

Keir Hardie

James Keir Hardie was born on the 5th August 1856. He was born into poverty in Lanarkshire. He was born in a one roomed house and lived with his mother, Mary Kerr.

He had little formal education and he taught himself to read at home. He started working at a young age. By age 7 he was working as a message boy to the Anchor Line steamship company, and at a bakery doing small jobs to earn money.

At age 10 he was working in a coal mine as a trapper. Trappers were responsible for opening and closing doors to keep air supply going for miners below. He would later use this name, Trapper, as a nickname when he later wrote articles for the Cumnock **News**.

By age 17 he taught himself to read and write. He loved to read. Keir Hardie continued working in mines in various roles - pit pony driver, coal hewing and he also worked above ground.

Poverty and stress of life in the mines made Hardie want to improve the conditions in mines, so he began to attend union meetings and organise local strikes against wage cuts.

In 1879 he was made the secretary of the Ayrshire Miners Association and he moved to Cumnock. He became involved in the local community and was a Christian. It was through the church that he met his future wife, Lillias, who he married in 1879. The couple had 4 children.

In 1881, he was displeased at the conditions in the mines so he led a protest against cuts in wages. This backfired as the strikes didn't work and Hardie got blacklisted from working in the mines.

He then decided to turn to journalism for a living, working for the Cumnock **News** in 1882, using the name Trapper which had been his mining job when he was young.

He was invited to be Secretary to the new Ayrshire Miners' Union in 1886.

1888 was an important year for Hardie. The Scottish Labour Party was formed, and Keir Hardie was elected as leader. He also stood as Labour candidate later that year at the mid-Lanark by-election, but he did not become an MP until 1892 for West Ham.

In 1900 he was elected as MP for the Merthyr-Tydfil constituency, a job he kept for the rest of his life. Although he was still down in London working as an MP, he lived in Cumnock, the town he regarded as home.

He lived in Lochnorris, in Cumnok with his family. This was the name of the house he built in 1891. It still stands today and can be seen on Auchinleck Road.

In 1915 shortly after the start of the First World War, Keir Hardie returned to Cumnock for the last time suffering from a terminal illness. He died in a Glasgow nursing home later that year at age 59. Keir Hardie and his wife Lillias are both buried in Cumnock Cemetery. People come to the Baird Institute from all over the world to see the legacy of Keir Hardie.

