

Topic 4:

The End of the Barony

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Section 1:

Closure

By the time the closure came there were few men left, only those there to tie up the loose ends and seal the pit.



Aerial view of the Barony
Photo © RCAHMS

"I can remember John Mackie, a former miner, at that time Deputy Director, when the face hit what I term a stone dyke - that was the only face we had - and John Mackie came down to inspect the face, I think he came on the Tuesday, I was working on the pit bottom. Put him up the colliery and I remember turning to the guys on the pit bottom and saying, 'That man's away with our future in his hands.'"

David Savage

And so it was to be. By the end of the day David Savage was told there would be a meeting on the Friday and as a Union delegate, for he had been elected to the Union Committee in 1986, he had to be there.

John Mackie came and talked to us about costs etc and then he announced the Colliery would close and the date he gave us for its official closure was Good Friday - how ironic.

David Savage

A ballot was held to decide whether the miners would accept their fate. It was generally felt that it would be supported and it was. By the time the vote result was in on the Friday:

I came back to work on the Monday and they were starting to pay men off. The atmosphere was awful.

David Savage

By the time the closure came there were few men left, only those there to tie up the loose ends and seal the pit.

Up to Good Friday the men were leaving and only the staff were left who were helping to deal with closing down the colliery - and it was a different atmosphere, maybe I should describe it as a ghost pit because you were down the colliery with the men who had to do things and then they were eventually away and then you were left with the deputies just going round and making sure the pumps were working till we got the final word to close it down....It was only Number 4 shaft that had cages in it in the last weeks....On the last day when we cut off the power...I remember thinking you've spent the last 21 years of your life here and that's it...Officially I was the last man to put my foot down in the colliery.

David Savage

I wasn't there for actual closure. I moved to the Killoch Washing Plant after they announced the closure, a couple of weeks after they announced the closure. People were getting transferred who wanted to get transferred, down to England, up to Fife.

William Menzies

“I came through to the Lothians, I took a transfer. I didn't take my redundancy, I took a transfer through to Monkton Hall... We had a lot of young tradesmen in the colliery and as Chairman of the Branch, I sat in with them at their interviews to see what they wanted to do... quite a few went to England.”

Jim Dunsmuir

If they were 50 years old they would release some redundancy payments which weren't on offer at 49, so we tried to keep as many men on as possible so they could maximise their benefit after they finished up. That was the type of thing the union did at that time in conjunction with management. I must say management was flexible on that approach as well. They wanted to see individuals getting what they deserved.

William Menzies

For those who didn't take a transfer, there was redundancy with large payments to some of the men who were not used to so much money.

When we were made redundant we were given 12 weeks wages in lieu of notice and we were given the week we worked, then our 3 weeks holiday pay. I reckon no one would go out with less than £2000.... That had to do you until your redundancy money came through 12 weeks later.

David Savage

I got £20,000 and I was in the pits for 35 years.... I invested my money. I'd seen too many people going out in the afternoons to the pub.... They spent their money foolishly some of them.

Billy Piper

I believe there was a guy who got his pay in lieu of notice on the Thursday and put £500 on a horse on Saturday.

David Savage

I even brought financiers into the pit - I went to the management and made arrangements because they were out of a job too, they wanted to know what to do with their money and I brought in the financiers.... and some of them took their advice and some didn't... and I was one of the ones that invested my money.

Billy Piper

“The bookies did very well! It's very difficult for people who hadn't much money and then suddenly got a fistful to handle it. Once the money was gone it was the Social Security.”

William Ross

They had money. Some people didn't handle it well, some people handled it very well - it depended on the individual... The place was flooded with financial advisers because they knew some of the men had substantial amounts of money. We'd private firms coming up and having meetings in the Community Centre and advising the men how to invest their money.... They didn't need to be paid by the Coal Board - they were making enough money from their advice.

William Ross

When I got my redundancy I went to see the Bank Manager. Even then I was thinking I'm not earning and it might have to last a long time. I put it into something that earned interest, but I could get it if I needed it... Most of them bought cars etc and within 2 years - nothing.

David Savage

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Section 2:

The Effect on the Community

The trouble with the closure was that there was no other major employer in the area...

The trouble with the closure was that there was no other major employer in the area and the closure of the pit had a knock on effect on other forms of employment that did exist. For example, the local bus company which had run the men to work lost out as it no longer had the same volume of business with no men to transport back and forward to the pit. The local dairy also suffered. In the Barony's heyday it had supplied something in the region of 1200 pints a day.

I think the worst thing was the whole community losing out because there was no employment for young people and other people to go to - no preparation at all for them when the Barony closed....There were no large factories or anything planned. It was just "hard luck, boys."

William Ross

It might have helped if we'd had a better input into something else when they did close. They did nothing for the mining villages other than dish out redundancy money. The young fellows have no work to go to.

John Stewart, local grocer

There was a boom time in all the villages...they all had their redundancy money and everybody was spend, spend, spend....now you're talking 30% unemployment in the Doon Valley.

Jim Dunsmuir

It was a disaster to this village and especially the surrounding villages. There was no income coming in.....It didn't show the 1st year, but it showed the 3rd and 4th year - the amount of people who left this village because of the pit shutting.

Billy Piper

"It took a few years before you noticed much difference because there was a lot of money went into the communities in terms of redundancy payments....but once that started to ebb away and the money was drying up a bit, you tended to notice that the young people were moving away from the community; the community was getting more elderly....To some extent a lot of the communities haven't recovered from that."

William Menzies

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Section 3:

The Human Cost of Coal

To bring coal to the surface cost lives.

To bring coal to the surface cost lives. There were terrible accidents and there were disasters. However, there was also the long term effect on the miners' lives.

There's quite a lot have suffered from white finger vibration, hearing loss and emphysema because I don't think things were logged as well, nor did they realise there were voice problems, chest problems and things like that. My own Dad was a miner and I knew what he was like when he was 60, he was an old man - asthma, bronchitis, terrible knees. He worked in the Barony.

Jean Armstrong, Nurse at the Barony Medical Centre

Emphysema is caused by gradual damage to the lungs and means that the person suffering from it finds it difficult to breathe. At its worst the sufferer becomes housebound, dependent on oxygen supplies. This disease is common among miners working underground though smoking also contributes to the condition.

I was also a smoker and I'm not the kind of guy who says smoking isn't detrimental to your health. I don't think you need to be a genius to realise that smoking isn't good for you and the combination of the 2 certainly isn't good for you.

Billy Affleck

The prevalence of chest complaints among miners meant that every 4 years they were X-rayed to check for chest complaints. A mobile unit came to each pit to carry out the X-ray. If emphysema was found the miner was recommended to see a chest consultant. However, the deterioration of the lungs continues long after the original diagnosis and can result in surgery and removal of parts of the diseased lung, sometimes it requires lung transplant.

In 1991 I went to the Western Infirmary in Glasgow and I had surgery on my right lung - 80% of it cut away and I did feel a bit better. It did help me, but it's progressive - emphysema is progressive.... I'm now on a transplant waiting list.

Billy Affleck

“If they opened the Barony tomorrow, there'd be a queue of men waiting to get in and I'd be one of them.”

Archie Glover

For all the suffering that mining can cause, all the miners who were interviewed for this pack do not regret their time as miners even those suffering from serious illness.

I'm not bitter about it because that's what I chose to do and I enjoyed my time in the pit and the men were great to work with.

Billy Affleck

I still believe in it [mining]... I'm still a member of the NUM... I honestly think there's a future for coal mining.

Jim Dunsmuir

I enjoyed the pit.

John 'Tug' Wilson