Coal Mining Transcript

Coal was very important during Britain's Industrial Revolution helping to transform the country from farming to building factories. Coal deposits formed millions of years ago from swamp lands. The Ayrshire region had high quality coal, particularly the distinctive 'cannel' coal known for its bright, clean burn prized across Scotland and beyond.

From the 1840s, mining villages or row villages were built all over East Ayrshire by the mining companies to house the miners and their families.

Common Row Auchinleck. This row consists of 96 houses built together in a long line without an opening. They are two apartment houses. There is not a single wash-house for all this population. The ash pits, the closets, and coalhouses were all built together and placed only five yards from the doors of the doors of the houses.

Living conditions for workers were cramped and very basic with large families sharing just one room for cooking, eating and sleeping. Furniture was sparse because low wages made it difficult to afford more. It was sometimes necessary to travel around in order to find work, so having fewer belongings at least made it slightly easier for families to move.

Underground, miners faced extraordinary working conditions. As the demand for coal grew, the mines grew bigger and deeper. It was dangerous work because the mines were dark, damp and cramped. Not only was visibility and movement restricted but there was always the risk of severe accidents. There were three main dangers of coal mining, flooding, collapsing and gas explosions.

Pit Pony harness. To protect these hardworking animals protective equipment was made. These pit helmets or pit caps were usually made of thick leather or had metal plates built into them with lots of padding to make them comfortable. They were crucial because mine tunnels could only be 2 or 3 feet high. Without protection the ponies would constantly hurt themselves on the low ceilings and falling pieces of debris while pulling carts of coal.

The Davy Lamp is a safety lamp used in mines. It was invited in 1815 by Sir Humphry Davy. It is a wick lamp with the flame enclosed inside a mesh screen. It was created for use in coal mines, where explosions happened in the presence of methane and other flammable gases. Those gases, called firedamp or minedamp, did not ignite a shielded flame. The wire mesh put flames out. The lamp also warned the men of carbon dioxide or methane. The flame would burn higher, and either went out or changed colour if gas was resent. Modern versions of the lamp are still used to test gases, but the light for working is now electric. This lamp was used after candles and naked flames but before electric torches and head torches.

The Barony A Frame is located to the West of Auchinleck. It is the only surviving feature of the Barony Colliery which was a crucial part of the South West of Scotland's mining industry until it closed in the 1980s. It is 180 feet high and it was built in 1954 as part of the modernisation of the Barony Colliery which had opened in 1907. In 1938 work began on no.3 shaft mine tunnel, intended to improve ventilation and increase output. The outbreak of World War Two delayed the opening

of the shaft until 1950. The finished shaft was 2052 feet deep (635.4 metres) making it the deepest in Scotland.