

The New Town at Ballingry

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An extensive development of the coalfields in Fife is planned. It will entail more housing accommodation for extra workers. This will be met partly by the extension of existing mining communities but mainly by the erection of new townships. The latter are sited at Kennoway, Oakley, Ballingry, and the new town, which is to be called Glenrothes. The latter, like the pit, which is being sunk there, will be on the larger scale. It is a state scheme, whereas the others are the responsibility of Fife County Council.

These big developments will bring Fife back to the position it once had as the largest coal producing centre in Scotland. The whole situation indeed provides a historical parallel.

Throughout the reigns of the Stuarts, Fife was not only a main coal-producing area; it was the commercial hub of Scotland. To and from its harbours, stretching east to Crail and St Andrews, passed the numerous sailing ships with exports and imports. Commerce, up till the Union of 1707 was with Scandinavia, France and the Low Countries. Trade with the other side of the Atlantic had not yet begun. The famous fairs of Anstruther and St Andrews were rendezvous for the packmen and gaberlunzie men who set out from Fife to sell their commodities over Scotland. Coal then, as now, was a valuable export.

The south shore of the Firth of Forth is allied with the north in the new development (as it was at the beginning of the Scottish coal era). Coal was first discovered in Fife and the Lothians in the twelfth century by the monks of Dunfermline

and Newbattle, respectively, and in these areas the mineral has been produced since.

The opening up of the Clyde to navigation, coincident with the development of the Americas, changed the centre of mining gravity, as well as of commerce. It stimulated the exploitation of the coalfields of Lanarkshire, Ayrshire and Stirlingshire, while Fife and the Lothians were left mainly to export coal, as in earlier centuries, across the North Sea.

The great demand on the former coalfields has caused increasing exhaustion of the seams, thereby rendering many pits uneconomic and many miners redundant. Fife has been found to be still rich in the mineral, and is now expected to restore the balance of Scottish output, and at the same time provide employment for the displaced persons of the west. The migration' and resettlement of workers is now in progress.

Migration of miners is not new. Next to agriculture no single occupation has occasioned more flitting. In the days when collieries were smaller and relations more personal, and employment regulations were not so binding, movements of miners were commonplace. A miner might change his job because of a difference with the gaffer or owner, but more often because of the economic law of supply and demand. The demand for coal fluctuated with general conditions in the country, creating unemployment in one pit or area, and a demand for workers in others. The miner went for work where it could be found.

Another factor, which occasioned unemployment in Fife, was climatic conditions in the Baltic. The bulk of Fife coal was

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exported to Scandinavia and Russia and so when the Baltic was icebound, as frequently happened, trade was dull in Fife. Labour exchanges and unemployment benefits had not yet reached the statute book. It was a case of work or want or charity. With his characteristic independence the miner went afield looking for work.

Contrawise there was a big rush to Fife round the turn of the century. The decade round that period witnessed a great coal development. It was then that big enterprises were on foot—the Mary Pit, Lochore; the Aitken, Kelty; Minto, Lochgelly; Glenraig Colliery, the resinking of Dundonald, Kinglassie, and the enterprise of the Wemys Coal Company further east. It is worth noting that few collieries have been opened within the present century. A notable exception is that at Comrie, west of Dunfermline, reckoned today to be the last word in colliery development.

Fife became a receiving centre for miners. Thousands at that time were absorbed. They came from England and Wales as well as the coalfields of Scotland, to open up the seams of new pits, labourers from Ireland—and oncost worker, many of the latter from Angus where trade then was dull. The oncost workers in time graduated to a “place at the face.”

Housing accommodation was then the responsibility of the coal companies. The houses were mostly to a common pattern, brick walls and a room and kitchen with scullery attached. Hamlets grew to villages and villages to towns. Within two decades the population of the particular mining area which the new Ballingry township is intended to serve

increased by 36,860. This *area* embraces the three parishes of Ballingry (which includes Lumphinnans and part of the Burgh of Lochgelly), Auchterderran (including part of the Burgh of Lochgelly), and Beath (including Cowdenbeath Burgh).

	1891	1901	1911
Ballingry	2,275	4,156	9,214
Auchterderran	6,185	8,626	17,547
Beath	6,298	15,812	24,357

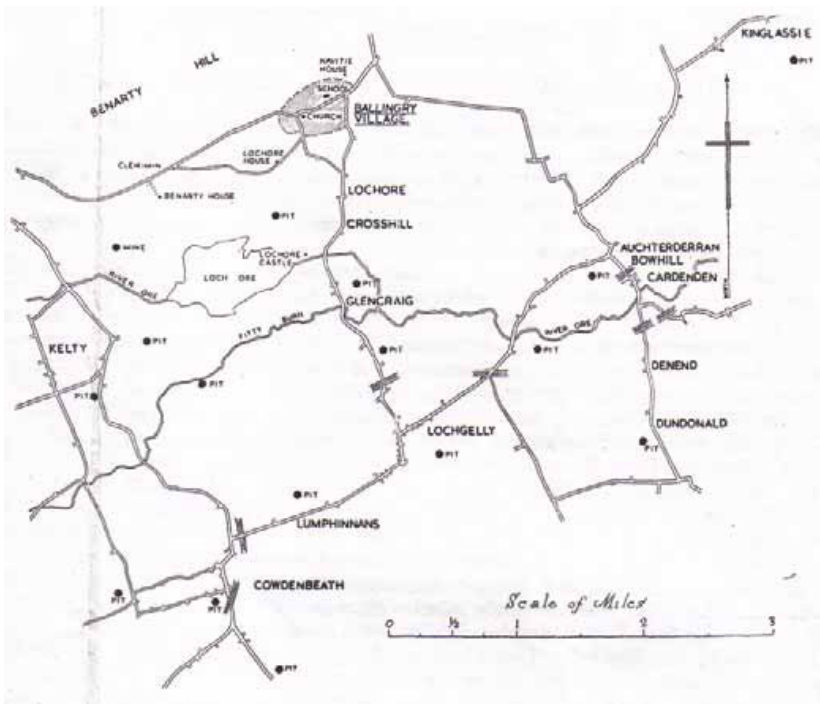
While no new collieries have been opened up in these parishes, the pits sunk at the close of the last century have been extensively exploited and several of the older exhausted pits closed.

A major problem concerning housing in the Cowdenbeath-Lochgelly area, where coal has been mined for nearly two hundred years, is securing firm ground on which to build. Much of the land covered by the older and shallow workings had subsided to what could be accepted as a new natural level. The deeper seams, however, were and are worked generally on the same ground. And so the subsidence is accentuated and cannot be computed on a time basis. That applies both to the two Burghs and the landward parts.

So extensive has been the mining of coal that it is almost impossible to get a site which can be reckoned safe from subsidence. Mining subsidence has caused much damage, particularly, as regards property in Cowdenbeath, and by flooding by the fall in land levels. Along the valley of the Ore and the Fitty hundreds of acres of agricultural land are permanently lost. The most striking instance is the Loch of Ore, close by the new Ballingry Township. Before the recent war the Fife Coal Company considered a scheme for again draining the

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water by changing the outlet to the west and turning it into the Fitty Burn on the west side of the Clune hill. That scheme would have taken the flow into the River Ore but by a different route. At present the loch is being used as a dump for the unsaleable output of the Mary Pit. Already that process of reclamation is noticeable.



In the selection of a building site, the planning authority, the County Council of Fife, was obviously faced with a problem. It had to be found in a district riddled with coal workings; the choice was limited. They chose wisely. It is not an overstatement to describe the site of the new town as approaching the ideal. The aesthetic deplored its effect on the rural scene. "Bonnie Bingry" nestling at the foot of Benarty must lose its sylvan beauty. But we live in a utilitarian age. It was necessary that a site should be found which would provide a solid foundation, and a residential area convenient for workmen and in touch with modern amenities.

The new town lies in a shallow valley, at an average height of nearly 500 feet above sea level. The higher point on the lower slope of Benarty has a wide range of view. Sheltered from the north by the huge hulk of Benarty, it greets the sun as it rises over the Forth estuary and holds it to its setting over the Cleish and Ochil Hills. All round are "craggs, woods and knolls," a scene of rustic, natural beauty.

On its doorstep are many places of historic interest; the Auld Kirk, part of which dates back to pre-Reformation days and is mentioned in "The Abbot"; the new town is hard up against Lochore House, the policies of which were designed by Sir Walter Scott when his elder son married the heiress of Lochore estate; at the other boundary stood the mansion-house of Kirkness (lately demolished), once the property of the Douglasses of Loch Leven.

A little further to the east is the ruin of Balbedie, home of the old and notable family of the Malcolm's. They were long the principal heritors of Ballingry. In the seventeenth century

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they acquired the estate of Lochore and a baronetcy. It was one of this ilk, a Member of Parliament, who gave voice to a well-known couplet:

“Happy the man who belongs to nae pairty, but sits in his ain hoose and looks oot on Benairty.” (Many doubtless will endorse that philosophy !) Cromwell on his way north spent a night at Kirkness House. Through the new township passes the old road from Pettycur Ferry to St Johnstoune. Nearby is the ruin of the oldest type in Fife of a medieval keep, Lochore Castle, beside the waters of Loch Ore which have again returned and now provide good trout fishing. This loch was drained in 1799 by the then proprietor, Captain Park, by means of a deep cutting at the east end. For over a century, the land reclaimed provided abundant crops of meadow hay.

Round the east shoulder of Benarty, on the shore of Loch Leven, a mile away, there is a favourite promenade and a rendezvous for family parties in the summer evenings and particularly on Sunday. A short distance further, and one is in the heart of historic Bishopshire, a district which lies along the eastern shore of Loch Leven, at the base of the Bishop Hill. It roughly approximates to the parish of Portmoak. The view from the hill side induced Robert Chambers in his *L “Pictures of Scotland”* to describe it as “a very heaven.”

The new township with its garden city layout, and its physical and historic environment, has a residential attractiveness that few places can offer. The building scheme was started in 1947. By July, 782 houses were completed. Forty more are authorised, and another 260 are in the offing. The extension of

building ground will be mainly to the north and west. To date £2 million has been spent. The ultimate population is estimated at 8000 to 9000. It will include those transferred from the existing villages of Glencraig and Lochore, where many houses will eventually be condemned as unsuited for modern requirements. At present the proportion of incomers from neighbouring villages is in a ratio of 3 to 1 of migrants from outside Fife. The latter are not yet arriving in the numbers expected.

The houses have a substantial look. The first lot were built with a steel frame and concrete blocks, but most are of bricks and concrete blocks. All now erected, with the exception of fifty, are four apartments. They contain complete internal fittings for electric cooking, washing, heating and lighting. Bedrooms have a built-in wardrobe, while the living-room is fitted with an alcove with a space for book shelves, radios, &c. Rents for the three-apartment houses which comprise living-room, two bedrooms, bathroom and scullery are £23 per annum; four apartment rents are:—Cottage type, £27 10s and flat type, £23 10s—all exclusive of rates. The rents are lower than of comparable houses in the neighbouring burgh. Some, however, consider the rents beyond their means and there have been a considerable number of applications to colliery officials to get back to the old colliery rows. The latter are very much cheaper, running from 5s to 6s a week including rates, for a two-roomed house, to 9s and 10s for a house of three rooms. It might be appropriate at this point to say a few words about miners' wages.

The wages of N.C.B. mine employees engaged in work below ground are considerably higher than for above-ground work, and again there is a distinction between men at the coal

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face producing the coal and the “ oncost” men who transport it to the pit bottom. The highest reward goes to the former.

Assessing miners’ wages is somewhat involved, both in what is received and what is deducted. The highest wage, 33s a shift, is paid to the stripper of coal. If he works the full week of five days he gets a bonus of 26s, which brings up his gross average. Overtime is also paid and it is not uncommon for a stripper to have an average daily wage of 39s 4d. Oncost workers underground have a single shift wage of 19s 2d. With the bonus shift, however, it may reach 28s. Surface workers, with bonus, average 22s. Over a whole colliery the gross individual earnings will average 30s.

Account, however, must be taken of the many deductions apart from the statutory income tax and National Insurance. These generally include weekly contributions for local Welfare Associations, brass and pipe bands, &c.

Ballingry street names are territorial, or of old family territorial connection. Playfields and recreation grounds are planned to suit each end of the scheme. Provision is made for a nursery school and playground. The plan also includes a village hall or community centre, where accommodation will be provided for social activities. The latter will be sited close by the old white-washed kirk, one of the oldest churches still in active use in Fife and dating from the pre-Reformation period. From Roman Catholic worship it passed to Presbyterian. During the later Covenanting period it was Episcopal, and not till the Revolution Settlement did it revert to Presbyterian. The minister who “went out” then is understood to have taken away

the church records. This put a limitation on the Rev. David Jamie's history of the church, published nearly sixty years ago. The church bell is rung from outside ; the pews are of the commodious box type, and in the loft family boxes provide for the heritors. It was last reconditioned in 1831, and is seated for 287. A new church is taken into consideration by the planners.

Special interest will be focused, especially by education-ists, on the new school, named "Benarty." It is of Primary status with infants and juniors, and accommodates 600 pupils. The estimated cost is over £160,000. This will inevitably be exceeded. From it the pupils will pass to the present Ballingry School which will become solely a Junior Secondary.

Benarty Primary School has been conceived on the most modern lines. Generally the classrooms are of aluminium and glass, and the administration block is of traditional construction. The base of the aluminium portion of the school is constructed of brick and concrete slab upon which are erected the aluminium units. All the classrooms face south-east, and considerable thought has been given to colour schemes, each individual classroom being of a different pastel shade.

A considerable part of the acreage is laid out in flower beds and grass. Twenty-one classrooms are provided — 4 infant (30 pupils each); 12 juniors (40 pupils each); rooms for needlework, arts and crafts, music, and tutorial purposes.

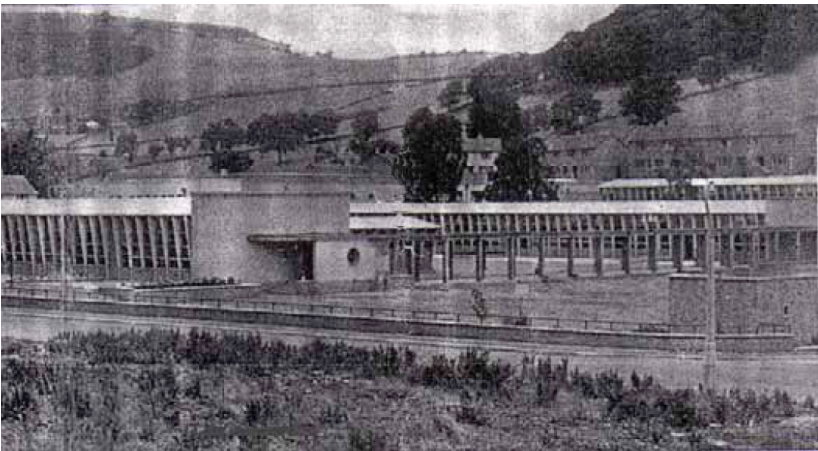
A large assembly hall is provided with a full-size stage, and ante accommodation. Apart from school use it may be utilised for certain community purposes. The dining room gives accommodation for 500 meals in two sittings. There is a

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splendid gymnasium. Every room and hall is connected to the radio “Doctograph” system which is controlled from the headmaster’s office. He is thereby in direct contact with every corner of the school.

The planning of the village and school of Ballingry provides a strong contrast to the slow process of evolution whereby towns have hitherto been allowed to develop. It may indeed become a milestone in Scottish social and educational development.



Benarty School, which was opened recently, is built mainly of aluminium, and is considered to be one of the most advanced of its type in the country.