This waste was the responsibility of the National Coal Board (NCB).

October 1966 saw a period of heavy rain. On 21st October the heap gave way and slid towards the village. The heavy, fast-moving spoil collapsed and buried Pantglas Junior School and neighbouring houses. The avalanche destroyed two water mains which added millions of gallons of water to the spoil slurry.

Classrooms were demolished and filled with mud and rubble. Staff died trying to protect the children using their bodies and classroom equipment. When the landslide stopped it became solid and created a mound of slurry 30 feet high.

Want to know more?
peoplescollection.wales/collections

DID YOU KNOW?

For years local officials and residents had warned the NCB about the instability of colliery tips above the village. To avoid blame, the NCB claimed the disaster was an unforeseeable tragedy.

The MP for Merthyr Tydfil, S.O Davis, did not speak out about possible tip slides for fear the colliery would be closed.

In 1968, the government took £150,000 from the Aberfan Disaster Fund to help pay for the NCB to remove the remaining dangerous tips from the village. This money was not returned until 1997, following representations by local people.

WHY WE NEED HILLSBOROUGH LAW

"The Coal Board blamed everybody but itself. It blamed the weather, the rain, the springs in the tip, everything except its own failure and neglect"

Gwynfor Evans MP

"The failure of the National Coal Board to accept liability for the Aberfan Disaster and the taking of money from the Aberfan Disaster Fund for the removal of the waste coal tips were the two main injustices that were faced by the people of Aberfan in the aftermath of the disaster. Both these injustices built the resilience and determination of the Village to fight back and get justice for the community of Aberfan"

Jeffrey Edwards MBE, Aberfan survivor