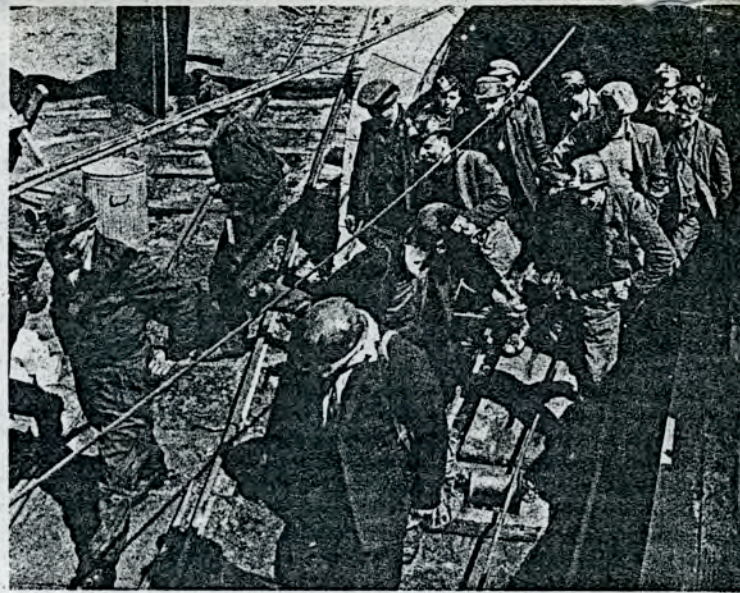




Green and white candle-lit coaches carried passengers, wagons carried coal on the 20 m.p.h. journey between Campbeltown and Macrihanish in the old days



Argyll Colliery's early shift reaches the surface from the entrance to the downcast drift, gradient 1 in 4, which extends 1,000 yards, towards the main coalfield

Ferguson, and so named because Ferguson in that year won the King's prize for rifle-shooting at Wimbledon—this pit never quite recovered after 1926, when the pump-men were called out.

Sinking of the new drifts began in 1946—the upcast, for ventilation only, at a gradient of 1 in 2½, and the downcast, for man-riding, supplies and coal outbye, at a gradient of 1 in 4. The name originally given to the new drift was "Lady Linlithgow."

Faults—and—worse—whin or belts of lava, made operations difficult. The main mine got to the coal at about 1,230 feet in the winter months of 1947-8; but the upcast mine—reaching out to prove the ground—struck whin at 1,350 feet, with 12 to 15 feet of solid lava and up to 100 feet of troubled ground ahead, before the three shifts of four men each, sweated through to coal again.

Meeting Troubles in the Sinking

The first serious fault—an upthrow—was met at 1,900 feet. More time-wasting, unproductive work. The whin was 1,150 feet behind by the time the main coal was once more reached.

At 3,200 feet, a curious re-shuffle of seams resulted from another fault—downthrow this time—where a throw of exactly 16 fathoms found the shallower Kilkivan seam directly ahead of the main roadway, while the main coal was proved by borings to lie 16 fathoms beneath.

Beyond this latest fault, however, the main coalfield is expected to open out. Working between the two main faults is expected to last for at least 2½ years, then—barring new faults—development work in the main field should follow without undue difficulty.

The hard work and patience will be well justified if hopes are realised, for it is estimated that the main field holds reserves of some 50 million tons.

Nothing Left to Chance

The fact that these natural hazards were encountered must not give rise to any impression that the planning engineers are leaving anything to chance. Systematic boring



Argyll Colliery manager, Mr. John Watson Williamson, brings to his task experience at Dumbreck pit

from the surface is proving the seam-movement well ahead of the underground workings and in this connection I was very interested to meet William Shields, foreman driller, at the moment when he "was just on to rock, 114 feet down, at a distance about two miles E.N.E. from the mine entrance."

He told me he was expecting to find the coal at 200 fathoms. "Last bore-hole in this line was 120 fathoms, about three-quarters of a mile from the mine . . . The seam has been dipping 1 in 3 E.N.E. and if our calculations are correct we should now be at about the deepest point."

Fresh bores will finally determine whether or not a closer approach to the main coalfield might be justified, either by a new drift or a vertical shaft. Meanwhile, John Williamson's cautious estimate is that ten years

should see output raised to at least 1,500 tons a day.

The coal is being won by stoop and room (pillar and stall) methods, using A.B. short wall cutters and hand-filling on to duckbill (drivage is too short for the duckbill-shovel). Thence, it travels by a 900-foot main gate conveyor into a 50-ton-capacity hopper, and finally along two 900-foot endless vulcanised joint conveyors, set in tandem, direct to the screening plant.

Main Coal is 17 feet thick

I have mentioned the unusual thickness of the main coal—an overall thickness of 17 feet; but only the centre 9 feet are being worked, leaving 3½ feet of coal for a roof and 3 to 4 feet on the floor of the roadways.

A whole generation of Drumlemble Campbeltown boys has grown to manhood in the years between the closing of the old pits and the driving of the Argyll drift-mine.

No miner, proud of his craft, will feel it to be other than pathetic that there has been this complete break in family mining traditions in a land which was deep-mined for most of the 19th century, and whose mining history stretches back to 1498, when James IV sent John Davidson—"a coll man to pass through Kintyre to verify if colys may be wonny there."

Only 1 in 20 from Kintyre

Of the 96 men underground and the 600 on the surface (including lorry and stockyard men), old Kintyre miners account for only one in twenty, and their guidance has to stand for the sum total of individual father-to-son example which would have been at the disposal of new entrants, but for the gap in continuity.

However, the youngsters from Drumlemble and Campbeltown are doing good work with experience growing as each new problem of mining technique is tackled and overcome. Men from redundant Lanarkshire pits are moving across the water just as quickly as houses become available, and in due time the natural inheritance of mining lore will have been restored.

by the 1,000-ton mounds of coal heaped in the stockyard over behind the old distillery, it won't be long before three of them nose into Campbeltown loch every week.

Smart new colliers. The older fishermen can call to mind the names of boats which carried coal away from the port before the old Wimbledon mine closed down, way back around 1929. That was shortly before the Machrihanish Light Railway stopped running.

Wonder what "Nan o' the Train" would say if the old rail track were to be relaid. Nan comprised exactly one half of the entire station and train crew in the days when the candle-lit green and white coaches, or weathered coal wagons, rolled on their 20 m.p.h. journey between Campbeltown and Machrihanish. The other half was the engine driver himself.

Further back in memory—they remembered this from their grandfathers—there'd been the canal, ending somewhere near the present stockyards. A distinguished canal, surveyed by James Watt himself, in person.

Like the defunct railway, the dead canal was built originally to handle coal.

From Mine to Quarries

Now? If it is thought worth-while today to drive a new mine to tap a coal basin supposedly lying between Campbeltown and Machrihanish, why did the old pit close, leaving its miners to find work in the quarries and on the farms?

Bad days—the '20's—for the men of Campbeltown. Two major labour disputes by 1926, then the beginning of the economic depression—which hit Campbeltown hard. Not only the miners suffered. Out of 26 whisky distilleries, only two remained working. Fishing suffered, too.

Plenty enough for honest Scots fishermen to wonder on. The Campbeltown tradesmen also listened to the rumbling of steel lorries carrying seven and ten-ton loads of coal. They know it to be economic for coal to be taken by road to the port, just so long as output remains

about a figure of 500 tons per day.

What if that output figure should be exceeded? A town enquiry has already heard of the possibility of a new light railway skirting the Meadows farm and connecting with a coal-quay to south-east of the harbour. Indeed, there has been some rumour of an aerial rope-way as an alternative.

In the meantime, coal is already the biggest single employer in the district: 160 men, with talk of the number going up another 90 or so before the year is out.

New Houses for Miners

You can tell that developments are expected, by the new housing estate rising on the slopes beyond Crosshill. Fifty per cent. of those houses, built by the Scottish Special Housing Association, are reserved for miners.

Some of these newcomers would be sur-



Underground electricians on the job at Argyll. L. to r. J. Grant, foreman J. Hardie, apprentice Nimmo

prised if they could meet the former occupants of the site. On this spot, in 1652, the fiercest MacDonalds made one of their rare truces with the Campbells for a joint assault on the fort held by Cromwell's men.

The road to Argyll Colliery passes through an old mining village—Drumlemble—where the mood of the present-day miner is very much in evidence.

One row of stone-built butts and bens is still occupied—but one row only. The rest of the cottages, which once housed men working in Wimbledon, Kilkivan, Shedloch and Trodighal pits, stand roofless, ripe for demolition.

Beyond, a new Drumlemble has arisen. At present it is clothed in single-storey pre-fabs, but the time will come when these are replaced by solid homes in keeping with the agricultural background against which they are placed.

As with Drumlemble, so with the new colliery. A way is being sought between the old Kilkivan workings, 20 fathoms deep on the rise side to the south, and the Wimbledon workings, deepening from 38 fathoms on the dip side to the north.

Objective is the 15 to 17-foot seam, proved at 120 fathoms in July and December 1944, when boring operations were first started by the Glasgow Iron and Steel Company. Under John Watson Williamson, former manager of Dumbreck Colliery, work initiated by this company has been pushed ahead by the National Coal Board.

Accurate Survey Work Needed

Two drifts already reach for more than 1,000 yards eastwards from the entrance, which lies 120 yards south of the filled-in Wimbledon shaft. They call for very accurate survey work.

Little is remembered nowadays of Rae Pit which, like another short-lived pit called Shedloch, may have worked the thinner Kilkivan seam at 16 fathoms until brought to a dead halt by serious faulting. As for Wimbledon Pit—sunk in 1881 by Hector



Half of these new houses going up on the Crosshill-Meadows housing estate are reserved for incoming miners—many from Lanarkshire's redundant mines



From the mine entrance rises the main drift conveyor to the screens. In the background is the country over the coal basin to which Argyll is heading