

# **Topic 1:**

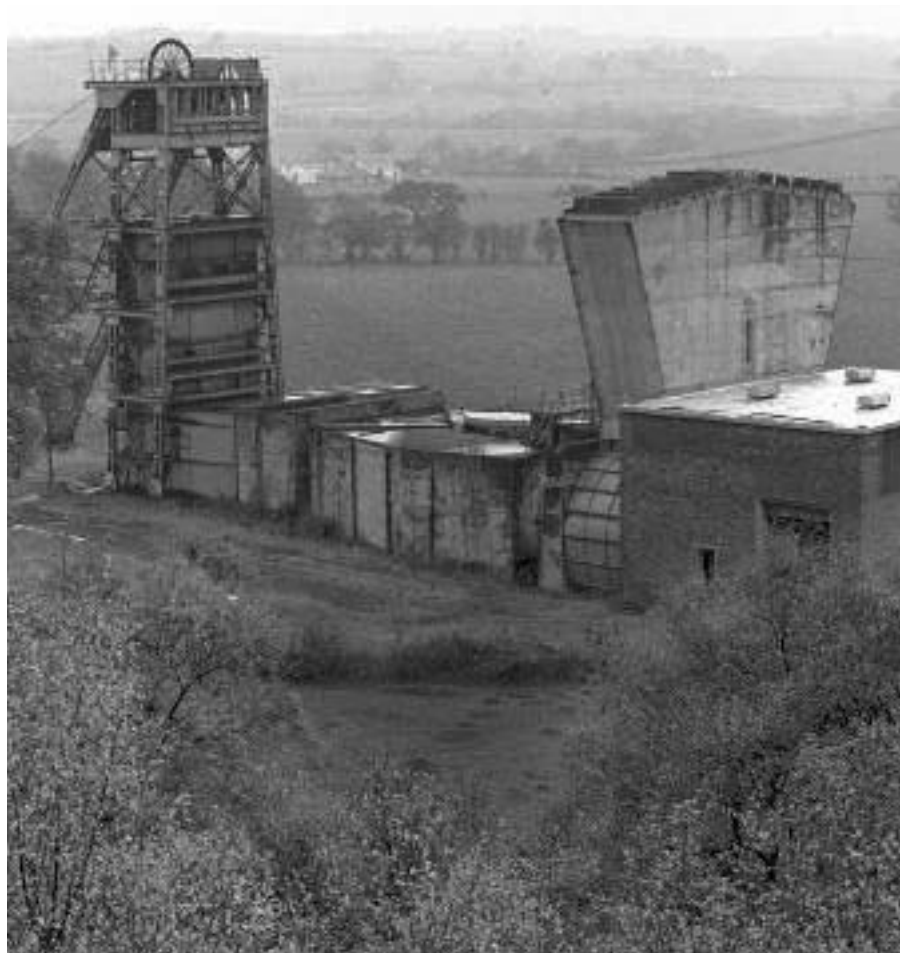
## **Working at the Barony**

## Topic 1: Working at the Barony

### Section 1:

# Choice – what choice?

You could work for the Cooperative, Currie's lemonade factory or you could go down the pit.



*Barony Shaft 4*

Photo © Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland RCAHMS

*"I was the oldest boy so when I left school it was my job to go to the pits and start earning and earn as much as you can to help the family."*

**Alan McFadyean started work in 1954 aged 15**

Without exception the recordings of miners from the Barony, whether from the 1940s or later make it very clear that there was little choice in what work they could get in their local community when they left school. The Cooperative Society was a big employer in Auchinleck as it ran the majority of shops in the village, including the slaughter house for the butchery department and the dairy, both of which would have employed boys. However, most boys had little choice in the matter of where they worked, the decision being made for them by their fathers. Young people left school at age 14 and for most of the boys it was a case of leaving school on the Friday and going to the Barony on Monday with their father to get a job...

*I remember my first day – it was snowing heavily and the buses weren't running to the pit..... I remember walking to the Barony behind my father and there were big drifts across the Barony Road and I fell in a big drift.... I started at the pithead... I was 14 when I started.*

**Jim Bryden who started at Barony in 1941**

*Happy Birthday, son – you start at the Barony on Monday; so that was it.*

**Billy Crawford**

Once the boys had left school, it was important to get a job as quickly as possible. Miners' families were often quite large and the boys' wages were needed to supplement the household income.

## **The First Job**

It may seem strange but the process of learning mining starts back to front as the first jobs at the pit were always on the surface, at the pithead where the coal was processed for transportation; in essence – the end product. The surface work given could involve a variety of tasks.

Most miners remember working at the picking or sorting tables as their first job.

*The hutches came up to the tumbler and then ran back down the creeper, empty, ready to go back down the pit.*

**Jim Bryden**

[A hutch: "a mine car used to carry the coal and other materials within mine workings, cages (which carried them to the surface), and around rail circuits." Often called tubs in rest of UK. Source: RCAHMS Scottish Collieries, Miles Oglethorpe.]

Once the hutches came up from the mine they were emptied (tumbled) on to the jiggling chute - pulsating metal plates like giant



*Railways lines at the Barony*  
 Photo © East Ayrshire Libraries

*"The coal went down into the wagons and that went away."*

**Jim Bryden**

sieves; the small pieces of coal (dross) fell through the sieve-like holes. The bigger pieces carried on to the picking tables. At the picking tables the boys picked out stone and dirt from the coal and then:

Some of the coal went through a washing process. The small pieces of coal which had fallen through the holes went by conveyor belt to more screens where the coal was sorted into different sizes. In a particular part of the washing process small pieces of coal floated to the top and this was skimmed off and used to power the boilers. When the Barony Power station was opened by the South of Scotland Electricity Board (SSEB) in 1953 this slurry from the washery was burnt there. The Power Station closed in 1982 and was also demolished then.



*Power station at Barony*  
 Photo © East Ayrshire Libraries

The new recruits to the Barony could also be given the job of emptying the coal hutches on to the sorting tables as they came up from underground - tumbling the hutches as it was called. Some men remember working in the wood yard as their first job. This would involve unloading wood as it arrived into the colliery; loading dumper trucks with wood props that were taken to the top of a shaft and then re-loading the wood on to the cage to be sent down the pit. (There was a wood yard behind the old bing at the Barony.) Preparing pit props for the mine would also be done here. These wooden props were used to support the roof in the mines and had to be stripped of their bark and cut to size for use in the mine. The boys would also be expected to do any general work that needed to be done as would any employee at the Barony on the surface or underground:

*You went to any job - you got told to go to a certain place in the pit you'd to go.*

**William Wilson**

Boys did two years on the surface if they arrived at the Colliery at age 14. At 16 years old they were allowed underground, but not at the face. They did not work at the face until they were 18 years old.

## Topic 1: Working at the Barony

### Section 2:

# In the mine

Going underground for the first time



*Miners at the pit bottom*  
Photo © East Ayrshire Libraries

Before going underground, certain safety precautions had to be taken. Of course the boys had to get kitted out for going underground and in the days of mining before nationalisation, they had to provide their own steel toe-capped boots and boiler suits as well as their working tools. Safety helmets with lamps were provided - in the days before nationalisation these lamps were run on carbide.

A common misconception of mining work is that all miners were equipped with a safety lamp known as The Glennie. (This is also known as a Davy Lamp - Scots miners always referred to their safety lamps as Glennies after the first inventor of a safety lamp in 1813 - Dr Clanny. The misinterpretation of his name is a good example of how words passed orally can become corrupted.) However, the Glennie was only used by the Deputies whose job it was to inspect the mine for gasses and make sure that those underground were working in a safe environment.

*You'd never lie down in the pit - if you saw anyone who did fall asleep it would be sitting up. You wouldn't lie down because you'd get blackdamp - that's carbon dioxide. Blackdamp goes to the pavement....that's what your safety lamp was for. ....folk will say that's an old fashioned thing, but it's a safety lamp, it's not for seeing with....we all got taught how to read it. Firedamp went to the roof. You'd turn the flame low down, hold the safety lamp up and see it rising if there was gas there.*

*The lamp room*  
Photo © RCAHMS

**Billy Crawford**



Once they were dressed to go underground, the tokens, or tallys as they were known, were picked up from the board in the Time Hall. The tokens were in sets of two (one square and one round) and were numbered. Everyone who went underground collected two tokens. Before the men and boys went into the cage to go underground they gave one token to the banksman who worked at the pithead and kept the other token. The banksman hung the tokens up that he had been given on the board in the Time Hall. At the end of their shift when they returned to the surface the men and boys returned their token to the board, hanging it beside the token the banksman had hung up. This meant at the end of a shift, if there was only one token in place, someone had not returned to the surface. The token system was therefore another form of safety check.

Barony Colliery was a “no smoking” mine. Some mines were seen as “safe” pits where the miners could smoke underground. Some of the “safe” pits proved to be very much unsafe as happened at the nearby Kames pit in 1957 where 17 men lost their lives in a gas explosion:

*I went down the pit with the boys in the morning and by 2 o'clock I was wrapping them up because they were dead...young boys, 16 and 17. Their bodies were as black as the soot at the back of a lum. It was a coal dust explosion - dust ignited as you bore the holes and spread through the pit like a tornado.*

**Alan Murray**

*The time office*  
Photo © RCAHMS







*Coal preparation plant*  
Photo © RCAHMS

However, Barony was never deemed a “safe” pit and everyone was checked for what was called “contraband” - cigarettes, matches or lighters - before going down the shaft. Underground the men always had to be aware of gas and nothing could be carried into the mine that would cause an explosion - hence the surface check.

*“I just remember the  
water trickling down the  
back of my neck.”*

**Arthur Burley**

Most of the boys were from mining families so knew from the tales of their fathers, brothers and uncles a little of what they might find underground. However, that first trip underground was still quite frightening. One miner said it was a good idea to carry a spare pair of trousers with you in case the fear got to you! The cage rattled as they went down. The smell was strange - not just from the coal and atmosphere of underground, but also because there were no toilets underground and that could sometimes be the cause of unpleasant smells. There were the rats and mice to deal with too, not that they were new to the boys as all of them would have encountered mice if not rats in their homes in the “rows”. Others remember the darkness and the dampness.

## First jobs underground

Their first work underground was as supply boys or wood boys.

Supply boys brought the supplies down from the surface while the wood boys took the supplies into the face-line. In addition to their official jobs there were other jobs that the boys would do for miners. Can Boys are a good example of this. Can boys went to the "powder house", which was some distance from the main area of the pit for safety reasons, and collected the number of powder cans required by miners at the face-line and took these cans to them. At the end of the day they took the empty cans back. The boys got paid for this by the miners, usually an agreed amount of 2 shillings per man and with 20 colliers on a face line this was a nice extra bit of money for the boys. On Friday nights the can boys would wait for the miners outside the pay hall to collect their tips:

*Most of the men just tipped out their smush - their small change - out their pay poke and you got that. There were 2 face wood boys and you halved that. I've seen us getting as much as a fiver a piece on a Friday for carrying the can and this was in addition to our wages.*

**Alan McFadyean**

(It may be the origin of the phrase "carrying the can" when it refers to taking on responsibility, is from the mining industry.)

The miners at the face-line were paid for the distance they went so they did not want to waste their time doing things they could get the boys to do for them. If the boys kept them supplied with explosives the miners got a good wage and paid their dues to the can boys. If someone did not pay up the boys could approach the Spokesman. Each face-line had a Spokesman - later known as a Leading Man - who could be approached about minor disputes underground. The can boys could use him as an intermediary in disputes over tips and if they were not being paid as agreed the Spokesman would tell the offending miner to carry his own can until he'd "squared up" with his boys. If this didn't work the collier was just left to get on with things himself. It was a system that worked well on the whole.

In the days before nationalisation when miners still had to buy their own equipment the boys would also take the picks up to the surface to be sharpened. This was done by a blacksmith on the site:

*And they'd maybe give you a shilling each - which was a lot of money then.*

**Billy Crawford**

The boys would also be taught the haulage system used in the mine and would learn how the coal hutches were pulled along using a combination of wire ropes and chains. Much of the haulage work in the pit in the 1940s involved sheer brute strength

*James Campbell with detonators  
outside the explosives store*  
Photo © RCAHMS



and was dangerous as wire ropes could break and control of the hutches would then be lost.

These jobs which were non-productive, but essential to production were known as "oncost".

At "piece-time" when the boys and men got their break underground, the boys were not allowed to sit with the men:

*As a boy you had to sit in your own bit at piece-time - you didn't get sitting with the men.*

**William Wilson**

This may have been some attempt to assert the difference between the boys and the men, but according to one man recalling his youth:

*I suppose it's something to do with a bit of swearing that went on with the men!*

**William Wilson**

## 'Piece-time'



*'Piece-time' for the miners*  
Photo © Ayrshire Archives

Piece-time for the morning shift was about 10 o'clock and the men got 20 minutes for their break, whichever shift they were on. The snacks eaten underground were a strange concoction of foods.

*You ate nothing normal in the mine - cold meat curled, tomatoes went through the bread and bananas went black. So you had things like jam or lemon curd and cheese in your piece; or "Fry's Chocolate Cream" or a "Tunnocks" snowball in your piece, sometimes even a "Mars Bar" - they stayed moist.*

**Archie Glover**

Another popular piece was the sugar piece - just as it sounds, butter and sugar in bread. The foods eaten were high energy foods for men who were doing jobs that required considerable physical strength and mental alertness.

*"Fruit loaf - 2 pieces of bread, full of currants!"*

**Billy Crawford**

Miners' mouths got very dry in the pit so they would do anything to keep their mouths moist. They sometimes took flasks of tea down the pit, but the flasks often broke, so it was more likely that they would drink cold tea. They also chewed tobacco as that helped keep their mouths moist and for those who smoked tobacco this was particularly welcome:



*The canteen at the Barony*  
Photo © RCAHMS

*Everybody chewed tobacco, not just the cowboys.....it kept the saliva in your mouth, kept the dust out of your mouth and it gave you the tobacco taste.*

**Billy Crawford**

Some miners even took snuff:

*Not just for the posh folk - the miners would have a wee tin with snuff in it.*

**Billy Crawford**

## **Underground training**

Boys were not allowed to do face working until they were 18 years old. Before nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947, training for face work was provided on a fairly ad hoc basis. You trained with an experienced miner or you were sent to Highhouse Colliery for your face-training:

*I worked as a wood boy for 2 or 3 years waiting on a job. And I asked the gaffer for a raise and he said, 'you're not face-trained'. So they sent me to Highhouses [Highhouse Pit] to do face-training before I could get a job at the face.*

**Jim Bryden**

After nationalisation, The Coal Board established Dungavel as their local training centre for the area.

## **Training at Dungavel**

*"No one liked it."*

**Billy Affleck**

The training was provided at Dungavel - half way between Muirkirk and Strathaven, 7 miles each way. It was residential and for 3 months. The young men lived there from Monday to Friday and usually got home at week-ends:



*Demolition workers*  
Photo © Mining Museum

*... unless you had misbehaved during the week - then you got kept!*

**Billy Affleck**

Accommodation was provided in dormitories and for most of the young men it was the first time they had been away from home:

Things were provided to do in the evening like table tennis and snooker and some of the young men walked to the villages in the evening for a pint at the local pub or even to see their families.

The training was practical - the boys had 1 day in the classroom and then the next day down the pit. The Kames Pit at Muirkirk was used for the practical element of the training. The training at Dungavel was generally regarded by all the miners to have been very good and an ingenious method was used to make sure that all the information on procedures was learnt:

*You had to say it all as you were doing it.*

**Billy Crawford**

As the young men learnt the jobs of the pit they had to say out loud each part of the task as they did it. At first it seemed strange, but soon became second nature. The real test at the end was when they had to undertake the various jobs without saying anything at all. Once they could do that then the job had become second nature.

For every task they learnt in the pit, they also learnt a safety procedure. The emphasis of the training was very much that of safety underground.

*The training you got was excellent. Just basic safety standards that you'd expect to be taught and you'd take it as second nature.*

**Billy Crawford**

When the training was finished and the boys were back at the Barony, they were allocated to an older miner for 20 days so that they could be eased into the new work that would do.



*Back-splitting*

Photo © A G Ingram Ltd via Ayrshire Archives

## Working at the face

*I got a man's wages at 18 because that's when I became a spare stripper - each section carried an x amount of spare strippers in case someone wasn't there that day.*

**Alan McFadyean**

Those who worked at getting the coal out of the seam were called strippers. This came from the time when the men literally stripped it out of the seam with a pick - the method that would have been used before mechanisation of coal cutting was introduced into all pits. The Barony was mechanised quite early on, but Jim Bryden remembers stripping coal out with a pick at Barony in the 1940s.

Not all jobs at the face were stripping jobs:

*The first job I had, what you called a paying job, was a hole-borer - boring holes in the face for the colliers to get in.*

**Jim Bryden**

Before face-workers could begin stripping out the coal, the area in which they were working had to be made safe. The roof was supported by wooden props and straps. Although these were ultimately replaced with steel girders and hydraulic props, there was still a lot of wood used in the mine. Pieces of solid hardwood called chokeblocks were used between the steel girders and props as a safety measure:

*You wouldn't put steel to steel in case it shifted off.*

**Jim Bryden**

The areas in which they worked were often quite small and cramped; though with increased mechanisation the areas at the coal face had to be big enough to take the machines and those who worked them.

With mechanisation the coal face workers became known as power-loaders. These men worked in teams and there were 3 teams in a section covering 3 shifts. A coalface was worked until all the coal had been stripped out or as much as could be stripped out safely. Heavy machinery was used to cut the coal and their training to use it was important or accidents could happen.

The coal cutting was done on the morning shift after which the back brushers would come on duty to remove the "dirt" that had been created from the coal cutting. This meant removing the loose rock and extending the roadways into the seams using explosives.

## **Topic 1: Working at the Barony**

### Section 3:

# **All in a day's work**

The pit was operational 24 hours a day.



The pit was operational 24 hours a day and while the whole point of mining is to remove the coal, the preparation involved in making it possible to remove coal and keeping the mine a safe environment in which to work was a large part of the mining operation. For all the various jobs there were workers.

The workforce had names which denoted what work they did.

## The Workforce

- **The Manager** - he was in charge of the whole mine: its production, maintenance and safety of the workforce.
- **The Oversman** - the man who was appointed to this job was the mine manager's assistant underground. Where serious decisions had to be made regarding mine working, it was to him the miners went.
- **The Fireman or Deputy** - he made sure that the mine was free of gasses.
- **Collier** - face-worker at the coal seam.
- **Power loader** - operated the coal cutting machinery at the face and power supports to advance the face and secure the faceline.
- **Back brusher** - removed the loose rocks so that a girder could be fitted into place and extended roadways into the face.
- **Pit-bottomer** - loaded the hutches full of coal on to the cage and sent it to the surface. He was also responsible for the men getting safely on and off the cage at the beginning and end of a shift.
- **Banksman** - he did exactly the same as the pit-bottomer, except he did it on the surface. At Barony, he was also responsible for collecting the tokens from the men before they went down the mine.
- **Shanker/Shaftsman** - maintained the shafts into the mine. By law the shaft had to be inspected daily and repairs that were needed were usually done at night to reduce disruption in production.
- **Loco driver** - drove the 'cars' in and out of the mine along the roads. When the miners arrived at the bottom of the shaft, they then had to travel into where they were working, often a considerable distance from the pit bottom. They were transported in 'man-riding cars', 10 in each one. There were also 'cars' for transporting supplies and coal in the mine. There was a special ambulance 'car' for moving the injured. This took a stretcher and was covered in case any rubble or loose stones fell on top of the injured person.

- **Supply and wood boys** - young boys on their first job underground who kept the face workers and everyone else supplied with what they needed.
- **Winding engineman** - controlled the engine which raised and lowered the cages whether they were full of men, supplies or coal.

## The Tradesmen

Every mine needed tradesmen. These comprised of surveyors, electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, blacksmiths, electricians, joiners and bricklayers. A mine needed a workshop where running repairs could be done on equipment and machinery, including the rail tracks which ran in and out of the pit and the surface track serving the commercial world and here many of the tradesmen would be employed. However, tradesmen were also needed underground, particularly surveyors and electrical and mechanical engineers.

*"I took Highers - you had to, to get into surveying."*

**Bill McCall**

To become a tradesman involved a different process as it required the boys to go through an apprenticeship learning their trade alongside experienced men as well as going to college. An apprenticeship could last for 4 or 5 years depending on which trade the boy was training for, during which time the apprentice was usually very poorly paid. However, once qualified his wages would rise considerably. Some apprenticeships required the boy to stay on at school and take Higher Exams which also lengthened the period before he could start to earn high wages. For some families with a large number of children to support, this was not an option for their sons despite their abilities.

*If in a trade, you'd maybe 5 years before you earned much. In those days with a big family - the wages were that small you had to get to work as quick as you could and get as much as possible to help keep the rest of the family.*

**Jim Bryden**

It was also possible to enter a trade by doing a pre-apprenticeship course.

*I didn't do O Levels. I did a pre-apprenticeship course at Kilmarnock College. There were 36 apprenticeships in mining and 600 applicants and I got a place!*

**Jim Dunsmuir**

Electricians were trained at Lugar.

Having a trade meant that many young men could move on from mining as their training could be used by other industries and organisations.

*I left the pits in February 1965 to go to Kilmarnock Power Station with the SSEB.*

**Arthur Burley**

*I left after the disaster and joined the Civil Service.*

**Bill McCall**

Given the length of time that tradesmen took to qualify before they were able to do their respective trades, there could easily have developed a feeling of superiority between tradesmen and miners. This was not the case at the Barony:

*The tradesmen had great respect for the miners and saw them just as tradesmen like themselves, after all, miners had to undergo thorough training too and everyone depended on each other.*

**Jim Dunsmuir**

With regard to miners' views of tradesmen, Jim Dunsmuir remembers one comment that they, the tradesmen, were "a necessary evil"! However, on the whole respect between miners and tradesmen and vice versa was evident. The miners knew that if they were to get on with their job, they had to let the tradesmen get on with theirs.

## **Topic 1: Working at the Barony**

### Section 4:

# **Working together**

The Camaraderie

*"..patter laced with humour - a dangerous job; there was always a bit of fear there and you showed it through humour.."*

**John Stevenson**

To a man, all the miners and tradesmen interviewed from the Barony commented on the camaraderie they shared with their fellow workers. This was common to the mining industry because of the daily dangers they faced in their work. Through humour they dealt with these difficulties and risks.

*I think it's because you worked so close, especially as you reached the coalface because you were depending on each other.*

**Billy Crawford**

*Everybody in the pit was there for everybody else, if needed. They'd have laid their life on the line for another miner.*

**Jim Bryden**

*Great comradeship - I don't think any other industry had that whether down the mine or on the surface. You depended on one another - your safety was as important as the guy you were working next to. One mistake and someone could be hurt or killed.....the comradeship was fantastic.*

**David Savage**

*The camaraderie was something different. It was typical across the whole of the mining industry. We were all responsible for each other's safety. If someone made a mistake it affected everyone. We had to work together and trust each other - we all knew the dangers.*

**Jim Dunsmuir**

That camaraderie was often displayed in humour and stories were told to each other at piece-time or to alleviate a tense situation.

*One chap - he was a great gardener - he was always telling us stories about his garden. One day he told us he'd grown a trumpet in his garden. We said 'so what did you do with this trumpet' and he said he'd rooted-it-oot!*

**Billy Affleck**

*There's this story - two men arrived at their place of work, bored up the holes, then discovered that neither of them had brought the powder. One said, 'Just a minute I had brown sugar on my piece', so scraped it off and stemmed up the holes with it. They fired the shots and out poured jub-jubes [sweeties]!*

**Jim Bryden**

*Davy said, 'Do you hear that Billy?' I said 'I do.' He says 'Are you ready?' I says 'I'm ready'. Then the weight just comes and it's like thunder that's right above you and it's really loud....it's all that noise and the wood all about you is cracking and the trees are falling and men are sawing trees, sticking trees in to let their men out, because there are men in the middle of the coalface - they have to crawl up. But before that Davy says 'Do you hear that?' I says 'I hear it.' And we're sitting there all tense and he says 'is the cundy clear?' 'Aye, the cundy's clear.' And just before the crack came he says 'Billy, what do you get when you cross a pig with an elephant?' I'm sitting there and I'm waiting - and this is us waiting to run - and I says 'I don't know.' He says, 'Pork ribs, 3 foot long - now run.'... You ran out to safety where the girders are ...you'd hear the girders singing with the weight going on the metal.*

**Billy Crawford**

(A cundy is a small roadway off a major road underground.)

## **First Aid**

*"If there were accidents underground they were initially treated by one of the Deputy boys and first aid boys who were excellent."*

**Jean Armstrong, Nurse at  
The Barony Medical Centre.**

First Aid was of paramount importance and there was a long tradition within mining to provide excellent First Aid to cope with minor accidents at the pit. Deputies underground were responsible for safety and that included First Aid.

*The Deputies all carried First Aid boxes. If you got a reasonable cut no one said anything because they put iodine on it which made it 10 times worse!*

**Billy Crawford**

*Mine Deputies were the only people in the country allowed to administer morphine other than a doctor....if someone got injured...it wasn't just a wee knock you'd get, it was a sore one and it had to be administered and we were allowed to do it. In later years, that wasn't done because younger ones were trying to break in to steal the morphine.*

**John "Tug" Wilson**

The Barony had a medical centre on the surface which was open Monday to Friday 8.30am until 4.30pm, but the Nurse was always on call in case there were accidents underground.

First Aid competitions were organised by the mining unions in Scotland and England. These competitions were designed to raise safety awareness and the miners and First Aid teams competed fiercely for trophies and shields which demonstrated their high levels of competence. Under Jean Armstrong who worked at the Medical Centre from 1986-89, the Barony won a major competition.

It was her responsibility to carry out First Aid training. Jean also thought it was extremely important to understand the kind of dangers the men faced and therefore went underground:  
*...if the men came up and said 'I've been hit by a doughtie' - a doughtie, what's a doughtie? - a doughtie is a big steel beam. So I went underground to find out what kind of accidents happened.*

**Jean Armstrong**

There were serious accidents too.

*If it was really bad the Mine Rescue boys would come in. Things were put into operation very quickly, right down to the canteen being kept open all night and no charge....it was well organised. And everyone pulled together at an accident to make sure it was easy for everyone involved, and it was easy for the boys who were injured because your priority was getting the boys out of the pit.*

**Jean Armstrong**

Mine Rescue Teams were only called in for major accidents when specialist skills were required and often breathing apparatus had to be worn. There was a mine rescue station in Auchinleck which served the pits in the area.

*Killoch Mine Rescue Team*

*Photo © Baird Institute/East Ayrshire Libraries*



Every accident was recorded.

*If there was an accident, there was an enquiry. If there were several accidents in a particular area you needed to find out why. Everything was logged in the accident book...If it was a serious injury the area got closed until the Inspector went down.*

**Jean Armstrong**

*We had to make plans for the Mines Inspectorate for every fatal accident. We were supposed to be there before the body was moved, but in practice it never happened. You saw the blood and the scene of the accident but the bodies were away.*

**Bill McCall, mine surveyor**

Not all accidents were caused by mine workings, some was through the very nature of the job. Working on the shaft was particularly dangerous. Inspectors went down with the shaftsman fastened on to the top of the cages to check that all was in order in the shaft. However, sometimes the work that was being done in the shaft was without the cage and the men worked their way down the shaft

*The scary thing about that was you had to cross the shaft on a foot wide plank with a rope handle on one side and a 600 foot drop below you.*

**Bill McCall**

Men were killed while working in the shaft. One shaftsman reached for the rope, missed it and fell to his death. However, from these accidents lessons were learnt.

*It led to a tightening up of safety procedures.*

**Bill McCall**



## Topic 1: Working at the Barony

### Section 5:

# The Disaster at the Barony 1962

...the winding frame had collapsed into the ground - only the wheels were showing...

*The shaft collapse*  
Photo © RCAHMS



*"It was strange and tense at that time because it was such a surprise. I think it was a Friday that it sunk. They were building a big, new fan at the Barony and it all sunk below ground - the whorls [winding wheels] was the only thing you could see just above the surface of the ground and no more. And there were men lost."*

**Billy Crawford**

The worst accident at The Barony is referred to as the Disaster as it led to the death of 4 men whose bodies were never recovered. Many of the men interviewed have very vivid memories of that day and it therefore seems fitting to leave it to them to tell this poignant story.

*...the winding frame had collapsed into the ground - only the wheels were showing. And we measured the hole and it went down 643 feet - shafts were about 24 feet in diameter - and the hole down was 643 feet and that volume of stuff had burst the timbers between number 2 and number 3 and engulfed 4 men in the loco station of number 3 pit. The bodies were never recovered and are still there.....One of the men I worked with was a man called Peter Green whose brother was engulfed....We used to have our piece in the joiner's shop and in the joiner's shop they kept 4 plain wooden coffins in the event of the bodies being recovered. Peter sat and stared at these coffins.*

**Bill McCall**

*I was at the Barony a lot when the 4 men were killed when the whorls went down because one of them was my uncle, Harry Green. I had a small motor bike and I was allowed to come from Auchinleck and sit in the canteen and if there was any news I was allowed to take it back up home and tell them...They were never found. My Auntie Bess still talks about it yet. He was a Deputy.*

**John "Tug" Wilson**

[The whorls are the wheels of the winding gear.]

*I didn't work with the Coal Board then, I worked with the building firm in Muirkirk at the time and we actually were doing a job at the Barony colliery...and I can remember the morning it happened we came in to continue the work and there were people on the gate and they were asking who we were and what we were doing because they shut the gate, I think mainly to keep out the press... ..and when we went in that shaft had gone, it was no longer there and they started filling it in. In fact the firm I worked with had one of these big giant concrete mixers and they commandeered everything they could get just to keep putting stuff down to seal that shaft. I can remember that...BBC Television were allowed in to film it and in fact that night it was on the news because 4 men were killed that day.*

**David Savage**



It was touch and go as to whether Barony would ever re-open. However, a new power station, Longanet, was to be built and it was to be coal fired. This secured the future of the Barony. A new shaft, number 4, was therefore sunk providing the mine with a ventilation shaft and importantly an escape shaft in the event of an accident. Barony re-opened for business in 1966. Men, who had been part of the workforce before the closure, were offered places at the re-opened mine; some returned, some did not.

For those men whose bodies were never recovered, a memorial was erected which still stands to this day.



*The Memorial to the men at the Barony*

*Photo © Artemis*