**Dockers, 1930** *by David Butler*

First light.

The descent from the tenements.

Flat-caps and donkey-jackets, shoulders

hunched against an easterly would skin you.

Keen-eyed, skint, eager for the scrimmage about

the rough pulpit to catch ‘the read’, the foreman

meting out who works, who idles.

A hard graft for the chosen.

Scant light

aslant through moiling

dust inside the dusky hold of a collier

where rope-muscled, calloused hands

rough-handle shovel-hafts, scraping, angling,

hacking irascible black-flecked phlegm until,

begrimed like pantomime blackamoors, they emerge

to carry their thirst like a wage and pay out

the bitter tithe - the match-boxed shilling

that buys the wink and nod.

It’s that or starve.