Topic 2:

Life in the Mining Community
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Section 1:

The Rows

If you were married you got a house, but if for any reason you could no longer work in the mine, you lost your house.

Taiglum Rows, Drongan
Photo: Baird Institute, East Ayrshire Council Libraries
The rows, or “raws” as they were known locally, were long rows of cottages which had been built by mine owners. Most of them had been built in the 19th century, but there were some built at the beginning of the 20th century. Each mine owner had their own sets of rows for their workforce. If you were married you got a house, but if for any reason you could no longer work in the mine, you lost your house. Although working at the pit got you a house, rent was still paid. Dalsalloch Rows in Auchinleck were one of the sets of rows owned by Bairds & Dalmellington Ltd and occupied by men who worked at the Barony. After nationalisation, the National Coal Board took over ownership and the rows were still being occupied into the 1950s. Eventually the conditions in the houses were deemed unsuitable for continued occupation.

“That remember my father coming off the bus after his shift and he'd give me an orange or an apple, said he's picked it off the tree growing in the pit. I must have been about 4 years old. We lived in Dalsalloch Rows.”

Arthur Burley

**DALSALLOCH ROWS**

The wash house was shared by several families, but every house had a toilet and coal house, though not always directly beside their home as shown on the diagram. These toilets and coal houses were built in blocks of 8 again seen in this plan of Dalsaloch Row.
The house was what is described as a room and kitchen - which is literally just that!

As you stepped off the street there was a very small hallway, then you were straight into the kitchen which was the hub of the home. In the early days the cooker would have been a range or sometimes even more basic than that:

Your fireplace was an old grate - an oven was built at the side and your swee came out and you hung your pan or your kettle on it and swung it back over the fire.

Allan McFadyean

By the 1940s some women had a gas stove in their kitchens. The houses did not have electricity, but they did have gas as this provided the lighting for the home:

When you were back in the house at night and turned on the gas mantle, the cockroaches were running.

Arthur Burley

The gas meter was run on pennies fed into a meter box which was emptied regularly by the “meter man” and when times were hard and money was running short:

...they’d use a washer instead of a penny!

Arthur Burley

The kitchen had 2 ‘hole-in-the-wall’ beds, or recess beds as they are also known. These beds were double beds, but could accommodate more children if required. There were also beds known as ‘hurleys’ which were pulled out from underneath the recess beds. The hurley was a basic wooden frame with a mattress that could provide additional sleeping provision for large families. When not in use it could be pushed back under the recess bed.

The back room had another 2 recess beds and was generally kept as a room for “best” - somewhere to entertain guests on big occasions like family celebrations. The beds were usually in use, but as this was at the back of the house and you had to go through the kitchen to get to it, it was often a less inviting place to be and seldom had a fire lit in it, except for those special occasions.

With the building of the pit baths in 1932 at the Barony, the daily chore of heating up water for the men who worked in the pit to have a bath when they returned home came to an end. However, there was no bathroom in these houses for the rest of the family. Baths were taken in tin tubs in front of the fire in the kitchen with the water for the bath heated up in the kettle over the fire or on the stove. Given the work involved in heating the water, baths were
taken once a week and the water was often shared by the children and their mother.

…the rest of the week we washed in the sink in the kitchen.

Arthur Burley

Both the wash-house and toilet for the home were in blocks opposite the rows with the coal-house for each cottage too. Beside the wash-house were the drying greens:

The toilet was outside across the road and behind the wash-house; the toilet froze in the winter and you had a pail inside for during the night. Everyone was issued with a day for the wash-house, rain or shine. The husbands got the fire going for the boiler before they went to work.

Arthur Burley

The wash-house had in it a coal-fired boiler to heat the water, tubs and a mangle. Women brought their washboards and carbolic soap with them and did their washing for the week on their given day. Any other washing through the week had to be done at the kitchen sink. If it was wet, the washing had to be dried inside, either hanging from a pulley above the fire or as Arthur Burley remembers ‘over the winter dyke’.

[Winter dyke is another name for a drying frame - in some country areas of Scotland, women dried their clothes over dry stone walls called dykes. When they had to dry their clothes indoors in the winter they dried them on their winter dykes, or winter walls.]

Beyond the wash-house/toilet block were the gardens of the cottages.
The houses were heated by coal fires. Working in the mines, the men got a coal allowance or “con” coal, meaning concessionary coal, as it came to be known. The coal was delivered to the houses and it was the family’s responsibility to get it into the coal-houses.

It was delivered by horse and cart in my day and it was couped at your front gate. Us boys used to ask, ‘you want your coal in, Mrs?’; ‘aye son.’ And she’d pay us, save her man when he came back from the pit.

Allan McFadyean

If they dumped it in front of the door of the coal-house and it was closed, you had to shovel it so you could open the door!

Jim Bryden

The coal was not completely free, Scottish miners had to pay delivery, or cartage as it was called. This was a sore point as in England, after nationalisation, the miners did not have to pay this nor did they have to shovel it into the coal-house.

In England...they delivered the coal in bags and put it in your coal-house and that wasn't happening up here.

Jim Bryden

Making ends meet was often a problem as mining families were often quite large.

Thursday was poor day - the day before your wages.

Allan McFadyean

Once a boy went to work his wage was given to his mother on his return on a Friday and she gave him some pocket money so he could go out with his friends.

Jim Bryden started work in 1941 - here are his memories about what you could get from his wage:

I remember an old pay line for six and three quarter shifts on the pithead - 36 shillings. I got 1 bob pocket money from that and if you got a wee bit more money, you got half a crown. A loaf would be about fourpence then. I think a pint was a tanner. The pictures was thrupence, ninepence and a shilling - the price to get in. So you could do 2 or 3 things with your shilling. But when your shilling was finished that was it. If your mother couldn’t give you anything then there was nothing until your next shilling.

Jim Bryden

“I remember every Sunday, Dad went to his shed in the garden and did the cobbling - the tackity boots, my mother and sisters' shoes too. Then we fed the hens. Dad made me a holster too - just like big John Wayne.”

Arthur Burley
Allan McFadyean began working in the Barony in 1954. He remembers that boys got £4 a week at the pithead and once they went underground came home with £8 a week:

*Coal mines were the best wages there was for boys aged 15 to 18. In those days I got £1 pocket money, but rest assured £1 went a long way, but that was all.*

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Living conditions in these houses were very basic. Apart from the lack of modern day conveniences, the houses were not well looked after by the landlords and general maintenance was minimal. Pests were a real problem. As Arthur Burley already highlighted, cockroaches were rife. Jim Bryden also remembers them as cunning little creatures:

*In Dalsalloch Row, the “cocky” roaches came out from the open grate where the heat was, they came out through the cracks in it and the skirting boards….In the morning when they got up to light the gas, they were tramping on cockroaches. We were bothered with mice too. These things you took for granted; didn't bother you.*

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There were ways of getting rid of them.

*You went to the chemist and you'd get this box with white powder just like DDT and you put that right round the edges of the skirting board and that killed the cockroaches.*

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Despite all the hardship endured by the people living in the rows, all the men remember their childhood, and for some their adulthood too, with great affection.

*The rows were more of a community - everyone was in the same position, we'd very little money.*

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By the 1950s it was recognised that the rows were virtually slum dwellings and that better provision had to be made to house people. This was a general initiative across Britain, with local councils undertaking house building - what was known as council houses - to re-house those who had lost their homes in the bombing of World War II, but also to undertake re-housing of those living in sub-standard conditions. These new housing areas were known in Scotland as 'the schemes'. Families who had male and female children got houses which enabled the children to sleep separately - a bedroom for the boys and one for the girls.
In 1953 we moved to the scheme, Barbiston Road - the first Friday in September. You were allocated a house according to the number in your family and whether you had boys and girls, so we got a 3 bed roomed house with an inside bathroom. When your turn came up you had to go. And we had electricity. Mother and Father were over the moon with the new house.

[Arthur had 2 sisters.]

In the early 1960s Dalsalloch Rows were demolished.
Section 2: Social Life

Much of the social life centred round the rows.
Much of the social life centred round the rows. Families played games like tiddlywinks, dominoes, bagatelle and card games. On Saturday nights families would gather in each others homes, taking a turn to host the event each week-end:

*We played 'Newmarket' on a Saturday night till midnight with sixpence or a shilling on the last game - big money!* 

Arthur Burley

[Newmarket is a card game]

Then there was the cinema:

*There was a picture-house in Auchinleck. We went Monday, Wednesday and Saturday because the picture changed those days. I went with my Mum and Dad, my sisters didn’t always come.*

Arthur Burley

People didn’t eat out in the way we do today. However, on a Saturday night on the way home from the pictures:

…*there was the 'tally’s' fish and chip shop, where we had a half an' half - chips and peas and sometimes a macalum’s - ice cream and strawberry sauce.*

Arthur Burley

[The 'tally's' means the Italians, who ran the café and fish and chip shop.]
Another form of family entertainment was listening to the wireless, but this wasn’t listened to every night because of the expense involved in having the accumulator charged up. [An accumulator was a primitive kind of battery.] The common practice was to have 2 accumulators - one in use while the other was being charged at the Cooperative. The wireless was not listened to every night, but there were favourite programmes that the wireless would be switched on for:

_We’d listen to the McFlannels and Scottish country dance music._

Arthur Burley

[The McFlannels was based on the story of a Glasgow working class family.]

Outdoor games were popular too and men and boys always enjoyed a game of football:

_If you went home from your work at 3 o’clock you played football till 10._

Alan Murray

The pits all had teams:

_The Barony had a team and Highhouses and Kames had a team. Kames got fed up winning it! Happy days._

Alan Murray

_I played for the Barony tradesmen’s team._

Bill McCall

Traditional outdoor games were popular with children like peevers, hide and seek, rounders, kick the can, the gird and cleek:

_The gird and cleek race…it was a stoatir._

Alan Murray

…sometimes the gird would run away and you’d be left with the cleek!

Samuel Blackwood

Quoiting, pronounced kytn’, was a game associated with physical strength and was exclusively a working class sport. It involved throwing heavy iron rings at a stake in the ground - the usual distance thrown was 22 yards (20 metres). The rings looked like doughnuts and could weigh up to 16lbs (7.7kg). They were usually made by local blacksmiths although Houston’s of Johnstone, Renfrewshire, made the “Rolls Royce of quoits”, so that champion quoiters would purchase from further afield if necessary. At one time there were over 500 quoiting clubs in Scotland. It was fiercely competitive with money prizes to be won and trophies too for the mantelpiece. This game was still being played by Barony men in the 1950s.
"My father played quoits and he was a good player - he won money at the competitions."

Arthur Burley

The highlight of the summer for children was Gala Day. Dalsalloch Rows had their own Gala Day held in “the field down the Barony Road”. This was very much a family day with floats, dressing up competitions, races for the children, football games and stalls and:

…a poke with a sausage roll, cake and a bottle of Curries ginger.

Arthur Burley

The Barony miners as with other mining communities had a social committee that organised dances, darts nights, football matches, golf outings, Gala days and such like:

The social committee organised things for whatever you were interested in - if it was fishing there'd be a fishing day; golfing - there's be a day for that. Whatever you did there was a day for it.

Archie Glover

There were a lot of good nights out at the Barony...we went to the dances and to the Gaiety.

Madge Stark, miner's wife

[The Gaiety is a theatre in Ayr.]

However, the big event of the year was the Social Night. It was held every year and was difficult to get tickets for because it was so popular; in fact most people had their names down for next year’s event as soon as possible:

If you went to it this year, you’d book your ticket for the following year. You couldn't get a ticket for love nor money and it was a great night.

Alan Murray
"The rule was you weren't allowed to bring even a bit of coal to the dance; you never talked pit at the dinner dances."

Archie Glover

A great deal of effort went into organising this Social Night with the committee members going to enormous lengths to provide a night of very memorable entertainment and laughter:

We had “Miss World”, all these things that were on the telly, “The Benny Hill Show”, we did all these things just off our own backs…..Used to have the “Come Dancing” with the pit helmets on, all the lights out.

Alan Murray

On social nights like these, there was one thing which all miners had to do - not talk about work!

When you had your socials you didn't talk about your jobs - total enjoyment.

Alan Murray

Big dances were organised in the local town halls and community centres:

Auchinleck Dance Hall - one of the best in Scotland. You got Mud, Herman's Hermits.

John ‘Tug’ Wilson

There was also a social committee for the trades who worked at the Barony. Bill McCall was a member of this committee:

We brought big bands to Cumnock Town Hall - Rick Lewis, Johnny Kidd and the Pirates, Clyde Valley Stompers - they all came through the Barony tradesmen.

Bill McCall

While these bands may be forgotten today, they were very big names in the late 1950s, 60s and early 70s. Rick Lewis was an R ‘n’ B singer from Philadelphia. “Johnny Kidd and the Pirates” were a British rock ‘n’ roll group which had a big hit with “Shakin’ all Over”, said by “The Who” to be Britain’s best pre-Beatle rock single and covered by them in 1970. “The Clyde Valley Stompers” were a traditional jazz band who had TV appearances on shows like “Morecombe and Wise” and had an unlikely hit with a jazz version of “Peter and the Wolf” by the classical composer Prokofiev. “Herman's Hermits” came to fame in the mid 60s with their hit, “I’m into something good” while “Mud” was a glam rock band formed in 1968 who were very successful after their hit “Tiger Feet” in 1974. The miners also organised a welfare committee that helped out at times of difficulty and hardship:

I was on the welfare committee..... If your house went on fire, it was all one....they didn't say have you got insurance or not got insurance, straight away we sorted something out. If someone died, the first thing the welfare would do would be to go to the door with condolences etc and also give the widow some money.

Archie Glover
Section 3:

Auchinleck Shops

In its heyday, you could get anything in Auchinleck

The mine canteen supplied by the local Co-operative

Photo © RCAHMS
In its heyday, you could get anything in Auchinleck, whether it be food or clothing, shoes, you name it. Shops right from the top all the way down…2 or 3 paper shops, umpteen grocers shops; in 1955 I got the spirit license ..I was the first licensed grocer. We had 6 pubs…now we have 2 maybe 3, and we had the best Cooperative in the West of Scotland… best competition in the world!

John Stewart, local grocer

During the high years of the Barony, you wouldn’t believe the High Street in Auchinleck. There were shops from top to bottom. There were 5 Cooperative shops…ironmonger, butchers, there was everything. It was a thriving village.

Allan McFadyean

The Co-operative had everything: the milk; the slaughterhouse - the cattle came off at the station and went down to the slaughterhouse, they killed their own beasts; bakery round the back - baked their own bread and everything;… butcher, grocers, the hardware, the drapery…they sold absolutely everything.

John Stewart, local grocer

The Co-operative Store was a very important element in Scottish working class life and very different from the local Co-op Stores we have today. They were very much shops run on socialist principles aimed at providing affordable goods to working people. The very first co-operative store was opened by Robert Owen at New Lanark Mills where Owen pioneered his socialist ideals of co-operation among his workers. These ideals were developed into the more practical Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society (SCWS) which purchased goods in bulk and then distributed these goods to local outlets where people could buy them at reasonable prices. To shop in the Co-operative, you had to be a member of your local Co-operative Society which involved registration and being given a number:

They say every soldier remembers their number. I bet everyone in Auchinleck remembers their Co-op number….4018, you always remembered your store number.

Archie Glover

Can’t remember my own number, but I remember my mother’s because I went so often - 1223.

Jim Bryden

When people shopped in the Co-operative their purchases were marked into a book which earned the shopper a dividend, or 'divi' as it was known, at the end of each quarter.

Mum always looked forward to the divi at the Co-op at the end of each quarter.

Arthur Burley
“When they got the dividend, the 2 or 3 extra shillings they got, that was a great day. It wasn’t long in getting spent on clothes and things.”

Jim Bryden

The dividend they paid, 2 shillings and 6 pence to 3 shillings in the pound. They got this money every quarter and they didn’t spend it all in the Co-operative, I got a lot of it.

John Stewart, local grocer

The Co-operative kept miners in the hard days when you didn’t get much money for wages. You could always depend on the Co-operative.

Allan McFadyean

Apart from the Co-operative there were also travelling shops and salesmen which widened the choice available.

There was the midnight fruiterer - he came on Fridays about 11pm. Travelled all round. And there was the shilling a week man - he had fancy goods, stockings and such like. There was a saying ’a shilling now and a shilling when you catch me!’ There was the Maybole boot man from a shoe factory down there. Dishy Watson - he sold china, you could buy a cup from him if you’d broken one and plates and saucers.

Arthur Burley

There was also a travelling grocers run by John Stewart.

In 1950 my uncle built me a travelling shop, he was a coach builder in Kilmarnock. That was the first private trader’s travelling shop in the district. It ran till 1977. Same man, same van for 27 years...and there was always a girl on it, there was 2 of us. It really took off. I had another travelling shop, but it didn’t do as well.

John Stewart
Section 4:

**Barony Poets**

No lighthouse beacon shines to show the way, nor even signpost to be seen, where one could say on reading, in this secluded dell 'at Pentland's feet, an author once did dwell.'

*George Montgomery*
Apart from the amount of coal it produced, the Barony is also famous for the number of poets it has produced. The tradition of working class poets was established by Robert Burns, who lived and worked in Mauchline, not many miles from Auchinleck and it may be that his inspiration continued through the generations, for there are few miners who cannot quote lines from Scotland’s bard. Some of the poets write fairly exclusively about the pit and incidents that happened in and around it while others are more general in their themes. Language styles vary too with some writing in Scots and others in English.

Here are 3 examples of poetry by Barony miners. The first is by Allan McFadyean from his book, ’Little Book of Poems’:

**Dinosaurs**

The day of the dinosaurs dawns
We who were lions, are no more
Now we are pawns
Relegated to stories and lore
We walked as giants among men
Never defeated, never bowed
Strong in the belief in ourselves then
Above all others we towered.

Now we are old, story tellers of the past
Do you remember? We ask each other
Only the memories dim and distant last
Then we stare at one another
Now we are bowed by time and age
Trying to recall what we said
Cursing ourselves in silent rage
Is this the price that must be paid
For growing old?

Here is a verse from a poem called 'Comparison' by Jim Bryden:

Do you think noo that they care?
I would like to see take them to compare
Of life in Dalsalloch Rows
When life was not all ribbons and bows
Nae double glazing or ony that caper
Draughts or holes were stuffed with paper
Nae central for turning oan son
No, when you got coal by the ton
An open grate nae imitation fire
Just piled on coal to it went nae higher

Here is a verse from 'Swanston Village Unmarked' by George Montgomery and is in his book, ‘the barony bard’:

No lighthouse beacon shines to show the way,
nor even signpost to be seen, where one could say
on reading, in this secluded dell
‘at Pentland’s feet, an author once did dwell.’

Information on where to find these and other poetry can be found in the bibliography at the end of this pack.
Section 5:

Visitors to the Barony and Auchinleck

Perhaps the most unusual visitors to both the Barony and Auchinleck were the Eton Boys.
The Barony had its fair share of visitors who came to see how a pit operated and the conditions in which the miners worked. George Foulkes was elected MP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon in 1979 and remained their MP until 2005 when he retired. He went down the mine and his visit is remembered vividly by Jim Dunsmuir:

*George Foulkes came for a visitation to the pit. We took him...into the section EO2 - a 3 and a half foot seam, very rich coal...it was a hands and knees job. He'd never been in a pit in his life...the face-line had stopped for whatever reason...and when the face chains started back up, you wanted to have seen him; then the shearsers started up. We actually had to pull him out...he just hadn't a clue.*

Jim Dunsmuir

Another visitor in the mid 1960s was Clive Fairweather, a young trainee officer in the army stationed at Troon. It was arranged for him to go down the pit:

*It was an awful long way down and then it was a long walk to the seam. It struck me then what a tough life mining was. It confirmed that it wasn’t an easy number.*

Clive Fairweather

Clive Fairweather was to go on to be second in command of the SAS.

Perhaps the most unusual visitors to both the Barony and Auchinleck were the Eton Boys.

In February 1961 Emrys Hughes, the MP for South Ayrshire, was invited by Francis Cripps, a pupil at Eton College to speak at their Political Society. Hughes was a Labour MP known to be very left wing in his views and during the course of his address to the boys he invited them to come and see what life was like as a miner for themselves:

*I live in a little mining town in Ayrshire in Scotland where many miners work in a colliery called the Barony Colliery, at Auchinleck....I think I could arrange with the Coal Board for any keen, enterprising, young student from Eton to spend his summer holidays there and I can assure anybody who wishes to come of a warm, enthusiastic welcome.*

Emrys Hughes, MP

The visit that was subsequently made by the Eton Boys was not a working vacation as planned by Hughes but more of a fact finding expedition to another way of life.

On 8th April 1961, 7 boys aged 16 to 18 stepped off the train at Cumnock Station to begin their short visit. The boys were Jeremy Cripps, Francis Cripps (both grandsons of Sir Stafford Cripps), Piers Rodgers, Jonathan Aitken, Val Lewthwaite, Richard Mews and John Aschan. They were boarded out with families around Cumnock and Auchinleck:
One of the most amusing times I had was when the Eton boys came up. My Dad was in the Union and he came into my Mum one night and said 'Right, there's 10 boys coming up from Eton, they want to see what a mining community is like.' So they came up. We had one, Cripps...he came into the house, introduced himself and we showed him his bed. I was put out of my bed for him to get in it. I slept on a camp bed through the back.

John ‘Tug’ Wilson

(Since recording Tug’s story it transpires that it was actually Jonathan Aitken who went on to become a Tory MP and Government Minister and not one of the Cripps boys who stayed with the Wilson family.)

Both the National Coal Board (NCB) and Emrys Hughes were aware of the publicity that could be gained from this event. The NCB organised that the whole visit be filmed, Hughes accompanied them to their various engagements and there was media attention from the beginning. Once the boys stepped off the train at Cumnock there were flashing bulbs from the press photographers and as for the NCB film crew they had travelled up on the train with the boys to make sure they missed nothing! The local paper ‘The Cumnock Chronicle’ gave the visit extensive coverage reporting their arrival ‘at 7.57 exactly’, their being 'whisked away in a Minibus laid on by the NCB to their respective digs' and the fact that the minibus was followed 'by a veritable cavalcade of press cars', much to the astonishment of one and all. The NCB film shows Val Lewthwaite in the living room of James Turner of the Barony looking over books on mining while Jeremy Cripps is seen arriving at the home of Mr and Mrs Holland. ‘The Cumnock Chronicle’ shows Jeremy having his dinner there and in the morning the NCB crew show Jeremy tucking into a bacon and egg breakfast. There seems to have been some fascination with what the boys would make of their meals as remembered by Richard Mews:

My clearest memory is being presented with a generously too large dinner on the first night of my stay, which I mindfully ate in front of the cameras of a now defunct Sunday newspaper.

Richard Mews

Being a Saturday night, the youth of Auchinleck were going to go dancing as usual. John Wilson asked Jonathan Aitken who was staying with his family if he'd like to come and he said he would. John said to him:

You'll need to get changed to go to the dancing...so he came through - 'you're not going with that on?', 'Yes, that was my grandfather's suit'. You should have seen it; you'd have got it in the Oxfam shop in Kilmarnock!

John ‘Tug’ Wilson
It wasn't just Jonathan Aitken who went - they all went:

_All these boys were all at the dance on Saturday night and they thought it was great. They thought it was like the 'Locarno' in London, they were all up dancing._

**John ‘Tug’ Wilson**

Needless to say the film crew and press were there and the ‘Scottish Sunday Express’ featured the dance on their front page!

Sunday morning was spent at a service at Barony Church followed with a bit of sightseeing taking them first to Dalsalloch Rows and then to Burns birthplace. In the evening they were back to the Church to meet the Youth Fellowship.

Monday was the day they visited the Barony. Once again pursued by press and film crew the boys got ready to go down the mine, being put through all the procedures that would be done for anyone going underground including being given their token and checked for 'contraband':

_We got all dressed up in mining clothes…. the deep mine was a staggering experience and not only because the seam size meant we all had to sort of crouch once at the seam._

**Jeremy Cripps**

The visit made an impact on the boys as seen in Jeremy Cripps' 'thank you' letter written on behalf of all the boys which was published in 'The Cumnock Chronicle':

_We will always remember the warm welcome and kindness we received in Cumnock and Auchinleck, and the way we were treated in the homes of our miner hosts….When we hear in the future of miners on strike for higher wages and better conditions we will not disapprove. We could not conscientiously do so._

**Jeremy Cripps**

John Wilson and his family also felt it had been a success:

_We enjoyed having the Eton boys up because they saw what miners were used to, because there was some one there from the Guinness family…and Wolsey's Cigarettes - it was all that type of boy._

**John ‘Tug’ Wilson**

However, not everyone saw it in this positive light. At a Barony union meeting, some of the officials criticised the NCB for its use of the whole event as 'a good publicity stunt' and that the Coal Board’s ‘Operation Springclean’ which involved whitewashing grimy walls and conducting a general tidy-up would not solve the problems of the industry. Richard Davidson, Barony’s branch secretary was quoted in 'The Cumnock Chronicle' as saying:
We are annoyed because a false picture was presented to the lads from Eton. We’ve nothing against the boys. They mixed well and were liked by the mining folk. But there was definitely no need for all the fuss and bother.

Richard Mews

With hindsight, Richard Mews also feels that there were difficulties to the visit:

The experience attracted quite a lot of press interest (organized by Emrys I suppose) which only illustrates the stiltedness of the British social structure at the time - but also raises the more contemporary question of how best do you get people of different experiences together and bind them into a cohesive group.

Richard Mews

The idea that a visit be made to Eton by miners was put forward by Mr Davidson:

After all, the Eton boys saw how we worked and lived and now we think that some of our young men should see their way of life.

Emrys Hughes supported the idea of bringing miners down to Eton:

I would certainly do anything to help bring this about. It would be good if the young miners could see Eton.

Emrys Hughes

And so it was organized.

They wanted them to go back down, the people they’d stayed with, so my dad went away down there...and that was an experience my father enjoyed.

John ‘Tug’ Wilson

I vaguely remember the visit to Eton but I think it must have been mostly in the hands of others.

Richard Mews

Reference is made to this visit in Eton College's 'Chronicle' of February 1963 which also reports on a return visit made by Eton boys in December 1962 after the disaster:

We were extremely concerned when we heard about the situation in Auchinleck, and we were determined to do something to help.

Piers Rodgers
Piers Rodgers and Val Lewthwaite returned with 2 other boys to raise money for the bereaved families. Two children's parties were organised and a dance was held in Auchinleck's Community Centre. A total of £130 and 9 pence was donated by the Eton College Appeal to the Miners' Dependants Fund set up after the Barony Disaster.

While the original visit in 1961 was obviously a media event milked for its political impact by Hughes and used by the NCB for its own benefit too, it did make its mark on the boys who now as older men remember this visit clearly. It seems from the recollections of those involved at the time, both of miners and Eton 'boys', that the working conditions were sufficiently different to make an impact.

The miners who accompanied the boys on their visit to the mine and who had them in their homes knew that these young men had seen something that would stick with them for the rest of their lives:

I very well remember our stay and the wonderful hospitality we enjoyed.

Jeremy Cripps

I remember the visit well, and the hospitality of my host family who were most kind to this gauche creature from the South of England.

Richard Mews