



The Barony Colliery

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Education Resource Pack



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Introduction

The A-Frame has been listed as an important landmark of Scottish industrial archaeology, being one of only two examples of this type of frame ever constructed and the only one still standing. It is also the cornerstone of this oral history project being the visible focus and memorial to all those who were part of the Barony.

The use of coal as a means of keeping warm and for cooking may well date back to the Neolithic period when it was found in riverbanks and by the seashore. The Romans in Britain used coal too, but the first documentary evidence of coalmining in Scotland is in a 13th century Charter to the monks of Newbattle Abbey giving them permission to mine coal at Prestonpans to use in their salt making.

Coal mining remained a small industry in Scotland with most of the demand being for domestic purposes until the Industrial Revolution when coal became an important commodity for the steam powered machinery in heavy engineering, ship building, the iron and steel industries and the railways. There was also a growth in population in the new towns and cities, therefore an increase in domestic use too.

The mines were initially owned by landowners, fortunate enough to find that they had coal on their estates - hence the term coalfield when referring to vast areas of coal beneath the ground. However, with the growth of industrialisation coal companies were formed by business men who often had connections with other industries that needed coal, leasing coalfields from landowners who found they could not manage the growing industry but could enjoy some of the benefits of this expanding industry through the money gained from leasing.

One such business was William Baird & Company. William Baird began in mine management in 1816 at the age of 20 working for his father who had leased a small coalfield in Lanarkshire. From these small beginnings his father acquired the lease of the large coalfields on the estate of Gartsherrie and with his sons developed large ironworks dependent on the coal they were also mining. The Company formed by William in 1833 on the death of his father went on to own coalmines in Ayrshire as well as Lanarkshire to provide coal for its growing iron production which was also developed in Ayrshire.

By the beginning of the 20th century the coalfields of North Ayrshire were almost exhausted and central Ayrshire coalfields under Baird ownership had been well exploited too. This left East Ayrshire ripe for development and in 1912 William Baird & Company brought the first coal to the surface at Barony, after sinking the pit here in 1906. They also owned the pits of Highhouse, Whitehill and Cronberry and continued their interests in the iron industry. By the 1920s, their iron industry was not doing as well following a slump in demand and the business turned its attention to coal. In 1931, Baird merged with the Dalmellington Iron Company to become Bairds & Dalmellington Ltd and continued to own the Barony Colliery until nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947.

Under Bairds & Dalmellington Ltd a series of improvements were made to the colliery. This began with the building of pithead baths in 1932. New electrical winding gear was also installed. In 1938 work was begun on the sinking of No. 3 shaft which was to improve the ventilation in the mine and increase output from 1500 tons a day to 2500 tons a day. This was not completed until 1950 because of the outbreak of World War II which meant the loss of skilled workers to the armed services and the shift in focus to production for the war effort.

The nationalisation of the coal industry after World War II meant that the newly formed National Coal Board (NCB) were responsible for the completion of No.3 shaft. They wanted to increase the output of Barony and this was the key to that increase. Once completed the shaft had a diameter of 6.55metres (21.5 feet) and was 635.45 metres (2052 feet) deep, the deepest in Scotland at the time. It was lined in concrete with rigid steel channel guides to suit four cages, each cage having four decks which were used to transport the miners up and down the pit as well as coal and other materials. Twin platforms allowed two man-riding decks to be loaded at the same time. The A-Frame was erected above this shaft to hold 2 sets of winding gear and, apart from some railway track running from the A-Frame, is the most visible evidence of mining at the Barony or in fact of deep mining in Ayrshire, an industry that once dominated the area.

The A Frame has been listed as a structure of architectural and historic interest, being one of only two examples of this type of frame ever constructed and the only one still standing. It is also the cornerstone of this oral history project being the visible focus and memorial to all those who were part of the Barony.

The earliest memories of working at Barony date from 1941 during World War II when the Colliery was owned by Baird and Dalmellington Ltd and it is from this point that we will start.



The Barony pit
Photo © The Scottish Mining Museum