

# Mining Accidents & Strikes

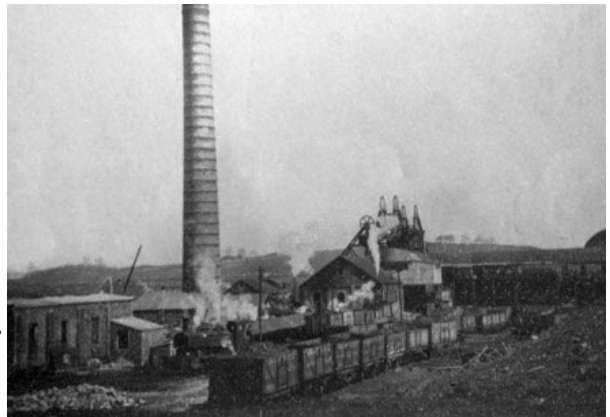
**3 April 1902**

## **Colliery Accident in Fife – Four Men Killed**

One of those serious accidents which illustrate the dangers of the miners calling, and at the same time thrill the country, occurred yesterday at Glenraig Colliery, Fifeshire. The colliery is a comparatively new one, situated on the estate of Glenraig, which was acquired eight or nine years ago by the Wilsons & Clyde Coal Company, but it has been so rapidly developed that a large village has sprung up in the immediate vicinity, and employment is afforded for about 600 men. There are two large pits lying about a mile and a half to the north of Lochgelly, both sunk together, and worked on the double shift system.

What led to the accident is not exactly known, but it was ascertained that at about half-past nine o'clock, when the men were finishing their breakfasts, a terrible explosion was heard reverberating through the workings. The explosion is supposed to have occurred in the five-foot seam of No. 1 pit, which is about 250 fathoms from the surface. Most of the pits in Fife are free from firedamp, a large quantity of water having to be dealt with, but at Glenraig this dangerous gas has from time to time been found to exist, and the use of safety lamps by the miners is insisted upon.

Peter Adamson and Andrew Marshall began work in a dook of the five-foot seam about six o'clock in the morning, and in a companion dook running parallel with it James Crichton. and Robert Wilson were engaged. About eight o'clock Adamson and Marshall fired a shot in the roof. Nothing unusual occurred immediately after this, and the men, after working for an hour longer, retired to a point some distance off, where they had breakfast. They must have finished their meal and been resting when a terrific explosion occurred, by which they were shockingly burned, and were practically killed instantaneously. One of the men nearest the scene of the explosion was James Rowan, a drainer, who, on hearing the report, ran to one of the dooks, and on looking through an air screen discovered William M'Caw, the dook pump engineman, lying prostrate in the centre of the roadway. It was the afterdamp, and not the firedamp, however, by which M'Caw was affected, and Rowan lost no time in having him dragged out of his perilous position into a purer atmosphere beyond the screen, where the work of resuscitation was successfully carried out. It being impossible as yet to reach the other men, an alarm was raised, and a rescue party was organised by Mr W. H. Telfer, the general manager, who took with him Robert Wilson, the under manager, John Wilson, the oversman, and others. On reaching the main dook the party found the air so bad that they were nearly stifled, and they resorted to air



chambering, which had the desired result in a comparatively short time. The bodies of Adamson and Marshall were found at the bottom of the dook in the condition already mentioned. Attention was directed to the companion dook, where the bodies of James Crichton and Robert Wilson were found at a point some distance from where the men had been working. It was evident that the two men had been the victims of afterdamp, there not being a mark of burning upon their bodies, nor no trace of violence. It being ascertained that there were no further fatalities, and that no more men had been left in these parts of the workings, arrangements were made for bringing the bodies of Adamson, Marshall, Crichton, and Wilson to the surface.

Work being entirely stopped in the pits, news of the sad event soon spread to the village of Glenraig and the burgh of Lochgelly, and when the bodies were brought up one by one from the underground workings, and placed on stretchers; and conveyed to the joiners' workshop at the colliery, a mournful scene was presented at the pithead, where there was a large crowd of men, women, and children. Dr Dickson, Lochgelly. and his assistant. Dr Wallwork, were early on the scene, and descended the shaft, remaining underground until all the four bodies had been recovered. Their services, proved specially useful in the case of M'Caw, who was in a state of collapse when found in the roadway, but was speedily resuscitated.

It seems that all the men employed in the dooks referred to carried safety lamps, and that there was no naked light in the vicinity of the roadways.. It is consequently thought that the cause of the explosion was a sudden burst of gas from the minerals of sufficient force to break one of the safety lamps. The accident which occurred yesterday is the third involving serious loss of life, which has occurred in Fife within little more than a year. In February last year seven men lost their lives through being asphyxiated by carbon monoxide at Hill of Beath Colliery, and in August eight men perished in the Donibriste pit. Of the men who were killed yesterday, Crichton was thirty-three years of age, and leaves a widow and two children, while Marshall was a widower, aged twenty. Adamson and Marshall were young unmarried men.

The Executive Board of the Fife and Kinross Miners' Association was sitting at Dunfermline yesterday, when news of the accident was received. Great regret was expressed by the delegates, and a resolution of sympathy with the relatives was unanimously passed. [Scotsman 4 April 1902]

## **February 20 1905**

### **Fife Pit Fatality**

Bernard Hulskramar (29), miner, Glenraig, was fatally injured in the Wilsons and Clyde Coal Company's colliery, at Glenraig on Monday night. He was working at the face, when a fall from the roof occurred, consisting of about 3 cwts of stone. Being buried by the fall, and his skull fractured, the man lived only a few minutes after being extricated. [Scotsman 22nd February 1905]

### **3 February 1908**

Mining Disaster in Fife - Three Men Killed; Several Others Seriously Injured  
The central district of Fife has again been the scene of a mining disaster. By an explosion of firedamp which occurred in the Fife Coal Company's Mary pit Lochore, towards midnight on Sunday, one man was killed outright, another died while being conveyed to the Dunfermline and West Fife Hospital, a third died yesterday afternoon, and five others are so seriously injured that their condition at the time of writing was regarded as critical.

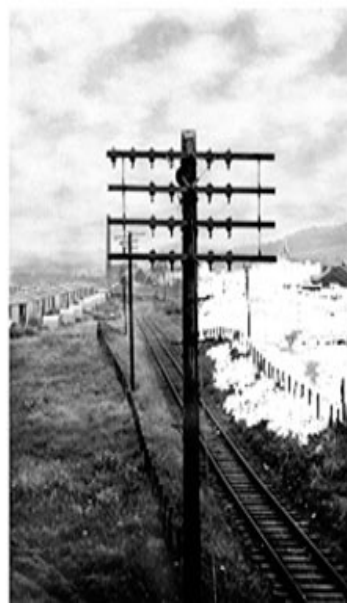
The Mary pit which is the deepest in Scotland, being sunk to a depth of 333 fathoms, is worked on the three shift system without brushers, the miners carrying out their own brushing as they proceed. Upwards of 300 men are employed, and between 10 and 11 o'clock on Sunday night between 100 and 120 descended the shaft. The great majority of these were lowered to the five feet or navigation seam, which is operated on from the bottom of the shaft, while eight others were left at the Mynheer seam bottom which is between 21 and 22 fathoms higher. The names of the 8 men were:-

John M'Ginn, pit inspector, Lochore  
Stephen Heggie, miner Lochore  
John Thomson, miner, Lochore  
Thomas Bell, miner, Lower Milton  
James Law, miner Lochore  
John Stein, drawer, Lochore  
William Abel, drawer, Lochore; and  
William Gibson, drawer, Crosshill.

According to the statutory regulations, M'Ginn proceeded to make an inspection of the working places before the seven other men were allowed to go to the face to which there is a road extending about 100 yards. Owing to the peculiar circumstances, it was difficult to obtain reliable information as to what actually occurred, but it is known that firedamp, with which the Fife miner is now becoming more familiar, owing to the depth to which some of the pits are being sunk, was discovered, and that means were adopted with a view to removing the noxious vapour from the roadway and working places. This was by a fan driven by a motor, and it is surmised – although the theory was discounted by an expert before he descended the pit yesterday – that a spark from the motor had ignited the inflammable gas. The explanation seemed to be the only feasible one elicited in the course of enquiries, for none but safety lamps are permitted to be used, and men interviewed praised the management for the care which was exercised in order to prevent accident.

### **Four Explosions**

At about quarter past 11 o'clock the men engaged in the five feet seam were startled by a loud report, which was followed by James Law being projected down the shaft, falling on top of the cage, which was at the time stationed there. Twenty



minutes later another report was heard, and that was followed shortly afterwards by two explosions occurring in rapid succession. As soon as the second period of excitement had passed, William Gibson was discovered lying dead on the pates at the pit bottom, with Stein, much injured, close by. The five other men escaped the horror of falling down the shaft, but they suffered terribly from the force of the explosion, all the exposed parts of their bodies being terribly scorched.

A panic seemed to prevail among a large section of the miners in the low-bottom workings, and at least 72 of them made as hurried an exit as was possible by traversing the road leading to the company's Aitken pit, fully a mile to the west, and escaping by the upcast shaft there.

Meanwhile those that remained did all that was within their power to render succour to their disabled comrades. There being no ambulance appliances ready to hand below, what are called service stretchers were improvised, and all the men and the body of Gibson were brought to the surface. It was about two o'clock yesterday morning, however, until the last ascent of the cage was made. In the interval Dr Dickson had been summoned by telephone from Lochgelly, and Drs Toss and Dickson from Lochore. Three ambulance waggons were at the same time requisitioned. By the doctors and police constables and miners possessing ambulance knowledge everything was done that human skill could suggest to relieve the sufferings of the injured previous to their being placed in the waggons. M'Ginn, Heggie, Law, Stein, and Abel were conveyed to the Dunfermline and West Fife Hospital, while Thomson and Bell, who were believed to be less seriously injured than their neighbours, were removed to their homes. In the course of yesterday they too were transported to Dunfermline.

Among those who were early upon the scene, directing operations, were Mr Henry Rowan, the general manager of the Fife Coal Company's western pits, and Mr John Allan, the Mary Pit manager. Mr Robert M'Laren, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Mines for the Eastern District of Scotland, who was telegraphed to, arrived from Edinburgh before 11 o'clock, and after making enquiries at the office, donned pit clothes, and along with one of his assistants and the manager, descended the shaft with a view to exploring the region affected by the explosion, and discovering the cause of the ignition.

The disaster caused a painful sensation in the district and work was entirely suspended in all sections of the pit, where during the day groups of men, among whom were those who had been in the five feet bottom, discussed the situation. The stoppage will only be temporary, except as regards the Mynheer seam, which, however, it is hoped will soon be repaired. In the early hours of yesterday morning many men and women were attracted to the pithead, and some affecting scenes were witnessed as the cage was for the time brought to the pithead, where anxious inquiries were made for relatives.

James Law died in hospital from his injuries as 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon. Early in the afternoon Mr M'Laren telegraphed to the Home Office as follows:-

"Regret to inform you that an explosion of gas occurred last night at Mary Pit, Lochore, Fife, by which three men lost their lives, and five were seriously injured."

Further inquiries show that all safety lamps were in perfect order. It is still impossible to say what was the cause of the explosion. Three of the men's lamps were damaged, but their appearances do not explain the cause of the explosion. [Scotsman 4 February 1908]

### **6 January 1914**

Frank Murphy, a miner, twenty-four years of age, was fatally injured late on Tuesday night at Glenraig Colliery, Lochgelly, belonging to Wilson's & Clyde Coal Company. He was working at the coal face, and was struck by a large stone which broke from the roof. His neck was broken. [Scotsman 8 January 1914]

### **May 3 1916**

At Lochore Colliery, owned by Messrs. The Fife Coal Co., Ltd., on 3rd May, a repairer and a brusher were killed. They had to take out a bar and put a new one in its place. They had carried out the first part of the work and were apparently engaged on the second when the fall occurred. No one saw the accident and therefore it cannot be stated positively that temporary props had not been set beneath the bars on either side of the one taken out. The changing of bars is usually dangerous, and it cannot be too strongly urged upon men who are sent to do such work that temporary supports -must be set until the new bar is in its place and properly lagged. [Report by H Walker, Inspector of Mines & Quarries, Scotland Division for the year 1916]

NB The men killed were Matthew Anderson, single, 29 & James McLachlan, married, 41.

### **21 May 1918**

Award of the the Edward Medal in silver to James Simpson, a fireman at the Glenraig Colliery, Fife:

On the 21st May, 1918, a repairer, whilst engaged with two other workmen in carrying out repairs, was killed by a fall of roof. The two workmen were both caught and held by the fall. Simpson, who arrived half an hour later, found the men imprisoned and realised that if he went for help they would be suffocated before it could arrive. He immediately set to work unaided and worked for three hours without relaxation, though exposed to danger from the falling roof. At last he succeeded in releasing one of the men. Simpson was then so exhausted that he could not release the second man; but he protected him with timber before going for help. Had it not been for Simpson's presence of mind and devotion the two men would have lost their lives. [London Gazette 8 November 1918]

### **6 November 1928**

Mysterious Fife Pit Fatality In Dunfermline Sheriff Court yesterday, a fatal accidents inquiry was held in regard to the death of William Kennedy . 55 Montrose Cottages, Lochore, who died in No. 1 pit, Lochore where he was employed as a pumpman, having been killed by falling from the high bottom to the low bottom of the pit, a distance of one hundred fathoms. Colliery officials and fellow workmen stated that the shaft at the high bottom was sufficiently protected by sliding gates. To reach the shaft gates deceased would have to walk a distance of twenty yards for his pump. For deceased to get into the shaft, the gates would either have to be opened or he would have to get down on his hands and knees and crawl underneath them. It was impossible to get through the gates by accident. The man would either have to go below to gates or climb over the top. Evidence was also forthcoming to the effect that after the man's mutilated body was found at the bottom of the shaft, the gates were found to be closed, and the pit bottom where he had been employed properly lit up. By the direction of the Sheriff, the jury abstained from saying in their verdict whether Kennedy met with his death by accident or otherwise. [Scotsman 1 February 1929]

### **27 April 1929**

Fife Pit Fatality - A lad of 14 years, John Finlator Mitchell, Currie's Buildings, South Glenraig, near Lochgelly, who started work only a short time ago died on Saturday from injuries received while at work on Thursday. He was employed as a pithead worker at Glenraig colliery, which belongs to Wilsons & Clyde Coal Co. (Ltd.), and was engaged in pinching a waggon forward when the accident took place. He became jammed between two waggons, and was severely crushed about the chest. After receiving medical attention he was conveyed by ambulance to his home, where he died. [Scotsman 29 April 1929]

### **July 5 1934**

Peter Hogg, a miner, of Cowdenbeath, was killed yesterday in a mining accident at Lochore, near Cowdenbeath. He was crushed by a hutch on a haulage road and was so severely injured that he died almost immediately. [The Times July 6 1934]

# Strikes & Riots

## **21st September 1926**

### **Disturbance in Fife - Baton charge by police**

The agitation which has been on foot during the past week to stop the safety men from working at Glenraig Colliery, Fife, culminated in a clash between a band of strikers and the police early yesterday morning. The Colliery is owned by Wilsons and Clyde Coal Company, and is situated between Lochgelly and Lochore, while the miners' houses are nearby. On Friday morning last pickets were out in force, and prevented most of the safety men from descending the pit. The latter were called out for Monday morning, and at meetings held on Sunday it was resolved to prevent them from starting.



On Sunday evening and throughout the night crowds paraded the streets of the village in military formation, singing songs, but the police were alive to the situation, and considerable force was drafted to the village from Lochgelly and Cowdenbeath. They wore steel helmets.

In the darkness of the early morning, shortly after 5 o'clock, pickets came into contact with the police. The police state that stones were thrown at them. They charged the crowd with drawn batons, and quickly dispersed them. A few of the strikers received hard knocks, but nothing in the nature of serious injury was reported. No arrests have been made. Much excitement prevailed in the district yesterday.

## **23 Nov 1926**

### **Fife Pit Stormed - Damaged By Miners - Police Stoned**

A serious situation developed at a pit at Glenraig, a village about a mile north of Lochgelly, yesterday afternoon. A crowd of several hundred mine workers stormed the pit just after the men who had been working had reached the pit bank.

The police in attendance at the Colliery were not insufficient force to stop the crowd, and considerable damage was done. The miners who had been working took refuge in a building, but a few who had already left for their homes were attacked and beaten, while several of the police were injured by stones and other missiles. In a short time the police were reinforced by a contingent from Lochgelly, but before they arrived the crowd had got into the engine house, put the cage out of action, broken the windows, and damaged the boilers. They dispersed when the additional police arrived.

### **More men at work**

In the Lochgelly pits fully thirty more men were at work yesterday, including those who were assaulted on Saturday. A procession of strikers visited the various pits as the men came off work, but no untoward incident occurred.

### **24th November 1926**

#### **Fife mining disorders - 48 men charged.**

Arising out of the disturbances at Glenraig and Bowhill on Monday, the Fife County Constabulary arrested 48 men, who were conveyed to Dunfermline Sheriff Court yesterday under a strong police escort. The arrival of the prisoners, who were followed by a considerable body of sympathisers, excited great interest, and a large crowd assembled outside the court buildings. The proceedings, however, were of a private nature, and the public were not admitted to the court room.

The prisoners, who were divided into two groups - 30 from Glenraig and 18 from Bowhill - were judicially examined on charges of mobbing and rioting. Among the offences complained of in the charges were assault on the police, by the throwing of stones and the use of catapults; malicious mischief at the pit head at Glenraig; and the smashing of windows of houses occupied by miners who have resumed work. The accused were admitted to bail, which was fixed at £4 in each case.

### **7th December 1926**

Fife miners strike - Dispute over Re-engagement

The miners employed at Glenraig Colliery, near Lochgelly, came out on strike yesterday. The Colliery normally employs fully 1500 men, and about 75 per cent had resumed last week. The cause of the renewed stoppage is connected with the re-engagement of some of the workers.

### **8th December 1926**

Fife Coal strikers returned to work

The miners who went on strike on Monday at Glenraig Colliery, near Lochgelly, belonging to Messrs Wilsons and Clyde Coal Company, after an interview with the manager last night, decided to resume work this morning.

### **31st March, 1927**

#### **Miners on trial - Strike scenes in Fife**

A remarkable account of disturbances in West Fife in the last week of the mining dispute was given in Dunfermline Sheriff Court yesterday, when, before Sheriff Fenton, K C, and a jury, the trial was begun of 29 miners on an indictment charging them with mobbing and rioting at Glenraig on 22nd November, 1926. There were five counts in the indictment relating to assault on the police and men who had returned to work, and window smashing and other damage at Glenraig Colliery. The Crown case is being conducted by the advocate depute (Mr J R Dickson) and Mr R Gibson, advocate and Mr R W Currie, solicitor Dunfermline appear for the defence.

Police witnesses who gave evidence yesterday stated that when the workers

were due to leave Glenraig Colliery, a large picket march up the road, and one section went into a quarry and fortified themselves with stones. Escorted by the police, two workers left the pit, but they were driven back by a fusillade of stones. As they were being driven back, they saw that the other section of the picket was coming up the road, and they were likely to be caught between the two crowds. Accordingly they retreated into the pit road, and at this point the two crowds joined forces and rushed into the Colliery grounds. Twice the police charged with their batons drawn and cleared out the crowd. After a lull, the crowd received considerable reinforcements and forced their way into the pit.

Damage was done to the pit property, and the winding machinery set in motion. As a result the cage was raised above its proper stopping place and the winding rope came off the pulley wheel. This appeared to alarm the crowd, who then cleared out of the colliery premises. Several police constables spoke to having been severely injured by stones thrown by the mob. The Crown case had not been concluded last night when hearing was adjourned until today.

### **1st April 1927**

#### **Fife miners trial - Damage to pit machinery.**

At the adjourned hearing, in Dunfermline Sheriff Court yesterday - before Sheriff Fenton, K C, and a jury - of 29 Glenraig miners on charges of mobbing and rioting, officials gave evidence with regard to damage done by the mob at Glenraig Colliery on 22nd November last.

Andrew Crowe, the manager, stated that the crowd rushed into the pit premises, throwing stones, and smashed all the windows of the Colliery buildings, and broke the electric globes. Finally, some of them operated the winding engine, which caused some damage to the pithead gear. The cage was standing 3 or 4 fathoms from the pit mouth, and steam was applied to the engine and the cage raised. The rope became detached from the cage, and fell through the roof of the building. If the cage had gone down instead of up, it would probably have wrecked the shaft. There were pumpers working underground at the time.

Firemen who had been working at the pit stated that they were attacked by the crowd on their way home.

The hearing was adjourned until today.

### **4th April 1927**

#### **Glenraig miners trial**

There were still a large number of defence witnesses to be examined at the close of the 4th day of the trial in Dunfermline Sheriff Court on Saturday, before Sheriff Fenton, K C, and a jury, of 29 miners on charges of mobbing and rioting at Glenraig on 22nd November last. The evidence led on Saturday was in support of the Special Defence of alibi which had been stated on behalf of

six of the accused men.

Owing to the fact that today is a public holiday in Dunfermline the hearing was adjourned until Tuesday morning.

### **7th April 1927**

Fife pit strike riot - More miners sentenced

Twenty Glenraig miners were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from three to 12 months at Dunfermline Sheriff Court last night, on being found guilty, after the trial which has lasted six days, on charges of mobbing and rioting at a Glenraig on 22nd November last. 29 were indicted, and of these, two were found not guilty, and in the case of the remaining seven the charges were found not proven.

The indictment charged the men with having formed part of a riotous mob at a Glenraig on 22nd November last, and, acting with common purpose, assaulted police officers and miners who had returned to work by throwing stones at them, and striking several of them with their fists; broke windows at Glenraig Colliery, set the engine in motion and caused the cage to be raised above its proper stopping place, and damaged the winding gear; and threw stones at and broke the windows of a house occupied by a police pensioner. The prosecution was conducted by advocate depute Mr G R Dickson; and Mr R Gibson, advocate, and Mr R W Currie, solicitor, appeared for the defence.

Sentences appalled imposed on the convicted men wear as follows: -  
12 months imprisonment - James Holland, Lochore, and George Armstrong, Crosshill.

9 months - Thomas Malcolm and Peter Aird, South Glenraig, and James Ogle, Crosshill.

8 months - Michael Cooney, Joseph Wilkinson Stewart, Charles Marcinkowitch (Mitchell), James Moffatt, Donald Shoolbread Fraser, South Glenraig; John Hunter, Crosshill; Robert Fleming, James Keicher, and Augustus Keicher, South Glenraig; William Maguire and William Menzies, North Glenraig.

### **4th May 1927**

#### **Ejection actions against Fife miners**

Sheriff Umpherston had before him, in Dunfermline Sheriff Court yesterday, actions by the Wilsons & Clyde Coal Company Ltd and the Fife Coal Company Ltd in which ejection was sought from their dwelling houses of 30 miners at Glenraig and Lochore. In every case it was pleaded that the men had not been reinstated in their former employment, and that each was prepared pay the arrears of rent due as soon as they found work. In one case the arrears was stated to be £15 6d and in another £25. After hearing a statement by the law agent of the Fife, Kinross, and Clackmannan Mine Workers Association, who pointed out that Mr Adamson, MP for West Fife, was still in negotiation with the Colliery proprietors, the Sheriff gave decree of ejection in five of the

cases, the decrees in four cases not to be operative for a month, and in one case not to be enforced for a fortnight, the time being allowed in order that some arrangement, if possible, might be come to between the Colliery owners and the tenants. Continuation was made in the other cases.

### **30th November, 1927**

Following soon after the steps taken by Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company (Ltd), at Dundonald, a notice posted at GlenCraig Colliery by the Wilsons and Clyde Coal Company Ltd has caused something like consternation in the village. The announcement is to the effect that owing to the depression in the coal trade and the difficulty in getting coal sold, notice is given that 14 days' from 29th November (yesterday) all agreements with workmen will terminate.

It is understood that for some time the management have been considering the advisability of re organising the present system of shifts, making it a single shift Colliery instead of a double. The change will, in the first instance, affect between 300 and 400 workers. The management hope that the day shift will have six days per week, unless unforeseen circumstances crop up. The feeling in the district is depressed.

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