

BY THE
PEOPLE
FOR THE
PEOPLE

"The Coal Board is a fine team going into bat on a distinctly sticky wicket, but I think it will score a great many sixes."

Clement Attlee, Prime Minister
Derby Evening Telegraph, 1 January 1947



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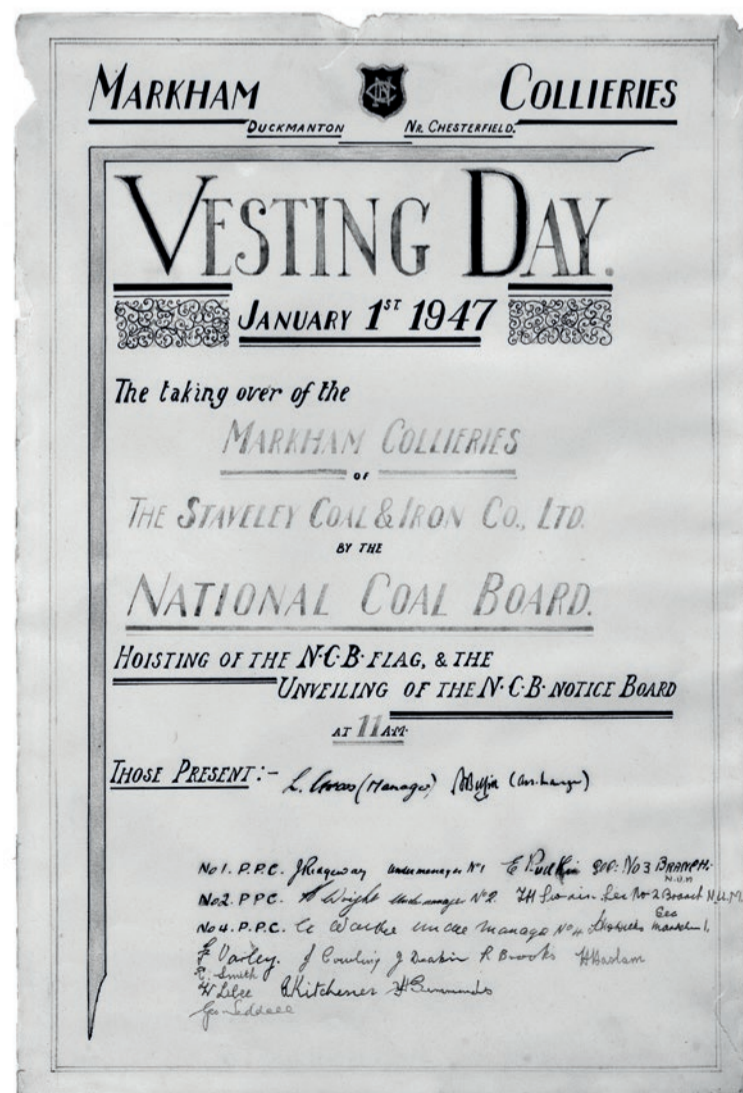
"It is the beginning. Let us hope it will lead to happiness, contentment and prosperity, not only for the miners, their wives and children, but for everybody. Our slogan is 'The mines for the people - the whole of the people'."

Emanuel Shinwell, Minister of Fuel and Power, Gloucester Citizen, 4 January 1947

Vesting Day

Held on 1st January 1947, Vesting Day marked the end of a long fight for a better life, in and out of the pit with the creation of the National Coal Board (NCB). In 1947 over 900 coal mines were taken out of private ownership and handed over to the nation. Over the next forty-seven years the NCB oversaw production and development, regulated wages, introduced widespread safety and welfare reforms and invested heavily in technological improvements.

Described as "the great experiment of socialism in a democracy" it was spearheaded by Clement Attlee's Labour Government. On the day flags were raised and signs appeared which proclaimed that 'This colliery is now managed by the National Coal Board on behalf of the people.'



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Welfare

The Coal Industry Nationalisation Act of 1946 stated that one of the duties of the NCB was in securing 'the safety, health and welfare of persons in their employment'.

From 1952 welfare was divided into two areas, 'colliery' welfare and 'social' welfare. The NCB assumed full responsibility for colliery welfare which included pithead

baths, canteens, medical services and vocational training. Social welfare fell to the newly established Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO). Halls and institutes were provided alongside community centres and youth clubs. Miners' children also benefitted from enhanced educational opportunities through the introduction of university scholarship schemes.

Miners and their families could take part in sports at recreation grounds and swimming pools. They also enjoyed a week of fun at the coast staying at the newly-built holiday centres such as those at Skegness and Rhyl.

"Things is different now. This is the day of the working man. My boys earn more in a week than I got in a month - and good luck to them I say. It's a change all right. Holiday wi' pay - week by sea - wouldn't have thought it thirty years ago."

COAL, August 1947



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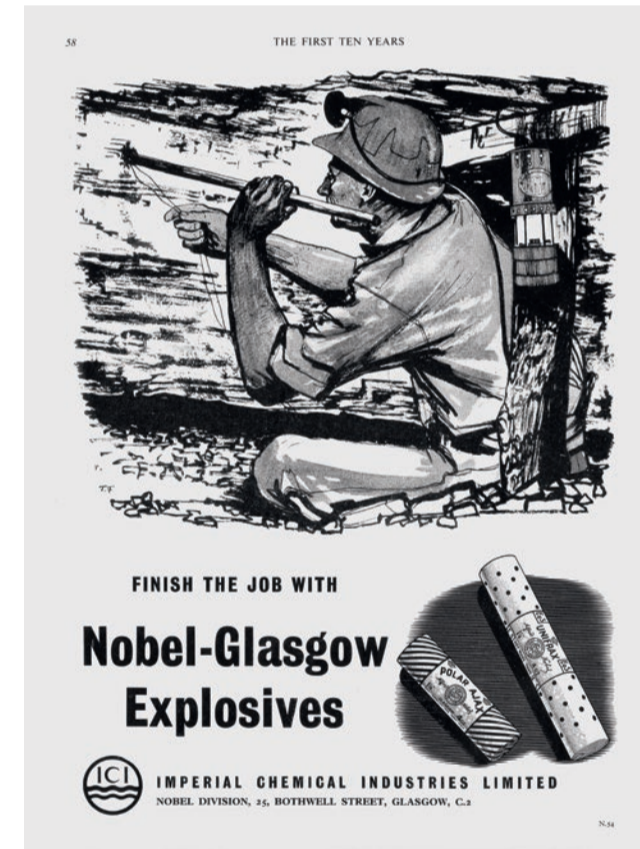
Convalescent homes and other support were provided for those who were sick or disabled due to their job. There were gala days; a celebration of the industry with marches, bands and banners for the different coalfield regions. Regional and national Coal Queen competitions aimed at young women from mining communities were introduced. The overall winners became ambassadors for the industry and brought prestige to the winning colliery.

“The public have come to realise at last that their coal and prosperity depend on three things – giving to the miners the recognition they have long merited, increased mechanisation and manpower.”

Editor, COAL Magazine, July 1947



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Investing in Coal

The NCB saw new investment as essential for revitalising British coal mining. Colliery companies suffered through both World Wars and during the Depression of the 1930s, with little capital available to be put back into the mines. This lack of investment meant a drastic decline in conditions leading to miners walking away from the industry.

Improvements were needed in facilities, equipment and in the training, education and

recruitment of the men. After Vesting Day, a report on the industry was commissioned and in 1950, the NCB published their ‘Plan for Coal’. It described the demands of the markets, highlighted where investment was most needed, and how best to increase output and reduce costs.

Mechanisation was seen as key to increasing production levels and offset the decline in manpower. Research into innovative cutting techniques such as the use of ploughs, cutter loaders, or continuous miners was supervised by the NCB’s new Mechanisation Branch. Special interest was taken in improving the scale and efficiency of transportation to cope with the faster cut coal. While certain

areas had embraced the use of machinery before nationalisation, the NCB rolled out new equipment across the coalfields.

The NCB worked with British mining manufacturers to develop new products, such as the Anderton Shearer or the Anderson Boyes Trepanner, both in 1952. They also looked at foreign markets, importing the Dosco Miner, the Joy Continuous Miner and Marietta Miner for trials in British pits during the 1950s. The capital to be able to investigate such a range of new technologies would never have been available under pre-1947 private ownership.

Training and Recruitment

The NCB viewed the mineworker of the future as more than just a hewer or tub filler. Advances in mechanisation changed the way coal was mined and the skillset of those that mined it. The manner in which miners were educated changed as the old methods were replaced by more formal training schemes.

With an ageing workforce there was a need to encourage younger men to enter the industry. The number of boys and young men working in mining below the age of twenty had shrunk from 170,000 in the 1920s to below 50,000 in 1946. The NCB saw training as going hand-in-hand with recruitment and with it, the opportunity of educational advancement.

The ‘Ladder Plan’ catered for boys entering the industry, enabling them to gain qualifications to rise up the career ladder. The Directed Practical Training Scheme gave scholarships for entry into university mining departments for mechanical and electrical engineers. The Administrative Assistant Scheme was a similar process for non-technical applicants to create the senior managers and administrators of the future. For those already in the industry, the Junior Departmental Training Scheme allowed promising 20–25 year-olds to gain a foot up in their career.



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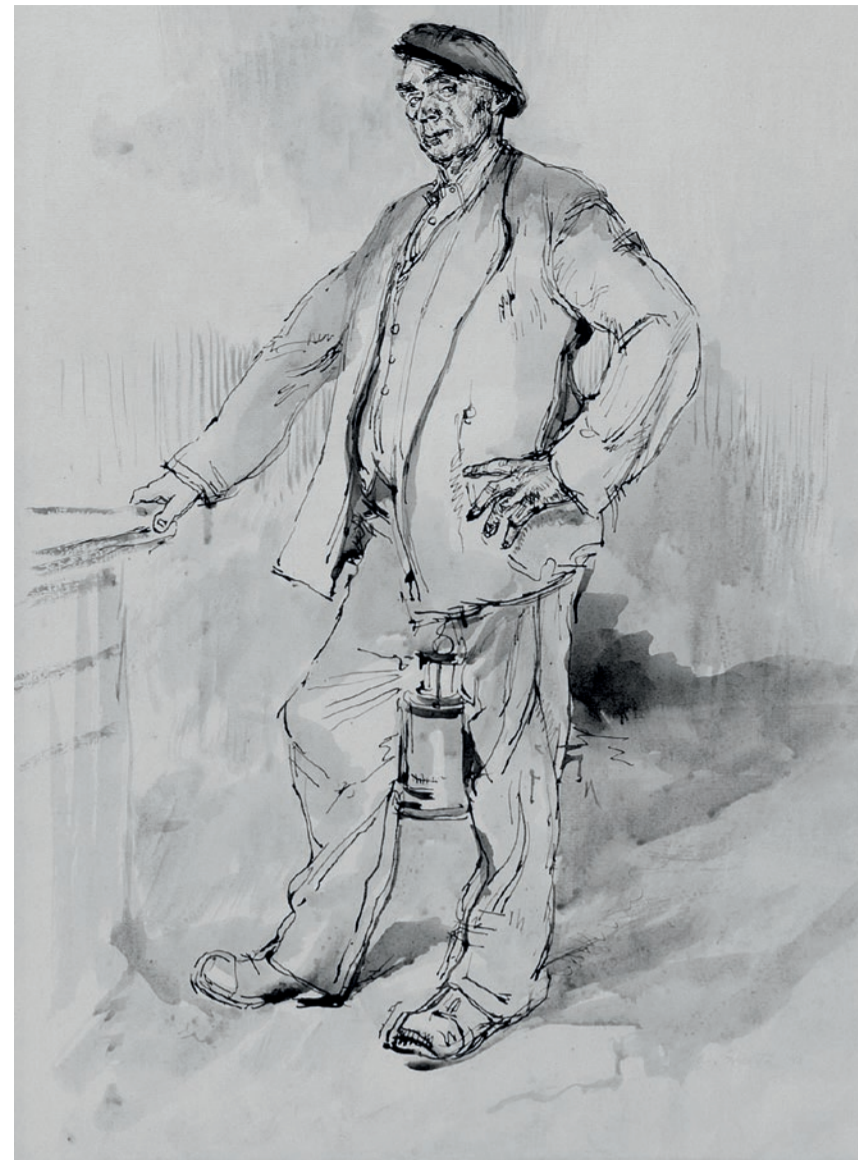
DEPT. 86, THE BENNETT COLLEGE, SHEFFIELD

COAL, April 1948

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“The larger the scale of the business, the more important do good schemes of recruitment, training and career planning become”.

Mr Blair-Cunynghame, Director General of Staff, NCB, 1957



John Jones (Pit Profile No.21) (1949)
H. Andrew Freeth
Ink on paper
© The Freeth Family

Art and Culture

From its earliest days the NCB encouraged, collected and even commissioned art which reflected the industry. Ahead of its time, the NCB was enlightened enough to see the benefits that cultural pursuits could bring to its workforce. Equally, they also had the foresight to see art as a successful marketing tool.

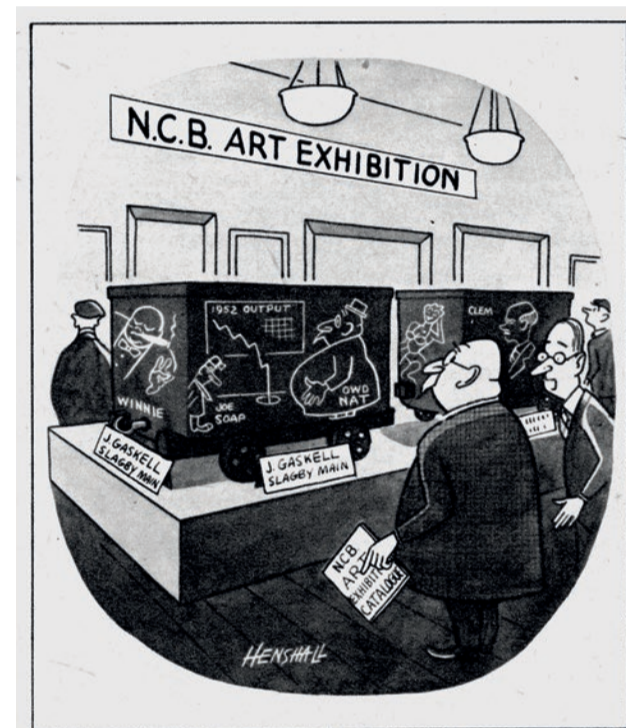
Before nationalisation, there had been a growing interest in 'mining art'. The members of the Ashington Group and Spennymoor Settlement had successfully shown the power of using art to capture the working man's experience. What changed after nationalisation was the explosion of mining art as well as the number of established artists who chose to record the coal industry.

Perhaps inspired by the Government's Official War Artists scheme the NCB chose to commission its own artists to record the industry. H. Andrew Freeth (1912–1986), a professional portrait painter and Official War Artist, was the first to be commissioned in 1947. Freeth visited collieries across Britain to sketch and talk to the men who worked in all areas of the industry. These portraits were published in COAL magazine accompanied by a brief story of each man's life titled 'Pit Profile'. In 1949 he wrote, "Pit Profile does not select only miners of outstanding ability . . . but presents also interesting personalities for their own sake." For the readers of COAL, Freeth's portraits and own words about these men bring their characters to life while giving recognition to all those who helped to shape the industry.

Alongside commissioning art, the NCB organised exhibitions both locally and nationally, to showcase mining art to a much wider audience. In October 1947 the NCB

"Mining has been my life. I've always drawn what I've seen around me, like the comings and goings at the pit head and coal face, and the different people and things you see at different pits . . . I'm a pitman first, and maybe then, a painter."

Tom McGuinness, miner and artist (1926–2006)



By L. Henshall "It represents his best work" Kitt Green, Wigan

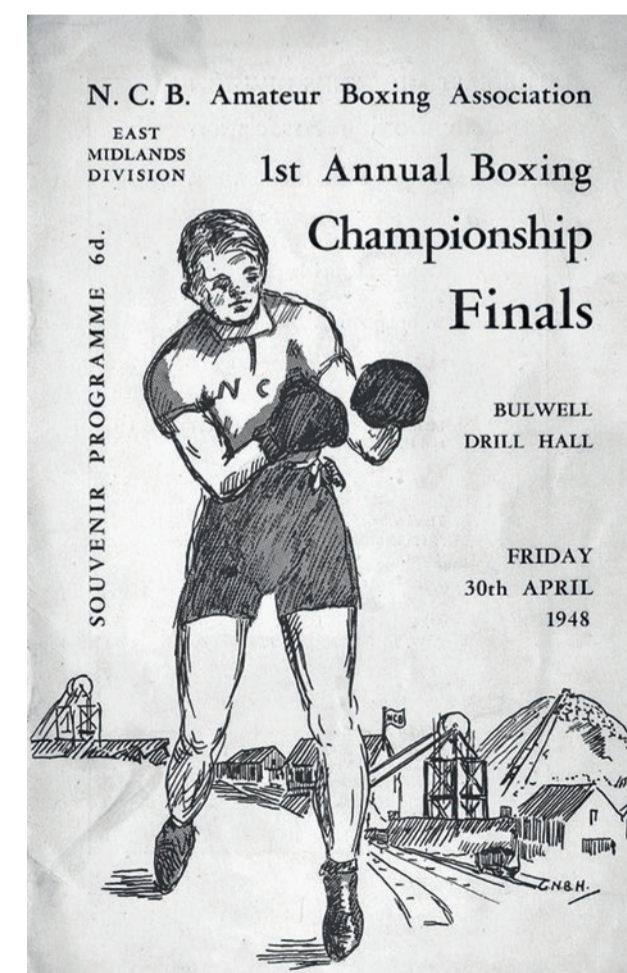
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held an exhibition called 'Art & Handicrafts by British Miners'. Interestingly, the exhibition was open to both miners and their families and included paintings, sculpture, models, furniture and handicrafts. These exhibitions continued to grow in scale and ambition, even attracting support from national bodies such as the Arts Council. For the first time, unknown mining artists were given the opportunity to have their work shown alongside internationally renowned artists such as Henry Moore (1898–1986).

As significant as mining art was in promoting the coal industry and the NCB, it became a vital outlet through which to record the miner's experience and gave many of its workers the confidence to continue developing their artistic practice and to even pursue new careers as artists in their own right.



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Sports and Pastimes

The National Coal Board continued the work of the Miners' Welfare Fund in promoting the benefits of outdoor hobbies and activities. They provided recreation and sports grounds, promoted sporting events in COAL magazine and organised inter-colliery competitions in a number of outdoor pursuits.

In the early 20th century, a large amount of research found working in dark and dusty environments was detrimental to miners' health. Illnesses such as nystagmus were directly linked to prolonged working in low-light levels and lung problems associated with dust and fumes caused by mechanisation was a growing concern. The NCB recognised the need of health activities outside the colliery walls.

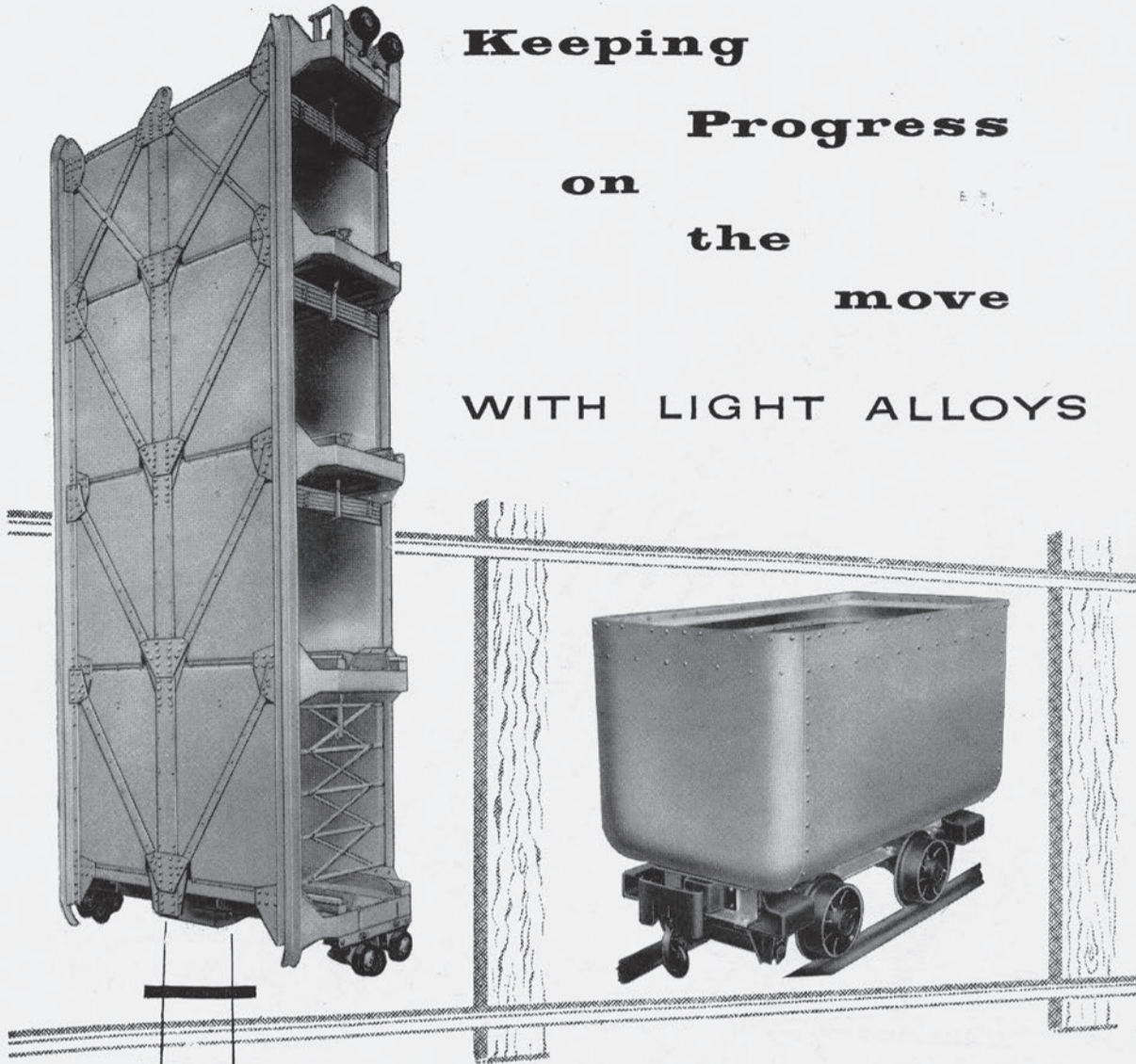
There were many sports that miners took part in. Most collieries had rugby, football and cricket teams, with Divisional and Area trophies for which to compete. In 1948 the National Coal Board Amateur Boxing Association was set up, organising fights in eight weight divisions. Cycling, athletics and bowling clubs were open to miners and their children to encourage health and fitness outdoors.

As well as sports, other pursuits were organised. There were angling clubs and homing pigeon racing groups organising regular competitions with monthly coverage in COAL magazine. Other social activities included amateur dramatics, choral singing, and of course, colliery bands.

"When a miner leads a healthy life and keeps fit, he is a better workman."

Mr I. Thomas, manager of Elliot Colliery, Area No. 5.

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The Library catalogue and digitised issues of COAL magazine can also be found online via the Museum's website:

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